WOMEN'S ROLE IN CULTURAL LIFE IN NORWAY

by

NORWEGIAN NATIONAL COMMISSION

Division of Cultural Studies and Policies
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Unesco, Paris
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and implementation

UNESCO in conjunction with the end of the Women's Decade has initiated a comparative study of women's participation in cultural life in the industrialized countries and in the developing countries. This report is a part of that project. It is a cooperative effort between the National Council of Women, Norway (NCWN), and the Institute for Cultural and Social Studies (IKOS), an independent foundation associated with the Department of Culture and Sport at the Telemark Regional College.

A national seminar was organized as part of the efforts to obtain background material for this report. The seminar was held from 11th to 12th April 1985 at the Telemark Regional College.

The project has had a timeframe of four months. It has therefore only to a limited extent been possible to examine specific sectors or to present detailed surveys. Thus, this report should be considered a summary sketch which indicates some problem areas, presents some main concepts and indicates some relevant relationships.

The basis of the report has been prepared by sociologist Trine Deichman-Sørensen. This has then been edited by a steering committee composed of Kirsten B. Welhaven (NCWN), Solveig Halvorsen (NCWN), Sigrid Ø (IKOS), Tormod Øia (IKOS) and Irene Iversen (University of Oslo). Stan Burkey (PARCONSULT) has translated the report into English. The final report is therefore a joint effort.

1.2. Culture as a concept

The world culture as a concept is used in quite different ways by dissimilar disciplines and professions. It is therefore useful for the purposes of this report to differentiate between two main types of definition which represent essentially different ways of approaching the problem. The first is the traditional "Fine Arts" approach and the other is the concept of culture as it is used in the social studies.

The traditional understanding of culture coincides more or less with the use of the word in daily speech. Underlying this understanding are assumptions relating to quality, values, sophistication and humanism. Historically, this concept of culture has undergone a transformation from a specific definition related to growth in nature to a description of a "spiritual level of development" of society as a whole. In line with this understanding, art represents the highest expression of a spiritual level of development so that art and culture more or less become interchangeable concepts. Significantly, the traditional concept of culture contains a measure of value - a measure of what is worthy or unworthy, good or bad.

Within the social sciences an attempt is made to give the concept of culture a greater degree of value-neutrality. With this as a starting point, emphasis is given to "culturally relative" descriptions. Such a concept is more useful in describing and explaining variations in culture. Ideas, standards
and values can be understood on the basis of their own pre­mises rather than from some external measure of quality. This use of the concept is also found in daily speech, e.g. we speak of different cultures.

Nonetheless there are some nuances in the manner in which the social sciences understood the concept. One interpretation sees culture as a package of values, standards and ideas borne by a particular group of society, and more or less transferred in their entirety to the next generation. Ethnologists and archaeologists often give the concept an even broader meaning. Culture is not only values, standards and ideas, but also material structures, production processes, technology - in other words: the sum total of all activities within a society.

These dissimilar interpretations of the word culture reflect at the same time dissimilar levels in society, or levels of human social activities in general. These dissimilar levels are to a large degree conditional upon each other. A presentation of women's participation in cultural life must therefore of necessity include all of these levels, and simultaneously commute between them.

2. THE ROLE OF CULTURAL LIFE IN NORWAY

2.1. Distinctively Norwegian characteristics

Relative to other countries in Europe, Norway is a young nation. The country was first under Danish rule for 400 years, and then in union with Sweden for almost 100 years. National independence was achieved in 1905. This has not only had constitutional and political effects, but has also influenced the development of a particularly Norwegian culture. During the last century there was considerable tension with Norwegian cultural life between the Danish and continental influences on the one side, and a dawning national consciousness on the other. The national romantic movement gained much of its inspiration from the rural and agricultural settings.

With the emergence of a national consciousness, both Swedish and Danish imperialism came under fire. The spokesmen and spokeswomen for "Norwegianness" wanted a political and cultural liberation of the country. The main opponents in this conflict were the usually Danish inspired civil servants. The dominating culture was experienced as being remote from Norwegian life, not only culturally and politically, but also in form and content. Towards the end of the last century these new directions moved towards naturalism and realism in art. Those opposed to a European idealism desired a distinctively Norwegian culture which had its roots in, and was reflected in, the people's daily lives and history. This movement was at the same time an expression of strong social currents. This period is considered to be the "golden age of Norwegian literature". Also during this period a new Norwegian written language, New Norwegian - based on the rural dialectics, was developed. The written language had until then been essentially Danish. From the time of this national breakthrough it is possible to speak of a Norwegian-European culture in which the most outstanding names are Henrik Ibsen and Edvard Munch.

This breakthrough occurred about 100 years back in time.
Since then, Norwegian culture has in broad terms been characterized by tensions within different Norwegian traditions on the one side, and between the specifically Norwegian and an expanded European cultural perspective on the other. Since the Second World War the Anglo-American influence has been strong.

2.2. Egalitarian traditions

The development of a Norwegian national consciousness, in which distinctive national cultural features at the same time become part of a shared European consciousness, has been a process peculiar to Norway. In all countries this process has been integral with the establishment of nation-states. For other countries in Europe this was primarily a question of internally reorganizing society. Norway's location on the outer edge of Europe resulted in the process, which on the continent extended over several hundred years, being concentrated to the second half of the last century. This development was characterized by a revival of national consciousness in which national symbols and a search back in time for phenomena and forms considered genuinely Norwegian were important parts of the process.

Another characteristic of the development of Norwegian cultural consciousness is tied to the society's relatively strong egalitarian traditions. An aristocracy of bourgeoisie in the European context was almost completely nonexistent. For example, only in the old Hanseatic trading city of Bergen was there a "salon society" of any extent which could be compared with cultured European city life. In contrast with the continent, Norwegian farmers were never serfs. In Norway more or less everyone has a farmer as forefather three or four generations back. The social aspects of the cultural revival were therefore to a large degree associated with the opposition to things foreign and culturally alien.

It is first and foremost the position of the arts which distinguishes Norwegian cultural life from the European. Art as an institution has as such a relatively marginal existence. In spite of a different social composition and historical background, we find nonetheless that the values cultivated by the European bourgeoisie have rather penetrated Norwegian society. Above all this applies to the European tradition of enlightenment, philosophy which in Norway has materialized in organizational and study circle activities. This has left its mark on everything from the integration of local communities and workers associations to the organization of the greater society in general. The impressive interest in literature which one finds in Norway can in this context be seen in conjunction with both a general diffusion and a privatization of the arts.

2.3. Forms of sociability

The forms of social entertainment and sociability reflected the material poverty. Social idleness was as equally lacking as the upper classes who would have cultivated it. Social gatherings have instead been primarily associated with the family and church functions and festivals. Neighbours invited each other according to special and often complex customs. While European culture was characterized by more disconnected forms of
sociability and communication outside the family and often in public places, Norwegian culture and forms of sociability were firmly tied to the family and the locality. These local forms of community life became later an important foundation for extensive organizational activities. In conjunction with this was a widespread tradition of storytelling and an interest in the refinement of handicraft techniques. It was the farmer's rather than the towndweller's life which was given esthetic value and importance. The later interest in the amateurs arts within the various study organizations can also be seen as an extension of this tradition.

2.4. Recent trends

Norwegian society and its cultural life has changed rather radically over the past 20 to 30 years. The interest in art and cultural activities has expanded in line with the explosion in education following the last war. Along with this has been the reduction of working time. As a result leisure time and cultural activities have attained increased importance. In this respect Norwegian cultural life is following the same development trends as elsewhere in the Western world. This is most easily seen in the growth of mass culture in the form of popular music, comic books, etc.

The polarization within cultural life tends to disappear. In Norway it is only possible to talk about cultural conflicts in a strict sense - which also had social and political components - during the period from 1880 to the Second World War. Since the war the cultural landscape has become more uniform. Norway is technologically advanced and has a surplus with which to administer cultural life in a broad sense, but is still rather poor with respect to an active "cultural life" in a more classical meaning. In one sense the circle has been completed, Norway has gained a new folk culture.

2.5. Cultural policies

To the extent that government institutions have concerned themselves with cultural policies, they have done so by primarily taking the traditional qualitative concept of culture as the starting point. The goal has been to preserve the national cultural heritage and to disseminate professional "high quality culture" to the general public by establishing nationwide institutions.

There has, however, occurred a certain change of direction during the past ten or fifteen years. This change of direction has received inspiration from France, and has at the same time obvious parallels with developments in Swedish cultural life. The ambitious plans to democratize access to traditional culture have been replaced by a democratization of the cultural concept itself. In conjunction with this change there has also occurred a cautious building up of cultural administrations at local and county levels.

These new trends linked with "the broader concept of culture" are based on liberal, culturally relative perceptions of society. A broader concept of culture implies tolerance for
dissident thinkers, for other religious beliefs and cultural conceptions. Additionally, these new policies are based on the recognition that traditional culture was primarily the culture of the elite. A broadened concept of culture attempts to encompass culture as it is experienced by the people. Government policies are concerned therefore not only with theatre attendance, museum visits, etc., but also with leisure time activities with lower traditional status such as participation in clubs and societies, sport and other amateurs activities and the media.

This broader concept of culture in terms of cultural policy still has many things in common with the traditional concept. Culture is still a sector concept encompassing only a limited part of social life. The "old" cultural sector has certainly been expanded with a few new areas of activity, but this is still quite far from regarding culture as an aspect of all activities in the society. It can instead be said that the new concept of culture is pragmatically limited.

These pragmatic limitations are most clearly seen in the reorganization of the administration and committee structure which has been carried out by the local governments in Norway. Most local governments now have a structure based on four main committees: one for health and welfare, one for technical matters, one for education, and one for culture. Of these four main committees, it is the one for culture that undoubtedly has the weakest administration as well as having the smallest budget. There are still many small local governments that have no administration for culture at all.

3. WOMEN'S CULTURE - WOMEN AS A SUB-CULTURE

3.1. Sisterhood - Fellowship between women

The household and the family have had a central role in Norwegian culture. For this reason women have assumed a central role in the development of our own distinctive culture. Even though women have not had equal rights nor have participated in society as equally as men, they have, however, fulfilled a role which has been more or less indispensable for that sense of fellowship and equality which is seen to be so typically Norwegian. Women have been the keystone in the local communities in a sparsely populated and spacious country. On the basis of the same reasoning, the question can be raised as to whether women have been the caretakers of that pressure for conformity and conventionality that are seen as more negative features of the nation's culture and religion.

As a result of their position in the household, women have not only left their mark on Norwegian culture in general, but they have also represented a sub-culture, a women's culture.

According to Harriet Clayhills and Elisabeth Helsing in their article "Our foremothers - culture and work" (Vare formtfdre - kultur og arbeid) published in 1979 in Norway's Cultural History, the women's culture was undermined by "the great change" which began in Norway in the middle of the 1800's. As industrialization changed the household from a unit of production into a unit a consumption. This resulted in an increasing limitation of women's areas of power and responsibility until
they were finally left with reproduction as their only real area of responsibility. Industrialization also increased class differences and the social distance between women belonging to different strata of the population. It has therefore become more difficult to speak of a shared women's culture. Women lost what they had had in common. Upperclass women concerned themselves less and less with the management and administration of their households as the housewives on the large farms had done previously. On the other hand it was completely unacceptable among the higher strata of society for women to work outside the home. Among the lower strata, however, women worked hard both as housewives and as paid workers with poor wages.

Other researchers have, however, maintained that industrialization laid the foundation for a new women's culture as it made it possible for women to participate more and more in employment, organizational life, and, in general, in public and cultural activities. But women's participation was limited to women's matters. Gender roles were applied at all levels and in all connections. Women functioned within their own women's world.

Looked at in this way, industrialization did not break down the borders around the women's world, but merely expanded them. The women's culture did not disappear, but on the contrary gained new possibilities for growth with industrialization. This interpretation is based on the work of a Norwegian social psychologist, Berit As, who maintains that women live in a women's world and develop a women's culture, a model for experiences, behaviour, perception and ideas which they have about themselves and the world.

It is, however, possible to question whether women's lives have so much in common that it is natural to speak of a separate women's world, a separate women's culture.

3.2. Women as the bearers of tradition

In Norway as in other countries women have played a central role in oral storytelling traditions. Perhaps because they had the opportunity to meet more often, it was the women who knew the secrets about the local community. In the course of helping and assisting each other, and either out of necessity or desire, women exchanged both small tales and important stories about which they knew far more than men.

Some of these stories were often just pure tales. Stories one had heard and were to be passed on to others. In this way the women passed along the traditions, legends and myths from one village to another. When these folk tales and legends were collected and recorded there occurred a break in the oral tradition. Those who travelled around and collected the folk tales were men, although this can be understood: women were at that time more bound to their own localities. Norwegian folk tales and legends are today associated with the names Asbjørnsen and Moe, while the earlier storytelling tradition was unsigned, collective and oral. Those women who were perhaps best at telling a tall tale or story are today mostly unknown. Storytelling is no longer in the same way a part of our cultural heritage and inheritance.
Something of this women's culture still remains as a specifically collective social orientation and culture between women. Today this art of storytelling is, however, mostly associated with chats among friends, small talk and gossip. The value placed on the telling of stories has changed. To some degree its function has also changed. Historically, this local storytelling tradition could be compared with the European salons although, in contrast to these, women's knowledge was the focal point. However, with the privatization of society in general there occurred a transformation of the value preferences. Women's knowledge was kept at a distance, repudiated, and mostly seen as being foreign and secret. At the same time women's contributions to the transference of useful cultural information became more or less invisible. It became anonymous, random and private.

3.3. Women's culture becomes privatized

Even though cooperation among neighbours is still an important part of Norwegian culture, especially among the lower social strata and in the rural areas, a significant change in women's lives occurs when money assumes a more important role in the trade of goods and housekeeping, in other ways becomes more privatized. Cooperative efforts are still a normal form of social contact, but women's responsibility now becomes limited to the nuclear family and its private matters. Culture in other words has become privatized and outside interests are channelled into idealistic activities of either a religious or social welfare nature. It is in this context that we find the origins for the home as a centre of culture on the one hand and women's later extensive organizational involvement on the other.

Developments during the first decades after the last war have continued in the direction of greater privatization. Organizational affiliation and participation in cultural activities has to an ever increasing degree become based on individual interest. Contact with neighbours is no longer determined by custom and is left to private initiative. Home decoration and the procurement of various technical apparatus for the home have increasingly become central concerns.

Women's culture has been incorporated into the general consumer's culture. Woman's status becomes measured by outward status symbols, by the personal touch she puts into her surroundings, and by the care and feeling she puts into the home and its decor. While housework as such was earlier very central for most women, the creation of the best possible atmosphere in the home has become more important. Women's culture has become more associated to the emotional side of work and social life.

The increase in the standard of living has in Norway given women more time for themselves, for better and for worse. A generation of women were more or less isolated within their families although some of these also had time to develop their own interests. This applies among other things to local study groups and reading circles where women have mostly been in a dominating majority, and where "the women's culture" has again taken up an old thread.
3.4. Women's culture and changing gender roles

Although it was possible during earlier epochs to observe differences between women in dissimilar social groups, there was nonetheless a common set of ideals, life experiences and goals. Today this basic fellowship between women tends to disappear. Some women are concentrating themselves on a working career in much the same way as men. At the same time exceptions to the "normal life of a woman" with home, husband and children are more and more accepted.

An analysis of women's participation in employment shows two wave-like movements. There was a strong growth in their participation up until the 1890's. From this high point there was a steady decline in women's participation in the work force until the middle of the 60's. During the depression of the 1930's with its high unemployment, the slogan was that women should "go back to the home". The labour movement adopted a resolution calling for married women to yield their paid jobs to unemployed men. This contributed to a strong ideological compulsion towards women's place being in the home even after the crisis was over. The result was that in 1950 only 28% of adult women were working outside the home compared to 34% in 1920. The number of women who married increased during the whole of this period, but of these only 3% were economically independent in 1920 and 6% in 1950.

A transformation occurred towards the end of the 60's and during the early 70's which resulted in more women being economically employed. There were several factors contributing to this. Housework had become easier; many families found that they couldn't live on one income. Not the least important was that the explosion in education beginning at the end of the 60's lead to young women posing new demands in regards to their own choice of profession. Women entered into new fields in the tertiary sector of the economy and into government service - often as part-time workers.

Studies on the situation of women with part-time employment show that they have less time not only for their female friends, but also for cultural enjoyment and organizational activities. The surplus that should have been to their benefit turns out to be taken from them almost as quickly as they were putting it to use. Seen from a feminist point of view, this is both sensational and tragic. Part-time work for women - which in Norway is more common than in other European countries - has resulted in their having both weaker bargaining power in the labour market and less time as a whole for themselves. The participation of men in household work appears to have remained relatively stable: statistically about 2.5 hours per day no matter whether the wife is at home, doing part-time work or even working fulltime outside the home.

Put bluntly, women have less possibility of genuinely controlling their own lives. The problem as presented here is that working life is based on men's fulltime working day, and that women on the other hand continue to carry the main responsibility for the family in both practical and social matters.
A more positive side of the increased participation of women in working life is that women acquire new experiences and impulses which give them greater possibilities for making their voices heard within Norwegian public life. But the social aspects of work provide perhaps the greatest reward from the new working situation. A new fellowship has been created with possibilities for new acquaintances outside the family.

3.5. The invisible link

The incorporation of women in the working force appears to be a two-sided coin for them. On the one side women have the opportunity of establishing broader contacts and of acquiring greater economic freedom within the family. On the other side it appears that their income is for the most part considered only as a supplement to the household. Furthermore the time taken to acquire this supplement turns out to be taken at the expense of their traditional personal contacts and own interests.

A woman just starting to work fulltime or even part-time finds herself "caught in between". She must commute between different worlds, where she is now responsible for keeping it all together. This additional burden will most likely not be seen by others - and perhaps not even by the woman herself - as her primary task is still considered to be the family's needs and duties, and she is expected to ensure that the new additional burden disturbs family life as little as possible.

Women will continue being "the invisible link" in society. The increased degree of similarity between men's and women's working days will therefore not imply genuine equality between the sexes. While men's main interests will continue to lie outside the family in the requirements and enticements of the greater society, women must continue to provide fluidity, cohesion and breathing spaces in the daily family life while at the same time moving across the new borders between public and private life.

Women are expected to successfully maintain a balance between public and home life. The difficulties are greatest for fulltime working mothers with small children. Compared to other European countries, Norway has very few public daycare centres for small children and a minimum of afterschool activities for schoolchildren.

2.6. A time of change

We can observe today both formal and real differences between the sexes, but we also find even more obvious differences between women in different situations. The proportion of unmarried women has increased noticeably in the cities and densely populated areas where the working woman appears to have arrived for good. Differences in the social, cultural and living conditions among women have developed. Seen in this way it can become more difficult to find an "average woman". Only a few decades ago a woman's expected lifetime role seemed to be relatively fixed, but today it seems that discontinuity and change are things that one more or less has to expect as a part of life.

Society today poses new demands on the ability to adjust which appear to exceed the cohesion of the family. Perhaps this is why the frequency of divorce has risen. Perhaps it has become
on the whole more difficult to establish enduring relationships. But perhaps there also lies in this an opportunity for women to affect society and cultural life in new ways. Perhaps they will be drawn into a new and more changeable, varied and pulsating life. The situation now can be characterized as a time of change.

4. WOMEN'S ROLE IN ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

4.1. The scope of organizational life

Culturally and politically we live today in a more or less thoroughly organized society. While the number of organizations existing in 1900 had risen to 145, today we find about 1,300 registered organizations. The "organized society" can be looked at from several angles. First, there are the formal organizations which carry out their activities according to more or less clearly defined goals. Examples of these are professional organizations and labour unions which promote and protect various interests within the economic sphere. Voluntary organizations are more concerned with achieving social and cultural objectives. Secondly, it is important to view the networks within and around the organizations as an important part of daily life. Organizations in Norway fulfil to a very large extent the same social needs as the cafes and restaurants do other places in Europe.

The organized society has become a system which affects the entire culture. More and more people have some sort of organizational relationship, and within the political system the rights of organizations to negotiate directly with the government has shown a tendency to replace the representative system. In Norway this has so far only led in small degree to the emergence of a power elite. So far public accountability is great enough to ensure a degree of immediate democratic control over corruption and abuse. However, it is possible to see a form of transition from "close" to "remote" democracy. The democratic form of government has in general become more centralized. As the organized society both expands and gains importance in this way, the political constellations also change. The question today especially concerns who has political influence.

Organizations do not only participate in public hearings providing viewpoints and information to the government. They also operate as the providers of the basic premises on which general as well as economic policies are formulated.

It has been asserted that this development implies a reduction in women's political influence rather than strengthening their influence. Most women are organized in humanitarian or idealistic organizations. The traditional women's organizations operate today only to a limited extent as lobbyists for specific policy premises even though they to some extent represent various livelihood sectors. Women have increasingly joined and become active in trade unions and professional organizations in line with their increasing participation in paid employment. However, the leadership of these organizations is still predominantly with men.
4.2. Dissimilar motives for organizing

As part of "The Norwegian Power-Study" (Maktutredningen) it was discovered that there is not only a difference in organizational membership between men and women, but also in the manner in which they relate to organizational activities. At least 60% of Norwegian women belong to some type of organization compared to 80% of the men. However, the women who are organized mention other reasons for joining organizations and function at other levels of the organization than the men. For example, 52% of the women replied that humanitarian considerations motivated their membership compared with only 37% for men - a difference of 15%. Furthermore, 41% of the women replied that contact and friendship were important motives compared to 29% of the men. The men on the other hand placed a higher priority on material gain as a motive than the women, 46% against 29%. It is possible here to speak of giving a kind of inverse priority to different values. If the relationship between membership and leadership positions is examined, these differences repeat themselves. There is a distinct pattern of men having almost double so many leadership positions as women. Women have the poorest representation in the important employers and trade organization. All in all there seems to be a pattern which reinforces women's poorer starting position.

Even though women today have greater access to politics and the more masculine organizations, it is still within the so-called women's organizations that we find the largest number of organized women. There are nearly 50 women's organizations in Norway with altogether about 550,000 members. A dilemma which arises in this connection is that what can be called the "inner life" of the women's organizations contributes towards perpetuating the differences between the sexes. Women's and men's organizations not only involve themselves differently in society, but they also have different understanding of politics. While men's organizations are characterized by competition, most women's organizations have chosen primarily to promote unity.

4.3. The first women's organizations

In Norwegian society today it is still possible to discern a difference between men's and women's organizations in their organizational designs. Men's organizations are directed more towards achieving power and influence in decision-making forums, while women's organizations are to a greater degree concerned with what can be called the "bottom" of society: social welfare, health, care of the disadvantaged, etc. Men direct their attentions towards government and economy, while women take the family and the community as their starting point and end concerns. This pattern has its origins as far back as the middle of the previous century at the start of the growth of the organized society. At that time a number of religious and philanthropic organizations were formed in which women participated, often as a numerical majority. There were mission societies, charities to assist the poor and suffering, etc. On this same wave were the "societies for the defense of moral standards" which among other things were concerned with prostitution and the governmen's equivocal attitude to it. Women's organizations were established first in the middle of the 1880's, and took up women's social
and political interests and initiated the struggle for women's rights.

The Norwegian Association for the Rights of Women (Norsk Kvinnesaksforening) was founded in 1884. Its goal was to "work to obtain for woman her just place and rights in the society". The Women's Rights Association had its origins in the radical liberal movement. Even though the goals of the association received a great deal of attention and had a determining influence on the socio-political debate, the support for the organization was primarily a city phenomenon. The members of the association were recruited from the uppermiddle classes and the intellectual circles of the cities.

The women's rights activists were from the first concerned with the question of women's right to education and work. But the goal was also full legal, economic and political equality. These women were also from the start concerned about the situation of working women. They actively supported the first strike by female industrial workers (the matchstick workers) in 1886. However, during the 1880's and 90's the labour movement divorced itself more and more from the liberal movement, and this affected the women's movement as well. The early philanthropically motivated workers' associations joined the Social-democratic Party (founded in 1887), and an increasing number of trade unions were formed, also for women. At the beginning these women's unions were considered as competitors to the men's organizations and for their jobs, but in 1901 these were all united in one federation and closely tied to the Labour Party.

4.4. The split between working and middleclass women

During this process the Association for the Rights of Women had increasingly less contact with the organizations for working women. However, they worked closely with the new unions of women working in the professions and the civil service such as female telegraphists and teachers.

Additionally, the social contradictions also acquired importance in the question of women's right to vote. One faction of the women's movement chose to give priority to obtaining limited voting rights on the basis of property and income. This was interpreted as clearly emphasizing the social differences, and was one reason why the working class women left the liberal women's movement. The desired result was nonetheless achieved. In 1898 universal male suffrage was established. In 1911 women achieved universal suffrage in local elections, and two years later all adult women could vote in the parliamentary elections.

Towards the end of the 1890's an attempt was made to organize a nationwide women's right organization. This attempt failed. Instead, an initiative was taken to establish an umbrella organization which all of the organizations dominated by women could join. This initiative was taken in consultation with the International Council of Women in which one of Norway's leading women's rights activists, Gina Krogh, had a leading position. In 1904 the National Council of Women, Norway (Norske Kvinners Nasjonalrad) was founded. The goal was to
create a kind of women's parliament in which women could debate matters affecting them and present a united case to the authorities. The intention was to avoid politically controversial matters, but in spite of this the social and political contradictions were already so strong that the working class women's organizations didn't join.

During this period a split had also arisen between the working class and middle class women on the question of special industrial protection for working women. The Women's Rights Association was against special protection because they felt that it would lead to continued inequalities between women and men in wages and advancement opportunities. Within the labour movement this was seen by most as an anti-labour policy. The National Council also supported special protection, but demanded at the same time that female factory inspectors should be employed who could regulate and improve the working conditions of women in industry. The first female factory inspector was one of the National Council's leaders, Betzy Kjelsberg, who was employed in 1910.

Much of the National Council's work consisted of taking up matters related to the housewife's and the family's economic and social status. Questions such as employment and wages were given less attention. Internally, the Council engaged in informational and educational activities with the objective of helping women acquire skills and knowledge needed to capably participate in public and political life.

The National Council of Women had hoped to function as an advisory institution to government. This was initially declined, but the organization has gradually been recognized as an effective advocate for women's interests. It is today a permanent member of hearings on new laws and official commission reports; and in addition is permanently represented on official councils and committees.

4.5. Women's role in focus

Although there arose at the turn of the century a striking split in the women's movement and in the way women were socially organized, there was simultaneously a convergence of viewpoints regarding women's roles and concerns. Both in the conservative and socialist camps, the liberal ideals of equality were losing ground to a stronger emphasis on woman's biological and social singularities. The women's organizations continued to stress that women must be considered as equals, but they must also fulfill their role in society as mother and housewife. Women's political efforts became increasingly chanelled into welfare work on behalf of women and children. However, this singularity together with the glorification of motherhood also were used as arguments for a greater involvement by women, for example in peace work.

Within the labour movement there arose gradually a clearly defined distribution of work between the men's and women's organizations. The women in the labour movement worked within their own network for measures similar to the activities of the Public Health Association, but aimed at helping working class families. At the turn of the century they organized a chain of
so-called Mother's Health Clinics where women could get advice and assistance on health matters. An important difference between these health clinics and those of the Public Health Association was the provision of sex education and birth control advice. The working class women's organizations also began very early to demand the right to legal abortion on grounds of social welfare.

During the Second World War most of the women's organizations voluntarily disbanded in order to avoid being taken over by the nazis. However, before this happened the women had realized that their organizations could be used as effective nationwide networks for carrying out actions.

Women joined in the antifascist resistance work at every level. A woman became a district leader in the Norwegian Resistance Movement (Hjemmefronten). However, when the war ended she was told that she had no business in the victory parade! The only women who were allowed to participate were the nurses and other noncombatants.

After the war a new umbrella organization for women was established in line with the policy of national reconciliation. The Cooperation Committee of Norwegian Women's Organizations (Norske Kvinners Samarbeidsnemnd) existed from 1945 to 1951, but broke up because of an old controversy: the demand for abortion by choice. During this first period after the war there were positive developments, but the women's movement stagnated in the 50's and 60's. The initiative for the revival of "women's liberation" came primarily from a new generation of women. This generation had little contact with the traditional organizations, but distinguished itself in what came to be called "the new feminist movement".

4.6. The new feminist movement

The new feminist movement had its origins in the radical movement of the left which grew up in Europe and the United States in the 1960's, and recruited its members especially from among the students in the institutions of learning. "New Feminism" developed not the least as a response to the male chauvinism and discrimination practised in the movement of the left. However, the great change in women's employment patterns in the 1960's has to be considered as the major cause.

The new feminist movement mobilized women for political action through a process of conscientization based on the formulation of women's special social experiences.

The new feminist movement regarded itself as a radical movement critical of the existing society - a revolutionary movement. The struggle against the discrimination of women was seen as an essential part of the struggle against the hierarchical and repressive power structure of a capitalist society. However, there were different views about what organizational and political consequences this would have. In Norway, several different organizations emerged representing different shades of socialism, anti-capitalism and feminism. The New Feminists (Nyfeministene) came first and maintained their informal, horizontal organizational form. They organized national
Conferences and developed an extensive network of international contacts. The Women's Front (Kvinnefronten) was formed in 1972 and became the numerically largest of the new feminist organizations. The organization has been largely dominated by Marxist-Leninists. Bread and Roses (Brød og roser) was established with the same loose structure as The New Feminists, but followed The Women's Front in giving emphasis to the struggle for economic reforms.

4.7. Approaches between the "new" and the "old" organizations

The new organizations had in common and expressed critical view of the old women's organizations, even the Association for the Rights of Women. They criticized their liberal views on equality and their integration in a sluggish and antifeminist political system. However, their activities influenced the old organizations. During the 1970's there was a revitalization of the Women's Rights Association as well as of other women's associations organizing professional women, nurses, teleservice workers, teachers and women's political groups such as the socialdemocratic women's organization. After a while a coordinating committee was formed between the old and new movements in order to organize the 8th of March demonstration and to discuss law proposals, reforms, etc. During this process the new feminist movement has also become more inclined to work for reforms and exert pressure on the government through official channels.

The main and unifying demand of the new women's movement in the 1970's was the demand for "abortion by choice". In 1975 a new law on abortion was adopted. The women's movement saw this as a defeat because it gave the power of decision to a committee of two doctors rather than to the woman herself. But this law has in practice turned out to be what everyone wanted: legal abortion.

The struggle to change accepted gender roles and to break down the gender-determined work patterns in the family has gradually been channelled into a demand for a shorter workday for everyone. Since the end of the 70's, the 6-hour day has been a central and unifying women's demand. This is being fought for with increasing determination by the women's organizations within the labour movement, but is resisted by the male trade union leaders who give priority to longer vacations and a lower retirement age.

The new feminists criticism of the "old" equal rights programmes was to some extent political, but also involved the old question of women's singular social role and experiences. The new feminists have revived the argument that changes in society must be based on women's own premises, i.e. on a reevaluation of the values and priorities on which society is based. In women's culture, care and closeness are central. The women's movement see this as a critically important starting point for change. They demand more than mere equality; they demand a positive reappraisal of women's values and the possibility for qualitative thinking, also in business and work situations.
5. EQUALITY AND CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

5.1. Legal progress

During the past 20 to 25 years, public attention to the question of equality between the sexes has become broader. Concern is now no longer just over a minimum of political rights which earlier had been important enough and were a precondition for later work, but on the social rights of women in society in general. With the growth of the welfare society attention has also turned to the question of a more equal distribution of social and public resources. Women should for example have the same right as men to education and work.

A first step in this levelling process which occurred during a time of rapid economic expansion was the ratification by Norway in 1959 of the ILO Convention on Equal Pay Convention No.100. In so doing the government had committed itself to promoting the principle of equal pay for equal work. A special Equal Pay Council was established to ensure compliance. In 1972 this council was replaced by a more general Equal Status Council whose mandate was expanded to include the overseeing of other sectors of society.

The newly established Equal Status Council was expected to follow general developments in society and to identify those factors which could work against genuine equality between the sexes. On the basis of this work, reform proposals would be put forward in order to correct imbalances in the various sectors such as in education, employment, the family or political institutions.

During the 1970's the institutionalized aspects of equal status efforts were further strengthened. In 1978 the Norwegian Parliament adopted a comprehensive Act on Equal Status between the Sexes. This was partially a result of the many years of pressure exerted by the old and new women's movements on the authorities, and partially an initiative arising from the UN International Year for Women in 1975 which later became the International Women's Decade. An extension of the Act was the establishment of local Equal Status Committees in the larger local governments throughout the country. It was hoped that these Committees would genuinely follow-up the promotion of equal status at the local level.

However, the act also created some negative reactions within the women's movement. One objection was the possibility that the act could be used against positive discrimination in women's favour and could be used as an instrument to deflect women's demands for radical reforms. There is today an acceptance in many areas for the need to use various forms of "positive discrimination". Organizations and the authorities use quotas in order to increase the number of women in councils, committees and leading positions. Companies receive government subsidies for employing more women, etc.
5.2. Indirect discrimination

Although equality by law has been achieved, there are still many areas where genuine equality has not been achieved in practice. There has been some progress in terms of employment, within cultural life and in the society in general. Individual women have entered traditionally male professions, some have risen to positions of leadership, and it no longer creates a sensation when individual women assume truly responsible positions. However, there is still a long way to go before women in general participate in cultural and public life on an equal basis with men.

Women also often have a different relationship to employment with men. Another problem is that women enter far fewer professions than men. While men choose among 300 professions, women choose among only 30.

All things considered, it appears that the Equal Status Act - which among other things prohibits advertising positions by gender - has less effect and significance than traditional customs. An unwritten rule seems to both maintain gender differences and hide the discrimination and inequality which exist beside nominal equality.

5.3. New challenges and opportunities

Women's inclusion in the labourmarket on a genuinely equal basis with men represents a resource for Norwegian cultural life. For one thing the barriers between family and work would be broken down. Secondly, greater individual freedom would open opportunities for diversity and variation in everyday life. Work, home and leisure would be given equal value with several points of connection and different responsibilities for the individual. Women today appear to be carrying the burden of this transition between work, home and leisure. She has the responsibility of trying to keep it all together.

A first step towards greater sharing of these responsibilities between men and women would be the adoption of a shorter standard workday. This should provide more new work opportunities while at the same time enabling a better distribution of work and responsibilities at home. Work and leisure would no longer make competitive demands on limited time. There should be more time available for activities and interests other than the absolutely essential.

As a result of the new cultural policies of the 70's, the educational function of cultural activities has been more greatly emphasized. A new act was ratified which would encourage a more active use of leisure. Priority was given to those groups in society who were disadvantaged educationally, economically and socially. Cultural policies, adult education and informal study programmes were expected to bridge over existing differences in individual potentials. These programmes would give a new stimulus to the older popular education movement.

These new policies provided women with an opportunity to further their education, and many used this opportunity to develop
their skills and interests. Seen from a woman's viewpoint, this general emphasis on popular education and culture was an absolute blessing. They should be able to strengthen their relative position in society also in other areas. However, some people maintain that perhaps the opposite has happened.

Women have never been left out of cultural activities. These have often been a main area of interest and activity for women. It is thus possible to maintain that the reorganization of cultural and popular educational work has eliminated an area of initiative and responsibility that women earlier had. At the same time cultural work has become prestigious. This appears to have limited women's influence in shaping and organizing it. This applies particularly to the selection of members for the local cultural committees which used to be a women's preserve, and where men now to a greater extent are being heard and are gaining leadership positions. Of the new regional cultural directors, which is a strengthening of the administration of cultural work, only one tenth are women.

Even though the new cultural policies can appear to have bureaucratized cultural work, the longterm goal has been to bring benefits to everyone. A broadening of cultural opportunities and an increased emphasis on the cultural sector should in general benefit women's participation in cultural life.

6. WOMEN IN NORWEGIAN CULTURAL LIFE

6.1. Women as promoters and users

Women have always been active promoters of culture. Women have been overrepresented within professions such as teaching and library science. It appears that as cultural promotion becomes more impersonal and formalized then it attracts fewer women as participants. Journalism has for a long time in this way been dominated by men. Within broadcasting and the press, as generally in the media, there are far more active men than women.

On the whole it is possibly correct to maintain that women have a different interest in culture than men. They are actually perhaps more interested. They prefer and demonstrate a far more personal relationship to art and the promotion of the arts, while men dominate in those sectors where promotion is abstract, impersonal and more universal. Paradoxically, women seem to withdraw when it becomes too personal. Women's relationship to art is by and large associated with the social and local promotion of the arts, where they often are an interested public. Men on the other hand are in a majority both with relationship to the general promotion of the arts and with the more individualized production of art. A general characteristic is that women are to be found in the practical and intimate middle position.

6.2. Women as creative artists

In cultural life in general women have often been the organizational groundcrew, and others have had political
control and authority. Women have provided social and political support and performed the necessary groundwork, but this has just as often not been appreciated as such. Women have been the invisible support players in a system in which others have usually reaped the profits. When women's efforts have been appraised this has not infrequently led to a new invisibility.

However, there are also conspicuous female figures in Norwegian cultural life. The groundwork that women have many times taken upon themselves has also in reality involved the breaking of new ground.

Feminine research in Norway and elsewhere has shown that female artists have at all times been more numerous than first impressions would make out. Because there are few paintings by women hanging in the National Gallery and because there aren't many monographs in the book stores, it has been lightly concluded that a) there have been few female artists, or b) those who have existed were of little significance. Anne Wichström in her book about female artists in the 19th century, Women at the easel (Kvinner ved staffeliet), has shown that both these assumptions are wrong.

The problem has therefore been not so much the actual conditions for female artists, but just as much the historical rendition of their lives and work. It was common in older histories of literature to present female authors in a single collective chapter even though they represented completely different stylistic directions.

Even today female authors are badly underrepresented in literary anthologies and school textbooks. When literature is collected and analyzed, the works of women are either overseen or treated superficially or derogatorily. Feminine research and consciousness-raising among female authors has contributed towards changing this. One of Norway's larger publishers is now in the process of preparing a new literary history of female authors.

It has been common among male visual artists (painters, sculptors, etc.) and authors to seldom credit women with innovative creative talents. Creativity has traditionally been seen as a masculine trait in our culture. Women's creative potential and their talent have simply been considered insignificant. It has always been assumed that the impulses go from men to women, and not in the other direction. Such assumptions have inhibited literary researchers and historians of art from appreciating important aspects of the development of different directions within art and literature.

6.3. Recruitment of women to the art profession

Art as a profession will always demand of the artist a more or less personal relationship to what is being created. This may be one of the reasons why women - who are often not brought up with the same "means/end" rationality as men - are relatively well represented in the various fields of art compared with other and more formalized professions. Of Norway's 2,500 registered artists and writers about one third are women. Considering that art as a profession is still considered masculine - where the
genius for example is always a man, this is a relatively high proportion. Almost sensational in as much as "women artists" are considered as being rather peculiar, who need their own designation, and are something outside the normal. It therefore is more normal for a woman to be an artist than both our own initial presumptions and general prejudices would indicate. Art is hardly a profession in the traditional meaning, but more a way of life literally; a call which often requires an absorption which takes precedence over both income and other prospects for material wealth. The artist's circumstances are still coloured by the old myth of the artist - an artist will forego other things for his or her art.

This gives rise to another difference between men and women. There is today a more equal distribution between women and men in those fields of art with more formalized training such as painting, music, theatre and the artistic handicrafts (ceramics, textiles, etc.), and in the latter slightly more women. The proportion of female students accepted at the schools corresponds more or less to the proportion of female applicants. In the long run this should lead to there being just as many female as male artists in Norway. Furthermore it has been observed that the percentage of selections for the larger art shows such as the Fall Show and the National Exhibition of Art corresponds well with gender and the number of works sent in.

That there is still a difference between male and female artists - and this applies in all fields - appears to be related to the differences between the sexes with regards to the progress of their careers. At the less advanced stages there should eventually be equality. There is little difference in education; the differences arise later in their careers. There has arisen a new problem which is perhaps more hidden and obscure.

There apparently are just as many female as male artists, but the female artists are less visible. The general problem seems still to be that women either hesitate to present themselves and their art in public - which earlier prevented women from registering themselves as artists and instead maintained their interest more as amateurs - or that women are prevented for other reasons from becoming as absorbed with their work as men.

Female artists do not have the same "efficiency" as men. They produce fewer works and attract less attention than more productive and already visible male artists. This creates a new vicious circle. In as much as artistic worth has more or less become equivalent with the number of officially registered works, female artists will again become marginalized. They will less often be presented in the press and media, and will receive less support in the form of stipends, public purchases or other forms of national or local subsidies. Art being generally dependent on the whims of the market, this will often lead to female artists earning even lower incomes than male artists.

There has arisen a new contradiction between the artist's role and woman's role. This was earlier manifested in that women more or less could not present themselves in public at
all. If they did, they were expected to use a male pseudonym or an unknown name, or they in some way had to demonstrate that they also had feminine interests in a feminine area of responsibility. A personal interest in the form of her own artistic activity - one which was also to be presented in public - was considered to be contrary to woman's role. A woman was expected to primarily concern herself with her social and practical responsibility for others. Few women could therefore isolate themselves with their work. They have not in the same way been able to concentrate on their art as their attention was simultaneously expected to be elsewhere. And if they did become absorbed with their artistic work, this was accompanied by feelings of guilt. Their concentration was thus already fragmented. Several female authors have noted this. They know that their life role is expected to be elsewhere, and the only way that they can productively live with this problem is to bring the dilemma with them into their art, to make it a theme of their work.

Women themselves feel this schism. It often leads to self-censure and a general reserve with respect to her own efforts and demands. In individual cases this ambivalence can become a stimulus for bringing something new into their art. When women have limited themselves both with respect to their pure women's role on the one hand and to their pure artistic role on the other, a tension is created which can just as well become a seedbed for new art.

6.4. Art stipends and guaranteed minimum income

The formal differences between the sexes have become much less even within the arts. One factor that has contributed to the betterment of the situation for female artists has been the extension of the governmentally guaranteed minimum income. This applies to the visual arts (painting, sculpture, etc.), the fields of art with the most women. Women's desire for a career as an artist should now become a realistic choice.

A discussion on the general situation for artists arose in connection with the promulgation of a new cultural policy in the 1970's. It was felt increased support for culture should not be limited to a general dissemination of the arts, but should also include support for new fields and initiatives. Efforts to improve artists' circumstances should therefore be a part of the general promotion of cultural activities. This resulted among other things in a special report to the parliament on the condition of artists.

This public concern with artists' circumstances arose simultaneously with increasingly politicized discussions within the arts. An important component of these discussions was a substantial criticism of the role of art in society. Equally important was the increased interest in artists' work situations. The artists wanted more secure and reliable conditions which corresponded to the new official policies where there was a general feeling that their work should be seen more as a profession rather than a call.

The demands of the working artists as put forward in 1974 were condensed to three points: 1) full compensation for the use of creative artists' works and products, 2) greatest possible
dispersion in the society of artists' work, and 3) a guaranteed minimum income for all professionally active artists not having a reasonable or sufficient income from activities mentioned in points 1 and 2.

The introduction of a minimum income for visual artists partially met this last demand. However, this did not cover all of the practitioners in the field. In 1977 a new system was introduced that benefited more sculptors and painters. Even though the minimum income still was low - about US$ 10,000 annually, it was an innovation that only had parallels with the Netherlands and Sweden. In 1984 there were 500 artists who were guaranteed a minimum income by the government. Artists' circumstances had become a part of the welfare state's area of responsibility. There is a similar type of support for writers which is the so-called "purchasing agreement" from 1965 which obliges the government to purchase 1,000 copies of all book publications of a certain standard.

Because of their often lower productivity, women will have a tendency to benefit less from the minimum income guarantee. Certain fields of art which traditionally attract numbers of women, such as textiles, are not included in the guarantee system. Put simply, the system leads to greater support of the more established artists working in the more established fields of the visual arts. Although this has led to a general improvement in artists' circumstances, it has also contained a degree of hidden preferential treatment and inertia which have not only been related to necessary criteria of quality. This could become a barrier to creativity and experimentation.

A minimum income would be a minimum guarantee for improving female artists' working conditions which would help bring their work to the notice of the public. This in turn is usually the basis for awarding stipends and broadening their market. Female artists still differ from male in that they mainly produce for a small private market. In addition to the income system, it would therefore be important to have women, as well as other fields of art, better represented in the public collections and museums. This would be an improvement over the present situation where it is often possible to speak of good and bad circles of reinforcement, and perhaps represents the only possibility for having their works presented and preserved for the future.

6.5. "The Governor's Daughters", protest and originality

There are a number of examples of female artists who have created original works. Not the least of these was what is considered to be the first modern novel in Norwegian.

Camilla Collet's The Governor's Daughters (Amtmandens Døtre) represents a breakthrough in Norwegian literary history. The novel is a protest against the culture and society of the past century as represented by the local officialdom. This was so pervasive in Norway that it even had its own generic name: embetsmannskulturen - the culture of the official. This culture represented the highest cultural ideals such as refinement, moral responsibility, and the love of life's noble qualities; but Camilla Collett questioned whether this society also
prevented women from assuming the same degree of responsibility for their own lives. Before Camilla Collett's novel, written in 1854, social problems had not been a literary theme. Her novel was as such a precursor to the realistic novel which later would dominate national protest with names such as Bjørnson and Ibsen, and which condemned earlier traditions as being both academic and remote from daily life.

In Norwegian literary history as presented in the schools, Camilla Collett is perhaps as well known for having been the sister of the great national poet Henrik Wergeland, for having been in love with another great poet Johan Sebastian Welhaven who was Wergeland's worst enemy, and for having later married Jonas Collett. Although it is commonly known that she wrote "The Governor's Daughters" spoke up for women's rights, it has been little appreciated that her work was the beginning to something new and decisive in literary history with importance far into the future. While her brother was still only a romantic poet, Camilla Collett was speaking up for new directions in society. This earned her the antagonism of her contemporary critics, and this criticism apparently left its mark on her future reputation. Later literary and feminine research has unveiled new aspects of her life and writings.

Another author who followed in the footsteps of Camilla Collett was Amalie Skram. Her naturalistic writings were in the same way a protest against earlier cultural ideals. It could be said that her work was the continuation of the social and literary undercurrent. Amalia Skram wanted even more to bring literature "down" and to direct attention to the social causes of the general degradation and oppression. She also represents a decisive break in relation to Camilla Collett's work. While Collett kept her faith in the saving grace of love, Skram analyzed these feelings and showed how they could be used to maintain oppression. Women were kept dependent in the name of love - by themselves and others.

Similar groundbreaking work is found within the visual arts as represented by among others Kitty Kielland, Oda Krogh and Harriet Backer. Also here, women have been pioneers.

6.6. Is there a feminine aesthetic?

Recent discussion has maintained that form can be just as important as content. It can be equally important for women to try new forms of cooperation and expression as to try to gain entry into established systems. The latter can actually be dependent upon the former. In Norway one finds that women have made a mark for themselves in later years through new experimental efforts in music, the theatre, the visual arts and in literature. Women have begun indisputably to influence Norwegian cultural life.

The debate today is on how women can contribute something new and singularly feminine. Is there a distinctive feminine quality which comes through in their way of expressing things? Has form alone been a restraint on women's participation in cultural life? These questions have up to now been given little attention except in certain university circles. Concern has
primarily been directed at the political aspects of women's participation in cultural life, i.e. their representation and influence. More attention has been given to whether women have gained influence rather than on the manner in which their influence is exercised. This is a result partially of the political orientation of the Norwegian women's movement. The new feminist movement in Norway has been more concerned with social and more general cultural questions. The discussion has rather arisen after the high point of the feminist movement. It has developed outside the usual political circles and occurs simultaneously with various types of stylistic experiments within the arts. The feminine offensive - where it has become commonplace to speak of a feminine language - is therefore just a part of this general reorientation.

Another reason for the little attention which has been given the aesthetic question in Norway can be related to the general lack of debate on purely artistic qualities. Since Norway has never been a country of extremists, there hasn't been much room for countercultures. Those efforts which have been made in this direction have either been diluted attempts such as the Interdisciplinary Literary Women's Forum or have had the character of public manifestations.

One positive aspect resulting from the women's culture being kept within the established framework are the closer links between men's and women's milieus, and this in turn should be reciprocally stimulating. When the question of feminine forms of expression is brought up today, weight is put on this counter-argument that isolation has seldom given any benefits to women. To strive for a special standard may become a new way of separating women from the mainstream. Perhaps one can speak of a feminine aesthetic more because women have been put to other work than men, for example portrait painting, or because their work has been evaluated differently using different standards of measurement. As such, men and women do not need to express themselves differently.

7. TODAY'S CULTURAL PICTURE

Norway today finds itself in a kind of period of ferment. On the one hand there is a trend towards more conformity and uniformity, while at the same time we see greater variation in the cultural picture than earlier. Local differences in the cultural tradition have a tendency to disappear. This in turn can create new cultural differences, for example with respect to immigrant groups and other alternative lifestyles.

Woman's position in the society is affected by both these aspects of the cultural development. This is both to the advantage as well as disadvantage for their position in society. Most probably, the immigrant women are in the most exposed and vulnerable position. Compared to their men, immigrant women are to a lesser degree integrated into Norwegian society.

Most women with their roots in a local environment will experience the transformation to a more urbanized society as a loss. They are torn from their environment while not being
given any equally good alternative. Their earlier responsibilities in the local environment are taken from them, and they become instead the overstressed link between the home and the greater society. For the increasing number of women employed outside the home, this has come in addition to their traditional duties in the house and home. The transformation to an urbanized society implies a new millstone for these women.

On the other hand, it only now appears that women's role is radically changing. Women are not in the same way bound by their gender and the local environment. They must for good or bad share in society's mobility. Women are forced to expand their horizons and thereby are more actively pulled into larger areas of public life.

In such a situation cultural life is also affected. There is talk in Norway today about a general rootlessness as a result of the cultural developments. The cultural singularity is gradually being eliminated in competition with an international media and news picture. At the same time, culture is no longer a privilege of the few. Instead it has become part of the general patterns of consumption. Culture has become an article for sale - a consumer good.

Cultural life is more and more being incorporated into a general economic strategy which emphasizes private supply and demand. There has in recent years been a steady increase in private consumption. As a result of the petroleum economy, Norway today resembles a newly rich society with a steady growth in the consumer sector.

This economic expansion makes itself felt also in cultural activities. The music sector among others is more expansive now than at any time - and women perhaps for the first time have noticeably asserted themselves. The same is happening in other areas of cultural life such as the theatre, video and other media. On the whole more attempts are being made at producing various cultural entertainments and exhibitions. Jazz festivals have become an annual tradition. Poetry presentations are also new events. These are developments which a few years ago would have been unthinkable in a country as small as Norway. All in all there is a steady growth of new cultural alternatives across traditional lines. A new kind of cultural life has arisen beside the established. The cultural alternatives in the larger cities can today for the first time be compared with those of other large centres in Europe.

These cultural alternatives have as a rule had to survive with little governmental support. Commercial sponsoring as an alternative to public support has become a central topic of debate. Some argue for a new pluralism in which more viable cultural alternatives should be given other types of support from the public. Others reason that this will eventually lead to greater conformity. Another demand has therefore been that the official cultural policy should be to provide public support to alternative non-commercial activities. Only then can genuine diversity be maintained.
Today's debates are in many ways similar to the situation in the 1880's. In the same way as during the cultural fermentation at the end of the last century, women will today claim their right to influence society on a par with men. A society in change is a mobile society. During such periods of transformation there are openings for profound social changes.

From women's point of view the breaking up of traditional bonds has almost always been advantageous. The greatest possible diversity is a condition for liberation.
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