The book in your hand offers a personal look at one of the core personalities of the feminist movement in Norway in the 1970s and 1980s: Helga Hernes. This is a story about a voyage to New York, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, equal rights politics – and how to harness the power of change.

Since Helga Hernes arrived in Norway in 1970, she became the mother of State Feminism. She has always challenged and broken down barriers. What is more, she has done this discreetly, and in style.

This book was originally published in Norwegian by H. Aschehoug & Co. in 2013, as a part of the series *Stemmer* [*Voices*] released on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of female voting rights in Norway. PRIO thanks H. Aschehoug & Co. and the author Inger Skjelsbæk for generously allowing the translation and re-publication of this text.

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medicineheads

INGER SKJELSBÆK – HELGA HERNES THE STATE FEMINIST

PRIO

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CHANGES

What is the essential ingredient for bringing about lasting social change? An unbeatable idea? An outsider's perspective? Power, alliances, sanctions, idols, exhaustion, encouragement, endurance, new beginnings or idealism? Or perhaps luck, or coincidence? Or individual people and role models?

This text is about significant individuals, feminist political ambitions and hopes for specific changes. In particular, it is about one of the main strategists for gender equality in Norway, Helga Hernes. If there is a single issue in women's politics that has preoccupied her the most, it has been women's representation and participation in politics and society. This issue pervades everything she writes, everything she does. For Helga Hernes, the idea that women should have the power to influence the conditions that affect their lives is about more than gender equality, it is about democracy as a whole.

I am a generation younger than Helga Hernes, and have benefited from the changes that she and her contemporaries worked to bring into effect. I am also her colleague. The focus of my research is international politics, and I have a long-standing special interest in the situation of women in war and violent conflict. I have pub-

lished and lectured in Norway and abroad about the impact of war on women's lives, the opportunities that appear and are lost, and the systematic exclusions of women from efforts to create peace. In Bosnia, I have conducted field studies on the impact of sexual violence on families, local communities and ethnic groups, as well as the direct victims of a conflict, and have seen that the politics and logic of war often affect its victims in ways that are deeply personal. The academic texts I have published have also focused on how such experiences affect people unequally, and either promote or hinder participation in society after a war ends.

Encountering other women and the conditions in which they live casts one's own life and activities into relief. When I was growing up in Norway, we took almost for granted the powerfully idealistic concept that men and women should have equal opportunities on equal conditions. As a result, I've taken it completely for granted that I could complete my studies, including a doctorate, and combine having children with holding down a job, as well as various board appointments and senior roles. Why wouldn't I be good enough? And shouldn't I have the same opportunities as men? Until I arrived, complete with my strong gender-equality ideals, at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in the mid-1990s with an interest in researching the situation of women in war, I had thought little about the fact that these opportunities are not something that can be taken for granted in other parts of the world.

I was also naive enough to think that women's experiences would have been the subject of much data-gathering and analysis, but after just a few days at PRIO, I realized that this was not the case. Most analyses, narratives, research data and theories about war, peace, power and political change are based on analyses of men. These men are often soldiers, politicians, religious leaders, rebels or heads of state. Women are in the background, outside the scope of the analysis, the empirical data, and the horizon of understanding. Women have been sidelined because they have not been considered of interest politically. They have neither had power, nor been integrated into analyses of power. Accordingly, our understanding of how a society can progress from war to peace has been incomplete.

In the 21st century, however, this omission of women, their insights and experiences has been challenged by one of the most important norm-setting organizations on the global stage: the United Nations (UN). Following a series of world conferences in the 1980s and 1990s on the situation of women, the issues of women's political participation and need for protection from conflict-related violence were considered by the Security Council, the most powerful body within the UN. On 31 October 2000, the Security Council adopted a resolution, known as Resolution 1325,[1] which subsequently has transformed the international political landscape. Pursuant to Resolution 1325, all UN member states are now required to endeavour to ensure that women may

participate in political decision-making processes linked to peace and conflict, and to secure women better protection against conflict-related violence. Resolution 1325 has also influenced research into these topics. According to Resolution 1325 and the follow-up documents, we need more knowledge about how to ensure women's participation in politics, what effects this might have, and what the outcomes might be.

This is an important challenge for Norway. For Norwegians, gender equality is not just politics, it is part of our national identity. By providing knowledge, insights, analyses and experiences relating to gender equality, Norway can make a difference in the world, which is of course an express aim of Norway's idealistic foreign policy. This ambition of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in the background when I became Helga's colleague at PRIO in the mid-2000s. We were joined by Torunn Tryggestad, who moved to PRIO from the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs granted us funding to work on gender equality in relation to peace and conflict and to build expertise in Norway on these issues. At that time, I knew little about Helga and what she had contributed both to Norway and internationally. During the 1980s, I had seen her on television debating about whaling and disarmament in her capacity as a State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I also knew that she was known as the mother of state feminism. That was the sum total of my knowledge. As yet, I had

not given any thought to the actual goals of state feminism, its impact on Norwegian society, and how it had served as a role model for the UN's work on peace and security. I was also unaware that these connections put Helga in a unique position in the world of Norwegian gender equality politics.

Many academic exercises centre around the task of analyzing the known from a different horizon of understanding. It is possible to achieve the same level of insight, however, by reading far fewer books and taking far fewer programmes of academic study. Travelling abroad gives us not only new experiences and new impressions, but often also a far better understanding of where we are from, what we take for granted, and how our own lives and activities have been affected by the opportunities and constraints around us. As Karin Sveen has written, a person who is travelling has a double presence, "where absence and presence, trust and simultaneousness [blend], like a sea where water from several sources runs together" (Sveen, 2007, page 103).[2] What the woman in the neighbouring office had achieved, contributed to and inspired was revealed to me only when I emerged from my office, from Norway, and was able to see Helga's importance for Norway, for her own field of research, for thinking about women's political participation, and quite simply for myself personally, in a new light.

Accordingly, this article is written from a personal perspective, and contains my personal

view of one of the most influential figures in Norwegian feminism during the 1970s and 1980s: Helga Hernes. It is a story about our trip to New York, the UN Security Council, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, the politics of gender equality – and about being empowered to bring about change.

THE STATE FEMINIST

Just as the taxi stops outside the revolving doors at the airport express entrance to Oslo Central Station, I hear a pinging sound and reach for my mobile. I struggle to locate both my mobile, and the sound, in my over-stuffed handbag.

Eventually, I find my mobile deep in the furthest bottom corner of my bag, buried under some children's toys (long overdue for disposal) dating from our most recent visit to McDonald's. I read the following message: "Sitting inside by the ticket machines. Helga". I grasp the handle of my suitcase and ready myself to enter the revolving doors at the south entrance to Oslo Central Station. In the throng of people by the ticket machines, I see Helga. In contrast to all the other people rushing hectically towards the ticket machines, checking the time, fumbling with bank cards and wallets, Helga sits calmly, unassumingly yet immaculately dressed, looking in my direction. She has everything under control. She is holding her ticket for the airport express, her handbag is on her lap, her suitcase is at her side, and she is apparently unperturbed by announcements about departure times and the business men in suits racing along at breakneck speed. When I reach Helga, I find her serenity infectious. "Good day," she says, with mock so-

lemnity, emphasizing each word. “Are you ready for the journey?” She discreetly looks me up and down. I follow her gaze down to the floor, and see several muddy patches on my somewhat worn Camper boots. Like almost everyone in Norway, my husband and I are doing up our house, and the garden is a sea of mud that I must negotiate every morning to reach the gate and go out into the world. In the dawn twilight, I have evidently trodden in far more mud than usual, although this has only just now become apparent – by the ticket machine at Oslo Central Station under Helga’s imperious gaze. We look up simultaneously from my muddy boots, and our eyes meet as Helga says in a voice that is friendly yet firm, and quiet enough not to attract unnecessary attention: “Inger, I’ll just mention that I have shoe polish with me if you’re thinking about wearing those boots to meetings in New York.” I smile back, express thanks for the offer, and reassure her that, yes, of course I’ve thought about more elegant footwear and have another pair of freshly polished boots in my case. Those are the boots I’m intending to wear for the meetings in New York.

*

Early in the 2000s, I had a telephone call from my highly esteemed colleague, Torunn Tryggestad, who was working at NUPI at that time. Although we were working in competing institutions – Torunn was at NUPI while I was at PRIO – I thought of her as my closest colleague.

Torunn is a political scientist whose research focuses on the UN, gender, and peacebuilding. She knows who is responsible for what in Norwegian foreign policy circles and in the UN system, and every time she sees an opportunity for people to make a connection, to be invited to a seminar, or quite simply just to know about each other, she doesn’t hesitate to get in touch. Torunn more often gets a positive rather than a negative answer from the people she contacts, because she knows about power, politics and the rules of the game in a way that allows her to use them to her own advantage. Not cynically, but for practical purposes. Because psychology is my specialist field, I am far better at understanding relationships between individuals and personalities than hierarchical relationships. In my research, however, things are different. Understanding politics through the ways in which individuals create meaning, scope for action, and scope for the interpretation of their own experiences is of absolutely crucial importance in all my scholarly work. Instead of understanding the politics of power through formal structures, I have focused on how individuals view the hierarchical structures around them, and how they position themselves accordingly. For a woman who is a victim of war rape, this is not theory, but reality. There is an enormous difference if she feels that she was raped because she was in a narrow back street too late at night, wearing too short a skirt, and too much make-up, or if she feels she was attacked because she is a Muslim. Although the actual attack may be the

same, the woman's interpretation of it and her scope to take action will differ.

"Inger," says Torunn, "I've just heard that Helga Hernes is going to retire, but that after retirement, she's very interested in being associated with a research environment that focuses on international issues and gender equality. That should be right up your street at PRIO! What do you think? Perhaps you should invite her out to lunch and hear what she has in mind."

My immediate reaction is that this is a brilliant idea. We need to increase our commitment to research into the situation of women in war and in peacebuilding processes, and the addition of a name like Helga Hernes to our team could boost our profile significantly. For several years, Torunn and I had been discussing how we thought that gender research in Norway was not international enough, and that international research was not sufficiently focused on gender. We had felt ourselves rather isolated when writing our first articles about women's understanding of security, their need for protection, their participation in military forces, and their role in peacebuilding. Helga's profile as both a feminist and an expert on international relations, gained through a combination of politics and research, made her a guide and a role model, and her contribution would be a splendid addition to our small research environment.

Early in the 2000s, I knew Helga only as a public figure, and had met her on only one occasion previously. This was at a seminar at

NUPI in the mid-1990s, where I was to present my very first report about no less a subject than the significance of gender for the understanding of war and peace (Skjelsbæk, 1997).[3] This was before I had done any field work and got dirt under my fingernails. It was an overly ambitious project conducted at breakneck speed, which (for reasons that to me at the time were completely incomprehensible) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had found reason to fund. I had not realized that this topic was central to Norwegian foreign policy and that there was an urgent need to build up expertise. I had read up on theories and empirical reports, however, and had attempted to stitch together a presentation of the significance of differences between men and women for how wars are fought, and how one can build peace in the aftermath. The idea was that this presentation could be useful to people who, in various ways, would work with peacebuilding through aid and development projects both on the ground and at a political level.

While I, inexperienced and feeling relatively insecure, was presenting my report at NUPI's unpretentious offices in Grønlandsleiret in Oslo, Helga suddenly appeared. Halfway through the seminar, she entered the meeting room from the door at the back. I started and sat up straighter in my chair. After my presentation there were questions and a discussion, but there were no comments from Helga. She sat there nodding politely until the whole event was over, while I found myself wondering all the time what she

thought. Just as I was going to leave the seminar room, relieved that the whole thing was over, she came over to me. “That was very interesting,” she said. “Can you send me the report?” To me, this was simultaneously incomprehensible and fantastic. I worked for the most part alone, and had become accustomed to my area of research being met with only marginal interest in academic circles. Now the mother of state feminism was standing in front of me and enthusiastically expressing interest in my work. I assumed that she was not merely being polite – she could of course have left as discreetly as she had entered – but that she felt a common interest that she wanted to acknowledge. Precisely to what extent our interests would coincide, I didn’t then know. With hindsight, however, I can see that my views on the significance of gender and equality for policy-making in the aftermath of conflict were ideas that were largely similar to those expressed more elegantly by Helga several years before. It says much about Helga that she experienced this re-encounter with her own ideas with enthusiasm, and was not insulted that I had not referred to her own work instead. She is proud, but not arrogant. In addition, she is an activist who wishes to bring about change. Others, who would be in no position to cite such outstanding scholarly and political achievements, would be far more conceited. I felt a deep sense of gratitude for her comments, and my image of this imperious woman immediately become more tinged with affection than fear. The following year, when I

was asked to contribute a chapter to a book about the significance of women in Norwegian foreign policy, I based my chapter on Helga. I knew a little about her career in the Norwegian diplomatic service, and that she had been a State Secretary and Special Adviser for Peacekeeping Operations and Conflict Prevention. I imagined her in the corridors of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, travelling with her staff, and chatting to important men in suits and ties both in Norway and abroad. She became the leitmotif for my chapter and I fantasized and pondered about what it must have been like for her, for the people she surrounded herself with, and about the topics that came up on her agenda. The writing process gave me the opportunity to spend a lot of time thinking about Helga. And now, Torunn thought that she ought to become my colleague. A brilliant idea, but one that filled me with nerves.

I dialled her number and waited for her to answer. It wasn’t long before I heard an authoritative voice at the other end of the line, which said “Yes, this is Helga Hernes”, with a trace of a guttural German ‘r’. Her intonation rose at the end of the sentence, making her surname sound like a question. I responded rapidly by saying who I was, that I had been in contact with Torunn Tryggestad at NUPI, and that I wondered if she had time to meet for lunch? “I would like that very much,” I heard at the other end of the line. “Shall we say noon on Thursday? Can you come to NOVA?” “That’s great,” I said, quavering slightly, “that will be very nice, I look forward to

meeting you." But NOVA, I thought, what and where is that? I opened my laptop and Googled my way to the Norwegian Institute for Research into Childhood, Welfare and Ageing, NOVA. Good lord, I thought. Would it be possible to invent a more bureaucratic name? But I calmed down when I found that the address was in a street parallel to PRIO.

At 11.55 a.m. on Thursday, I leave my office on the second floor of Fuglehauggata 11 in Frogner, and by 11.58 a.m. I am standing in the Norwegian Institute for Social Research in Munthes gate. The street address and the number on the door tally, but I can't find NOVA. I explain my dilemma to the receptionist, who immediately provides an explanation. Shared premises. And just as I'm about to ask for Helga Hernes, suddenly she is standing in front of me, very correct, poised and elegant. I am far less well turned out, but at least I am wearing a suit jacket with discreetly padded shoulders. The importance of wearing a suit jacket in situations where one may feel insecure cannot be overstated. In situations where nervousness may get the upper hand, internal chaos can be calmed with the help of a tailored exterior. A lunch date with Helga Hernes is definitely a suit-jacket situation. Helga gives me a friendly smile and we walk together to the canteen in the atrium shared by NOVA and the Norwegian Institute for Social Research and get ourselves some lunch. We talk about women's studies, peace studies, war and violent conflict, and the UN's work on women and women's political participation. The total extent of my lunch partner's insight into understanding and devising strategies for women's political participation is not yet clear to me, but what does become clear is that I have much to learn. My suit jacket becomes ever less important as I become acquainted with Helga Hernes, the state feminist.

*

Helga arrived in Norway, or more specifically in Bergen, on 16 May 1970. It was raining. The following day – 17 May, and thus Norway's National Day – she got to see children's parades and marching bands. The rain continued, and so after several days she was forced to purchase a large sou'wester to wear while walking around the streets of Bergen with her Norwegian husband and taking in the city and its inhabitants. No one, absolutely no one, dared to tell her that she was wearing her splendid new sou'wester back-to-front. Helga wore the wide brim, which was designed to protect the back of the neck and prevent water running down the wearer's back, as a slightly extravagant wide brim at the front, which she had turned up slightly in order to see better. Helga tends to chuckle slightly as she tells this story. It perhaps says something about the confused state she found herself in, newly arrived in a country that would become her new home, where she would start a family and put down roots. Confused, perhaps, but certainly also happy, as she wandered round with her hat

askew, with no idea what Norway would come to mean for her, and what she would mean to it in return. Because she took the country by storm, if we are to believe her many admirers. "Helga has not only influenced us, she has civilized us," said Jan Egeland when he gave a speech at her 70th birthday. Helga herself described her entry onto the Norwegian stage somewhat differently, however, in an article she wrote for *Samtiden* in 1982: "When I look back at my experiences of being a foreigner, I can say without reservation that this role has been most difficult in Norway, the country that in many ways has accepted me most completely" (Hernes, 1982a).[4] The most obvious example of her acceptance was in 1988, when the then-foreign minister, Thorvald Stoltenberg, asked her to be a State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At that time, Norway was still governed by the generation that had lived through German occupation during the Second World War. Nonetheless, Helga, a German, was appointed to one of the most trusted positions in the Norwegian government. It is hard to achieve greater confidence than that.

Helga was born Helga Maria Jahncke (her maiden name). No one could have predicted that she would come to Norway. She was born in 1938 in a region that is now in Poland, and arrived in Germany in 1945 as a Prussian refugee. Helga has told me little about her childhood, but now and then she drip-feeds a little information that is evidence as to how the proud, confident Helga Hernes also knows what it feels like to be vulnerable, despairing and insecure. Her German family, who had lived in what is now Poland, were forced to flee, and her father and her grandfather, who were both in the military, were taken prisoner by the Americans. In a quiet voice and with lowered gaze, she occasionally gives a glimpse of what her family experienced during the war, about the people who were in hiding with them; about a school bag she clung to while they were fleeing and would have given, as a seven-year-old, everything in the world not to lose; how she and her younger siblings were made responsible for each other; and how they finally settled in Bavaria. She knows what it is like to have one's roots pulled up and to have to re-plant them in new soil. Helga does not dwell on these experiences, but to those of us around her it is obvious that they have left their mark and shaped who she is: a combination of strict and proper, and warm and caring. "Remember that I'm a Prussian," says Helga, if appointments aren't kept or things are otherwise in disarray, "I can't stand arriving late". At the same time, she worries about whether those around her are warm enough or properly dressed.

In 1956, aged 18, she travelled briefly as an exchange student to the United States. Two years later, she decided to return to Massachusetts to study at Mount Holyoke College, the oldest of seven prestigious American colleges that are historically for women only. In 2011, she was invited back to Mount Holyoke by the then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, to attend a gathering of

women who had held leading positions in public life. Helga Hernes, diplomat, politician, and academic, was an obvious guest.

It is easy to imagine that her years at Mount Holyoke were momentous for Helga. The college's list of alumnae includes many well-known figures in American public life, and I believe that these formative years must have given her a sense that being female did not impose limitations, but quite to the contrary, gave one reason to believe that everything was possible, including for women. Because Helga did not take the path followed by many of her contemporaries. She did not become a housewife and start a family, but continued her academic career and studied political science up to the highest level. In 1970, she submitted her doctoral thesis, *Concepts of Community in Modern Theories of International Law*, at the prestigious Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. The thesis discussed one of the fundamental problems in international politics, namely, to what extent should international law be based on shared concepts or on states' sovereignty. This issue is relevant to the UN's work to increase political participation by women. Should UN Security Council resolutions be considered as supranational law, legally binding on the member states, or merely as frameworks that the member states are encouraged to follow? What are the opportunities for this type of international policy development at governmental level? In other words, Helga was not interested primarily in kitchen-sink problems, and it is clear from her

later publications that the political and philosophical analysis inherent to her doctoral thesis was decisive for shaping her opinions about cooking and housework. It is in fact cooking and housework, invisible activities that are taken for granted, and the role they should have, which form the basis for her concept of state feminism, which she developed in Norway, a homogeneous welfare state. The challenge of reconciling the global and the local is described by Helga when she points out that "the challenge for these homogeneous societies is in fact to design a gender equality policy which allows for pluralism and gender difference while guaranteeing equality" (Hernes, 1987, page 163).[5]

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In several of Helga's publications, we find sentences that describe women's right, but lack of access, to power. In the 1980s, she wrote, among other things, that "women's formal rights and status as individuals and citizens has not led to a fundamental change in social institutions (which of course defend core values) that would make it possible for them to accept and use their rights and fulfil their obligations as individuals, members of society (bourgeois) and citizens (citoyen)" (Hernes, 1982b, page 12).[6] Nearly 30 years later, she wrote on the same topic, but this time with reference to Resolution 1325: "Its underlying goal is to secure women's right to be represented and participate in processes that affect their lives, in

particular in conflict situations" (Hernes, 2008, page 17).[7] Exercising political power was not only something that Helga discussed and described, but something she did herself.

In a retrospective article published in 2013, about state feminism as an ideology and analytical concept, Hege Skjeie describes the most important contribution of the trend for state feminism as a shift in the feminist way of thinking by "moving the gaze from an emphasis on power as a reproduction of masculinity and dominance towards power understood in the sense of *to be empowered* – as the capacity to generate change" (Skjeie, 2013, page 31). If we follow Helga's career, we see how she achieves precisely this: she is a researcher, academic, bureaucrat, diplomat and politician. She shares this with many of her contemporaries, who could be found in many different arenas throughout Helga's long working life. Helga's involvement has also been characterized by the fact that she has been the only woman in a long series of the most male-dominated areas, namely in foreign and security policy.

In 2010, I was asked to write an extended article for the journal *PROSA* about Helga's scholarly publications.[8] While I was working on this article, the untraditional and complex nature of Helga's career became obvious to me. The list of all the positions and honorary posts she had held was impressive in its length: her first workplace was the University of Bergen, where she worked from 1970 until 1980, interrupted only by a research fellowship at Stanford from

1974–75. In Bergen, she taught comparative political studies and public administration. She also had the opportunity to develop her interest in political philosophy. In collaboration with Gunnar Skirbekk, she submitted a successful application to the Research Council of Norway for funding for a seminar in political theory. From 1976, this seminar became an annual event and was held at Ustaoset, halfway between Bergen and Oslo. Subsequently it has become known simply as the 'Ustaoset seminar'. This seminar became one of the most important intellectual gatherings in Norway. What I was unaware of, before my co-author and I conducted further research, was Helga's key role as initiator and contributor.

When we were working on this article, we found an overview of the programme for the Ustaoset Seminar 1976. The agenda included many well-known political scientists and public figures. There were only three women, however, one of whom was Helga. We dug further and found out what she was writing about, and what she had published, and were no less impressed. I am the same age now as Helga was when she was at her most academically productive. It is striking to see the broad range of her interests, and in how many languages she was publishing. I see that neither I, nor many of my colleagues, are equally productive. In the same period, Helga continued to work on topics from her thesis and published widely both in terms of language (in English, German and Norwegian) and topic – about states and civil society, about multina-

tionals, and, in the 1990s, about environmental issues. Most of her articles were published in international journals and books. If we look at Helga's Norwegian-language publications from the 1970s and 1980s, we find titles such as "Gender equality within the borders of the constitutional state" and "The place of women in theoretical ideas about the state". These reflect her interest in political philosophy, but also another of her core research interests: the position of women in society.

In 1972, Helga led a Gender Equality Committee at the University of Bergen. It was this committee that introduced the ideas of 'radical' and 'moderate' gender quotas. At that time, of course, she could never have known how wide-reaching the Norwegian gender-quota regime would eventually become.

After Helga moved away from Bergen, she worked for a while as a Research Director at the Research Council of Norway, before becoming Research Director, and for a while General Director, of the Norwegian Institute for Social Research. From the end of the 1980s, she embarked on new challenges. She was appointed State Secretary (1988–89 and 1990–93) and then Special Adviser on Peacekeeping Operations and Conflict Prevention (1996–98) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and then Director of CICERO, the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo, (1993–96). She has also served as Norwegian ambassador in Vienna, Bratislava and to the UN organizations in Vienna (1998–2002),

Bern and the Vatican (2002–04). She has chaired the Norwegian Parliamentary Intelligence Oversight Committee (2006–2011). At the same time as holding all these extremely important positions (along with a list of private- and public-sector board memberships and positions too long to enumerate), Helga also maintained an academic career at the Institute for Social Research, as a researcher at the NOVA social research institute, and as Adjunct Professor II at the Department of Political Science, University of Oslo. She also holds honorary doctorates from the University of Tromsø (conferred 1993) and the University of Stockholm (conferred 2002). Since Helga retired in 2006, she has been a Senior Adviser at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). She now has the opportunity to focus on her many areas of expertise, not least international relations and gender issues.

We became almost breathless at this barrage of roles, and felt that we would be unable to write about everything because it would take up too much space, and our word-count was restricted. This review showed what a multi-talented public servant and academic she was, who not only theorized about female empowerment, but continually conquered new ground in practice. What made this all even more impressive was that we had focused only on what she had achieved in Norway, but Helga had an academic career even before she arrived in this small country in the far north. Accordingly, it became important to conclude by pointing out precisely

this in the article, and we chose to conclude as follows:

> *A foreigner in a predominantly homogeneous Norwegian society, and a top academic and top politician at the same time. And a woman marking territory where no woman has been before. What we have been struck by is this: On the one hand, Helga Hernes has devoted much of her life to being there for other women, professionally and politically, but also in private. On the other hand, it has never been sufficient for her to operate only in established women's arenas. She has a remarkable talent for challenging barriers, breaking new ground. She takes her place where she thinks she is needed and wants to be, even if it means entering the most masculine of arenas, more often than not as the lone female voice. We who come after her look up to her – more than she herself knows.*

*

When we board the airport express train at Oslo Central Station to catch our flight to New York, Helga and I do so as colleagues. We are making the same journey and have shared objectives and tasks. As the train crawls out of the station and the morning light begins to break through the layer of clouds over Ekebergåsen, Helga sits beside me and gazes calmly out of the window, while I sit equally calmly in the aisle seat.

Once we arrive at Gardermoen, we need to make our way to the gate for our flight to New York with British Airways. Helga walks in front. She knows exactly where we need to go. She has all the necessary papers in her hand: her passport, a print-out of the flight reservation, and some small suitcase labels on which to write our addresses. I lag a few steps behind and try to remember where I've put my passport and the other documents we need for check-in. While attempting not to lose sight of Helga, I open my handbag and excavate the contents in archaeological fashion. I dig deeper and deeper until finally, deep in a corner, behind the programme for a meeting at the Research Council of Norway, which I attended a few weeks ago, I detect the contours of my passport. I drag it up through all the layers of mobile phones, unnecessary papers, miniature children's toys, make-up bag, wallet and mobile chargers, and confirm that in the rush it has acquired some old chewing gum wrappers, which I had also failed to dispose of. With a swift hand movement, I remove the chewing gum wrapper and lob it into the nearest bin. Then I quicken my pace and find myself next to Helga just as the woman behind the check-in desk smilingly asks us for our passports.

Our cases are checked in, security is less hectic than usual, and before long we emerge into the tax-free shopping area. For my part, I generally stride through this part of the airport as quickly as possible. I resent being forced into a retail environment full of goods that I don't know

enough about and that I never really think I can afford to buy. But Helga comes to a halt and surveys the scene. One of the purposes of this trip to New York is to film an interview between me and the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize 2011, the Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee. Helga has taken a keen interest in this project and has wanted to know what clothes I will wear and my plans for make-up. I realize that Helga's relationship with me is as much maternal as it is that of a colleague. She wants me to present myself correctly, in all senses of the word. In the tax-free shop, she attracts the attention of several assistants and lists products and brands she wants to inspect. The assistants scurry back and forth, fetching one item after another. Helga tests and sniffs, nods and smiles. I watch the entire proceedings slightly from one side and feel that I should buy something too, if for no other reason than to keep Helga company. In an article published in the Norwegian journal *Samtiden* in 1982, Helga wrote that she had "never before" – not before she came to Norway – "experienced being met with distrust in political or professional circles because I was either too 'ladylike' or too 'foreign' or, on the other hand, too 'hippie-like'". The Norwegians had a low tolerance for differences. She wrote that she needed to find "the correct form of understatement". "One would have to spend years of one's life to learn to fulfil the Norwegian female ideal of being 'natural, nice and decent'". Helga's performance in the tax-free shop demonstrated that she had quite simply given up on that

idea. In contrast, I am a victim of this Norwegian feminine norm, and in the cosmetics section of a tax-free shop I am like a fish out of water.

When I think how Helga described herself in 1982, it surprises me that she still, apparently, chooses to spend just as much time on her appearance. Why hasn't she given up, and attempted to become like 'us', the 'natural' women? Was it this that Jan Egeland was referring to when he said that Helga had civilized us; that she had fought a tireless battle to bring us out of our 'natural state'? Helga's unwavering attitude says much about her personality, self-assurance, courage and will to dare to be different, even when it would have been much easier to conform. I interpret her preoccupation with correctness, however, as part of her feminist project. In her book *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*, published in 1993,[9] the Croatian author Slavenka Drakulić describes a meeting in Belgrade in the 1980s between Yugoslavian and American feminists. The American feminists, who turned up bra-less, in scruffy clothes and with no make-up, were not well received by the feminists of the southern Balkans (Drakulić, 1993). The Yugoslavian women could not understand how women with so many opportunities and freedoms could choose to adopt such a slobbish demeanour. The Americans' political message was drowned out by the stir caused by their appearance, and no extensive feminist cooperation developed across the Iron Curtain during the 1980s.

Although I see myself as something of

a contrast to the way that Helga presents herself professionally, I recognize the need to be taken seriously, to be listened to, and not to be overshadowed by clothes and make-up. Despite gender equality, women are still judged by their appearance. In various contexts where I have had to describe my research about war-related sexual violence, I have had to refer to body parts, sexual behaviours and intimate experiences that one would not ordinarily talk about in fora for international relations. When I also carry the memories of the first-hand accounts of women I have met, it is important for me to appear poised, so that I will be taken seriously on behalf of those who are not there to speak for themselves. On those occasions, I need to be formally dressed, wearing a suit jacket and discreet make-up, so that people will listen to what I have to say. Helga knows that a message isn't sold through words alone: the messenger must match the content. If you want to achieve respect, you must appear respectable. To Helga, aesthetic appearance and feminism are not opposite poles, but two aspects of the same concept. If a feminist is to assert that women can exercise state power, then she must look statesman-like, or perhaps stateswoman-like. For this reason, Helga is concerned about her own appearance and about mine. After a while, she comes over to me with a shopping basket full of precisely the items she was looking for and says, "So aren't you going to buy anything, Inger?" I manage to mutter that "I think I've got enough make-up with me," while simultaneously

suddenly fearing – based on what Helga herself wrote in *Samtiden* in 1982 – that my comment will be perceived as a criticism of her substantial purchases. And so I rush to add "but if you think I ought to put on some different make-up before the interview, I hope you'll let me know". Helga smiles and says slyly, "I don't think that will be necessary". She obviously has confidence that I have learned from her how to master this balancing act (which I have, albeit in a Nordic fashion). She hastens towards the till, pays, and we are ready for boarding.

STATE FEMINISM

Since Helga's focus as a feminist is mainly on women's political participation and the idea that women must present themselves as willing to exercise power, it was of vital importance for her to identify the factors that prevented women from participating in politics. Research was needed to understand the barriers experienced by women. In 2004, Helga summarized the connections between research and her state-feminist political project as follows:

> After all these years, it is important to remember that the field of women's studies was the legitimate offspring of the women's movement. We wrote about women for women and were richly rewarded in the form of pretty much unanimous support, gratitude and curiosity from all the women's groups in Norway. Women of all ages and from very different backgrounds had the opportunity to describe their reality and they greatly valued this opportunity. Our book launches were always uplifting gatherings. What we wrote was intended to be – and was – of immediate relevance. There were empirical studies of time usage, descriptions of whole life cycles, an emphasis on private-sector care work,

> economic inequality, the political (ir)relevance of women's demands, the absence of childcare, short maternity leave, and so on. Most researchers had limited theoretical ambitions, but were highly politically motivated. Some were perhaps more systematic, analytical and compliant with research principles than others. The context of women's politics was present nonetheless, partly explicitly and partly implicitly. The recognition we failed to achieve in scholarly circles we found in other places. The lack of theoretical precision that was an inevitable consequence of all this is accordingly something we have to live with. Not least because it bears witness to a period of political engagement (Hernes, 2004, page 292).

This link between research targeted at specific change and that directed towards policy development is something I recognize. The willingness of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support a project to gather insights into the situation of women and their opportunities to influence peace processes certainly resembles the research agenda that Helga had for Norwegian gender equality efforts and state feminism. I will return to this topic below. First, it is important to understand the nature of state feminism in Norway.

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The first time I heard the term 'state feminism' was in the late 1980s, when it was almost spat out by a male contributor to a TV debate on family policy. The man referred to the concept with disgust, rolling his eyes as he explained how things had gone from bad to worse in Norway. Now, according to him, there was no one at home to look after the children. Men and women went out to work and were stressed, children were left to potter around in kindergartens, and homes were in a state of disarray. This conservative debater asserted beyond any shadow of doubt that Norway's gender equality policy – and the Norwegian way of life – was an emblem of Norway's decline. The solution, he said, was to accept that the way families chose to arrange their affairs was a private matter, and not something in which the state should intervene through extensive programmes to expand childcare provision and similar measures that almost forced mothers out to work. He didn't dare say it aloud, but I suspect that he had an intense desire to get mothers back in the kitchen, where they should occupy themselves keeping drawers and cupboards tidy. It was clear that state feminism was an inflammatory concept, and that he wouldn't have anything to do with anyone else's opinions about how he and his wife should organize their family life. It was very clear that he did not like the introduction of a law in 1978 that guaranteed equal rights for women to employment and education (the Gender Equality Act), the fact that we had kindergartens, parental leave for childbirth or when children were

sick and gender quotas in politics. All of these things have not only changed the situation of women in Norway, but also contributed to changing how men and women live their lives. Perhaps we don't value these changes enough when time is too short, and we have to get home from a full- or part-time job to collect the children from kindergarten or school, quickly make supper and then rush out of the door to attend parents' evenings, drive the children to sports training, meet friends, or perhaps attend a board meeting. Perhaps we don't value them enough when we read in the media about research showing that Norway has the most gender-segregated labour market in Europe, that not enough Norwegian women are top executives, professors or studying male-dominated areas of technology and science. Does this mean that efforts to promote gender equality have been unsuccessful? That those who wanted to bring about change have failed? Is complete social equality possible? Or desirable? And who should decide what is good enough? And for whom? And in what arenas? I choose to leave these questions unanswered, but note that they exist. In post-natal groups after my two children were born, I experienced milder versions of the same aggression as that displayed by the man on the TV screen. Once, after my second child was born, when we were meeting up towards the end of our maternity leaves and getting close to the time when we mothers would go back to work, I remember an outburst by one of the better-off women in the group: "I get so angry at these

Labour Party types who want us all to work." This mother wasn't even going back to work, because now she wanted to be at home and focus on her children and the house, and the idea of anyone expecting anything else of her provoked her, violently. For my part, I found it liberating to return to work, even though the time at home with my young children had been precious. But, simply the fact that one can choose, that it is possible for a mother to combine having children, a job and a home, is not something to be taken for granted, even if this is how we, the children of 1970s feminists, or state feminists, feel.

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The fundamental element of state feminism is the idea that the state can act as a constructive partner, even a guarantor, to promote greater social equality between men and women, and that this will be of benefit to precisely these women *and* men. In her first publications in Norwegian, during the 1980s, Helga argued that feminist goals could be promoted by women entering into a partnership with the state, by women taking on leading political roles and taking ownership of policy development. Helga wrote that state feminism, or feminist policies promoted by the state, is a "bottom-up" variety of feminism. In other words, it is a variety of feminism initiated from the grassroots upwards through the implementation of woman-friendly social and gender-equality policies, which have become woman-friendly because they are the result of pressure from women and women's organizations (Hernes, 1982b).

To take into account her analysis of Norway and its neighbouring countries: in Helga's opinion, the Scandinavian social democracies – as they existed in the 1980s – had "the potential to be woman-friendly". Through this statement, Helga set herself in opposition to the sceptical view of the state that prevailed in many feminist milieus. In these milieus, it was customary to analyze the state as a patriarchal system, namely, as a manifestation of general male domination. Now, here was Helga saying that this same state could, in time, and given the correct socio-democratic conditions, become an ally of the feminist cause. In my own opinion, Helga had been slightly seduced by Norwegian social democracy. In 2004, she wrote: "I must admit that my somewhat romantic claims about the social democratic welfare state and its grounding in Norwegian history were overstated and somewhat exaggerated" (Hernes, 2004, page 291). She goes on to say that this assessment of Scandinavian political systems "is certainly also implicitly determined by my comparative gaze from outside [...] there is no reason in principle not to believe that other systems could not develop in a more women-friendly direction" (Hernes, 2004, page 291).

In the foreword to her book *Staten – kvinner ingen adgang?* [*The State – No Admission for Women?*], which was published by the Norwegian academic publisher Universitetsforlaget, Helga argued that the growth of the welfare state

changed the balance of power between the public and private spheres, and that it was this shift in the balance of power that formed the actual basis of the concept of state feminism:

> It is a process that has helped to mobilize women and – partially – to incorporate them into the state, but their power has not increased proportionately with their increasing dependence on the apparatus of government [...] Women's political powerlessness is partly a constitutional and partly a democratic problem" (Hernes, 1982b, page 7).

The book contains a general analysis of state power and related theories, and shows how women have been excluded systematically not just from power fora, but also from theoretical studies of political power. Women have quite simply not been interesting analytical subjects for leading philosophers and thinkers about the relationship between the state and society: they have been invisible.

> Theories about the state and the governance of public life are based on the concept of the individual, the citizen, a being that at first sight has no gender, is rational, and dispassionate. Nonetheless, history has shown that the institutions that were established to protect general core values tend to favour one gender over the other (Hernes, 1982b, page 11).

This small red book was part of a series edited by Helga under the title *Kvinners levekår og livsløp* [*Women's Living Conditions and Life Cycles*], which presented studies of how women's lives in Norway were lived and understood – and how their lives in diverse ways prevented them from participating in politics at the same level as men. The series, which comprised 17 books in all, provides incomparably the best way of gaining insight into the situation of women in Norway in the 1970s and 1980s. The series includes *Kvinneperspektiv på sosialpolitikken* [*A Women's Perspective on Social Policy*] by Kari Wærness, *Kitchen-table Society* by Marianne Gullestad, and anthologies such as *Kvinnerett I/II* [*Women's Law I/II*] edited by Tove Stang Dahl and *Kvinner i fellesskap* [*Female Fellowship*] edited by Harriet Holter – to mention but a few. Each book in the series has an introductory foreword by Helga about the link between women's living conditions and their life cycles, where the latter, according to Helga, explains the former.

> In very simplified terms, one can say that research into living conditions tells us about the situation of women today. [...] But descriptions can never be as adequate as explanations of how and why things are as they are. [...] The "life-cycle perspective" makes it possible to interpret the fact that women's lives have a different rhythm than those of men, and that women's life cycles in most cases are adapted to fit in with men's.

> Women's living conditions are closely linked to, and are a consequence of, the forces that determine their life cycles (Hernes, 1982b, page 6).

The goal, Helga wrote in her conclusion to the same book, is – by having greater female participation in political life – to secure women various rights and facilitate choices for women. "[T]he process will lead to a women-friendly state that makes it possible for women to have a natural relationship with their children, their work, to public life – and also with their husbands!" (Hernes, 1982b, page 178). She chooses to conclude with an exclamation mark, as if the whole book ends with a call for action. On the back cover of the book is a photograph of Helga, where, in contrast to stereotypical ideas about the feminists of that era, she looks business-like, with her make-up recently applied. Her gaze is firm and directed towards the reader, but she does not smile. One could have the impression that she has just presented an argument, and her expression serves as the full stop. It is as though she is saying that this is serious, not any old nonsense!

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I was 13 years old when the Norwegian publication of *Staten – kvinner ingen adgang?* was published. I started at lower secondary school, made different friends, and experienced the remorseless physical changes wrought by puberty.

I lacked any urge to rebel or leave home. Instead I was happy at home and felt secure in my situation in life, despite all the changes around me. I never experienced any thoughts that because I was a girl, my options were limited compared to boys of my age. When my mother told me about the arguments she had had with my grandmother to be allowed to enrol at teacher-training college (something that my grandmother thought was a complete waste of time, since my mother was by then engaged to my father, and so could simply get married and forget about studying), I thought the situation sounded completely archaic. It involved attitudes from a distant and long-gone era. As I got older, I realized that my mother's account of her battles had not been at all exaggerated. My grandmother could not understand why I couldn't follow the example of my similarly-aged cousin and drop out of upper-secondary school to work in a fishmonger's, rather than toiling with all these books and study programmes that seemed so tiresome. My mother is some years younger than Helga. The indignation and willingness to resist that my mother had displayed at home were the real basis for the feminist movement among women in the 1970s. I think that the studies and theoretical interpretations of women's living conditions and life cycles must have felt very personal and evoked very conflicting feelings for many of Helga's contemporaries. While my mother's feminist project involved completing her teacher training and ensuring that my sister and I would never feel that

we didn't need to embark on higher education because we were girls, who should be concentrating on getting married, Helga's project was to make the conditions that influence and limit women's lives into a scholarly field. By gathering data, formulating hypotheses and proposing other ways of living one's life, these women brought about a full-scale revolution. They created a knowledge base for the development of new policies, and in the spirit of the age, found themselves operating in many arenas simultaneously, as researchers, bureaucrats, politicians, and mothers.

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According to Cathrine Holst (2009, page 114), state feminism "has become an umbrella term for government activities that have the formal intention of promoting gender equality".[10] In Norway today, state feminism comprises a combination of laws and welfare schemes that in the aggregate represent a 'top-down', state-sponsored strategy to promote gender equality. But, as all of Helga's academic publications and political roles have shown, this has not happened of its own accord, or without significant 'bottom-up' pressure. There are few political parties that dare to criticize arrangements such as parental leave in connection with childbirth, employment rights in connection with children's sickness, protection against gender discrimination and much more. It is as though these policies, which had to be fought for, are now taken for granted by many of

us who have been the beneficiaries. Politically, it would be difficult to disrupt these rights in Norway today.

While Norway has changed since the 1980s, criticism of state feminism has also made itself heard. The link between 'top-down' feminism imposed through state-sponsored welfare policies designed to promote gender equality and organized 'bottom-up' pressure from below is more difficult to formalize. As Cathrine Holst asks: who represents "bottom-up feminism" today (Holst, 2009, page 117)? Is state feminism perhaps a model and a concept that is most suited to a more homogeneous society, rather than a specific political context where the living conditions of ethnic minority women are neither part of the analysis nor part of the female community. This is the issue that today's gender researchers are debating, and there are continually new forms of women's lives, even within the welfare state of Norway, which form the basis for a more complex kind of 'bottom-up' pressure. This diversity has been more difficult for Norway's previously homogeneous society to deal with than has been the case in many other countries. "[W]hile Scandinavians are good at reducing inequality, we have few experiences with the need to address pluralism and difference," wrote Helga Hernes (2004, page 291),[11] acknowledging this criticism. She does not suggest any solution, however, instead leaving future developments to those of us who come after her.

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Helga reached more than just a Norwegian audience with the ideas from her book *Staten – kvinner ingen adgang?* She continued to write, including publications in English. In 1987, she published *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism*, which is among the most frequently citied Norwegian academic works. Through this publication, Helga reached a wide audience, and many were inspired by her ideas about the relationship between the state and feminism. In this book, she wrote more about the goals of the woman-friendly state by arguing that:

> A woman-friendly state would not force harder choices on women than on men, or permit unjust treatment on the basis of sex. In a woman-friendly state, women will continue to have children, yet there will also be other roads to self-realization open to them. In such a state women will not have to choose futures that demand greater sacrifices from them than are expected of men. It would be, in short, a state where injustice on the basis of gender would be largely eliminated without an increase in other forms of inequality, such as among groups of women (Hernes, 1987, page 15)

This book has been studied by UN staff members centrally involved in work on women's issues. Among the leaders of the new organization UN

Women,[12] Helga has the status of a heroine. Some of the UN Women staff members have visited us at PRIO, and their admiration for Helga is obvious. There is good reason, then, to believe that the work conducted by this worldwide organization to promote global gender equality has taken both philosophical and organizational inspiration from, among others, Helga Hernes. When Helga was Special Advisor for Peacekeeping Operations and Conflict Management in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she was among those who repeatedly pointed out that women must be included in the various decision-making processes linked to international peace and security. This was before the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325. Her major contribution was not primarily the idea that women must be included, but her very clear explanation as to *how* this could be achieved. She put into operation a gender perspective for security policy and established the concept that the state – the holder of power – could be the driving force. The importance of the connection between gender, peace and security is shown very clearly in an article published in the journal *The Nation* in 2013,[13] which examines Hillary Clinton's time and achievements as the first US Secretary of State to include explicit gender-equality principles in foreign policy (McKelvey, 2013). The article is titled: 'Hillary Clinton, State Feminist?' I do not know to what extent the author knew that the concept of state feminism came from Helga, but it is interesting to note that the term has entered

common usage, including among American journalists.

But where did these ideas come from, along with the courage to assert and fight for them? Feminism was part of the 1970s zeitgeist, but the rather proper, well-dressed and primed for power variety of feminist represented by Helga was no doubt foreign to many. Perhaps it was precisely the fact that Helga was an outsider, with a different view of Norway, our way of life and our eagerness for equality, that caused her to see this exact opportunity. It is also notable that she was able to so aptly describe it in these key publications. Helga has a piercing intellect and a sharp way with words, and when one reads her scholarly publications, it is striking how uncompromisingly she expresses herself. Once when I was having problems with a situation at work, Helga told me: "You don't need to explain or make excuses, simply state the facts." This attitude seems to have been the template for her own way of writing. This ability is linked to an idealistic vision, and she speaks fearlessly and directly to both traditional feminists and conservative thinkers when she claims that:

> [m]ost feminists would deny that states can be non-repressive and non-violent, and thus be friendly to women [...] I wish to make the claim here, that Nordic democracies embody a state form that makes it possible to transform them into women friendly societies (Hernes, 1987, page 15).

Hege Skjeie, who was the first woman in Norway to be appointed a professor of political science (as recently as 2001), was Helga's junior colleague at the Norwegian Institute for Social Research. She has written much about the status of state feminism in Norway today. Hege Skjeie's feminist principles have informed her studies of power and her work on the Gender Equality Commission. She has written about the state and women's issues in a number of books and articles. There are few people in Norway who can put the concept of state feminism into a broader context with greater authority. In a retrospective article about state feminism, she wrote:

> *State feminism* became established as a concept in the second half of the1980s [...] At that time, state feminism characterized the development of a feminist policy through political institutions and described the model for political action as a collaboration between female mobilization and 'bottom-up' agitation, involving the women's movement and trade unions, and 'top-down' efforts to promote integration through state and party policies. [...] The older understanding survives [...] and is of course reflected particularly strongly in UN policy development and institution-building in the area of gender equality. [...] [*S*]*tate feminism* today [is] perhaps more relevant transnationally than in a Norwegian or Nordic context (Skjeie, 2013, page 29).[14]

Skjeie furthermore describes state feminism as a kind of achievable utopia, as though this woman-friendly society is a society where gender will no longer be a decisive factor in what you can achieve, one where it has almost been erased. A society where men and women can have equal opportunities on equal conditions, in a variety of contexts. This concept sounds viable, but as Skjeie writes, it required strategic thinking and interactions between politics, bureaucracy, the voluntary sector, and research. Just what Helga, and many with her, have accomplished.

THE GLOBAL ARENA

After a long flight, Helga and I land in New York. We find a taxi and make our way to our hotel, which is located very conveniently for 5th Avenue and within walking distance of the Norwegian Consulate General. It is bitterly cold in the city that never sleeps, but after dropping off our luggage, we head out, walking quickly to avoid freezing. It is as though all the hours spent on the plane must be walked off, and we stride out like true Norwegians, never thinking that a taxi would have been faster, more convenient and warmer. After some searching, we find a restaurant, settle ourselves down, and begin to plan our activities. There is a central theme for our stay in New York, namely the link between gender equality and peace-building, and the extent to which research may be important for generating a better knowledge base in order to improve policy-making. This is a topic that has always been close to Helga's heart.

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When Helga arrived at PRIO in 2005, she wrote an article for the journal *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift*[15] about the so-called 'new wars', i.e., the wars that followed the end of the Cold War. In the same

spirit in which she organized efforts to survey women's living conditions and opportunities for political participation in Norway in the 1980s, she chose to focus on the security situation for women in many conflict settings and analyze how this affected their opportunities to exercise political influence:

> only when their [women's] need for security has been met can one begin to assess the conditions for their participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives – in other words, to focus on their democratic rights. Individual safety and security and a securely grounded constitutional state are essential requirements for women's participation in the labour market and in public life, something that is essential if they are to be equal partners in the social and economic life of society. Increased stability and confidence in the constitutional state make it possible to build peace and democracy (Hernes, 2007, page 31).

The link between peace, democracy and equality has been central to the work of the UN for many decades. Even so, it was first in the 2000s that this idea was addressed seriously in a way that imposed obligations both on the UN as an organization and on all its member states. Most importantly, the beginning of a new era was marked by the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace

and Security'. This resolution has a very broad scope and effect, but is ground-breaking just as much because it so clearly recognizes women as political actors. It shows that women are not only victims in conflict situations, but also that what hinders them from grasping power is a lack of focus on their security and need for protection. The core idea is that a more equal peace (in terms of protection and participation for women) will be a more lasting peace. The resolution has a triple goal. Firstly, it seeks to promote women's participation in decision-making and peace processes nationally, regionally and internationally. Secondly, it seeks to include a gender perspective in the planning and implementation of peace operations and to increase the proportion of women involved and to introduce gender-sensitivity training among the personnel. Thirdly it seeks to increase understanding of women's particular security requirements. Torunn Tryggestad explains that this important Security Council Resolution is about two general principles, namely to secure women's rights (humanitarian and political), and to enhance peace work under the auspices of the UN by harnessing a previously unexploited resource: women's experiences and competences (Tryggestad, 2008).[16] Peace, democracy and equality are thus closely interlinked, with each fostering and reinforcing the others.

My own research has been linked to this resolution in that I have investigated how sexual violence in war affects not only the immediate victims, but also their families and communi-

ties (Skjelsbæk, 2012).[17] Through my fieldwork in Bosnia with women who have been victims of war rape, I have seen how these attacks often render the victims (and their families) unable to function in the aftermath of the conflict. The victims may be so traumatized that they are unable to look after themselves and their families, and even less able to work or participate in the society around them. For others, the situation is completely different. The attacks have not killed them, but they have often lost close members of their families and their homes. The fact that they are still alive, can breathe, talk and continue their lives with their heads held high, has given many of these victims a heightened sense of engagement. One of my informants in Bosnia explained it to me like this: "What happened to me wasn't an accident, it was a war crime, and this means I've suffered a war injury." This viewpoint causes her to be neither ashamed nor silent, but ready for action. The experiences and image of the female victim of war rape are extremely complex, and the will to take power, or the power to take power, also applies to those who have endured the greatest hardships. The challenge is to facilitate a situation in which women such as my informant, and others with experiences that are important for further policy development, are given a place and are heard. This has engaged the attention of Helga, Torunn and myself, and in 2011 it was this challenge and the UN resolution that formed the basis for the selection of the winners of the Nobel Peace Prize. On the morning of

Friday, 7 October 2011, just before 11 a.m., neither Torunn, Helga or I knew what decision by the committee Thorbjørn Jagland would announce. We did not know that Liberia and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 were about to become the centre of attention. We also did not know that Leymah Gbowee, whom we had encountered at a film screening organized by PRIO some years earlier, would be one of the recipients. At 11 a.m. Thorbjørn Jagland made the following announcement:

> The Nobel Peace Prize for 2011 is to be divided in three equal parts between Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkul Karman for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work. We cannot achieve democracy and lasting peace in the world unless women obtain the same opportunities as men to influence developments at all levels of society. In October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325. The resolution for the first time made violence against women in armed conflict an international security issue. It underlined the need for women to become participants on an equal footing with men in peace processes and in peace work in general.[18]

Jagland's rationale for awarding the prize was tangibly similar to arguments we had advanced

in a series of publications and research projects. Helga, Torunn and I almost felt that the prize was 'ours', at least in the sense that we had contributed, if by nothing else than through pointing out this connection also to central members of the Nobel committee. Now Helga and I are going to meet Leymah, who has gone from being a social worker and peace activist to a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. My task is to interview her for a film to raise awareness about the importance of research for peace. I'm wearing my suit jacket with shoulder pads, and have retrieved my smarter, mud-free, pair of boots from my suitcase. I've applied some discreet make-up. Helga has pronounced her approval. I am ready.

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Of course, it was Torunn who had heard that a documentary film had been made about the peace activist Leymah Gbowee, and that a screening was planned in Oslo in 2009. Once again, she saw an opportunity, grasped it, and ensured that the screening would be followed by a debate, chaired by Helga. The film was titled *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, a title that you don't forget once you've heard it. The film starts with Leymah, who is waking up in the morning after having a dream that she can't get out of her head. In the dream she saw a Liberia that was not at war, where children were able to be children, not soldiers. The story continues by telling how Leymah, as a social worker in 2002, managed

to mobilize over 2000 women in a network that spread across more than 15 provinces in Liberia to protest against war, violence, and Charles Taylor's regime. Their methods were simple. The first protests comprised a group of women who had dressed themselves in white, to symbolize peace, who appeared singing and praying at the local fishmarket in Monrovia. Leymah and Comfort Freeman, who were leaders of two different Lutheran churches, together with Asatu Bah Kenneth (who founded the Liberian Muslim Women's Organization after being inspired by Leymah and Comfort), succeeded in uniting political forces across religious divides. As time goes on, the women make themselves more visible along main roads, in public spaces, and other places where they can attract attention. In these new places, the women continue to sing and pray – albeit to different gods. The network evolves into the *Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace*, and in 2003 they succeed in getting Charles Taylor to attend a meeting, where the president promises the women that he will participate in peace talks in Ghana. The film shows how the women send a delegation to Ghana to put pressure on the negotiating parties. The women do not take part in the actual negotiations, but sit outside the hotel where the talks are taking place. The talks continue for a long time, several weeks. In the film, we see how some of the men inside the hotel have no interest in finding a solution. After having fought in wretched conditions, life in a hotel with clean sheets, which are changed on a

regular basis, as well as food and cigarettes available on demand, is something that they won't give up easily. Delaying the process means a longer stay at the hotel. After a while, the women outside the hotel have had enough. They go into the hotel and form a human chain around the rooms where the men are negotiating, and they barricade the entrance and the doors. They hold hands and will not move until then men have reached a peaceful conclusion. In other words, they shut them in. The police are called to throw the women out, and that is what triggers the film's climactic scene: Leymah protests against the police action and threatens to strip naked. While Leymah signals that she is willing to take off her t-shirt, headwrap and other clothing, we are told that such an action is associated with strong taboos in Liberia, and is almost like putting a curse on anyone who sees the naked woman. The policemen panic and don't know how to react. This is a situation and form of protest for which they are completely unprepared. The only way out of this embarrassing situation is to allow the women to stay – and so they do. The parties agree on a peace agreement, and the women and Liberia have won a major victory. The film ends there, but the efforts of Leymah and the women's network continued. She and her network managed to mobilize many women to vote when an election was held in 2005, and she deserves much of the credit for having brought to power Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman in Africa to be democratically elected as a head of state.

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One evening in January 2009, a jet-lagged and weary Leymah sits at the back of the auditorium at Parkteatret Cinema, in Oslo's Grünerløkka neighbourhood. She has arrived in Oslo that same morning with the film's producer, Abigail Disney. The far-too-small auditorium is packed to capacity: when the doors opened, people were queuing around the block, hoping to get in. In connection with the screening, Torunn, Helga and I are responsible for organizing a debate on the topic of the film: the women's non-violent campaign for peace in Liberia. Torunn and I are organizing things behind the scenes, while Helga is chair for the evening. When the film is over and the lights come on, the cinema is completely silent. People are overwhelmed by what they have seen and don't entirely know how they should react. The atmosphere is unlike that after other films about women's experiences of war that I've seen before. Many documentaries about women's experiences of war are so painful to watch that the audience is silent due to the discomfort caused by the intense depiction of mental and physical pain. The film about Leymah is different, and the silence results not from discomfort, but from enormous admiration for the woman sitting behind us in the cinema. While the credits roll, and Leymah, Abigail and two other debaters settle down in front of the screen, Helga takes charge and breaks the silence. She is moved, but composes herself. "This documentary gives me

hope not only because it shows that women can protest against injustice and war, but also because it is splendid evidence of what civil society and grassroots organizations can achieve when they stand united. It is nothing less than deeply impressive and inspiring." Everyone applauds, and Leymah looks as though she has finally emerged from the fog of jet-lag. Questions pour in from the auditorium: Where did she get her courage from? What are her views about Liberia today? How could she take so many risks when she is the mother of six children? What can other people learn from her experiences? What impact do her religious convictions have on her political struggles? With the same sense of gravity and engagement as Helga, simply packaged in West African attire and a headwrap, Leymah answers all the questions. She exudes authority and determination, and as she stands in Partkteatret, tired and weary on a January evening in 2009, we realize that the policeman in the film who was afraid that she was about to strip naked, would not have doubted for a second that she was prepared to make good her threat.

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In preparation for my interview with Leymah, I have read her autobiography (Gbowee, 2011).[19] In the book, she describes herself as a woman who toils and stumbles, who struggles with alcohol, men and a bad conscience. She is younger than I am, but has experienced more than anyone

should in a long lifetime: war, grief, loss of close family members, violence and the collapse of the society around her.

The interview is to take place at Abigail Disney's office. Abigail is near enough a relative of Donald Duck (Walt Disney and Abigail's grandfather were brothers) and she is a well-to-do philanthropist. But although there is obviously a lot of money linked to the Disney name, Abigail's office is hardly glamorous. It is in a grey building among many other blocks slightly away from the most hectic streets in New York. I find the door and go in to meet Leymah, Abigail and the filming team. I have never been filmed before and have no journalistic experience as an interviewer. But at least I know about the subject and feel that I have read everything it is possible to read about Leymah, Liberia and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The nervousness I had felt when meeting Helga many years ago was of quite different proportions than the nervousness I now feel in New York. Even so, I am a little disconcerted when I enter the cramped office building and see Leymah, who doesn't look up from her seat and wish me welcome. She looks tired, and it seems that her status as a Nobel Peace Prize winner has made her blasé and fatigued. But as soon as I tell her where I have come from, that I helped organize the film screening at Grünerløkka in Oslo in 2009, she begins to laugh. She remembers that well: her dress was far too tight, and the seats were far too high. She had struggled during the whole screening not to fall off her seat, and she

had been afraid that her dress would split during the debate after the film.

With a slightly lighter atmosphere in the room, we get ourselves settled. We have to sit cramped together opposite each other in an unnatural configuration in order to fit in with the camera, lighting and sound. As we get started, the conversation flows as it did that time I talked with Helga over lunch in NOVA's atrium. Leymah explains how she felt herself to be a victim during the war in Liberia, but that encounters with other women who had experienced physical violence had made her feel like a hypocrite. These women, she said, had picked themselves up, along with the remnants of their lives, and the people who depended on them, and would not let themselves be broken by the attacks they had suffered. I think about the article that Helga wrote about the new wars, where she referred to precisely this type of threat to security by writing that "[i]t is a fact that women have greater reason to fear any man whom they encounter, whether or not he is wearing a uniform, if they are alone, in a conflict or post-conflict situation," (Hernes, 2007, page 29). In Liberia, there was extreme violence, and reports by several organizations suggest that 70 per cent of the female population experienced physical violence in one form or another. According to Leymah, these were the women who gave her the courage and strength to attempt to do something about the hopelessness of the extreme violence and misery that had characterized Liberia during a series of wars. As

a social worker, she travelled round and spoke to men and women in a variety of settings about how it might be possible to promote peace and reconciliation. She relates that in many of these meetings, she was the only woman, and that the people whom social workers spoke to tended mainly to be men. Often, she would stay behind and drink coffee with the women they had met, and that was when she got to hear their desires and thoughts about what had to happen to put an end to the war in Liberia. "These were insights that would have changed the dynamic in the formal meetings, if only the women had dared to come forward and say what they really thought. But something was stopping them and holding them back."

We conclude by talking about how research can contribute to promoting knowledge that can improve the basis for a durable peace, and how equality and women can be a part of this. She answers by setting me a challenge and looks me in the eyes: "Be present when the peace process is happening, don't write about it afterwards, be there when the attackers have gathered to negotiate a settlement and the victims are sitting outside, be there when things are at their most uncertain and unpredictable and try to understand who it is that is being represented, what they promise to do, and what is at stake for the various parties, and look to see who isn't present." She doesn't only answer my questions, but orders me to change the way in which I work and to gather new knowledge and insights. I nod and

make promises, but wonder how I will do this in practice. Leymah calls this *the beautiful moment*, when everything is possible, but it still needs to be better understood.[20]

When the interview is over, I haul myself into a taxi to meet Helga at a restaurant in another part of the city. There, we will talk with representatives from the UN and from the Norwegian mission to the UN. Helga is already there, and I enter in the middle of the conversation. Helga smiles and turns politely to a woman who is in the middle of making a point:

"Then I asked one of my senior male colleagues how he would have taken account of gender in a ceasefire or peace agreement," says the woman from the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA). She is speaking enthusiastically and leaning across the table, so that I'm a little in the background. It is not me she wants to reach, but Helga, who is sitting at the other end of the table. It is important for her to obtain Helga's recognition and understanding of what she has tried to achieve. She has taken a full year out from her job at the UN to study feminist theory and philosophy, and she has studied Helga's book *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism* very thoroughly. Helga listens with an enthusiastic expression on her face. "He answered that this was something he hadn't thought about," the woman continues with equal enthusiasm. "I mean, he had worked in conflicts where sexual violence was a major problem, but he hadn't thought that protecting women was particularly relevant in a peace agreement between the warring parties!" I expect that this woman will then roll her eyes. She has leant back in her chair so I can see her face, and to my surprise, she doesn't do so. "You know, in fact he was very moved and almost ashamed that he hadn't taken this into consideration." She has to take a gulp of water, because she has more to say, but her mouth is dry. "So," she says, taking yet another gulp, "he suggested that we should sit down together several times over the coming weeks, so that he could explain to me all the details and steps involved in ceasefires and peace agreements, and then we could think out loud about how women's situations and experiences during and immediately after a war could be written into the text of an agreement. Now he has become almost evangelical about this subject and talks about it in all contexts where he thinks it is relevant." She smiles and puts down the glass, which she has been holding in her hand and waving while she has presented the conclusion of her story. As the glass meets the table top, there's a thud, followed by a splash as the small amount of water that was left in the glass jumps out and changes her napkin from dry and pale blue to wet and dark blue on the white tablecloth. She has clearly come to a full-stop and she directs her gaze to Helga. Helga responds quickly: "But that is completely fantastic!" The two others sitting at the table nod in support. Helga looks fondly at the woman from the UN, who in terms of age could have been her daughter, and says like a

proud mother to her child: "I have never seen anything similar before and the way you have done this is quite simply ingenious! How clever you are!" The woman from the UN smiles yet again. She looks down at the table almost embarrassed, but happy for the praise. She has got the feedback she hoped for and can finally eat her lunch, which has remained untouched as she has explained about the process of putting together the UN's first handbook for peace negotiators.

This handbook, which has been completed with support from, among other countries, Norway, contains a checklist with boxes that peace negotiators can tick in order to check that they have ensured that women's experiences of war will be attended to and dealt with. The handbook is intended to generate pressure from the UN, so that people in conflict areas around the world realize that a peace is being developed that pays greater attention to men's and women's different experiences of war and that creates possibilities for men and women to influence and determine the way further out of the conflict. Hopefully towards a lasting peace. Such a world can be achieved by creating 'top-down' pressure – combined with 'bottom-up' pressure from civil society – which puts pressure on the UN's member states to ensure that women's experiences, viewpoints and complaints are taken seriously in these vulnerable moments when war ends and peace is to be created. Does this model sound familiar? Is it coincidence that Helga and two Norwegians have landed up in a restaurant in

New York to talk to a UN employee about a model for peace negotiations that takes better account of women? It is not.

Equality (and peacebuilding) are part of the Norwegian national self-image. In addition, Norway has the money (a lot of money) to promote gender equality ideals in other parts of the world. Through this double capital, i.e. gender-equality expertise and oil wealth, the small state of Norway can buy admittance to the ranks of more powerful nations and consequently perhaps gain influence in other political fields. Gender-equality is no longer about idealism, it is about practical politics. This is one of Norway's foreign policy trump cards in the international game of power and influence, an opportunity of which both current and former foreign ministers and diplomats have taken advantage. 'Everyone' is concerned with gender equality.

In a 'branding debate' about Norway organized by the Nobel Peace Centre in the winter of 2012, a British advertising guru asked Norway's then-foreign minister Espen Barth Eide, what was Norway's most powerful argument to market itself as worthy of a place at the table with the most powerful nations, seen from a foreign minister's point of view. Without hesitation, Espen responded "our gender-equality policy". "This is something that people want to learn more about and that in fact is rewarding," he continued, smiling even more broadly. "Watch out that you don't get self-righteous," responded the advertising guru, but Espen simply continued to smile. He

didn't mention that it has been women like Helga who have been completely decisive for Norway's presence at that table and who have created this capital.

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The lunch with the UN staff members ends, and Helga and I walk back to the hotel to get ready for the evening. We have been invited by the Norwegian Consul General to her Manhattan penthouse. The guest of honour is to be Leymah Gbowee, and the other guests are wealthy philanthropists who are eager to donate to worthy causes, including research. Since the topic for the evening is gender equality and peacebuilding, the Norwegian foreign service is happy to host the gathering. Helga and I arrive early. We have to take the elevator up more than 30 floors, and the first thing we see when we come into the room is a large, mahogany-coloured spiral staircase. Helga has been here before, and as soon as we are inside, she says: "You have to come upstairs with me." I am happy to accompany her, and we emerge onto a roof terrace that is several times larger than my first apartment. The view is impeccable, and we get out our mobile-phone cameras. We snap photos of ourselves and the view, and while we are doing so, the guests start to stream in downstairs. Members of the American philanthropical elite prove to have a relatively high average age. They are dressed discreetly and expensively, and all express interest in that friendly way that only Americans can master. Through the crowd I can see that Leymah and Abigail have also arrived. Unlike the other guests, they are not discreetly dressed; Leymah is wearing a green and white West African dress that makes her shine among the other guests. We sip at our drinks, balancing canapes and wine glasses while shaking hands and exchanging business cards. Helga has issued an amicable order to me to put down my over-large bag, so I have had to keep my cards in the pocket of my suit jacket. This turns out to cause difficulties when I have to fish them out while also dealing with my wine glass and finger food. I just about manage it, and while I attempt to get hold of a card to give to an immigrant Russian philanthropist, who has just told me that he is very interested in women leaders, the Consul General taps on her glass. She has gone a few steps up the staircase so that everyone can see her, and says a few words about what an honour and pleasure it is to have everyone's company, and what a special privilege it is to have the Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee among the guests. Everyone applauds, and Leymah makes her way through the throng. She gives thanks for the invitation, and takes the consul general's place on the staircase landing and shines even more in her green and white dress against the dark mahogany staircase. Everyone is quiet and looks expectantly towards her. In contrast to how she appeared earlier in the day in the cramped office building, Leymah seems more at home when she is the centre of attention. She

makes effective use of the moment, because she has something to say. The room is completely silent.

There is a beautiful moment, says Leymah, and repeats what she said to me earlier that day, "when war is to be ended and peace is to be created". She takes a dramatic pause. "If women are not present in that moment, if they have not been invited in, sought out and consulted, the peace will not be delivered as effectively as it could be if they were included." Her way of speaking has authority, not least due to her achievements. She has her audience in the hollow of her hand. She was there when the peace in Liberia was to be negotiated, but she was not invited in. Nonetheless she took responsibility for ensuring that those who were to negotiate knew about the women outside, that the women were ready to take action, and that they would not leave the hotel where the negotiations were taking place until the war was formally at an end. "In order to ensure that they are there, we must know what it is that prevents them from being there, why they are not invited in, and what it is that stops them," she continues. I glance covertly at Helga, who looks as wide-eyed as the rest of the gathering at the powerful figure that is Leymah Gbowee. I wonder if she is thinking the same thing that I am thinking: that Leymah is making the same argument as that advanced by Helga in the introduction to her book series *Women's Living Conditions and Life Cycles*, namely that one must understand how the rhythm of a woman's life

is different from that of a man's – and how this affects women's opportunities for political participation. How can we facilitate a situation whereby women can also be present at Leymah's *beautiful moment*? What is needed in terms of practical politics, knowledge development, commitment and facilitation? Can experiences in Norway and the efforts of Helga and her contemporaries be transferred to other countries?

In Norway in the 1970s and 80s, the population was approximately 4 million. The country was peaceful and harmonious, and there was great political will to neutralize differences: we got to the starting point at the perfect time. Perhaps the ground was particularly fertile for the development of state feminism. What is it like in other countries, in other cultures, in the transition from war to peace, where the state may be a party in the conflict, where physical and social infrastructure has collapsed, and where solidarity between people has been damaged or destroyed? Who can generate bottom-up pressure and who can become a top-down ally to promote more woman-friendly policy development that can benefit both men and women? Clearly this is difficult. But is it impossible?

"To ensure that women are present and are heard, we must know more about how this can be achieved in different contexts, in different circumstances, and under different regimes. Here, both researchers and politicians have a job to do," concludes Leymah, and the same challenge I was presented with earlier in the day is

now repeated to the philanthropists, who nod and sip discreetly from their wine glasses. Everyone applauds, and I think how incredibly far it is from a penthouse in Manhattan to the ground in Liberia, and other places that are in a state of transition between war and peace, and how little is actually being done to ensure that women are included. Will the reception, the enthusiasm of the philanthropists, and the contribution of researchers mean anything for those who it really affects? Can one change politics by increasing knowledge – or is it, as Helga wrote, that "descriptions can never be adequate as an explanation of how and why things are as they are," (Hernes, 1982).[21] Does one perhaps also need to be primed (and ready) for power, and is it precisely this that poses the greatest obstacle for women the world over? What very few women are able to do – perhaps particularly in the very difficult circumstances following a conflict – is engage themselves in politics.

However, one must not let oneself be fooled into believing that one knows what women are able to achieve. After some years, Helga became a single mother in Norway, where she was a foreigner and lacked any close family. Nonetheless, she stayed and managed to engage in politics and society, and take on senior positions in male-dominated fields. Leymah Gbowee has also several times found herself a single mother, and today she has six children. She has been a refugee, as was Helga, and has lost everything she owned. Nonetheless, she managed to force into existence a peace agreement that transformed Liberia. Since then, she has become a Nobel Peace Prize winner, and now she has a unique platform from which to exert influence and inspire enthusiasm. History is full of such examples of women who, with tireless force of will, create major revolutions, often through simple measures. When one hears these women's stories and shares their experiences, one is forced to look at oneself and reflect over one's own achievements.

The reception is coming to an end, and it is time for me to travel home, back to Oslo. Helga is staying on in New York for a few more days. The Consul General comes over to me and murmurs discreetly that a car is waiting for me outside. I look at her in some surprise and she winks at me before continuing: "Helga has made sure that you will be driven to the airport – punctually and with just enough time to catch the evening flight home to Oslo." I thank the Consul General, thank Leymah for the interview and her splendid speech, and go over to Helga to thank her for arranging the car. The state feminist is done for the day, and now she is Helga the caring Prussian, who simply wants me to be on time, have all my things with me, and have help travelling home to the country she arrived in, made her home, and transformed.

ROLE MODELS

Helga Hernes contributed to transforming Norway, such that it became a woman-friendly state with a family-friendly face. This kind of state, philosophy, and policy development constitute a role model for the global gender-equality goals that the UN is working towards. Although there is no direct line from Helga Hernes's work to Leymah Gbowee's efforts for peace in Liberia, the Nobel Committee's rationale for its award of the Nobel Peace Prize 2011 links these two women. The emphasis on the importance of involving women in key political decision-making processes pervades both women's arguments and political engagement. Several international organizations, such as the EU, the African Union, NATO and the OSCE have taken inspiration from this work and now have action plans designed to promote women's participation in peace and reconciliation processes in their various fields.

These organizations are exerting considerable top-down pressure. In contrast, bottom-up mobilization from states and civil society is, naturally enough, far more complicated than the situation in Norway in the 1980s, when Helga Hernes wrote her most important texts. Today, various alliances of conservative political and

religious forces, originating in places such as the Vatican, Russia, Iran, Egypt and Poland, do not want to see a global mobilization in favour of gender equality. Gender equality is often seen as a Western – even a Nordic – imperialist concept. Many of its harshest critics ignore the fact that many countries from the so-called Global South were also staunch supporters of the crucial Security Council resolution of 2000, Resolution 1325, which sets gender-equality goals for global security policy.

With global gender-equality challenges as everyday topics for discussion at office lunch breaks, on work trips, and in discussions with my colleagues, my encounters with the Norwegian gender-equality debate are often rather peculiar. In my experience, discussions of the issue often concern whether we have reached our goal, the nature of the final taboos, and to what extent the struggle for gender equality is really something still worth making a fuss about. I'm disconcerted by these types of questions, partly because they don't admit an understanding of the huge inequalities in Norway today between different groups of women, including in relation to various gender-specific issues, and partly because they are so insular. In these discussions, the feminist 'we' is generally Norwegian and white. The significance of difference exists only in the background. In addition, I fear that this dominant gender-equality discourse may contribute to creating a false consensus that we have come so far, as if this trend is going forwards and upwards

without any risk of going into reverse. As if Norway will always be a gender-equality role model for the rest of the world. This cannot be taken for granted. As Norway changes, gender equality policies will most likely also be amended. The forces that oppose the global gender-equality campaign may also come to oppose Norway's gender-equality policy.

Despite these concerns, Norway has long experience of women's participation in politics, and Norwegian gender-equality policy is thus justifiably held up as an international ideal. Taking an ambivalent view of Norway, from home and abroad, the question arises as to what obligations this international ideal imposes on us Norwegians. Do I – or we – who have grown up in Norway as the children of state feminists, have a responsibility to maintain these ideas through research, knowledge development and political participation? What should our contribution be? Where should we intervene? These are not questions to which there are simple answers, but my trip with Helga, my reading of her texts, my meeting with Leymah and the discussions with the UN staff members have shown me that there are high expectations that the centres of competence in Norway will be ready to assist global players wishing to work on gender-equality policy and women's political participation. In Norway we have money, resources, female academics and politicians who are able to work and have families – and be role models. In addition, the whole nation, men and women, has extensive experi-

ence of the effects of state feminism. Accordingly, it is vital to be vigilant as to Norway's opportunities, limitations, and models for gender-equality policy development, not only for Norwegians, but also for others. Here lies a challenge, or a call for action. If the premises for political participation are undergoing continual change, and if the top-down pressure is challenged, we need continually updated knowledge if we are to manoeuvre in this landscape. This is another way of understanding the struggle for gender equality: not as a linear development onwards and upwards, but as a chequered landscape where maps need to be repeatedly redrawn.

When Helga Hernes celebrated her 70th birthday, Hege Skjeie, Torunn Tryggestad and I edited a book for her with the title *Kjønn, Krig, Konflikt* [*Women, War, Conflict*]. In the introduction, we quoted from an interview in the Norwegian left-wing newspaper *Klassekampen*, where Helga said: "I have always been accused of being too positive. I think that's all right." Perhaps it is this attitude that is most decisive for daring to bring about major change? So easy and yet so difficult.

Shall we give it a try?

NOTES

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20 The whole interview is available here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=b94-9ylifsl

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