42 Women and gender in history in the Baltic region

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This chapter will focus on women and gender, the role, status, influence, and meaning of women in societies around the Baltic Sea set in a wider, historic, Euro-Asian context.

An overview of what is now the Baltic states, Poland, and the Nordic countries will be given, while a more detailed treatise will be devoted to Russia and the Soviet Union as developments there had wider implications for most of the people on the South-Eastern side of the Baltic Sea until 1991.

Glossary

Gender refers to culturally and socially constructed characteristics of women and men which change over time and place. This is the way a given society at a given time describes its women and men.

Gender equality means that women and men are accorded:
equal social value
equal rights and obligations
equal access to resources
equal opportunities

Internationally accepted definition of gender equality
"Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. ...The principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities." (Platform of Action adopted by the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing,1995)

Gender roles refers to roles which are socially and culturally, but not biologically, ascribed to women and men. Gender has everywhere been an important part in shaping a general social pattern.

Gender role stereotyping is a portrayal for example in school books or in the media of women and men in a narrow range of traditional gender roles which do not accurately reflect the contemporary world.

Mainstreaming means acknowledging that gender equality is an integral part of every government policy decision, and to make sure that women's priorities and views are included in decisions on policy

The current internationally accepted concept of gender equality is often blended with Soviet-style "equality" and is because of that rejected by many.

1. Background

Many societies praise an early and more matriarchal age before the dawn of history, with a fertility goddess eventually being superseded by a male war god as society gradually turned more patriarchal. From the Baltic Sea to the Pacific this was often the case. The female fertility goddesses gave way for a period of 500 years to the male warrior gods. This was a slow and uneven process. In European religions – almost wholly inspired by those of West Asia – the female goddesses eventually lost out to a monolithic male god.

The Lada of the Slavs, the Laima of the Lithuanians, the Sun goddess of the Scythians and the Japanese, the green Tara of the Mongols, and the Dragon and the Moon goddesses of the Chinese all represent early female deities and principles. However, opinion is still divided on how direct relationships were between the world of worship and that of reality.

Marija Gimbutas, the world-famous Lithuanian archaeologist, went 8500 to 5500 years back in time to find the first high culture of the Old Europeans – supposedly peaceful, egalitarian, Neolithic – worshipping the Goddess of Fertility, only to later, 4300-2800 B.C., be superseded by a more patriarchal, Proto-Indo-European culture called Kurgan – "kurgan" meaning barrow in Russian, named after the round barrows covering mortuary houses for important men – with their male war gods, domesticated horses and well-developed weapons. With the Kurgan culture spreading Northwards from the Black Sea, coupled with successive invasions from inner Asia, more martial societies developed in which women had a lower position.

This, as well as other theories about social development prior to written history are disputed, but if burial finds give any indication of culture and society we can discern a trend of an earlier period with fertility goddesses as symbols and expressions of power eventually being superimposed by martial gods. Both Gimbutas and Ehrenberg, a researcher on women's early history, agree on this point, as well as on the high status of North-West European and especially Nordic women during the late Bronze Age.

Gerda Lerner, professor of history, proved a similar development in the areas watered by Euphrates and Tigris rivers beginning 7-8000 years before our time. From a perceived more matriarchal origin already in the old Assyrian societies women were defined and treated as beings of generally lower value than men. Already the laws of Hammurabi from 1750 B.C. began to regulate women's behaviour and sexuality, while the Middle Assyrian Law of 1252 B.C. in §40 detailed the veiling of women, thereby classifying them into "good" and "bad" women.

Against this background a bipolar world emerged, man/women – fixed into opposites with women first being classified through their sex and then through their class – contributing to shaping definitions and ideas on women. This classification and degrading of women into "good" and "bad" was carried over into the Greek, Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions of Europe. A clear line can be drawn to these ancient traditions in today's pornography and discussions of rape and violence against women.

However, our presentation of problems is bound to culture and is culture-specific. For example, in the Western world we had the Enlightenment with individuals' questioning of and opposition to divine answers to scientific problems for example whether the sun circled the earth or the other way around. In China the secular Confucian view of the world did not in general oppose the development of science and this was certainly the case for astronomy. Hence, Marco Polo could report in the 13th century that the Chinese thought that the earth circled the sun, which at that time in Europe was a heresy often punishable by death. On the other, hand the Confucian-influenced world of East Asia – China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam

– did not experience the subjects' opposition to and liberation from the authority of their rulers, nor the women's from that of the men, nor the children's from that of their parents until late in the last century, while this process had been going on for a couple of hundred of years in the Western world, leading first of all to a distribution of power in society, and then to the development of individual rights, culminating in the belief in the equal human rights of every individual and later on also in the rights of women. Hence, for example, when the Soviet Union from the 1920s onwards and China from the 1950s introduced policies on women's emancipation, this was done in societies with different cultural backgrounds with more collectivistic traditions and where neither had experienced the Enlightenment nor an early division of power, or where the development of the rights of individuals had taken place. Therefore when policies and debates in these societies on women's issues were translated into Western terminology, it led many Westerners to misunderstand the issues and see parallels when there were none. Also for this reason many East European women reacted in the early transition period against the terminology of Western feminism sounding like official Soviet state ideology on women only to discover later that similar terminology had different meanings.

Interestingly enough on a global, cultural map that measures a country on a scale of "low trust" versus "high trust" society – depending on how well developed civil society is – East Asia, with Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan, dominated by Confucian culture, is placed between the Nordic countries of Protestant Europe and the Ex-communist, Baltic countries. (See chapter 12 by Thorleif Pettersson, Figure 49 in this book.)

However in regard to traditional-conservative values contra secular values, all these regions are on the same level – with the great exception of Poland – which explains the examples taken from the other side of the Eurasian landmass in this chapter.

Of the Baltic countries, Lithuania emerged relatively early as a state with supposedly the oldest living language in Europe closest to Sanskrit, a relatively late transition to Christianity and with a special development for women in society. Some speculations have came forward about the interconnections between the last two developments.

2. Lithuania

For a number of centuries women in Lithuania enjoyed a higher profile in public life than in neighbouring countries.

After a centralised state had been established under the rule of King Mindaugas in the 13th century, Lithuania managed to enlarge its territory rapidly through conquering Slavic lands all the way down to the Black Sea and became the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, covering areas which contained both Ukrainians and White Russians. As a way of managing a state of this size far outside the traditional, ethnic Lithuanian area, an alliance eventually developed with Poland. As early as in 1529 the Seimas of the Nobility, the Parliament, with the permission of the king, Sigismund the Old, adopted a codified collection of the current laws, the Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, with later editions in 1566 and 1588. This Statute was in force for about 300 years and was remarkable for the rights given to women compared to other European laws at that time. Women were given the right to attend assemblies and to defend their rights in court. A woman was entitled to a part of her husband's property which had to be approved by the spouse to be in a special act before the wedding. She also had the right to

succession and the right to own property. Severe punishment was meted out in case of sexual violence as a way of defending her dignity.

These rights in the Statutes given to women and the behaviour of women thereby sanctioned in civil society were criticised by some male Lithuanian authors as well as men from neighbouring, less developed countries. What particularly annoyed foreign male observers from more backward countries was the way Lithuanian women spoke up in public, in assemblies and churches, even instructing their men and shamelessly expressing their views.

The male Lithuanian author, Mykolas Lietuvis, wrote in 1550 that his country was struck by 3 types of catastrophes: the bribery of judges, drinking of soldiers, and freedom of women. According to him the role models were the societies of the Muscovites and the Tartars, where women had few, if any, legal rights and were subordinated under either fathers or husbands. This was later turned into cruel reality for women when the largest part of Lithuania during the 18th century came under the Russian Empire and Russian law, the "Domostroy", replaced the Statutes. Russian became the official language and Lithuanian children could only become literate in their mother tongue through their mothers. That century also saw the birth of a whole generation of female authors turning into classical writers of Lithuanian literature. When the national liberation movement gathered momentum at the end of the 19th century both the general public and the Catholic Church were positive towards what was called women's issues and the women's movement.

Two catholic priests, P. Dogelis and P. Janusevicius, were those who took initiative for the 1st women's congress held in Kaunas in 1907 with almost a 1000 participants from all parts of the country and all segments of society.

However, when the act of the Declaration of Independence was signed on February 16th in 1918 no woman was among the 20 signatories. Therefore the very next day a huge gathering took place in Kaunas demanding women's participation. The next year the Women's Congress of Lithuania demanded equal political and civil rights and when the first re-constitutive Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania was elected the 1st session was assigned to be chaired by Gabriele Petkevicaite-Bite, a well-known author. In the 1st parliament of the Republic of Lithuania the 1st parliamentary women's group was also set up. Hence with a clear historic precedent and a 300 year long tradition Lithuania at the crossroads between East and West also has a unique history and experience of female participation in society.

3. Livonia, Kurland and Poland

The regions North of Lithuania experienced quite a different development, particularly for women. After about 1250 – what is now Latvia and South-Western Estonia – earlier Livonia and Kurland – came under German, Swedish-Danish and Polish influence until the early 18th century.

The area of present-day Latvia was at the time of Ivan Groznyj, 1533-84, the tsar of Russia, the last outpost of Central Europe under the Teutonic Order and later, for almost a century, under Swedish rule after which it was another two centuries under Polish rule. From that time the Estonian and Livonian peasant class was mostly in bondage under a layer of German landlords and a Russian police and military force.

Hence living under foreign domination and suppression for centuries might shape an attitude where ethnicity might be seen as and maybe often was more important in certain

decisive life situations than gender. Maybe that is why the original goddesses, all courageous, fearless and daring survived in folk songs and mythology up to modern times in what is now Latvia according to anthropologist Marija Gimbutas. In addition, Latvia has more folk songs and poems than any other known country.

When faiths stressing the soul of the individual were introduced such as Buddhism, Christianity or Islam at first, this usually meant greater protection for women compared to that hitherto given in tribal, nomadic or agrarian societies at the time. Individuals, both Christian women and men, were given greater leeway against the collective. Childless women in particular could not be disposed of in the same utilitarian way as earlier, because childlessness was not accepted as grounds for divorce any more. The Christian church demanded that marriages should be voluntary, which could give women a legal claim against scheming kin who used it as a lever for possession and power. The demand for monogamy and prohibition against divorce and having concubines both helped and rendered life more difficult for individual women. The Christian principle that all children should have inheritance rights naturally made life easier for daughters born out of wedlock. The Christian church prohibited the setting out of children in the wilderness or the woods to die, an accepted way of getting rid of surplus children, particularly daughters, in pre-Christian times. In order to avoid involuntary marriage and risky childbirths, women had the option of choosing life in

The Flying University

Dominika Skrzypek

The Flying University – an underground organization founded in 1886 by Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa and Jan Władysław Dawid in Warsaw that arranged scholarly gatherings – in private apartments, hence the name – mainly for women. These clandestine classes were primarily held for the teaching of the Polish language and history, in order to maintain Polishness until independent Poland could be formed, as while in the purely economic area there was little interference from the occupying forces, education was clamped down on and Russified. This 'Polishness' was identified mainly with the mother tongue, both by the Polish nation and by the Russian occupiers, who imposed an official ban on the use of Polish at all educational levels. The lecturers of the Flying University had ties with the former University of Warsaw. The peak of its educational activities came at the beginning of the 1900s. After over twenty years of existence, it was legalized in 1905 under the name of the Society for Academic Courses (TKN – *Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych*). The Flying University offered some of the first opportunities for women in Warsaw and in Eastern Poland to attend higher education, and women comprised up to 70% of the student body. Between 1883 and 1905 about three thousand women received diplomas there. One of the Flying University's most famous students was Marie Skłodowska-Curie, the first woman to receive a Nobel prize, who studied science there.

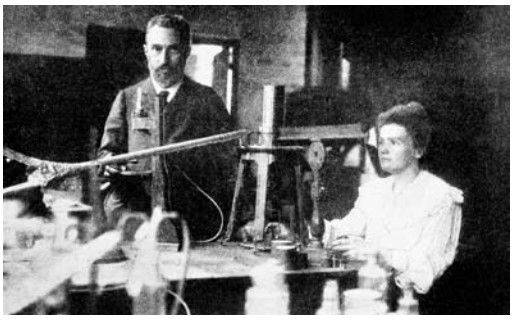

Figure 144. Maria Skłodowska-Curie with her husband Pierre Curie. Photo: BUP archive

The name 'Flying University' was later applied to a series of underground educative and publishing activities (open lectures, seminars and discussions) organised by KOR (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, the Worker's Defence Committee) and independent intellectuals between 1977 and 1979. This Flying University opposed the communist system and defied its ideology, its aim being, among others, the formation of a new political elite. Its activists (among them Andrzej Celiński and Adam Michnik) were constantly harassed and discriminated against by the communist militia. From 1978 the Flying University operated under the auspices of the Society for Academic Courses.

a convent by becoming nuns, in Christianity, particularly Catholicism and in Buddhism, particularly Vajrayana, in Tibet and Mahayana Buddhism, where the latter in China with the nuns' orders established in the 4th century A.D. has survived until today as an unbroken tradition. In the convents women could in this way have an opportunity to live an active, respectable life outside the confines of the traditional family structure and devote themselves not only to religious, but also to medical and highly intellectual endeavours. Nuns became great teachers not only in Europe, but also in China and lectured not only to other nuns but also to large congregations of lay people on the doctrine, wrote commentaries and treatises on them, held important positions as abbesses of influential convents and were directors of convents in the region of the capital. Some nuns publicly debated monks and defeated them, for example, the famous abbess of the Mo-Shan convent, Liao-Ran, where the monk Zhi-Xian publicly acknowledged himself as being her disciple.

In Poland, exposed to three partitions during the 19th century, both the Catholic church and women played a special role in upholding the country as a nation when it was being invaded. As a country dominated by farming and a patriarchal family model the duty of women was not only to have many children to supply the necessary number of hands in agriculture, but also to provide moral instruction to the young to a greater extent than that of most European countries. Because of Poland's stormy past, when men were out fighting invasions, women had to become heads of households. When Poland was partitioned the schools were more or less inclined to either Germanise or Russify the pupils depending on where and which the current partition was. Hence the family came to be seen as a bastion of Polishness and women were even called "mother-Poles", being responsible for political socialization and maintaining national awareness. In this endeavour the church helped to reinforce this value of women while identifying with the struggle for the independence of Poland. The cult of the Madonna in Catholicism was particularly reinforced in Poland and provided a frame for celebrating women as heroic and self-sacrificing mothers. With men fighting for the nation the duty of women was to maintain the family and thereby preserve Poland's national identity. This has been called a "managerial-matriarchy" by some researchers, bestowing upon women both dignity, prestige and also psychological gratification. Hence women's main road to a higher value was during long periods of history as family social figure and mother.

This can also explain why Poland still today is a stronghold of traditional-conservative values in relation to secular rational authority, being quite different from the rest of the Baltic region and in a global comparison closer to Portugal, Bosnia and India. (See chapter 12 by Thorleif Pettersson, Figure 47 and 49 in this book.)

But women in Poland were not only noticed in the family framework. In the secular world, authors such as Elżbieta Drużbacka dominated the literary scene in Poland in the early 18th century, while a century and a half later Maria Konopnicka in her epic masterpiece, "Mr Balzar in Brazil", completed in 1900, described Polish emigrants. Her contemporary Eliza Orzeszkowa is still seen as a leading positivist while Gabryela Zapolska was known for social criticism in a dramatic form and in novels.

4. The Nordic countries

We know about special laws for protecting women from around the last millennium in the Nordic countries. This meant that the prospective offenders could be punished by a woman's relatives, implying in reality that the lower the social rank of the woman the harder it was to

get real protection by laws as it was up to her relatives to avenge any offence. From the time of the Icelandic sagas and onwards, laws existed that forbade the stealing of women for marriage in the Nordic countries, but as late as 1316 this prohibition was stressed again in order to protect women, wives, widows, and unmarried women in the Swedish part of Karelia, while the stealing of women continued unabated in Russian Karelia. Also in Western Estonia and on the island of Ösel, (Hiiumaa) this custom was so common among the peasants that as late as 1521 this was again forbidden by the authority of the nobility, with the threat of capital punishment.

Women of the Nordic countries were considered as belonging to their families. When it came to inheritance, brothers usually first got everything, and later double as much as their sisters. In regard to work and sexual segregation, not only the common division of women being occupied with inside work and men in outside work dominated, but also old folk beliefs influenced the gender division of work.

In Eastern Finland for example and the North of the province of Österbotten, the peasant wife did the sowing and in certain areas she was the one who initiated the threshing as she was supposed to stand in a special relation to the earth. In the same area, cooking dishes of meat for the family was a man's job, just as hunting and preparing it was, because a woman was considered more exposed as she was carrying the young generation.

Figure 145. St. Birgitta of Sweden, who lived in 14th century, was a person with international outlook. She might also today be considered a symbol of religion in the Baltic region. Birgitta, belonging to the nobility, was politically active. Her main missions were peace and reform of the Church. World reknown for her visions, which contained material of practical policy in addition to religious, she was sanctified by the Pope already 20 years after her death. 600 years later, on October 6, 1996, the Pope John Paul II proclaimed her the patron saint of Europe. Ill.: Uppsala University Library

Among the most outstanding women in early Nordic history are the Holy Bridget, (*Heliga Birgitta*), later a saint in the Catholic Church and Queen Kristina of Sweden, an outstanding intellectual.

From 1809-1810 the Swedish parliament began in earnest to implement laws to make women and men equal before the law.

From the mid-19th century, general education for all was introduced in Sweden. Milestones for Swedish women were decisions on equal inheritance rights in 1845, on freedom of trade in 1846-64, on unmarried women becoming equal before the law in stages in 1858, 1863 and 1884, on admittance to lower government service from the 1860s, on the decision to enlarge the number of girls' schools from the 1860s, on access to higher education in the 1870s, on the equal rights of married women under administrative law in 1874, on equality in marriage from 1920, on equal municipal and political voting rights in 1918-21, and finally the right to higher government office in 1923. Hence formal equality was achieved rather early, with the universities lagging as bastions of eloquent conservatism.

Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, a male author who promoted women's rights and Fredrika Bremer, an author who wrote extensively on women's issues set the agenda for the radical debate in the 19th century. In the 20th century a number of outstanding women, Elise Ottesen-Jensen, Ellen Key, Elin Wägner, Alva Myrdal, among others contributed to easing the way for women into full participation in society.

However, old ways of looking at women were still strong. When voting for prohibition against selling alcohol in Sweden in 1922 – in contrast to the USA in the 1880s where women's votes were used to ensure a total prohibition – the social-democratic government decided that the ballot-papers of women and men be different in order that men's votes were given a higher value as alcohol was considered more important for men! This is the only example of sex segregated ballot-papers in Sweden.

In 1906 Finland was the first state in the world that granted women and men equal civil and political rights and this also included voting rights. It was not until 1918 that Swedish women had the right to vote, while for example Lithuanian women got it two years after Independence in 1920.

Figure 146. A Swedish girl of Somali origin. Photo: Katarzyna Skalska

It was not until after World War II that Nordic women come into politics in greater numbers. Nowadays they make up around 40% of the political decision-makers at all levels, thereby being part of the agenda-setting and the reformulation of priorities. With more women in most age groups and particularly in the eldest age group and with increasingly more women in relation to men voting from all age groups women in a democracy will decide the vote and hence politicians have to create a female-friendly agenda if they are to survive the elections.

Research shows that women from all political parties in the Nordic countries have some common priorities from a female point of view, being prepared to spend more resources on care of the old, the young and the infirm and relatively less on highways, the military and ice hockey rinks.

From the relatively homogeneous development in the Nordic countries we now turn to Russia and the Soviet Union where, depending on time and place we could prove that Russian and/or Soviet women are both leading in the world and among the most downtrodden, depending upon what time, which part of the vast country or which regime we are looking at.

5. Russian development

Russian researchers have studied periods with matriarchal traits at the dawn of Russian history, and often attributed the combined fear and admiration of strong women, the "poliantsy", to a more matriarchal origin.

From Kievan Russia at the turn of the last millennium, research seem to indicate that class differences widened and deepened also showing a worsening situation over time for women in regard to legal, social, and cultural development. In the Enlarged Russian Law from the 12th century, in article 88, it states that a woman's life is worth half of a man's life, except among those at the lower rung of society, where a woman's life was more valuable. Women among the affluent, the "boyars", enjoyed a more egalitarian relationship than women among the

peasants, the "smerdy", in regard to land ownership and inheritance rights. However among the least free, the "kholopy", the women, the "roba", were regarded as just as valuable as the men, probably because female slaves bore children and therefore could be considered more valuable to their owners.

This asymmetrical relationship – whereby women at the top and at the bottom of society enjoyed less blatant discrimination than those women trapped in the middle layers – is also evident from other parts of the world, such as in Chinese society throughout history.

Sometimes this deterioration was ascribed to Mongol influence from the 13th to 15th centuries, such as the practise of "terem" – the tradition of enclosing higher class women in the upper part of the house – which is somewhat curious as Mongol women never experienced "terem", instead Mongol women were active outside. This practice could rather have its origin South of Russia in the Turkish world.

In "Domostroi", the Russian Law, from the middle of the 16th century a hardening attitude also towards women of the upper classes could be identified. An absolute low point for Russian women occurred under the autocratic regime of Ivan Groznyj, 1533-84, (known as Ivan the Terrible in the West). Though beginning as a reformer in his brutal fight against the "boyars", high nobility, the suppression of women was intensified, from his own rapes to raw punishments that afflicted women, when they did not want to pose naked in the snow when he passed by. They were hacked to death or dragged by horses over the fields down to the river to be drowned. Sometimes several hundred Muscovite women were forced to parade naked in deep snow for him, the court, and their families. Some were randomly chosen and flogged to death in front of those gathered, to serve as a warning. From this absolute and lawless autocracy a century later the enlightened regime of Peter the Great began, from 1682, in which women partially achieved a better position and reforms were introduced to get women into public life. The institution of "terem", seclusion for upper-class women, was abolished and women's property and veto rights in regard to marriage were strengthened.

Under Catherine the Great the first state school for girls in the world, the Smolny Institute, was opened in 1765.

At the beginning of the 19th century wife-beating was prohibited, but among the peasants, who made up more than three quarters of the population, this tradition – seen as a man's right – continued unabated well into the 20th century.

In 1863 N. G. Chernyshevskij published "Chto delat?", *What to do?*, probably the most feminist book ever written by a man, pleading amongst other things for full freedom for women and also insisting that a husband as a means of redressing the former imbalance between the sexes should give his wife more freedom than himself. In 1869 landowning women could vote through a go-between and in 1874 civilian marriages were introduced.

At the turn of the last century women of the Russian empire – reaching from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea – were deeply divided by class. A Russian, intellectual upper-class woman could travel the world unchaperoned smoking "papyros" as a sign of emancipation, which no Western women of similar standing could get away with without ruining her reputation, while a woman of the emerging industrial class led a slave-like existence, not to mention her unfortunate sister eking out a living in the Russian countryside just liberated from bondage in 1861. In Sweden, for example, the first woman professor in mathematics was Sophia Kovalevskaya, a Russian, at the end of the 19th century. Hence, development for Russian women from the upper class was along European lines and sometimes more advanced than that.

The Russian upper class was always part of the European intellectual mainstream, sometimes lagging behind sometimes surging ahead. What set Russia apart from the rest of Europe at the turn of the last century was that a general European trend towards a closing of the wide gap between the classes was arrested and reversed in Russia after an interlude with a more European-style economic development from the 1890s until 1904. However, in regard to their husbands all women were legal minors.

6. Soviet development

The deepening cleavages in society and the fact that 1/3 of the early Bolsheviks either were women and/or had an upper class origin might explain why a radical women's program was promoted after the Bolshevik party usurped power from the first ever democratically elected government in Russian history in October 1917. This fact also is part of the explanation why a number of radical laws in regard to women's rights were promulgated in the early Soviet period in the 1920s. However, this Soviet period also led to another brutalisation of the entire society. Literary works from such diverse authors as Alexandra Kollontay and Alexander Solzjenitsyn, as well as recently published research from archives just opened in Moscow confirm this renewed brutalization of Russian society in the 1920s and the 1930s.

Partly for ideological reasons and partly because of the deep class divisions in Russian society the primacy of class over sex was not generally questioned. The official concepts of the Soviet planned economy came to operate within the ideological boundaries of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the emancipation of labour and egalitarianism. Hence emancipation for women implied full participation in production. A woman was to strive to became "Homo Sovieticus" as a worker, but at the same time she had to be a mother. She was not to challenge gender relations, nor ask for change in the underlying structure. Over time a male dominated elite defined the official ideology on wome''s emancipation. Women in this system became even more vulnerable then before, as leading men in building up a totalitarian state gained absolute power and did use it to their full advantage.

One such example is vividly described in Alexandra Kollontay's book, "The Love of Work Bees", (*Arbetsbins kärlek* in Swedish) when the wife early in the morning outside the door of her husband – one of the new elite – briefly encounters a woman coming out of that door after spending the night there. When talking they realized both were stuck under the absolute power of men and even more than before. Neither the wife nor the jobless and desperate woman had more alternatives than the other.

The author, Alexandra Kollontay, leader for the People's Commissariat for Social Welfare, already dismissed in 1918 by Lenin, the first Soviet leader, and sent by him to Scandinavia in 1922, eventually as ambassador to Stockholm in 1925, the first female one in the world, but – according to many – sent away as her radical ideas clashed with Lenin's. In her absence the laws she had introduced for women were abolished. After the experimental and culturally radical period under the NEP, the New Economic Policy, in the Soviet Union until 1928, a more conservative and dogmatic period began with the first five-year plans. This period of state terrorism left nobody protected from the whims of the Soviet dictator, Stalin, when up to one out of every seven people in the whole population perished during peacetime.

Nevertheless, the Soviet system tended never to forget to stress its removal of formal and legal hindrances for women's full participation in working life while simultaneously emphasizing women's crucial role as mothers in bringing up the young.

What also followed was Soviet style liberation of women, meaning women had to carry a double or triple work burden – with fulltime work in production assured combined with responsibility for household and childcare – because cultural constructions of gender assigned women the whole responsibility for child care and housework and because the services this ideology built on were not forthcoming until much later.

During Soviet time there were 4 features characterizing women's lives; 1) militarization, 2) collectivization, 3) internationalization, 4) hard tempering of daily life.

1) *Militarization*. During the war-time period Soviet unity was glorified and romanticized, and afterwards a militarization and regimentation of daily life occurred. In the propaganda people were "friends-in-arms" and comrades, the words "struggle" and "fight" were everywhere. The military terminology dominated with discipline in everyday relations. Not until the dissolution of the Soviet Union began did this warlike rhetoric cease.
2) *Collectivization*. With the liquidation of private property followed that property no longer could be a basis of self-esteem nor a foundation for a family. Hence families did not matter as before and there was a lack of self-esteem for many men as society took over. The functions of the men changed, males only became biological additions to women's lives. The economic interests gained priority.
3) *Internationalization*. In propaganda the Soviet woman came from no special nation, she was international, her image was unifying, and the family meant little to her. She was Homo Sovieticus made into one mass. The ties between woman and nationality were cut, while those between woman and Soviet society were emphasized.
4) *Hard tempering of daily life.* Comparing measurements between women's total average workload, paid and unpaid work, showed that women pre-1989 in the Soviet Bloc worked roughly 70 hours a week as against 15-20 hours less in the West. For example women in West Germany and Hungary in 1965 shared similar unpaid workloads of 36-37 hours a week. However, Hungarian women contributed an additional 35 hours of paid work, while West German women worked just less than half of that amount, implying that Hungarian women worked altogether almost 20 hours more every week. Soviet sociological surveys conducted in the 1970s indicated that while men on the average enjoyed almost 6 hours free time daily, women barely got 2 hours.

Some Western researchers dubbed Soviet-style liberation for women the "star system", whereby individual women were elevated as role models thereby showing the success of the Soviet promises on women's emancipation without eliminating some basic causes – such as lack of social infrastructure – that were hindering the mass of women to gain liberation in daily life. Although all legal and other formal obstacles were removed for women's participation in public life and production, the focus was in the propaganda and in politics on individual successful women, but not on the category of women per se. When resources were scarce and women as a group had no real political power, male priorities prevailed. It was less costly to promote a few "stars", than trying to elevate women as a group, thereby making women's unpaid work visible and part of the state budget.

In 1987 the last Soviet leader, Gorbachev, called on women to devote themselves to "their pure womanly mission" while simultaneously setting up women's sections, "zhen soviety", under strict party control like a latter-day revival of the more independently functioning women's departments, "zhenotdely" in the experimental period of the 1920s. Although

opening up to modernizing influences from the outside in many areas, however, the socio-economic stratification of Soviet society remained intact on the surface.

During the Soviet period a policy developed to give higher wages to those branches of industry deemed more important for a rapid industrialization, which meant that workers in heavy industry were favoured while employees in academia over time experienced a hollowing out of their salaries. Therefore while often more attractive for young men to go to heavy industry over time women came to dominate a number of professions requiring academic background, such as those of teachers, librarians, and medical doctors. Hence women were highly educated for low salary professions, while men had shorter training for high waged jobs, therefore more women than men received tertiary education in the Soviet system.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a new set of problems and discussions on how to proceed. However, no other system had trained more women with less prejudice on gender and still had erected so many practical barriers for these well-trained women to fulfil their potential.

7. Transition period

After half a century of Soviet power and for many countries outright occupation and continued Russification carried on from the tsar times it is no wonder that phenomena associated with the Soviet period were negatively regarded in Baltic area countries of the former Soviet bloc. Such as, for example, rhetoric on women's emancipation conjuring up so much and often – while insisting on women's full participation in production – ended with a double work load and hardships in daily life for women due to lack of promised social infrastructure. Many women felt they had been forced to take on public and economic responsibilities they did neither ask for nor want to.

So here was Eastern Europe suddenly with women more educated than men and all had been exposed to an official, socialist ideology on women's emancipation for half a century. And the last thing these women wanted was to live under a planned economy again, under another Big Brother state.

Of all the new, democratic movements coming to the fore only a few – the Interfront in Latvia, the Estonian Popular Front and The Women's Party in Lithuania – explicitly included demands for equal rights for women on their agenda. Hence during the first decade of transition women's equal participation in the overall changes in society were not high on the agenda, as social networks did not exist and much of what existed of the old social infrastructure crumbled. Also for most men and most people in the countryside time was used trying to manage to support themselves, their families and particularly their children. Equality and gender equality were usually understood as legal equality. But in spite of formal equality under the law gender relations could still be structured in unequal ways. Many of the inequalities between women and men, which were based in the practice and attitudes on what women and men should try to accomplish were seen apart from legal equality of opportunity. These structured inequalities affected both individual relationships and also had an impact on the course of social, political and economic transformation.

The Human Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Index

How far have we come since 1989 and how to measure changes over time in a comparative way?

The earlier frequently used measurement of well-being Gross Domestic Product, GDP*, per capita which can be computed in a number of ways was in 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, supplemented with a broader measure of standard of living; the Human Development Index, HDI.

The HDI tries to capture three basic aspects of human welfare; longevity, living conditions and knowledge. Methods of calculating the HDI have evolved over time. Currently this is done by using life expectancy at birth to measure health, and by adjusting per capita income to relative purchasing power, often measured at Purchasing Power Parity, PPP**, to calculate living conditions, and to use literacy of a population and combining it with enrolment ratios for education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary level to arrive at knowledge. Thereafter each variable are standardized on a scale from 0 to 1 for each country. A simple arithmetic average of the 3 scores makes up the composite index thereby showing a country's overall level of development.

However this HDI refers only to national averages and does not mirror inequality between groups in society such as women and men. For this reason further measurements have been developed such as the income-distribution index, the Gender Empowerment Measure, GEM and the Gender-related Development Index, GDI.

The GEM looks particularly at women in positions of effective power, in elected bodies such a parliaments, political parties, administration, and governments, but also in positions of power in the economy. In regard to GEM, Sweden ranks as number 1 in the world, with more women than men in government and about 45% women in the parliament and of the leaders of the 5 major political parties 2 are women. Denmark and Finland are also among the 10 highest countries ranked on the index.

In 1995 the GDI was introduced in the Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP. This GDI has the same 3 elements as the HDI adjusted for gender inequality. The greater the equality between women and men the higher the GDI compared to the HDI. The GDI considers gender differences in life expectancy, in earned income and in education and is basically calculated in the same way as the HDI.

In Figure 147 countries are ranked in relation to how advanced they are in relation to GDI and HDI, the higher on the list the more developed. The Nordic countries are leading worldwide in relation to GDI. They record the longest life expectancy, and lowest infant mortality with only Japan on par, but as soon as a GDI index is employed Japan falls far behind in rank. The rest of North-Western Europe, with Germany included, belongs to the 2nd group followed by former Soviet bloc countries. Poland comes out as most developed in relation to HDI and GDI compared to the Baltic countries, Russia, and Belarus. A special feature is that the countries here are more advanced in relation to gender equality than in relation to general human development. The high educational attainment of women and the high development of health facilities expressed in low infant and maternal mortality rates contributed to this state of affairs. Hence positive legacies of the Soviet past – giving women almost unlimited access to higher education and well developed health facilities – have been a strong contributing factor to a more advanced ranking in the GDI than in the HDI. However to utilise this potential of women is still up to countries now in transformation.

Even though women in the transition economies had a dip in their life expectancy in the mid-1990s, notwithstanding that this dip was much deeper and longer lasting for men, caused by alcohol, suicide and homicide, they still rank high in an international comparison (see tables 25 and 28). Hence a faster and deeper deterioration in the situation for men than for women made women came out as faring relatively better, though women in society did not experience a better situation on the contrary. This clearly illustrates how dangerous it is to rely on an index – though correct – without knowing about the underlying reality.

Since Independence most former Soviet bloc countries have year after year received an increasingly lower HDI rating. For example Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, were rated as nr 29, 34, and 35 respectively in 1993, belonging to the High Human Development Group of nations, and down to 57, 48, 36 respectively, in 1996 and a further worsening in 1999.

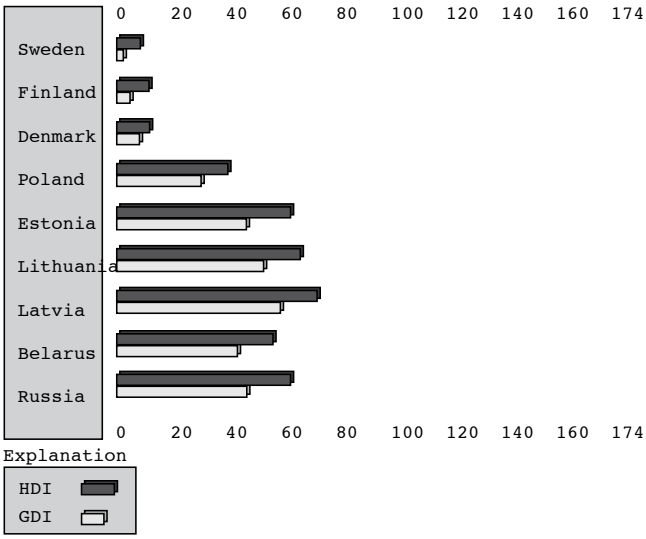

Figure 147. Development ranking according to the Human Development Index, HDI, and the Gender Development Index, GDI, for selected countries, 1995
This is part of the world index which classifies countries from number 1 to 174, where number 1 is best.
Source: WiT-6-99, p. 2

8. Conclusions

Hence in the history of the Baltic region no linear movement towards a more egalitarian and/or humanitarian society can be discerned.

Heterogeneity, a multiplicity of languages, life-styles, peoples, governments and policies on women's rights are instead characteristic of the Baltic region. All this diversity has a deep symbolic importance and can be seen as symptomatic proof of competition between countries and cultures, but is also the key in understanding the spiritual power inherent in this region and the potential for further development and cooperation with tolerance and a democratic mind as a necessary precondition.

On the one hand to diminish the role of the state is an essential goal of the transition, while on the other hand the state has an instrumental role in being responsible for promoting the balance of gender in transition societies. Gender equality is hard to impose from above as was attempted to during the Soviet period, while on the other hand it cannot develop totally on its own, as it is about giving more influence and voice to those having relatively less of it, hence the unfettered market place is not ideal either. For this reason the Nordic countries, with relatively strong states and functioning welfare systems stand out also in a global context as those countries of the world where women fare best, followed by other North-West European countries, such as Germany, followed by the rest of the market economies of Europe and thereafter by countries of the former Soviet bloc.

It is important to notice that the principles which are at the base for the transition from communism to democracy, from a planned economy towards a market economy are as well the same principles setting in motion the movement for gender equality namely: genuine political participation and representation, expression of diversity, the widening of choice and economic development.