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Recognising Men's Violence as Political: An Analysis of the Swedish Feminist Movement and Its Interaction with the State

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Abstract

Sweden is a country which is often praised for its commitment to gender equality, as expressed through its high female parliamentary representation and its adoption of measures such as the criminalisation of sex purchase. What many forget, however, is the role of the feminist movement in bringing this about and the large degree of resistance which it has often faced from the Swedish political establishment. In this thesis, I explore the struggle of the new (or “second wave”) feminist movement, from its emergence in 1968 until the end of the 1990s, to break down the traditional division between public and private and to have male violence, in its many forms, recognised as a political and structural issue. From a radical feminist theoretical perspective, I carry out two historical case studies that help to illuminate this process, one looking at the feminist movement’s struggle against the Sexual Crimes Investigation and the other at the activities of the women’s shelter movement over several decades. Finally, I analyse the state’s apparent willingness in the 1990s to, for the first time, take measures based on a feminist understanding and analysis of male violence and to depart somewhat from the principle of gender neutrality. I consider what some of the reasons for this might be and how much of a role can be attributed to the feminist movement as an independent political actor.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sweden has often been hailed as one of the world's "most equal" countries, coming fourth in the latest Gender Gap Report (after Iceland, Finland and Norway) and having a parliament that is 45% female. Measures such as the 1999 Sex Purchase Law have been applauded by feminists in other countries and provide a rare example of a state acting in the collective interests of women against those of men. This progress however would not have been possible without decades of feminist struggle, starting arguably with the emergence of *Grupp 8* in the late 1960s, and the feminist movement's many attempts over the last 40 or so years to influence the Swedish political process and to raise awareness around the oppression, marginalisation and abuse of women. In this thesis I aim to explore, in more detail, the role of the feminist movement politically over roughly a thirty year period from around the start of the 1970s until the end of the 1990s. This period is interesting for the purposes of my thesis as it spans the time from when the feminist movement first entered the Swedish political stage until the time at which it was arguably at the height of its political influence.

My focus throughout will be the issue of gendered and sexualised violence and my analysis will be informed by the radical feminist theories of, for example, Kate Millett and Catharine MacKinnon. Violence against women is perhaps the most contentious of all feminist issues in the sense that it exposes very clearly the gender conflict between women and men in our society. As Maria Sveland (2013: 16) puts it: "When we talk about the widespread problem of violence against women we are openly saying it is a problem that so many men abuse women". The intense backlash against feminist researchers and against prominent figures in the women's shelter movement that followed the 2005 documentary *Könskriget* is evidence that it remains highly controversial in today's Sweden to discuss violence as part of a patriarchal power structure within wider society.

Such an analysis has also posed a challenge to state institutions and their traditional unwillingness to accept the notion of a conflict or struggle existing between different social groups. The Swedish state has traditionally based itself on a corporatist model that promotes collaboration and compromise rather than conflict and works to restrict the ability of different groups to organise autonomously outside of the established political system. According to Edwards (2002: 13) women's self-organisation "disrupts and irritates the prevailing order's

norms as to how politics should be conducted". I would like to explore what forms this collective organisation has taken within the area of gendered and sexualised violence and the role of the feminist movement in changing how the state and other public institutions approach the issue.

The analysis that I aim to carry out in my thesis will be focussed around two main areas. The first of these areas relates to the strategies employed by the feminist movement to influence the political process and the Swedish state within the areas of gendered and sexualised violence. The second main area of analysis relates more to the way in which the Swedish state has responded to this challenge in terms of looking at such violence from the prism of a feminist analysis of gender-power relations. I will perform an analysis of secondary sources including books, articles, research studies, personal accounts and government documents while being informed by a range of feminist theoretical perspectives.

I will start my thesis with a look at existing literature, purpose, theory and methods before providing (in chapter 3) a brief overview of the history of the feminist movement in Sweden, looking, for example, at *Grupp 8*, *Kvinnofronten* and *Stödstrumporna* as well as the background for the debates that were later to emerge. In chapter 4 I will look at in more detail, through two separate case studies, the methods the feminist movement has employed to influence the political process in Sweden within the area of gendered and sexualised violence. In chapter 5 I will analyse, in more detail, the response of the established political system through a consideration of how, in what way, and for what reason, official policies and discourse around the issue of gendered violence has changed.

With my thesis I hope to build on previous research and to make the topic of my study accessible to a wider audience who may not have access to any of the Swedish-language sources I have made use of. All quotations taken from Swedish-language literature, of which there are many, are my own personal translations and it is therefore possible, considering Swedish is not my native language, that some of the meanings could have been lost or mistranslated. I have not however found the language issue to be a major problem and feel that any potential difficulties will be easily outweighed by the benefits of opening up this literature to a wider public.

Chapter 2: Purpose, question, existing literature, theory and methods

2.1 - Purpose and question

The purpose of my thesis is, firstly, to analyse how feminist concerns and the feminist understanding of patriarchal oppression, through the prism of gendered and sexualised violence, have entered into the political mainstream in Sweden and what strategies the feminist movement of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s has embraced in order to achieve this. Secondly I aim to explore how mainstream politicians and political parties in Sweden have responded to the fundamental challenge posed, by the feminist movement, to the patriarchal dominance of the state and political system. In particular I want to look at the role of the feminist movement as an actor in driving forward change and its interaction with the institutions of the state. My questions can therefore be summed up as follows:

1. In what way have feminist concerns and a feminist gender-power based analysis, particularly in the area of gendered and sexualised violence, entered into the Swedish political mainstream?
2. To what extent has the Swedish feminist movement been able to make violence against women into a political issue and to challenge and resist the patriarchal domination of the state?

My focus on gendered and sexualised violence here is influenced and inspired by radical feminist theory which sees the issue as the ultimate expression of men's dominance over, and contempt for, women. The issue of gendered and sexualised violence is one which, from a radical feminist perspective, lays bare the gender conflict which pervades all aspects of our society.

2.2 - Existing literature

Previous research on the exact topic which I wish to focus on appears, in some ways, to be relatively limited, however a number of books and studies have been written which help to illuminate the development of the Swedish feminist movement over the last few decades. Much has been written about the 1970s as this is the decade in which the new feminist movement first rose to prominence. Emma Isaksson's doctoral thesis *Kvinnokamp*, for example, takes an academic look at three different women's organisations of the 1970s: *Grupp 8*, *Arbetets kvinnor* and *Lesbisk front*. With this she aims to analyse three separate ideological projects: the women's cultural, the socialist feminist and the lesbian feminist. In particular Isaksson (2007: 9-10), by making use of a wide range of sources, explores how they looked at the existence of a specific women's oppression, what their strategies and ideas about how to organise the women's movement were, what goals they had, and how they related to men, prevailing gender norms and to other sections of the feminist movement.

Eva Schmitz's thesis *Systemskap som politisk handling* aims to explore the collective action and organisation of women's groups in Sweden between 1968 and 1982. Schmitz (2007) looks at *Grupp 8* and a number of other local women's groups, with a particular focus on the strategies they used to draw attention to women's disadvantaged position in society and to "create a consciousness around women's oppression". Schmitz looks at the women's movement both at a local and national level and makes use of a wide range of sources in her investigation including internal bulletins and protocols, articles from the mainstream media and both individual and group interviews which she herself carried out.

The Swedish women's movement of the 1970s has also been the subject of several master and bachelor theses written in recent years. Malena Nordenbro (2006), for example, in her undergraduate thesis *Vägen till kvinnans hjärta*, compares the more radical feminist *Grupp 8* with the Marxist feminist organisation *Arbetets kvinnor*. Her interest is primarily in exploring how the ideological conflicts between their competing visions of feminism were expressed with regards to topics like sexuality, abortion and child-rearing. Emmelie Hedin (2007) in *När det personliga blev politik* analyses the ideological development of *Grupp 8* during the 1970s in which it moved from being an explicitly socialist organisation to one that increasingly embraced radical feminism. The anthologies *Tusen systrar ställde krav* and *Kärlek, makt och*

systerskap also provide an immense amount of information about the development of the feminist movement throughout the decade.

In my thesis I also look at the feminist movement of later decades and the 1990s, for example, is the subject both of *Towards a New Democratic Order* by Gunnel Gustafsson (ed.) and of Petra Ulmanen's *(S)veket mot kvinnorna och hur högern stal feminismen*. The former book, which includes chapters from three different authors, takes a look at the women's movement of the 1990s and its engagement in the political process. In particular it focusses on the extent to which women, through collective action, are able to exert agency and influence within the political process and in that way undermine deeply-rooted patriarchal institutions and power structures.

In the second book Ulmanen explores the history of *Stödstrumporna*, a group of women who came together following the right-wing victory in the 1991 election, concerned at the direction the country was moving in. They held regular meetings and focussed explicitly on increasing women's representation and influence in politics. *Stödstrumporna*, by threatening to form a new political party, succeeded at getting most of the established parties to increase their number of female candidates in the 1994 election (when the Social Democrats won back power). The performance of the new Social Democratic-led government on gender issues was nevertheless disappointing for many feminists who felt their concerns had been side-lined in the years following the election.

Maud Eduards takes a theoretical look at women's political organisation and the scope for collective action available to them in the book *Förbjuden handling*. Eduards (2002) explores the conflict between women's organisation and the established rules for how politics should take place. Eduards shows how women's separate organisation is perceived as a threat and faces resistance by a political system which demands collaboration rather than confrontation and emphasises the need for gender neutrality in the decision-making process.

In terms of the main focus of my thesis, which is gendered and sexualised violence, a number of interesting studies have also been carried out. Gabriella Nilsson's doctoral thesis *Könsmakt eller häxjakt* explores antagonistic conceptions about men's violence towards women as expressed by a number of politicians, activists and professionals. She looks at three key issues

that have been a focus of feminist struggle between 1975 and 2000: rape, incest and physical assault, discussing how and in what way they came to be politicised and exploring the competing positions that emerged in the debate that took place. She also looks at the role of social movements in raising consciousness, from a gendered perspective, around these three issues and discusses what it took for them to make possible the significant changes that have taken place in terms of how they are looked upon and addressed. There has also however, she notes, been a significant backlash against the feminist analysis of male violence, meaning that real progress on the issue has, in many ways, been severely limited.

With regards to the specific cases I will discuss in my second chapter: the Sexual Crimes Investigation and the women's shelter movement, several research studies have been carried out. The bachelor thesis *Synen på våldtäkt* by Elina Jonsson, for example, is a discourse analysis of the Sexual Crimes Investigation, focussing in particular on how it looks upon and defines the act of rape. Karina Bäckström's thesis *ROKS och SKR – En studie av kvinnojourernas två riksorganisationer* meanwhile is a comparative study of the two national organisations of women's shelters in Sweden, looking into their historical development and exploring what ideological differences exist between them. Maud Eduards' chapter on the women's shelter movement, in *Towards a New Democratic Order*, also provides a very good overview of its development, arguing convincingly that the movement poses a serious challenge to the established political order.

Another useful source is *Våld mot kvinnor – män i kris*, a report by Socialstyrelsen into the women's shelter movement and its activities. Finally the book *Våldsutsatta kvinnor – samhällets ansvar* by Heimer and Sandberg (eds.) is a compilation of texts by different authors around the question of violence against women and the roles and responsibilities of various institutions in dealing with it.

2.3 - Theory

An important ideological inspiration for my thesis is radical feminism, with its emphasis on the importance of understanding society as governed by an oppressive, patriarchal gender-power system. The American writer Kate Millett is widely seen as being one of the first radical feminist theorists to emerge and her 1970 book *Sexual Politics* was an important

influence also on the new feminist movement in Sweden. In it she launched the term patriarchy as it is commonly understood today. Millett (1970: 25) writes:

...our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance – in short every avenue of power within society... is in male hands.

If one takes patriarchal government to be the institution whereby that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male, the principles of patriarchy appear to be two-fold: male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger.

Millett argues here that relations between men and women in all areas of life are, and have always been, characterised by an oppressive power structure in which men dominate women. This structure takes many forms and can be imposed through violence but, according to Millett (1970:43), it primarily comes about as a result of an intensive socialisation process. Patriarchal relations are so pervasive and normalised in our society, she argues, that they are often rendered invisible and scarcely require violence in order to be maintained.

Sexual Politics was particularly ground-breaking in its application of a feminist political analysis to the area of sexuality, showing us, in the words of Dworkin (1976: 11), that “sexual relations, the literature depicting those relations, the psychology posturing to explain those relations, the economic systems that fix the necessities of those relations, the religious systems that seek to control those relations, are *political*”. Millett did this partly through a critical analysis of the writings of four male authors (D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet) and of the theories of Freud, arguing that sexuality is socially constructed in such a way as to reinforce men’s dominance and control over women. This analysis of the role of sexuality in the oppression of women has been an essential part of radical feminist theory and has been built upon by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon among others. According to Thompson (2001: 14): “The feminist point is that sex is central to women’s oppression. It is through heterosexual desire that women are fitted, and fit themselves, into their subordinate roles in relation to men”.

Radical feminist theory also underpins my analysis and understanding of the state. Sweden, while having made significant strides towards gender equality, has a political system which is undeniably patriarchal and this was especially the case at the start of my period of study when female participation at the top levels of Swedish politics was very low – in 1970, for example, women made up only 13.3% of the Swedish parliament (Bergqvist, 1994: 34). As Gustafsson (1997a:21) notes:

...the political order in Sweden is an expression of a comprehensive gendered power order, or more precisely a male or patriarchal order. This gendered political order... consists of a number of arenas in which collective agreements are forged. These agreements include how society should be understood and organized in terms of gender, and how men and women should relate to each other in the family, civil society and politics. Such arenas, which we do not restrict to official institutions... are patriarchal, not in any essential or deterministic sense, but as a matter of concrete social practices.

According to feminist political theory men are constituted as the norm and women as something which deviates from this. The interests and concerns of men come to be seen therefore as synonymous with those of humanity as a whole while those of women are marginalised and ignored (Höjer and Åse, 1999: 8-9). Patriarchal society depends upon the concept of sexual difference, and political life, Höjer and Åse (1999: 9) note, has traditionally been constructed as “antithetical both to women and to what has been seen as feminine”.

Catherine MacKinnon, one of the most prominent radical feminist theorists of recent decades, has written extensively about the state and I intend to consider some of her theoretical perspectives in my look at the Swedish political process. In *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*, Catharine MacKinnon (1989) develops a theory of patriarchal male power as a driving force in all state and political institutions, believing that legal and political structures in themselves serve to create and maintain men’s dominance over women. This theory, developed primarily in an American context, may perhaps seem less relevant in Sweden where the state has actively championed, with the support of the feminist movement, a number of measures beneficial to women. Yet this, I would suggest, has largely not been due

to the benevolence of male politicians but rather because of a concerted struggle by the Swedish women's movement to challenge and resist patriarchal male power.

The clearest expression of this male power and one of the primary sources of gender inequality, according to MacKinnon, can be found in patriarchal sexuality, and particularly in rape, prostitution and pornography. As MacKinnon (1989: 113-114) writes:

Feminism has a theory of power: sexuality is gendered as gender is sexualized. Male and female are created through the eroticization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other. This is the social meaning of sex and the distinctively feminist account of gender inequality.

It is, I feel, interesting and appropriate therefore to take a detailed look at the role of the feminist movement in opposing the controversial *sexualbrottsutredningen* (Sexual Crimes Investigation) of 1976 and establishing the women's shelter movement which underwent a significant expansion in its power and influence during the 1980s and 1990s. In both these cases, feminists directly challenged male sexual power and attempted to assert their own bodily integrity and right to freedom from violence and oppression in a patriarchal society in which women and their bodies have traditionally been seen as available, at all times, to men sexually.

An important aim of feminism has been to challenge and break down the traditional division between public and private which is, according to Denise Thompson (2001: 7), "an ideological construct which confines important aspects of the subordination of women to the 'private', and allows some of the most violent manifestations of the power of men over women to go unrecognised and unchecked". The new feminist movement which first emerged in the early 1970s struggled, in accordance with the famous slogan "The personal is political", to have all aspects of women's lives recognised as political and to highlight the ways in which people's private lives are shaped by power relations and power structures within wider society. A feminist politics involves, in the words of Thompson (2001: 7):

...struggling to make the 'private' woes of women 'public'. It involves... identifying the numerous ways in which the public sphere men value is dependent for its continued existence on the unpaid, unacknowledged and unreciprocated work of women. And it involves elucidating the ways in which the 'public' penetrates the private – home, family, bedroom and the individual psyches of women *and* men.

In this thesis I am interested in how feminists have mounted a challenge to patriarchal political institutions in Sweden and how these institutions have responded to that challenge. Feminism as a political movement is far from homogenous and I expect this to be clear when I go on to look at some of the different feminist groups and organisations active throughout my period of study. I will define feminism however, from an ideological perspective, as an understanding that women are oppressed in society as a result of a patriarchal gender-power order and a desire to achieve freedom and liberation for women from this oppressive power order. This definition contrasts with the liberal definition of feminism as simply being a struggle for equal political and economic rights and opportunities for both sexes.

In exploring the political role of the feminist movement in Sweden I would like to consider several theories and hypotheses. That the Swedish feminist movement has achieved any real influence at all is disputed by both Lovenduski and Gelb. Lovenduski (1986: 98) writes that "One of the more surprising features of contemporary Swedish social and political life is the absence of a second-wave feminist movement of any size". She argues that this movement, as represented by *Grupp 8*, had little influence upon Swedish politics and that this relates to a collectivist culture which prefers to rely on universalist state solutions to problems in society. An important reason, according to Lovenduski (1986: 99-100), is that the feminist movement was pre-empted through the existence of strong party-based women's organisations and the implementation, early-on, of state policies which promoted increased gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market. Similarly Gelb (1989: 186) claims that "feminist movement politics per se have played a minor role in Swedish politics", arguing that while women have strongly benefitted from Social Democratic policies they rarely, as a group, have participated directly in the political decision-making process. Bergqvist (1994) agrees with Lovenduski and Gelb that the aims of the women's movement were, to a greater extent, achieved through the established political system than in other countries but she is clear to

highlight the role of the new feminist movement in driving forward these changes and mobilising women as an independent political force.

This is a theme that I am interested in exploring in more detail, particularly in my fifth chapter. As noted earlier, Eduards (2002) argues that the political system in Sweden has been extremely reluctant and even hostile towards accepting women's collective organisation. Similarly Elman (1996), in a comparative study of Sweden and the US with regards to state policy towards battered and abused women, concludes that the Swedish state, based on a corporatist and centralised model, has been unable or reluctant to develop policies targeted specifically at women that do not relate to the issue of labour-force participation. Yet not all analyses of the Swedish political system and the role of the women's movement have been equally pessimistic. Bergqvist (1994) emphasises that women have a strong position in Swedish politics and have real capacity to exert agency in their own interests if they choose to do so. Eduards (1997a: 20-21) argues that women's organising "is a sign both that inequality and subordination still exist, and that women possess strength and power to act".

The focus of the new feminist movement of course was much more than simply to change formal laws or to campaign for new government policies around certain issues. Drude Dahlerup (2000: 89), in her study of the Danish *Rødstrømpebevægelsen*, an organisation with similarities to *Grupp 8*, notes that: "In this movement one did not believe that fundamental changes could be achieved through legislation. It was the family, the labour market and, not least, women themselves who were the target for the movement's many activities, not the formal political institutions". The goal, she writes, "was not equality but rather an entirely new social order". The state, according to Dahlerup, was part of the establishment that the new women's movement wanted to fight against, seeing it as a patriarchal institution that contributed to women's oppression.

In her study Dahlerup has developed a theory of social movements and their role in politics. She defines social movements as "conscious, collective activities... which have the purpose of creating change in society". Importantly they are "protests against the established power structure and the dominant norms and values in society" (Dahlerup, 2000: 94). This definition, I would suggest, describes fairly accurately the struggle of both the Swedish grassroots feminist movement of the 1970s and of the women's shelter movement which grew

strong in the 1980s and 1990s. Although both certainly did work, at times, to change laws and to influence the mainstream political process, they have generally adopted a confrontative stance towards the establishment, aiming to overthrow the entire patriarchal social order and to highlight the many ways in which it impacts upon women's lives.

In looking at the struggle of Danish feminists to win the backing of local politicians for the establishment of autonomous women's houses, Dahlerup (2000: 120) notes that, in many cases, they were successful, despite their rejection of the established political process. Most Danish politicians were highly sceptical or opposed on principle to the aims of the new feminist movement, yet, according to Dahlerup, the *Rødstrømpebevægelsen* were, through their activism, able to gain sufficient legitimacy and public support to win partial backing for their political project. They contributed, she writes, towards "changing the framework for politics through a new and changed discourse on women and women's questions". This is a theory I will consider in my analysis as it can perhaps also explain some of the advances that Swedish feminists have achieved in recent decades.

2.4 - Methods

In this thesis I intend to, informed by some of the above theories, carry out a qualitative analysis of a range of primary and secondary sources in researching the issues and questions I have set out. This will include books, academic studies, magazine articles, personal accounts and government documents. Carrying out qualitative research means "emphasising words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2008: 366). Usually it involves studying one or several issues or phenomena in detail and does not demand the researcher to necessarily find a broad or representative sample. In my own research, I will choose several events and cases in order to illuminate a social and political process in which the feminist movement has challenged prevailing attitudes in society and made demands of the Swedish state.

In the fourth chapter of my thesis, I will carry out two historical case studies into the role of the feminist movement around two important political struggles of recent decades: the campaign against the *sexualbrottsutredningen* (Sexual Crimes Investigation) of 1976 as well as the emergence of the women's shelter movement soon after and its further expansion in

power and influence throughout the 1980s and 1990s. I feel that the relevance of these two cases, given my focus on gendered and sexualised violence, is clear. The Sexual Crimes Investigation could be said to mark a major turning point in society's attitudes to rape and other sexual crimes and served to unite the entire Swedish women's movement in outrage at the failure of the male-dominated state to empathise with, or understand, the perspectives of the victims of such crimes. The women's shelter movement meanwhile, has, in recent decades, not only provided help to those women subjected to male violence but has also played a vital role in raising public awareness and lobbying politicians to better address the issue.

Case studies are defined by Gerring (2004: 341) as an "in-depth study of a single unit... where the scholar's aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena". In my thesis, I would like to take the Sexual Crimes Investigation and the women's shelter movement as both being representative of a wider struggle by the Swedish feminist movement to politicise the issue of gendered and sexualised violence and to organise women collectively against patriarchal male power, whether in the state or in society more generally.

My choice of using case studies as my main method, I feel, provides a number of advantages relative to my research problem. I intend, for example, to use a wide range of primary and secondary sources which, as Denscombe (2007: 37) notes, case studies both "invite and encourage the researcher to do". This will, I hope, allow me to gain a better and clearer picture of the two developments that I wish to study. Case studies also allow the researcher to go into detail and explore the complexities of a certain event or process and then draw theoretical conclusions from them. Case studies moreover tend to "emphasise the detailed workings of the relationships and social processes, rather than to restrict attention to the outcomes of these" (Denscombe, 2007: 36), a focus that is in keeping with the aims of my thesis.

My fifth chapter is more of a general and theoretical look at the response of the Swedish state to the demands of the feminist movement around the issue of male violence, with a particular focus on the 1990s. It was during this decade in particular that Swedish feminists were seemingly able to profit from their many years of political activism, with important new laws brought in such as the law against sex purchase which was part of the government proposition *kvinnofrid* (Women's Peace), a wide-ranging set of proposals aimed at eliminating gendered

and sexualised violence. My interest here is the role of the Swedish feminist movement as an independent actor in bringing these changes about and forcing a traditionally patriarchal political system to put the needs and perspectives of women centre-stage when drawing up and implementing various policies.

My research throughout will be informed by feminist methodology. There is no one uniform feminist way of carrying out research and feminism, in this context, usually refers to, as Reinharz (1992: 241-243) notes, a perspective that informs a researcher's work as opposed to being a specific method that they make use of. Due to the fact that I will not be carrying out any actual fieldwork many of the ethical issues and concerns that often face feminist researchers are unlikely to come up. My engagement with feminist methodology will therefore manifest itself more in the theories that I make use of and the focus that I have in terms of looking at the role of the women's movement as an actor in driving forward political and social change.

I share the feminist critique directed at the notion that a researcher must always strive to be "neutral" and "objective" in their work. Feminists have argued this to be almost impossible to achieve since every researcher is situated within a very specific social context that inevitably impacts upon their work. This means, for example, that the supposedly neutral perspective they consider themselves to be adopting may in fact be one based on deeply patriarchal assumptions about society. In this thesis I intend to be clear on my theoretical perspective which is informed by radical feminism and on my motivations which involve a desire to highlight the struggle of the women's movement in challenging patriarchal power structures and ideology within the Swedish state and in wider society.

Chapter 3: Background

In this chapter, I will provide a historical overview of the feminist movement and its attempts to influence politics in Sweden over several decades as well as the context in which this movement originally emerged. The time period will span roughly from 1968, the year *Grupp 8* first emerged, until the end of the 1990s and the introduction of a number of important measures based around the government proposition *Kvinnofrid* (Women's Peace). These measures are significant, as they could arguably be said to represent a culmination of decades of feminist activism aimed at politicising violence against women in its many forms. The 1990s has also been associated with the emergence of a so-called 'state feminism', particularly during the period following the election of the Social Democrats to power in 1994, and the party has arguably been quite successful at co-opting a range of social movements, including the women's movement. Former Social Democratic Prime Minister Göran Persson is famous for having openly called himself a 'feminist' and, especially from the 1990s and onwards, there has often been a role for prominent feminists within Social Democratic-led governments.

3.1 – 1968-1979

The emergence of the new (or 'Second Wave') feminist movement in Sweden is usually traced back to *Grupp 8* (Group 8) in the late 1960s. While feminist or women's organisations did exist before this time most of them (for example the *Fredrika-Bremer förbund* and the *Svenska Kvinnors Vänsterförbund*) were largely influenced either by liberalism or Marxism and didn't share the sort of gender-power analysis that was later to be developed. Barbro Backberger, in an article for *Ord & Bild* in 1968, accused the existing feminist organisations of giving up the goal of "changing women's role in society" and instead simply "reflecting" it (cited in Isaksson, 2007: 31). That same year *Grupp 8* was formed, an event marking the beginning of the new feminist movement in Sweden, when a group of eight women came together, inspired by a series of seminars on gender by Karin Westman Berg at Uppsala University which had highlighted women's subordinate position in society and their exclusion from politics and academia (Schmitz, 2007: 114). The women, who were mostly in their thirties and of an educated background, first decided to form a study group which would regularly meet to explore and analyse issues relating to gender and the class struggle.

It is perhaps no coincidence that *Grupp 8* came into being in the late 1960s at a time of rising political radicalism in the form of a number of political movements that aimed to challenge the status-quo and bring about fundamental changes in how society is run. The student movement, anti-Vietnam War movement and Anti-Apartheid movement all helped to mobilise people politically and create a new, and more radical, climate in society as a whole. As Eva Schmitz (2007: 117) notes:

All questions in society were politicised and one could make politics of everything – from rebellion against teaching at universities, opposition to the traditional theatre and commercial music. The greatest engagement could be found in a comprehensive solidarity with people who fought against colonial and neo-colonial oppression in Africa and Asia and against dictators in Latin America. Alongside these non-parliamentary movements continued a debate on women's equality and how a politics for gender equality could be laid forward within several parliamentary parties.

The emergence of *Grupp 8* coincided with the rise of new feminist groups in a number of other countries too and many of those women who were to take part had previously been members of various male-dominated left-wing organisations within which they were often marginalised and their experiences as women ignored. As Eva Schmitz (cited in Olson, 2002: 16) writes of the women who, in 1970, established the independent Lund-based group *Kvinnoligan* (the Women's League): "Many of these women came from the male-dominated left within which they felt oppressed. They felt that it was the men who had the leading positions and analysed things while the women created stencils and made coffee".

Grupp 8 continued for two years as a closed organisation with a very limited membership but, in 1970, it decided to open itself up to interested new members and around 100 came to the first meeting in Stockholm. At the beginning of 1971 *Grupp 8* started to publish its own magazine *Kvinnobulletinen*. By the end of 1972 it had 470 members organised in 43 different local groups across Sweden (Schmitz, 2007: 153). *Grupp 8* existed primarily as a group of activist women and pursued a non-hierarchical and decentralised form of organisation. The tactics they embraced were often new for the Swedish women's movement: instead of trying

to work inside the established political process *Grupp 8*'s members "played street theatre, held picket-lines, heckled at meetings, wrote songs and plays, created images and art exhibitions" (Witt-Brattström, 2010: 51). The struggle, for the new feminist movement, was cultural as well as political and attempts were made to champion a new "women's culture" as part of a radical challenge to patriarchal society.

Grupp 8, as Nordenbro (2006) argues in her discourse analysis of *Kvinnobulletinen*, started out being influenced primarily by Marxism but, from around 1972 onwards, it developed a more explicitly radical feminist theory of society. It began, for example, to emphasise the role of sexuality in women's oppression and featured articles on issues such as prostitution and pornography (Nordenbro, 2006: 8). A consciousness around women's specific oppression quickly emerged out of the feminist movement and spread to society as a whole. As was stated in an article in *Grupp 8*'s internal bulletin (cited in Schmitz, 2007: 153):

One thing is certain and that is that consciousness about women's oppression has increased among the Swedish population and especially among women in the last few years. It can be seen in the debates that take place today, in the mass media, in the increasing number of paperback books which have begun to come out about the women's question and in the public discussions between people.

Not all local branches of *Grupp 8* however were equally quick to embrace a radical feminist understanding of society. In Gothenburg in 1973 a number of women broke away to form the group *Nyfeministerna* (The New Feminists), due to a reluctance to discuss feminism and women's solidarity among *Grupp 8*'s Gothenburg branch which, at this time, continued to see itself primarily as a Marxist rather than a feminist organisation (Schmitz, 2007: 285).

In 1976 the government-appointed Committee on Sexual Crimes presented its notorious *sexualbrottsutredningen* (Sexual Crimes Investigation). This report marked a major turning-point in Swedish politics and its controversial proposals (including reducing the penalty for rape) and the apparent blame it placed on female sex crime victims caused widespread outrage (Eduards, 1997b: 121). A massive and successful campaign (which I will explore in more detail later on) was launched by *Grupp 8* with the support of many other women's organisations and a significant amount of attention was drawn to the issue of sexual violence

against women which, until that point, had been largely ignored or seen as a private matter of no wider social or political significance.

A number of internal conflicts were to emerge in *Grupp 8* around this time however and, in 1977, a significant proportion of its members broke away to form a new organisation called *Kvinnofronten* (The Women's Front), angered at what they saw as the failure of the organisation to take a clear enough stance against pornography (Kvinnofronten, n.d.). *Kvinnofronten* also emerged as a national organisation with local branches in various towns across Sweden and its key issues included a 6 hour working day, free childcare and opposition to pornography (Kvinnofronten, n.d.).

Grupp 8 and *Kvinnofronten* were not the only organisations in which women were organised and the 1970s saw a wide range of feminist groups emerge such as the more explicitly Marxist *Arbetets Kvinnor*, the lesbian organisation *Lesbisk Front* and around 25 other women's groups in towns across the entire country (Sillén et al, 2010: 8). A new gender-consciousness and awareness of oppression came to be felt by many women and can be witnessed in many of the struggles that took place at that time. Eva Schmitz, for example, notes that a number of strikes and other forms of industrial action took place (such as the cleaner's strike of 1974) which primarily involved women and were, to some degree, inspired by the new feminist movement (Schmitz, 2002: 24-25).

This movement rejected the liberal ideology that had characterised most women's organisations in the 1960s and set out to offer an alternative role for women outside of the narrow confines of patriarchal society. As Gunnel Granlid writes of *Grupp 8*: "we broke with the prevailing female ideal and created an entirely new role for women – an outspoken, determined and angry woman prepared to fight for her rights. A woman who refused to please men and who went her own way" (Granlid, 2010: 21).

3.2 – 1980-1989

The 1980s is a period that relatively little has been written about, and feminism certainly appears to have dwindled somewhat as a grassroots movement at this time. According to Eva Schmitz (2002: 25): "The independent women's movement, with its diversity of groups,

ebbed away at the beginning of the 1980s... [when] there began a period of economic downturn and a new ideological discourse in society. The different women's groups didn't know how to approach the new conditions". The feminist movement nevertheless remained relatively strong during this decade and Schmitz notes that "The feminist consciousness continued to grow even if the broad activist movement slowly disappeared".

This consciousness is particularly evident with regards to the area of sexualised violence, and an important issue uniting feminists at the time was opposition to pornography. The emergence of pornography as a political issue can be traced back to the beginnings of the new feminist movement but it increased further in importance during the 1980s, partly driven by the writings of the American radical feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon. In 1985 *Kvinnofronten* established the organisation *Folkaktionen mot Pornografi* (People's Action Against Pornography) which came to be joined by around a hundred other organisations (Kvinnofronten, n.d.).

Folkaktionen mot Pornografi (FmP) worked to change public opinion and to influence the country's politicians in a number of ways. This included holding protests, gathering petitions, submitting police reports, forcing shops to stop selling pornography by threatening boycotts, sending in letters to politicians, and showing an anti-porn slideshow at schools and workplaces and at meetings of political parties, trade-unions and other organisations (Kvinnofronten: n.d.). FmP held meetings with many prominent politicians during the 1980s and 1990s and was able to successfully lobby for a number of changes to the law. In 1986 and 1989, for example, legislation was introduced banning the depiction of violence in both filmed and printed pornographic material (Kvinnofronten, n.d.).

Another feminist movement which grew during the decade, and which also focussed on the issue of sexualised violence, was the women's shelter movement. The first shelter for abused women was opened in Gothenburg in 1978 and, in 1984, the national organisation ROKS was formed to coordinate the country's network of women's shelters and raise their profile at a national level. The women's shelter movement grew during the 1980s and 1990s and, at its peak, according to Eduards (1997b: 122) gained around 10,000 individual members. The importance of this movement in politicising the issue of male violence in Sweden should not be underestimated and it has posed a clear challenge to the established political system. As

Eduards (1997b: 122) writes, “Men’s abuse of women has mobilized women – against men and against a male political order”.

3.3 – 1990-1999

The 1990s is a period which was arguably marked by a breakthrough for feminist ideas within the established political process. The fall in female parliamentary representation from 38% to 34% following the 1991 election (won by the political right) had sparked fears of an anti-feminist backlash and prompted nine women, some of whom had previously been involved in *Grupp 8*, to hold a meeting and decide to establish the group *Stödstrumporna* (Support Stockings). This was originally kept secret from the media and the group was organised in an informal and non-hierarchical way (Ulmanen, 1998: 21-23). Any issues seen as relevant to women were discussed and the group’s members shared their experiences and talked about what they could do to influence politicians and to get their views across in the media. The women of *Stödstrumporna* largely took a pragmatic approach, focussing on issues they agreed on and uniting behind the slogan “Full pay, half the power” (Ulmanen, 1998: 24-25).

Stödstrumporna announced itself publicly to the media in 1992 with the threat of establishing a separate women’s political party if the other parties didn’t do more to nominate female candidates. An opinion poll published soon after found that 42% of Swedish voters would consider supporting such a party (Ulmanen, 1998: 31) and mainstream politicians soon began to take the threat seriously, meeting with *Stödstrumporna* and promising to work for increased women’s representation. In the end *Stödstrumporna* agreed to give up the idea of establishing a separate party and in the election of 1994, which was won by the Social Democrats, women gained a record 42% of seats in the Riksdag. Half the ministers appointed in the new government were women and Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson promised to make gender equality a top priority (Ulmanen, 1998: 61).

The government adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy, declaring that gender concerns would be integrated into all new policies. A “gender equality delegation” was also appointed to advise the government on a number of issues and included several women who had actively been involved in *Stödstrumporna* (Ulmanen: 1998: 66-67). Ulmanen (1998: 68-71) notes, however, that the results were often disappointing, with many government departments failing

to implement the gender mainstreaming strategy when drawing up policies and the government, more generally, pursuing socio-economic policies such as spending cuts which worked against women's interests. This posed a dilemma for the women of *Stödstrumporna* who had gone from trying to influence politicians from the outside to joining the very political establishment they had once stood in opposition to.

That mainstream politicians nevertheless made real attempts to co-opt the feminist movement at this time suggests that feminists achieved a large degree of success in terms of being recognised as a significant political force. Gustafsson (1997b: 55-57), writing about the 1990s, identifies three main strategies that the Swedish women's movement employed in its attempts to influence politics: "State feminism", "interest group feminism" and "civil feminism". These strategies often overlap, and cannot always clearly be distinguished from each other, but they represent a willingness to pursue a diversity of tactics within the women's movement. The entry of feminism into the established political scene can be seen in the desire of many Swedish political parties to refer to themselves as "feminist". Perhaps the first was the Left Party when, in 1996, it officially put feminism on an equal footing with socialism in describing the basis of its political ideology. The Social Democrats were to follow in 2001 and also the Green Party, the Centre Party and the Liberal Party have, at some point, declared themselves feminist in the last two decades. According to Maria Sveland (2013: 12), the period from the 1990s through to the mid-2000s was a time when "everyone wanted to be feminists, including Prime Minister Göran Persson, a politician who hardly distinguished himself for his feminist consciousness". It was, she writes, "the first time in world history that a feminist was something that many people wanted to be".

A key policy introduced during the 1990s is the *sexköpslagen* (Sex Purchase Law). This law, which was part of a wider package of proposals aimed at combatting gendered and sexualised violence, made the purchase of sex a criminal offence and came into law in 1999. It is an interesting case to look at in more detail as it is one of the few examples of the Swedish state clearly acknowledging the relationship between men and women as characterised by unequal power relations and basing a policy on non-gender neutral arguments (Erikson, 2011: 56). The *sexköpslagen* was broadly supported by the feminist movement and pushed forward by a number of, mainly female, politicians from across the political spectrum, with the Social Democratic women's organisation *S-kvinnor* playing a particularly important role.

Chapter 4 – The politicisation of violence

In this chapter I will carry out the first part of my analysis, exploring the battle that the feminist movement faced in politicising gendered and sexualised violence. I will begin with a brief look at the sexual debate of the 1960s and the absence of any real analysis, or even recognition, of rape and other forms of violence against women. Finally I will carry out two case studies into two separate attempts of the feminist movement to influence policy in this area. The first relates to the Sexual Crimes Investigation published in 1976 and the second to the women's shelter movement which first emerged around the same time.

4.1 – The 1960s “sexual debate”

To gain an understanding of the social and political conditions under which the new feminist movement emerged, I would like to look briefly at the Swedish sexual debate of the 1960s and the critiques that have been made of its perceived gender blindness. The 1960s was a time of significant social change across the developed world with a traditional religious-based morality coming under attack from many different directions. In Sweden there emerged, beginning in 1962, a significant public and media debate around a range of sexual issues and this debate was to continue throughout much of the decade (Lena Lennerhed, 1994). The debate was initiated by a number of young liberals, influenced by writers such as Kinsey and Freud, who criticised not only religious moralists but also the earlier sex reformers whom, they believed, had collaborated with the state in order to control and manipulate people's sexualities (Lennerhed, 1994: 106).

The sex liberals of the 1960s focussed on a number of issues, including sex education in schools which they criticised for promoting a conservative morality and ignoring matters such as homosexuality (Lennerhed, 1994: 107-111). Other key issues included abortion and pornography, with sex liberals calling for a liberalisation of the laws surrounding them. While a small number of female writers were engaged in such questions, Lennerhed (1994: 118) notes that women's organisations at the time remained largely silent or ambivalent in the debate which took place.

This “sexual debate” which flourished in Sweden during the 1960s was, in many ways, gender-blind, with those in favour of greater liberalisation largely basing themselves on a liberal concept of individual freedom. They argued for the “individual’s freedom to do whatever he/she wanted as long as it didn’t harm anyone else” and “fought against paternalism and moralism, against the state’s involvement in the private sphere, and against that which they believed to represent a lingering hostility towards sex” (Lennerhed, 1994: 138). The consequences, whether positive or negative, were not discussed from a gender perspective and even the women’s movement, at that time, tended not to understand gender in terms of a conflict between men and women, seeing women’s oppression more as a result of a persistence of old-fashioned values and ideas (Lennerhed, 1994; 233-234).

An influential book at the time, and which received praise from several sex liberals, was *De erotiska minoriteterna* (The Erotic Minorities), written in 1964 by psychiatrist Lars Ullerstam. In it, he took a number of controversial positions, such as advocating the establishment of state-run brothels, and suggested that paedophiles belonged to an oppressed sexual minority deserving of tolerance and respect. Sexual relations between adults and children, Ullerstam thought, were becoming more and more common and posed no inherent cause for concern. Absent from Ullerstam’s book was any analysis of power relations between men and women or between adults and children and, while Ullerstam did not deny that abuse perpetrated by men sometimes took place, he believed this to be extremely uncommon and not worthy of any deeper analysis (Lennerhed, 1994: 156).

Hjördis Levin has written extensively on the history of sexual politics in Sweden and other countries, and she notes that violence has long been seen by male psychologists and sexologists as an inevitable part of heterosexual sexuality. Typifying such attitudes is Havelock Ellis, a well-known sex reformer of the late 19th and early 20th century. In a book published in 1910, for example, he argued, in the words of Levin (1989: 196), that: “The man’s sexual drive is manifested in the desire to conquer the woman. The woman’s resistance is not real. It is, on the contrary, the very manifestation of her sexual drive – the desire to be conquered.” Ellis, moreover, claimed that “even if sex takes place against a woman’s will it usually still happens with consent – of her unconscious instinct”. Seduction, he argued, is a struggle in which men overcome women’s resistance, including through violence, and this

serves an evolutionary purpose of ensuring that the strongest men are those most likely to reproduce and pass their genes on to future generations.

Such ideas, supposedly based on biology, are, as Levin argues (1989: 198), far from politically neutral, and were developed with the “purpose of finding justifications for inequality and oppression, not just between men and women but also between different classes and nations”. The influence of Ellis can be seen in the works of later writers and researchers, such as Kinsey, and went on to shape popular thinking during the sexual revolution of the 1960s and beyond. Kinsey, for example, repeatedly trivialised cases of rape and child abuse that he came across and he saw women’s refusal to engage in sex as a sign of them being sexually inhibited or prudish (MacKinnon, 1989: 132). According to Nilsson (2009: 43), Kinsey believed rape to be something experienced largely by frigid women, and which could be turned into something positive as sexual freedom increased in society and they were prepared to fully embrace their sexualities.

It was such thinking that the new feminist movement set out to challenge, and it has been an uphill battle for the feminists to have sexual violence and abuse against women and children recognized as a political and structural problem existing on a large scale. The traditional view, of course, is to see such violence as being an individual or private issue of marginal importance which only a small number of deviant men are responsible for. Feminists also fought for an alternative vision of sexual freedom: instead of defining it as the freedom of one person to get whatever they want, they reframed it in terms of the freedom of women from violence and coercion and a right to their own bodily integrity.

4.2 – Rape and the Sexual Crimes Investigation (Case Study 1)

The importance of the *sexualbrottsutredningen* (Sexual Crimes Investigation) of 1976 cannot be underestimated in terms of its role in mobilizing the entire Swedish women’s movement around the issue of sexual violence and the indifference shown towards it by male politicians. The investigation was commissioned by Sweden’s Social Democratic government in 1971, a time when, according to Ebba Witt-Brattström (2010: 182), “(the male defined) sexual radicalism was at its height”. Its aim was to “modernise” sexual crimes legislation in accordance with the “increased openness and tolerance concerning sexual questions which

currently prevails in society” (cited in Witt-Brattström, 2010: 182). The group appointed to write and carry out the investigation was composed of eight men, most of whom were above the age of 60, along with one woman (Boëthius, 1981: 15).

The publication of the Sexual Crimes Investigation five years later came not long after the feminist journalist Maria-Pia Boëthius initiated, in 1975, a debate on rape through a series of articles in the popular tabloid *Expressen* (Nilsson, 2009: 41). Boëthius (1981: 11-12) was partly inspired, following a trip to the USA, by the success of American feminists such as Susan Brownmiller in raising a public debate around rape and having it discussed in new terms. Brownmiller, in 1975, had written the book *Against Our Will* in which she famously described rape as “a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (Brownmiller, 1975: 15), providing one of the first analyses of rape from a feminist, gender-power perspective. Boëthius (1981: 13) writes how, after speaking to many women about rape, she gained the understanding that, “somewhere around rape exists the core of sexism, of the sexual oppression of women. Somewhere in the problem of rape can be found the male role and the female role, absolutely naked, miserable and exposed. Rape... is only the tip of the iceberg”.

In the above section, in which I described the sexual debate of the 1960s, it is clear that rape and other forms of sexual violence received little or no attention during the period commonly referred to as the “sexual revolution”, being seen as marginal phenomena perpetrated, at most, by a small number of deviant individuals. The emphasis was placed on the freedom of the (male) individual to be able to do whatever they wanted without interference or restriction, either by the state or by an out-dated and religious-based morality. Through to the mid-1970s, rape was largely only recognised if it took the form of a violent stranger rape and it was seen as completely normal, according to Nilsson (2009: 44), that a certain degree of force would be needed by a man during heterosexual sex in order to overcome the woman’s natural resistance.

The article series by Boëthius arguably marked the beginning of a serious engagement among the Swedish feminist movement with the politics of rape, giving room to a new discourse around the crime and creating a climate in which many women felt able to speak out about their experiences for the first time. Boëthius, in her articles and in the 1976 book *Skylla sig*

själv, also helped to shatter the belief that the state and legal system are in some way neutral in the way they approach rape and other sexual crimes. She showed how the male-dominated justice system repeatedly sides with the perpetrators of rape, refusing to believe the victim or holding her partly responsible for the crimes she is subjected to.

That the publication of the Sexual Crimes Investigation happened to coincide so closely with this rising awareness of rape as a political issue, perhaps explains why many of the reactions that followed were so strong. Its aim was, as noted, to undergo a review of all of Sweden's laws relating to sexual crimes, and to suggest ways they could be altered or re-written in accordance with the changes that had taken place in society. The proposals that it came up with were controversial, to say the least, but are arguably very much in accordance with the ideology of sexual liberalism that had flourished during the 1960s and which lacked any sort of critical gender perspective.

With regards to the crime of rape, the Sexual Crimes Investigation proposed dividing it into three levels of severity, with only the most severe level (which required "particular ruthlessness and brutality") being referred to as "rape" and the other levels referred to as "sexual coercion" (SOU 1976:9: 17). For less serious acts of "sexual coercion" it proposed that it would be possible to impose only fines and suggested that the current penalties for rape, when compared to other forms of violent assault, seemed unreasonably harsh (SOU 1976:9: 60). This is despite the fact that, of the very few cases which, at the time, ever resulted in a conviction, the typical punishment was only a few months in prison (Boëthius, 1981: 100). The Sexual Crimes Investigation suggested therefore a "softening" in how sexual crimes are dealt with by the legal system, stating that, "even if significant force is used there can be factors which call for the crime, in that particular case, to be judged relatively mildly" (SOU 1976:9: 60-61).

While the Swedish courts, as Boëthius showed, had long based their judgements in rape or sexual assault trials, to a large extent, on the behaviour of the victim, the Sexual Crimes Investigation suggested officially incorporating this into the law. Its proposition for changing the section of the penal code relating to sexual assault reads: "If the crime, with regards to the victim's actions before the assault... is seen as less serious, the sentence is fines or imprisonment of a maximum of one year" (SOU 1976:9: 11). Such actions from the victim

which would warrant defining the crime as less serious include, the Investigation later states, “to a greater or lesser degree consciously encouraging sexual advances” (SOU 1976:9: 136). In Appendix 3 of the Sexual Crimes Investigation, criminology professor Knut Sveri argued that many cases of rape in such circumstances, for example when women follow unknown men home, were a result of men and women “misunderstanding each other’s intentions” and not following “the rules of the sexual game” (SOU 1976:9: 184).

Other controversial proposals in the Sexual Crimes Investigation included the decriminalisation of incest, a reduction in the age of consent from 15 to 14 years, and allowing the sexual touching of children above the age of 10, showing an equal lack of concern or regard for the child victims of sexual abuse. The Investigation also took a relatively liberal view towards prostitution, calling for a softening of anti-pimping laws. Legal consequences, it suggested, should only apply to those who took a “leading position” in the activity, and the most important factor when deciding the punishment should be: “the relationship between the perpetrator and the prostitute or prostitutes who are involved”. A “good” relationship between them would call for a “short prison sentence even in cases where many women are involved” (SOU 1976:9 126-127).

The publication of the Sexual Crimes Investigation caused huge outrage among the Swedish feminist movement, and was to mark an intensification of its engagement around the issue of rape and other forms of male violence. *Grupp 8* was one of the first organisations to come out against the Investigation, inviting all organised women’s groups, including a housewives association, to join in their campaign to have it torn up (Witt-Brattström, 2010: 183). Most of them willingly joined and it was, Witt-Brattström (2010: 183) writes, the first time since the suffrage movement that so many women of all political orientations united around a single cause. The campaign is described in *Grupp 8*’s magazine *Kvinnobulletinen* (1982: 96) from that year:

Everything started with *Grupp 8*. We had worked with the Investigation the whole spring, made leaflets, encouraged protest, submitted comments on it to the government. But all our efforts were just drops in the ocean compared to the massive threat that the Investigation is. Disheartened we asked ourselves how we could mobilise a massive opinion against the proposition in only a few

months. So we decided to go to all the women's organisations and associations with the purpose of organising a protest. Some ought to bite we thought. And the astounding happened: they ALL did! Closely counted stood half a million women behind our joint protest. The cooperation went above our expectations and, on the most important points, we were completely united in our criticism. And on the 30th of June, the last day to submit comments, everything was ready.

The delegation consisting of representatives from 13 women's organisations and associations marched up to [Justice Minister] Geijer's summer stand-in, State Secretary Sten Andersson who, clearly ill at ease, received our joint statement. It will be hard to gloss over in the parliamentary debate.

The statement, which was signed by *Grupp 8*, *Fredrika Bremer Förbundet*, *Lesbisk Front* and several other organisations, along the women's groups of all Swedish political parties, sharply criticised many aspects of the Investigation. It accused it of having an "old-fashioned view of women which we, under no circumstances, can accept", and condemned any attempt to "excuse" violence with a woman's "attitude or actions before the assault" (Kvinnobulletinen, 1982: 96). Any softening of anti-pimping laws was also rejected and the statement called for an "investigation into prostitution and its physical, psychological and social consequences". Criticism was, unsurprisingly, directed at the fact that only one woman was involved in the writing of the Sexual Crimes Investigation.

The campaign was very successful in raising awareness around the Investigation and much attention was given to it also by the media. As a result it, according to Lindvert (2002: 196), became "impossible for the Social Democrats to go ahead with the proposal" and, following the election later that year, the new centre-right government, in 1977, ordered that it be replaced and a new investigation into sexual crimes carried out. The new investigation was made up of four women and two men and set out to look at sexual offences primarily from the perspective of the victim (Witt-Brattström, 2010: 183).

The new feminist movement, from the beginning, had struggled to highlight the voices and experiences of women in all areas of society and to resist a political order that either completely ignored the concerns of women or relegated them very much to the side-lines.

There was a belief that, by women talking, often together, about their experiences and about their oppression, a new feminist consciousness could be built that would pose a clear challenge to the status-quo. In the area of rape and sexual violence feminists naturally based their critiques on the experiences of its female victims, contrasting these with the patriarchal myths that official policy often seemed to be based on.

The conclusions of the Sexual Crimes Investigation, with its purely legal and medical perspective based on prevailing patriarchal attitudes and norms, were entirely divorced from the realities of sexual violence and its impact upon women. Feminists set out to create a new narrative and to give a voice to women, as is the case with Boëthius who bases her book *Skylla sig själ* on the experiences of the many women she had spoken to, or who had phoned her, after reading her newspaper articles. The effect of this politicisation of rape was, in many cases, to empower victims to speak out or to think, in a new way, about what they had gone through. In a 1976 article from *Kvinnobulletinen* (1982: 98), a woman, describing her experience of rape 15 years earlier writes the following:

I was brought up with a sexual politics whose conditions and laws are dictated by men and I reacted with feelings of guilt at what happened to me. Why would I report these boys?... Who would believe a woman's word against two men? Again it is this thought which comes through in the Sexual Crimes Investigation: it's up to the woman to prove while for the man it's sufficient only to deny...

To understand [the social factors that lead to rape] does not sweep away the feeling of being deeply degraded. And that feeling comes to the surface again when I read the Sexual Crimes Investigation and notice the same old way of thinking, the same reactionary view of women which I myself was once indoctrinated into and which made me remain silent.

Rape is not the only issue within the sphere of sexual politics where the new feminist movement worked to bring about a radical shift in attitudes. A number of years before the rape debate, Swedish feminists had started to campaign against the growing porn industry which had been fully decriminalised in 1971. Ebba Witt-Brattström (2010:71-75) describes how in

1973, and then again the following year, members of Grupp 8 in Stockholm had torn down or covered over pornographic advertisements, as well as putting up feminist posters on the windows of sex shops and clubs, an act for which a number of them were arrested or beaten by security guards. From this time onwards pornography became a political issue, as an article on the new feminist movement in *Vi Männskor* (1976: 50) describes:

During the 1960s there were few of us who dared to say what we thought about the growth of pornography for fear of being branded as conservative puritans. Many of us were victims of the liberal open-mindedness. Today it is taken for granted for all women to say no to porn... and work against those forces which want to make money from women as objects... To be able to embrace a positive sexuality we must be able to say no.

The new feminist movement stressed the importance of women taking back their bodies and their sexualities which had long been controlled and defined by patriarchal society. As Maud Eduards (2007: 264) writes: “Feminists demanded the body back from different institutionalised power structures, like the state and capital. The body should neither be privatised, as with pregnancy and mothering, or sexualised, as with prostitution, pornography and rape. Women’s bodily experiences were not just personal but also political”. An important aim, at this time, was to create an “alternative female-defined sexuality” (Witt-Brattström, 2010: 188), in which women were no longer reduced to objects of men’s lust. In these efforts Swedish feminists were able to draw on the work of their sisters in other countries and the 1976 *Hite Report on Female Sexuality* was, for example, one ground-breaking study that helped to dispel many of the patriarchal myths that have been built up around sex.

In this new social climate it became impossible for the state to completely ignore a feminist or gender perspective, as it had done previously, when drafting policies around the areas of sexuality and male violence. The Sexual Crimes Committee of four women and two men, which had been appointed in 1977, eventually released its final report four years later titled “Rape and Other Sexual Assault” (SOU 1981:61). The report took a victim-centred approach and completely rejected many of the key recommendations of the Sexual Crimes Investigation. Women were no longer to be seen as sharing a degree of responsibility for rape and their behaviour before the offence, or their relationship to the perpetrator, was to have no

bearing in court. The proposal to cease referring to many less severe cases as “rape” was also dropped and the sexual abuse of children was recognised and condemned. The new report called, in addition, for increased help and support for rape victims and stressed the need for the legal and medical establishment to better meet their needs through increased awareness and training (Elman, 1996: 72). Rape was, importantly, now acknowledged as a public concern and could still be prosecuted if reported by someone other than the victim, a change which was implemented into law soon afterwards (Lindvert, 2002: 198).

Progress on the ground was, however, not immediately apparent and, according to Elman (1996: 73), the new Social Democratic government which came to power that same year was slow to take any initiatives that would have seriously addressed the report’s recommendations. The debate around the Sexual Crimes Investigation nevertheless marked, in the view of Maud Eduards (1997b: 121), a “watershed in Swedish politics pertaining to the issue of violence against women”. Before this time the issue was almost entirely absent from the Swedish political agenda and was certainly not widely looked at from the prism of a feminist gender-power perspective. Lindvert (2002: 200) notes that violence has tended to be very much overshadowed, both in academic research and in official gender equality work, by other issues such as income equality, childcare and political participation. The increasing attention it has received in recent decades has been driven almost entirely by the women’s movement, forcing politicians to act as was the case in the aftermath of the Sexual Crimes Investigation.

It is interesting to note that, at the time of the publication of the Investigation, *Grupp 8* had in fact been shrinking as a grassroots activist organisation: its membership dropped from 470 at the end of 1972 to 300 by 1975 and just 200 by 1977 (Schmitz, 2007: 280). While this fall may be partly accounted for by a growth in other feminist organisations it does suggest that the new feminist movement was relatively weak politically and organisationally at this time. Its success however lay in bringing together a diverse range of women’s organisations and mobilising public opinion in its favour. This in itself would likely not have been possible were it not for the feminist movement, over many years, working to create a political climate in which it became legitimate to talk about, and analyse, all aspects of women’s lives from a critical gender-power perspective. As a result of this the ideology of sexual liberalism, upon which the Sexual Crimes Investigation had based its findings, had started to be undermined and weakened. As Nilsson (2009: 62) puts it:

When the Investigation was complete the situation was quite different from when it was formulated and from when the work began. The sexual liberal vision of sexual freedom was no longer the political goal in front of all others. The Investigation came in a context where a critical perspective in the view of rape was possible.

4.3 - The women's shelter movement (Case Study 2)

The women's shelter movement dates back also to the 1970s and to the campaign to establish, in several Swedish towns and cities, independent "women's houses" as meeting places for the feminist movement and as somewhere that women could go for help and advice. One of the first calls to establish such houses had come from *Lesbisk Front* in 1975, and by 1978 the movement had gained significant momentum (Witt-Brattström, 2010: 192). In February that year the first women's house opened in Gothenburg when the feminist group *Kvinnocentrum* was granted permission to rent a former pharmacy (Eduards, 2002: 81).

In August of 1978, a "Women's House Festival" was organised in Stockholm and the local municipality appeared willing to offer the women's movement a building in which it could be established (Witt-Brattström, 2010: 194). Divisions were, however, soon to emerge within the Women's House Group which had been established as a coalition of women from different organisations to promote and advocate in favour of a women's house in Stockholm. The dispute centred on what form the women's house would take and how much of its activities would be related to providing support and assistance to abused women (Eduards, 2002: 86). Social Democratic women in the group, at this point, broke away and, with the support of Municipal Commissioner Mats Hulth (also a Social Democrat), formed a breakaway organisation called *Alla Kvinnors Hus* (All Women's House). The new organisation wanted to use the building primarily to help abused women and not as a centre for grassroots feminist activism (Witt-Brattström, 2010: 195).

Finally, in May 1979, a vote was held in Stockholm municipality and, by 90 votes to 9, it was decided to award the building to All Women's House as opposed to the Women's House Group and its allies in the feminist movement. In support of this decision, which *Grupp 8*'s

magazine described as a “murder of democracy”, were the Social Democrats and all the parties of the right with only VPK (the Left Party – Communists) against. All Women’s House was preferred by the political establishment, Eduards (2002: 86-87) notes, on the grounds that the municipality believed it would have a greater chance to influence and oversee its operations and wanted it as a complement to the work of social services. A number of politicians had also expressed hostility at the possibility of the house becoming a centre for militant activist groups and stressed the need for it to work within the established bureaucratic system, something which the new feminist movement, with its oppositional stance towards the prevailing social and political order, appeared unwilling or unable to do.

The feminist movement also faced difficulties in its struggle to establish women’s houses and shelters in other towns and cities. In Umeå, a women’s shelter had been established in 1982 when, following several years of struggle, the municipality agreed to pay the rent for a flat. In its first years, however, the shelter struggled as no other help was provided and local politicians appeared unsympathetic to its cause (Eduards, 1997b: 134). In 1983 around 30 feminist women, some of whom had been involved in the shelter, occupied a house and ran it as a women’s centre for three months before they were eventually forced out and the building was demolished. Following this action, financial and material support for the shelter was stepped up and the number of women who went to it for help increased. The municipality, nevertheless, continued to have a problem with the informal organisational structures of the shelter, forcing it to turn itself into a formal association, and, according to activists, claiming money has been a long and complicated process (Eduards, 1997b: 135).

During the early 1980s women’s shelters started being set up in a number of towns all over Sweden and, by the start of 1983, numbered around forty (Ds S 1983:2: 141). The situation differed entirely from one municipality to another in terms of whether or not they received any public funding, and significant ideological differences existed. In Stockholm, for example, the Women’s House Group, which had been denied municipal support, went on to establish, in 1980, their own women’s shelter which was run on a purely voluntary basis and funded through donations. The shelter was inspired by radical feminist ideology, in its understanding of violence against women as the ultimate expression of a system of patriarchal male domination, and it aimed to remain fully autonomous and outside of the political establishment (Eduards, 1997b: 131).

All Women's House, by contrast, has been happy to work within the established political process while taking a more cautious stance ideologically, refraining from openly describing itself as "feminist" and avoiding controversial statements such as "all men are potential rapists" (Eduards, 1997b: 132). The municipality, in return, has, according to a former chairperson, been relatively generous with the financial support it has provided.

In 1984 a new national organisation, ROKS (The National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden), was created to loosely coordinate the activities of the different women's shelters, lobby on their behalf, and work to build public awareness around issues relating to violence against women. Especially in the early years, there was no ideological consensus between the dozens of local women's shelters which make up ROKS and such questions were often neglected in favour of more practical matters such as applying for government and local municipality support (Nilsson: 178-179). It wasn't until 1992 that ROKS decided to formally describe itself as a feminist organisation.

A recognition of violence against women as a social problem related to unequal gender-power relations was nevertheless important, from the very beginning, for most of the women's shelters that emerged across Sweden. As one woman involved in the Umeå women's shelter puts it: "We came from a women's organisation and saw the women's shelter as a part of the struggle against women's oppression and for women's rights. It was important for us to emphasise that it wasn't about charity but rather about a solidarity among women" (cited in Eduards, 2002: 89). Gunilla Nordenfors (2010: 228), who was also involved in the Umeå women's shelter, notes that, throughout its many years in existence, it has been able to contribute to a rising consciousness around the oppression of women, partly through holding lectures and seminars on the subject. The individual women who have gone to it for help have also been empowered to think about their experiences in a political way. "Many have realised", she writes, "that the basis of men's violence against women can be found in men's power over women, in men's dominance and women's subordination, and that violence helps to uphold this prevailing order".

The development of a more coherent feminist ideological position within the women's shelter movement was helped, from the mid-1980s onwards, by new feminist research into male violence, which provided an alternative to earlier psychological explanations (Nilsson, 2009:

180). The Norwegian feminist and professor of sociology at Uppsala University, Eva Lundgren, for example, developed, based on many interviews of abused women and abusive men, a theory on the normalisation process of violence which has been used extensively by much of the movement, and has formed the basis of how it understands violence against women within intimate relationships. According to Lundgren's theory, men's violence against women is understood as "a dynamic process whereby violence becomes normalised in various ways" in the eyes both of the perpetrator and the victim (Amnesty, 2004: 7).

Men's violence against women, Lundgren argues, relates to the prevailing gender roles in society and the desire of men to impose and uphold these roles within their relationships. Men abuse their partners, in other words, to force them to conform to an expected feminine role based on inferiority and submission. This violence should not be seen, according to Lundgren, as a result of an explosion of anger, but is rather a conscious strategy on behalf of the man who is in full control of his actions (Nilsson, 2009: 181). The victim, meanwhile, begins to see violence as a normal part of her life and internalises the man's negative image of her, often blaming herself and feeling a sense of guilt. She becomes more and more isolated from others outside of her abusive relationship, and her ability to escape from it is reduced. Many women therefore try to cope by adapting to their abusers' understanding of how the relationship should be and how she should act as a woman (Amnesty, 2004: 7). Lundgren's research has had important implications for the way male violence is interpreted and understood. According to Nilsson (2009: 185):

The adoption of Lundgren's theory involves... not just the choice of a scientific research tool, but a comprehensive gender-political perspective on the abuse of women. This implies that abuse is understood as a central component part in a certain gender order, and that there exists a link between the ordinary man and the violent man, between the ordinary subordinate woman and the abused woman, just as between the peaceful and the violent partner relationship.

ROKS, according to Nilsson (2009: 182), was quick to adopt Lundgren's theories which provided academic support and legitimacy for its political project. She achieved an important status within the women's shelter movement, and her research allowed ROKS a leading role in determining how male violence was understood and defined within the Swedish political

and academic debate. With its adoption of Lundgren's theories the organisation moved towards a radical feminist position and, increasingly, emphasised physical violence to be only one of many expressions of a wider system of gender-based oppression. According to a ROKS statement in 1993: "The battering of women, prostitution, rape, incest and other forms of assault together with pornography, are the worst consequences of the visible oppression of women in society. All forms of this oppression are a difference of degree rather than type" (cited in Eduards, 2002: 84).

Eva Lundgren's theories were, as I will explore more in my fifth chapter, to have a considerable influence not only on the women's shelter movement, but also on official policy around the issue of violence against women. Her theories have, nevertheless, remained highly controversial as a result of their identification of violence as something which becomes normalised and accepted in people's lives and which is closely related to prevailing gender roles and norms. Psychologist Margareta Hydén, with the publication of her research in 1992 into couples in which the man had been reported for abuse, provided an alternative understanding of violence to that of Lundgren. Hydén was critical of the supposed implication of Lundgren's theories that abused women are always passive victims with no control over their own situation, and she disagreed with the idea that violence ever comes to be seen as something truly normal within a relationship (Nilsson, 2009: 185-186). She rejected also the belief that women are, as a result of societal structures, automatically the subordinate partner within a relationship, believing that it is through the use of violence that men are first able to gain a dominant position over their partners.

Following a critical review of Hydén's work by Lundgren, an academic dispute broke out between them with each accusing the other of being unscientific and each representing opposite sides of the division between structuralism and post-modernism (Nilsson, 2009: 187-188). Hydén accused Lundgren of ignoring the "complexity of the social reality that men and women live in", with her structural understanding of women's oppression and her belief in the applicability of this to all relationships between men and women in Swedish society (cited in Nilsson, 2009: 188). It was in the context of this dispute that divisions also grew within the women's shelter movement, with the leadership of ROKS siding strongly with Lundgren. Many of those in the movement, such as All Women's House, that had long been critical of

Lundgren's theories were meanwhile happy to embrace the alternative academic perspective provided by Hydén (Nilsson, 2009: 192).

The dispute culminated, in 1996, with sixteen local women's shelters breaking away from ROKS and forming a new organisation called SKR (The Swedish Association of Women's Shelters and Young Women's Empowerment Centres). SKR, at this time, distinguished itself from ROKS both in terms of its focus and its ideology. The new organisation desired to "broaden women's shelter work" and cooperate with other organisations, including those outside of the women's movement, in order to achieve greater equality in society (Holmberg & Bender, 1998: 20). SKR, moreover, expressed criticism for the theoretical model ROKS embraced in its understanding of violence against women. It accused ROKS, according to Holmberg & Bender (1998: 20), of "simplifying a highly complex problem when it discusses in terms of a 'male-dominated society' ... something which", SKR believes "risks hiding the nuances in the mechanisms that lead to violence".

ROKS and SKR both struggle for gender equality and women's liberation and believe that a link exists between violence against women and an unequal gender-power relationship within wider society (Holberg & Bender, 1998: 21). While ROKS puts "sexualised violence" at the centre of its analysis (with physical abuse only one of many forms that it takes), SKR talks about a "gender-related violence" that affects different groups of women in society. For SKR violence is something that affects a limited number of women, particularly within certain groups, while for ROKS sexualised violence is endemic in society and affects all women regardless of age, class or ethnic origin (Holberg & Bender, 1998: 21). The explicitly feminist and structural-based explanation of violence which ROKS has contrasts with SKR's equality-based approach which looks more to the individual circumstances within each relationship as an explanation for why violence takes place (Holmberg & Bender, 1998: 21).

Despite the setback which the split within ROKS posed, the women's shelter movement continued to grow throughout the 1990s and beyond. By 2001 there were 158 women's shelters across Sweden with 126 part of ROKS and 32 belonging to SKR (Eduards, 2002: 83). By 2013 the total number of women's shelters had increased to more than 220 with roughly half belonging to ROKS and half to SKR. According to Karina Bäckström (2001), who carried out interviews with women in both organisations for her undergraduate thesis, the

differences between them had seemingly decreased by 2001, with both organisations working with similar issues and enjoying a greater level of ideological convergence. SKR, for example, was devoting greater attention to the issue of sexualised violence than it had done previously. It has continued however to be more cautious in what it says and to have closer links to the political establishment, with its leader, at that time, actively involved in the Social Democratic party (Bäckström, 2001: 20).

A significant degree of cooperation with the political establishment has, however, been increasingly necessary for ROKS too with almost all women's shelter across the country receiving a large proportion of their funds from local governments and from the Swedish state. Elman (1996: 42) notes that Sweden doesn't have the same culture of voluntary work as many other countries and that volunteering is often viewed critically as the women's shelter movement struggles to get the state to provide the necessary funds to meet the needs of abused women. This, she argues, has made the women's shelter movement entirely reliant on the state and reduced its ability to act independently in the interests of women. As Elman also however notes, volunteering has indeed been essential to the survival of the women's shelter movement in Sweden due to the unwillingness of successive governments to treat violence against women as a priority issue. From 1986 until 1987, for example, over a hundred different projects providing support to battered women received just 890,000 kronor while seven men's centres and helplines received 730,000 kronor (Elman, 1996: 42).

The amount of help on offer is therefore often limited, with not all of the organisations that describe themselves as “shelters” actually able to provide their own accommodation to women fleeing from violence and abuse. The assistance provided is, in some cases, limited largely to a support helpline that women can call for information and advice, and this is often only open for a number of hours per week (Elman, 1996: 39-41). The amount of state funding provided to women's shelters and consequently the level of support they are able to provide has, nevertheless, increased in recent decades (Eduards, 2002: 94). By 1997 local women's shelters provided telephone support or advice to 14,000 women per year while 1,500 women were living in temporary accommodation provided or arranged by them (Holmberg & Bender, 1997: 35). While much of the work continues to be carried out by volunteers many shelters now have at least one paid, full-time employee. A 1997 study of seven women's shelters, four in ROKS and three in SKR, found that five of them employed at least one person and that a

majority of them received all or most of the local municipality grant that they had applied for, even if the amounts remained small (Holmberg & Bender, 1997: 45-47). More recently, in 2009, the Swedish government announced its intention to increase direct state funding to the women's shelter movement from 19 million to 29 million kronor. A further 109 million kronor is provided to local authorities, with at least some of this money then being distributed to women's shelters in the form of grants. A total of 800 million kronor a year of state money goes into projects aimed at preventing violence and supporting abused women (Integrations- och jämställdhetsdepartementet, 2009). While this is clearly an improvement from the earliest days of the women's shelter movement, the amounts provided are arguably still fairly small relative to the scale of the problem of violence against women in Swedish society.

The women's shelter movement provides, I would suggest, a particularly interesting example in terms of the feminist movement's interaction with the state. It is dependent on the state, or on local municipalities, for most of its funding and, often, it has no choice but to work closely with state institutions, such as social services and the police, in providing help, support and protection to victims of male violence and abuse. At the same time, however, the women's shelter movement has had to struggle hard to gain access to even a relatively meagre amount of state and municipality funds and poses, through its feminist analysis of society, a strong challenge to the prevailing political order. Its focus on sexualised violence, Eduards (2002: 104) writes, "places the democratic order, which doesn't only have so-called gender neutrality, but also gender harmony and gender complementarity, as its guiding principle, under a serious challenge". It is provocative, Eduards argues, to talk about "men's violence against women" because such language makes clear that men are "directly responsible for the injuries that women sustain". Other gender issues, such as the pay gap or women's political influence, are less controversial since they call for equal treatment based on men as the norm, and are often discussed in terms of a perceived benefit for society as a whole (Eduards, 2002: 104-105). The women's shelter movement demands that measures be taken "specifically for women without reference to the public good" and, especially in the case of ROKS, has an analysis of violence that conflicts with the official equality-based discourse (Eduards, 2002: 105).

This has, Eduards notes, been resisted by the political establishment which, despite often appreciating the job done by the women's shelter movement, does not like its political independence and unconventional organisational approach. The demand for "professionalism"

is one way in which local and national authorities have worked to oppose the politicisation of male violence. While the women's shelter movement believes that “solidarity and empathy are more important than expert knowledge” public authorities claim to “stand for an objective professional knowledge” (Eduards, 2002: 103). A women's shelter in Stockholm was, for example, accused by municipal representatives of always taking the woman's side in a dispute and, therefore, not acting in accordance with the principles of objectivity (Eduards, 2002: 96). Local municipalities in Sweden also frequently make a set of demands of the organisations that seek their financial support with Gothenburg, for example, insisting that they be run on “democratic principles” and have clear management structures, including an elected governing board (Eduards, 1997b: 158). This runs counter to the flat and informal organisational structure of many women's shelters and is often seen by them as an unacceptable intrusion on behalf of the authorities. The response of the shelters has often been to set up formal structures on paper, while in practice continuing to adopt an unconventional approach influenced by the new feminist movement of the 1970s.

Chapter 5: The Swedish state's response to the feminist challenge

In this chapter I am interested in exploring further how the Swedish state, and the Swedish political system, have responded to the challenge which, Edwards argues, feminists have posed by looking at, and describing, gendered and sexualised violence in a new way. In the previous chapter, I have carried out a short case study into two campaigns or movements which, in a Swedish context, could be said to represent or exemplify a wider process by which feminists fought to extend a political analysis to an issue previously relegated to the private sphere. With these two cases in mind, and informed by radical feminist political theory, I hope to provide some analysis of the interaction between the feminist movement and the Swedish political establishment. The picture I have gained so far has been quite a negative one, with the Swedish state showing considerable reluctance to accept a feminist understanding and analysis of male violence in its various forms. Developments at the end of the 1990s however, such as the adoption of the law on *grov kvinnofridskränkning* (Gross violation of a woman's integrity) as well as the *sexköpslagen* (Sex Purchase Law), challenge this picture somewhat, and I would like to consider, in more detail, the role played by the feminist movement in bringing them about.

5.1 - A feminist analysis of the state

As noted in my introductory chapter, one of the best known feminist analyses of the state is provided by American radical feminist and legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon. The state, from this point of view, is an institution which largely expresses and enforces patriarchal male power and this, she argues, is particularly visible in areas such as sexuality and violence. The state, MacKinnon (1989: 161-162) writes:

...is male in the feminist sense: the law sees and treats women the way men see and treat women. The liberal state coercively and authoritatively constitutes the social order in the interests of men as a gender – through its legitimating norms, forms, relation to society and substantive policies. The state's formal norms recapitulate the male point of view on the level of design.

While the issues of gender inequality and discrimination are no longer completely ignored, the dominant approach taken by the state, according to MacKinnon (1989: 234), is based around the notion of “gender neutrality” and makes the assumption that “society is already fundamentally equal”. As a result, taking any specific measures in the interests of women as a group is “stigmatized as special protection or affirmative action rather than simply recognized as non-discrimination or equality for the first time”.

MacKinnon’s theory is written in an American context in which it is assumed, in a quote often falsely attributed to Jefferson, that “The best government is that which governs least”. From this perspective, “government best promotes freedom when it stays out of existing social arrangements” and the US constitution, for example, stresses heavily what the government may not do and where it may not intervene (MacKinnon, 1989: 164). The effect of this has been, she argues, to protect only those rights which can potentially be taken away by the state while placing other areas, i.e. those where women are most often oppressed, “beyond the reach of legal guarantees” (MacKinnon, 1989: 165). The role of the state in Sweden, especially following the emergence of Social Democracy in the early 20th century, has, in many ways, been larger than that in the US and the political concept of freedom, in a Swedish context, has not been focussed as exclusively on so-called ‘negative liberty’, that is to say freedom from the interference of others.

Yet, despite such differences, much of MacKinnon’s theorising about the state could also be said to apply to Sweden. The Swedish state has arguably shared, at least until recently, the unwillingness which MacKinnon describes to recognise gender as a social category based on an unequal power relationship, and has often appealed to the same gender-blind notions of “neutrality” and “objectivity”. Especially in the area of gendered and sexualised violence, the Swedish state has been very slow to respond to the demands and claims of the autonomous women’s movement and, according to Elman (1996), may, in some ways, have an even worse record than the American state in this regard. The Sexual Crimes Investigation, despite being written at the time of the new feminist movement’s emergence onto the political stage, strongly reflected a patriarchal, male-supremacist view of sex in which a degree of force is seen as part of normal sexual behaviour and a woman’s ability to withhold consent depends on her relationship to the man concerned. Such opinions, of course, also formed, and in many cases arguably continue to influence, the judgements that Swedish courts make in rape cases.

As a result of this patriarchal ideology it becomes, MacKinnon (1989: 177-179) argues, hard to separate between "sex" and "rape", not only for the legal system but also for the victims of rape who often try to explain away their experiences as something other than rape. Those women who do know they have been raped cannot, in any way, trust that they will be listened to or taken seriously by the legal system, let alone achieve justice for the crime they have been subjected to. From women's point of view, MacKinnon (1989: 179) writes, "rape is not prohibited; it is regulated".

The way in which the legal system handles rape in Sweden has undoubtedly improved since the feminist movement's successful battle against the Sexual Crimes Investigation and the appointment, in early 1977, of a new committee to re-examine sex crime laws. Boëthius (1981: 181-182) writes that, five years after the Sexual Crimes Investigation had been published, the police had, in a number of towns and cities, become significantly better in their treatment of rape victims, while the punishments handed out by courts had increased somewhat. Elman (1996), however, notes that the state continued to show a reluctance to recognise the scale of the problem, and claims that Sweden's centralised, corporatist state has reduced the ability of the women's movement to push for reform and to influence the development of government policy.

The same applies, Elman argues, to other forms of physical violence directed at women, such as within intimate relationships. Protection orders for abused women were not introduced until 1988, 12 years after they had been in the US, after being proposed by the women's organisations of four political parties, and Sweden had not, as of 1996, established any special units for prosecuting cases of male violence (Elman, 1996: 52-53). The use of such orders have also been more limited in Sweden and they tend to be focussed almost exclusively on providing increased security to women rather than on limiting the mobility of abusive men (Elman, 1996: 55). The autonomous women's movement, Elman argues, has been marginalised by successive governments, while gendered violence is seen almost exclusively as the result of an unequal division of power in society or of factors such as drugs or alcohol, ignoring a feminist analysis emphasising the role of sexuality in violence against women (Elman, 1996: 56-57).

5.2 - Government Proposition *Kvinnofrid* (Women's Peace)

Despite the pessimistic assessment that Elman provides, Sweden was to make important strides forward in tackling the issue of gendered and sexualised violence in the second half of the 1990s. Firstly, in 1995, the *Kvinnovåldskommisionen* (Commission on Violence Against Women) published its report *Kvinnofrid* (Women's Peace). It had originally been established by the centre-right government two years earlier, following a significant increase in reported rapes and cases of domestic violence (Nilsson, 2009: 2006). The committee directive from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs which set up the commission, arguably showed a willingness to take on board many of the arguments and analyses of the feminist movement and of feminist researchers such as Eva Lundgren. It adopted, for example, the term "sexualised violence" and embraced the concept of a "normalisation process" of violence. Physical violence, it pointed out, is related closely to "other phenomena in society" such as "prostitution, pornography, incest and sexual harassment in workplaces", mirroring the position taken by ROKS (SOU 1995:60: 7).

While many of the arguments put forward, Nilsson (2009: 206-207) notes, such as that gendered violence is a result of old-fashioned ideas and prejudices about the role of women and of a lack of equality in society more generally, were far from new, there was clearly a genuine interest among politicians at this time for the feminist research being carried out by Eva Lundgren. Already at the beginning of the 1990s, the government had decided that an understanding of male violence "in terms of power" should be "deepened and developed in Sweden", establishing, for this purpose, a special professorship at Uppsala University focussed on studying the links between violence and power. The post was awarded to Eva Lundgren in 1993 (Nilsson, 2009: 208), giving a degree of official backing to her theories and providing an important platform from which to disseminate and lobby for, alongside the feminist and women's shelter movements, a feminist, gender-power based analysis of men's violence against women.

The Commission on Violence Against Women was, it must be stated, far from uncontroversial, and ROKS was excluded from being officially represented so as not to diminish the commission's perceived objectivity (Nilsson, 2009: 210). The report, published two years later, nevertheless, drew heavily on the insights of feminist researchers and of the

women's shelter movement in suggesting a number of measures to combat violence against women. It explicitly made, for the first time in an official document, "gender into a legitimate category" in the discussion of violence against women, Åsa Eldén writes (SOU 2004:121: 56). The proposals of the 1995 report were later to form the basis of the 1998 Government Proposition *Kvinnofrid* (Women's Peace).

The measures and proposals included in this proposition were wide-ranging and included a widening of the definition of rape, an increase in the punishment for female genital mutilation and new requirements on employers to take measures to prevent and to tackle sexual harassment against their employees (Prop. 1997/98:55: 10-17). It also recommended increased funding for women's shelters, the criminalisation of hateful insults based on gender and the appointment of a new commission to re-evaluate Sweden's laws on sexual crimes. Two of the best known laws that were to come of it are those establishing the new crime of *grov kvinnofridskränkning* (Gross violation of a woman's integrity) and those banning the purchase of sex (often known as the *sexköpslagen* – Sex Purchase Law).

The new crime "Gross violation of a woman's integrity" applies to any man who commits criminal acts against a woman "with whom they have, or have previously had, a close relationship... if each of the acts were part of a repeated violation of the person's integrity and the acts were liable to severely damage the person's self-esteem" (Prop. 1997/98:55: 10). The crime is not strictly limited to cases of men abusing women and, in other cases, is referred to simply as "Gross violation of integrity". There was, ROKS (2019: 25-26) notes, a desire by the government to maintain gender neutrality in the law and this has arguably worked against the aim of highlighting the gender-specific nature of the crime and its role in the abuse and subjugation of woman. It was nevertheless intended to apply primarily to abusive men and is influenced to a large degree by Eva Lundgren's theory of the normalisation process of violence, acknowledging the way in which women are often systematically broken down mentally and psychologically within abusive relationships. The crime of the violation of a woman's integrity, Eldén writes:

...is an example of a concrete application of a gender-power understanding of men's violence against women, where violence is understood coherently and as connected to a gender-power structure. The crime means that individual...

(criminalised) acts are judged more seriously together than on their own. In that way, the process where the man, with help of violence, takes control over the woman's life is made visible and punishable... Through seeing the connection between repeated violent acts, the context of that violence becomes visible as does the significance it takes in a woman's life as a whole (SOU 2004:121: 57).

Also included within the Women's Peace proposition was a new law to criminalise the purchase of sex, which came into force at the start of 1999, marking the culmination of a long struggle by the Swedish feminist movement to politicise the issue of prostitution and to have it recognised as part of a system of patriarchal violence and oppression. The debate over the Sexual Crimes Investigation sparked an increased interest among feminists for the issue and, in 1977, the government appointed an official investigation into prostitution which was published four years later. The investigator, right-wing politician Inger Lindquist, concluded that prostitution, as a contract between free individuals, could not be criminalised and that its existence as a social phenomenon was largely inevitable (Eduards, 2007: 145). Many of the experts who had contributed to the report, however, disagreed with this position and published, with the support of the feminist movement, a 600 page book of analysis and proposals around the issue of prostitution and how to tackle it (Eduards, 2007: 146). They identified prostitution as a symptom of unequal gender-power relations and suggested taking, from the starting point that prostitution is wrong and should not be accepted, measures to support women in prostitution and to reduce the market for it.

This second report proved influential in terms of how prostitution is seen in Swedish society, and the demand to criminalise sex purchase was made already, at that time, by some female members of parliament (Svanström, 2004: 230). By 1985 the Social Democratic Women's Association, the communist party VPK and the Stockholm group of the Liberal Party women's organisation had all called for the criminalisation of sex purchase (Erikson, 2010: 90). The first official proposal for criminalisation came as part of a new prostitution investigation in 1995 although here the proposal was to criminalise both the buying and selling of sex on the grounds that it would be "odd" to only target one side involved in the activity (Eduards, 2007: 147). The women's organisations of all Swedish political parties, except the right-wing Moderates, objected to this and called for only the buyers of sexual services to be criminalised (Eduards, 2007: 148).

Following extensive lobbying from women across all political parties as well as from the non-parliamentary feminist movement a law doing just that, with a punishment of fines and/or a maximum of six months in prison for men who buy sexual services, was included in the 1999 Women's Peace proposition. In describing its motivations for proposing the new law the Social Democratic government wrote: "Men's violence against women is not compatible with the struggle for an equal society and must be fought in every way. In such a society it is also unworthy and unacceptable that men obtain casual sexual connections through payment" (Prop. 1997/98:55: 22). According to a 2010 official review into the success of the Sex Purchase Law, Swedish equality policy sees prostitution as "a form of male violence against women and one of the more extreme expressions of an inequality" in society, allowing men to "buy and exploit women and children and treat them as objects" (SOU 2010:49: 55).

What is unusual about the Sex Purchase Law, according to Eduards (2007: 149), is that it breaks with the liberal tradition of equal treatment by penalising only one side and justifying this on the basis that one is exploited and in a weaker position than the other. The Sex Purchase Law makes the highly controversial move of pointing out, and identifying, men as the problem - as potential perpetrators of a criminal act. The state, unusually in an international perspective, has "gone from supporting men's sexual demands of prostituted women to making these actions criminal. The official view of men's sexuality has changed", Eduards (2007: 150) writes. "From being considered as a hard-to-tame natural force – and a special male right – it has become a question of politics, that is to say a phenomenon which can be renegotiated".

The role of the feminist movement and of feminist women, both inside and outside of parliament, in bringing this change about cannot be underestimated. Eduards (2007: 151) describes how the new prostitution legislation was a "work of politically active women, with constant pressure towards the state". It is hardly surprising, she notes, that the Sex Purchase Law, came at a time in which women's parliamentary representation had increased to above 40%. Women, Eduards (2007: 151) argues, "have utilised their democratic scope of action to demand bodily integrity and freedom from violence".

5.3 - Analysis

The developments of the 1990s are interesting when looked at in the context of the history of the Swedish state's reluctance to listen to the demands of the women's movement, or even to recognise gender as a legitimate political category. The ideology of gender neutrality, and the emphasis of the corporatist state on cooperation rather than conflict, has created a discourse within which equality policies are usually discussed and legitimised in terms of their benefit for society as a whole, rather than as part of a struggle for the liberation of women from patriarchal oppression. The feminist analysis of gendered and sexualised violence, developed since the emergence of the new women's movement in the 1970s, has proved so controversial precisely because it poses a strong challenge to this dominant discourse, laying bare the gender conflict existing in society and directly identifying men as the perpetrators of acts of violence and oppression. Pointing out men in this way, Edwards (2002: 115-116) notes, often provokes strongly negative reactions and accusations of hatred towards men.

The process of breaking the silence around male violence, and identifying it both as a political issue and a serious social problem, was made possible with the emergence of the new feminist movement, starting in 1968. With this movement came an understanding that women are oppressed collectively due to unequal and hierarchical power structures in society which benefit men at their expense and, also, an understanding that no aspect of human life is outside the realm of political analysis and critique. It empowered women to come together and develop a new collective consciousness, recognising and acknowledging their oppression as women and developing strategies and approaches to fight this oppression. The Sexual Crimes Investigation and the outrage it caused provided, in 1976, an important opportunity to apply a new feminist analysis also to the area of sexuality and male violence, highlighting their role in the oppression and subjugation of women and dealing a serious blow to the gender-blind sex liberal ideology which had prevailed during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Particularly as far as rape is concerned there emerged a new feminist consciousness which put the experiences of its victims centre-stage. Women increasingly felt able to speak out about the issue, both individually and collectively, and, in time, politicians, the state and wider society were forced to look at rape in a new way. The process of consciousness-raising created in the area of sexual violence, as in many others, an entirely new perspective and point of

reference which future discussions have been unable to ignore. MacKinnon describes the effects of consciousness-raising as follows (1989: 97):

The point of this process was not so much that hitherto-undisclosed facts were unearthed or that denied perceptions were corroborated or even that reality was tested, although all these happened. It was not only that silence was broken and that speech occurred. The point was, and is, that this process moved the reference point for truth and thereby the definition of reality as such.

Consciousness raising alters the terms of validation by creating community through a process that redefines what counts as verification. This process gives both content and form to women's point of view.

The women's shelter movement, with its roots in the feminist movement, has built upon and further developed this feminist understanding of violence as political and, despite its dependence on the state for funding, has provided a strong challenge to the concept of gender neutrality by putting the experiences and perspectives of women centre-stage in its work. Its ideological project, while controversial, has gained legitimacy through the work of feminist researchers such as Eva Lundgren and the support of politically active women both inside and outside of parliament.

The early 1990s, with the rise of *Stödstrumporna* and the record level of female representation achieved after the 1994 election, was the period in which this work appears to have finally paid off in terms of an official understanding and recognition of the feminist movement's analysis of society. The setting up then of the Commission on Violence Against Women, the drawing up, several years later, of the Women's Peace proposition and, finally, the adoption of the Sex Purchase Law, would appear to demonstrate a real willingness to take on board many of the perspectives and concerns of the feminist movement. In explaining the success of these measures it is important to mention the role also of some female politicians and the importance of, what Nilsson (2009: 208) terms, the "alliance between science, politics and legislation" in the struggle over the understanding and definition of male violence. The feminist and women's shelter movements, feminist researchers and some female members of the Swedish parliament all joined forces to promote a new feminist understanding and analysis of gendered and sexualised violence.

When looked at a number of years later, the measures implemented as part of the government's Women's Peace proposition have arguably not translated into any major changes in terms of, for example, the ability of abused women to achieve state support or justice through the legal system. According to a 2004 Amnesty report the proportion of reported incidents of violence against women that lead to a prosecution has in fact fallen and, in 2002, legal proceedings were only taken in around one in ten reported cases of the new crime of "gross violation of a woman's integrity" (Amnesty, 2004: 33-34). Also in 2004, the official investigation "Slag i luften" (SOU, 2004:121) came to the conclusion that progress towards a gender-power based understanding of violence has, in various state institutions, been very slow and has been met with widespread resistance in the years following the adoption of the Women's Peace proposition. The distribution of resources in support of abused women has also been disappointing, it concludes.

In addition, an analysis by ROKS (2010) of the success of the law on the "gross violation of a woman's integrity" found that courts still tend to see the violence as something individual rather than structural and that, rather than focussing on the role of the man, it is often framed as part of a dispute between two sides in which the woman's behaviour is also deemed to be of relevance. The gender-power based analysis of violence, while an important influence behind the law, has therefore not achieved the same level of influence in the judicial system which, ROKS (2010: 27) notes, is concerned primarily with judging an individual's action rather than looking at things from a structural perspective.

Within wider society there has also been a significant degree of resistance to a feminist, structural-based understanding of gendered and sexualised violence, as demonstrated through the anti-feminist backlash that followed the 2005 TV documentary *Könskriget* (The Gender War). Its aftermath saw Eva Lundgren subjected to an official investigation at her university into claims (for which she was later cleared) of "scientific dishonesty" while the leader of ROKS was forced to step down after being demonised in the media as hating men.

The battle of the Swedish feminist movement is therefore far from won and the patriarchal political order far from broken. In the roughly thirty year period that I have studied here, an immense degree of progress has nevertheless been made, starting with a new consciousness

around women's oppression. According to MacKinnon (1989: 244) the first step towards "changing the state's relation to women and women's relation to men" involves claiming "women's concrete reality" of oppression, violence and dehumanisation. The next step involves recognising the way in which "male forms of power over women" are "embodied as individual rights in law". An example which she provides of the latter is the way in which men's exploitation of women in pornography is often defined as an issue of freedom of speech by a patriarchal legal system oblivious to the inequality and oppression that characterises the relationship between men and women in society.

The feminist movement in Sweden has arguably achieved major progress with regards to both of these two steps. The concrete reality of women's lives, which feminist activists and researchers have worked to highlight and expose, forms, for example, the basis of the new crime of "gross violation of a woman's integrity", drawing on Lundgren's theory of the normalisation process of violence. The Sex Purchase Law, meanwhile, demonstrates a willingness by the state to take the side of women against men and to declare unlawful, on feminist grounds, an activity long seen as a natural right of men within the sexual sphere.

These successes, alongside those of earlier decades, were not due to the benevolence or goodwill of male politicians but rather the culmination of years of struggle by the feminist movement. Similarly to the Danish *Rødstrømpebevægelsen*, as described by Dahlerup, 2000: 119-120), Swedish feminists created a new discourse around women's issues and were able to, despite resistance from within the political establishment, win a significant degree of legitimacy for their political project. In this climate a number female politicians from across the political spectrum have been able to take up and champion, through legislation, a number of key feminist demands with varying degrees of success.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

In this thesis I have looked at the emergence of the new feminist movement in Sweden and its interaction, over a roughly thirty year period, with the state in the area of gendered and sexualised violence. At the start of this period female representation in parliament was minimal and a gender perspective completely absent from official discourse around the issue. The proposals included in the Sexual Crimes Investigation of 1976, provide a clear indication of whose interests the state, at that time, was, either consciously or unconsciously, acting to protect. In the ensuing debate the feminist movement was able to organise a mass movement of women against the patriarchal political establishment and against male sexual power, having not only the recommendations of the Investigation torn up but, also, paving the way for an entirely new discourse around rape and other forms of sexual violence in which they were recognised as political acts that serve to silence and subordinate women.

The reluctance of the state to act in women's interests was also challenged by the women's shelter movement which puts the experiences of abused women centre-stage in its work and has strongly promoted, alongside feminist researchers, a gender-power based analysis of men's violence against women. Women's shelters are active now in a majority of Swedish municipalities and the state has been forced to acknowledge the importance of the work they carry out, providing them with various grants and other forms of support. Not so readily accepted has been their distinctly feminist and women-centred analysis which runs contrary to the principles of gender neutrality that have long underpinned the Swedish state. This gender neutrality nevertheless started to be undermined during the 1990s with the Sex Purchase Law and the new crime of "Gross violation of a woman's integrity".

The most crucial success of the Swedish feminist movement in recent decades, I would suggest, has been to build a new understanding and a new discourse around women's oppression and this is clear in the area of gendered and sexualised violence. Men's violence, in its many forms, is no longer purely an individual problem but rather a social one that is discussed in terms of inequality and power. This new discourse has provided a context in which politically active women have been able to push successfully for certain legislative changes and forms of state action that are in the collective interests of women. The principle of gender neutrality has, it must be noted, not been fundamentally broken and there has

arguably been a failure to properly implement many of the legislative changes that have been made. The feminist movement has, nevertheless, laid the groundwork for challenging men's power in the sexual sphere and building a political and legal system that protects the rights of women to bodily integrity and freedom from violence.

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