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*Monarchy and Gender
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Abstract: The main focus of this article is to analyse the Danish monarchy from a gender perspective. However, the article also provides a general analysis of the Danish monarchy, the formal and informal powers of the monarch and the modern legitimisation of the monarchy. The development of the Act on Succession to the Throne, finally leading to full gender equality in 2009, plays a central role in the article. The approach is primarily legal, with an interpretation of legal sources as its point of departure, but the article goes beyond this by analysing informal power, public expressions on the monarchy and gender by members of the royal house as well as present-day legitimisation of the monarchy. Moreover, it positions this analysis in the broader historical context.

Keywords: Danish monarchy; Margrethe II; gender; informal power; legitimisation

This article has three main arguments.¹ The first is that, while gender inequality as regards succession to the Danish throne was present until 2009, gender has had no impact on the formal and informal powers of the monarch. The second argument is that by the time gender equality in royal succession was introduced, initially in 1953 and finalised in 2009, the formal and informal royal powers had already been limited due to constitutional developments from 1848 to 1953. In other words, not only did modern times strengthen gender equality, but they also strengthened a more democratic form of government. Finally, it is argued that over the last decades there seems to have been a development in how the royal family views gender equality in society.

When researching the topic “monarchy and gender,” the first question that springs to mind is: How does gender find an expression in a monarchy? From a strictly legal dogmatic point of view, the answer would be in the constitutional text. Consequently, the Act of Succession, the Act on Civil List Annuity and constitutional practice including the interpretation of these sources, as well as in preparatory legislative works including debates in Parliament, will be analysed in this article. However, the analysis will go beyond this as it will also focus on both the formal and informal powers of the monarchy. Furthermore, the analysis will include public expressions on gender and related issues by members of the royal house.

A Brief Historic Overview of the Danish Monarchy

The Danish monarchy is more than a thousand years old and among the oldest

¹ The author wishes to thank project student Anna Carolina Jensen for assistance with finding sources for this article.

monarchies in the world. Traditionally, the Danish kings were elective monarchs but, in reality, the oldest son normally took over the throne after his father. Absolute monarchy was introduced in Denmark in 1660. In 1848, public demand for a constitution increased and Frederik VII yielded. Thus, in Denmark there was no violence involved in the transition. The King signed the new Constitution, which established a constitutional monarchy in 1849.

In the new Constitution, the King selected the Prime Minister and the other ministers and still had much political influence. In 1901, the parliamentary principle was introduced. According to this, no government could remain in office if a majority in parliament was against it. In 1920 a political constitutional crisis occurred during the “Easter Crisis”—the King dismissed the government and the Prime Minister, who had the confidence of Parliament, and replaced him with a new prime minister who had similar political ideas to the King, but a majority in parliament were against him. Thousands demonstrated in response to this decision, and eventually the King gave in to the pressure. From then on, the parliamentary principle was respected and regarded as a constitutional convention.

Frederik IX became king in 1947 and was the first king who chose to stay entirely out of politics. In 1953 the parliamentary principle was codified in the Danish Constitution. The Act of Succession was amended in 1953 and 2009 in order to create gender equality (step by step). Due to the amendment in 1953, Margrethe II succeeded to the throne after her father’s death in 1972 and became Queen of Denmark.

A Historic Perspective: Margrete I and Margrethe II. From a Female Monarch “in Reality” to a Female Monarch “in Formality”

In the first instance, it is important to outline the historical context that underpins gender and the succession in Denmark. This narrative begins with Margrete I, who in reality ruled Denmark from 1376 to 1412:

Strictly speaking, the first Margrete was never queen regnant, but came to rule Denmark and Norway—and eventually to unite all the Nordic countries in the Kalmar Union of 1397—after the death of her son in 1387. She remained the actual ruler until her death in 1412, although she had her great-nephew, Erik of Pomerania, elected king in 1396.²

Margrete was married to King Haakon VI of Norway. As was often the case, the marriage was of a strategical nature and was designed to strengthen the ties between Denmark and Norway. Margrete and Haakon had a son named Olaf. In 1376, when Olaf was 4 years old, he inherited the Danish throne from his grandfather King Valdemar, and in 1380 he inherited the Norwegian throne. Queen Margrete ruled Denmark and Norway on behalf of her minor son. When King Olaf died in 1387 with no male heir to the thrones, Margrete adopted her sister’s daughter’s son, Eric of Pomerania. Since he was a minor, she ruled on behalf of him also. In 1388, Margrete vowed to support a group of Swedish nobilities in their efforts to overthrow the Swedish king, and as a result hereof she was appointed as the ruler of large parts of Sweden in 1389. In 1396, Eric was formally named King of Denmark and Norway, and from 1397 also

² Trond Norén Isaksen, “The Prince Who Would Be King: Henrik of Denmark’s Struggle for Recognition,” in *The Man behind the Queen. Male Consorts in History*, ed. Charles Beem and Miles Taylor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 241.

King of Sweden, thus uniting all of Scandinavia (The Kalmar Union). Although Margrete was not formally the Regent of Denmark, she was the de facto ruler of all Scandinavia from this point until her death in 1412.³ It is very interesting that even though Margrete I as a woman had no formal claim to the throne, she became the perhaps one of the most powerful woman in Europe of the Middle Ages. She united all of Scandinavia by ruling through her biological son, and later her adopted son, and by using informal power.

Margrethe II, daughter of Crown Prince Frederik, the future King Frederik IX, and the Swedish Princess Ingrid, was born on 16 April 1940. She followed her two sisters, Princess Benedicte and Princess Anne-Marie. When Frederik IX became king, he used the term “the two of us” (he and his wife) from the balcony of the royal castle on 21 April 1947. This reflected that new times were on their way to the Danish Royal House, both in the sense that the King underlined that they were a couple, but also in the way that the new king was more informal in his way of approaching the people.⁴ According to the Act of Succession from 1853, only men could become monarchs of Denmark. This meant that Prince Knud, the younger brother of Frederik IX, and his son Prince Ingolf would be the next monarchs, rather than Frederik’s daughters. This started a public debate about whether women should be allowed to inherit the throne.⁵ Organisations such as the Danish Women’s Society were very active in this debate. While gender equality was at the core of the public debate, it was also about which family was best suited for ruling the country and, for some groups in society, it was even about preventing Denmark being turned into a republic.⁶ Another important driver for a new Act of Succession was the fact that it was (and still is) very difficult to amend the Danish Constitution.⁷ The amendment procedure required that a majority of the voters participated in the referendum and that at least 45% of the entire group of voters voted in favour of an amendment. Since the royal family was very popular, it was a strategic move to include the question of gender equality in relation to succession to the throne in the referendum on a new Constitution. This would most likely secure a sufficient number of voters. Therefore, a reference to the Act of Succession of 27 March 1953 was inserted into Article 2 of the new Constitution and a joint referendum on the new Act and the new Constitution was then held.⁸ Thus, in 1953 the voters voted on a new Constitution and on a new Act on Succession allowing women to inherit the throne. However, this would only be allowed if they had no brothers, including younger brothers. The new Act of Succession made Margrethe Crown Princess of Denmark and, in 1972, she became Queen of Denmark and continues in this role to the present day. Interestingly, one might put forward that Margrethe in this way has at least an informal legitimacy through the referendum on amendment of the Act of Succession. The Danish people voted in favour of having her as their monarch.

The formal powers of the monarch were also limited in the 1953 Constitution. This

³ Anders Bøgh, “Margrethe 1., 1353-1412,” *danmarkshistorien.dk*, accessed 14 May 2018, <http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/margrethe-1-1353-1412/>.

⁴ Annelise Bistrup, *Margrethe* (Copenhagen: Politiken Bøger, 2005), 39.

⁵ Søren Eigaard, *Idealer og politik. Historien om Grundloven af 1953 [Ideals and Politics. The Story of the 1953 Constitution]* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1993), 199–217.

⁶ Bistrup, *Margrethe*, 43–44, and Eigaard, *Idealer og politik*, esp. 209.

⁷ See, for instance: Eigaard, *Idealer og politik*, 199–217.

⁸ See: Eigaard, *Idealer og politik*, 199–217, esp. 210–211; and Knud Bjørn Eriksen, *Erik Eriksen – den smilende reformator [Erik Eriksen – The Smiling Reformer]* (Odense: Mellemsgaard, 2013), 115–125.

was not linked to gender, but was instead a result of political developments since the first Danish Constitution, which had led to a more democratic Constitution and less power for the monarch. This development had already found an expression in the 1915 Constitution, and with the 1953 Constitution this tendency became even clearer. This means that when Margrethe II became the Queen of Denmark in 1972, the powers she wielded were in reality much more limited than those of Margrethe I, even though Margrethe II was the first formally recognised female monarch. Gender equality may have been realised in modern times, but the changes that made this possible also strengthened a more democratic form of government and meant less power was extended to the monarch.

A Legal Perspective: The Monarchy and Gender—Changing the Succession to the Throne in Two Steps

This section provides a detailed legal analysis of the Danish monarchy in a gender perspective based on the relevant legal sources. The monarchy is regulated in the Constitution, in the Act of Succession, and in the Act on Civil List Annuity. The legal analysis of these sources is carried out in the subsequent sections of this article.

Starting with the Constitution, the first observation is that the Constitution refers to the monarch as the “king.” Whereas this is understandable in the old constitutions, “king” could have been changed to “monarch” in the current Constitution from 1953—as mentioned above, the voters voted on an amendment to the Act of Succession making it possible for a woman to be heir to the throne. Today, the term “king” is interpreted as monarch, due to the rule of a queen regnant. Later in this article we shall see that gender does not affect the monarch’s powers. As mentioned earlier, these powers are now significantly limited. However, the monarch still has a number of formal powers as well as considerable informal influence, which we shall briefly touch upon in order for the reader to be able to evaluate the extent of power that the monarch possesses. In a gender perspective, this is important because it shows the impact of an introduction of gender equality in the line of succession to the throne, while not ignoring that the introduction of gender equality can also have a symbolic effect.

The Act of Succession is one of the most significant pieces milestones in the introduction of gender equality. However, it was the so-called “Kongelov” (the “Royal Act”) of 1665 that first theoretically allowed women to inherit the throne. It was a very limited access though. It presupposed that there were no male descendants of Frederik III in the male bloodline (“agnatic-cognatic” primogeniture).⁹ In the Act of Succession of 1853, women had no right to the throne. During the debate following the 1939 proposal for a revision of the Constitution, it was discussed whether women should be allowed to inherit the throne.¹⁰ However, this idea could not obtain a majority, and the 1939 Constitution did not get past the constitutionally required referendum.

The line of succession to the throne has been amended twice since 1853, step-by-step introducing gender equality. As mentioned above, the first amendment of the Act of Succession took place in 1953 and made it possible for Margrethe II to become Queen of Denmark in 1972. The amendment of the Act did not introduce full gender equality, as a

⁹ See the preparatory works to the Act of Succession 1953.

¹⁰ See the preparatory works to the Act of Succession 2009.

woman would only inherit the throne if she had no brothers (Article 2). Thus, even a younger brother would become king if his older sibling was a woman (unless she had male children).¹¹ Nevertheless, since Margrethe has two sisters and no brothers, the Act did provide de facto gender equality, giving the throne to Margrethe instead of her uncle and his son. As described, a public debate took place before the political decision to amend the Act of Succession, and not only gender equality but also other aspects, such as which family would be best suited to rule Denmark and preventing the kingdom from becoming a republic, were voiced in the debate. However, what were the political reasons provided in the preparatory work for the new Act of Succession? In comments made by the Constitutional Committee, which accompany the bill, there was consensus that it was desirable to give women access to inherit the Danish throne, while the right to inherit the throne should still be limited to descendants of Christian X and Queen Alexandrine. It was also mentioned that the proposed design was similar to the regulation on the accession to the throne in the Netherlands and in the UK. Further, the committee recorded that whenever the Act refers to “king” this includes a “queen regnant.”¹² It is interesting that the gender-neutral term “monarch” is not used in the Act as in the Constitution. Another new element in the Act of Succession of 1953 was that an heir to the throne must have the consent of the monarch in the Council of State in order to marry, otherwise they will lose the right to the throne. Before 1953 only the consent of the monarch was necessary but, through this new rule in the 1953 Act of Succession, the marriage of a Crown Prince or a Crown Princess was turned into a public affair and reflected that members of the royal family must now be suited to such a position. A king or queen regnant who wished to marry now also had to seek the consent of parliament. The preparatory works refer to the constitutional and political challenges that might arise from a marriage to a Crown Prince/Princess or ruling monarch of another kingdom.

In a minority statement by a female member of the Constitutional Committee, Ingeborg Hansen, she expressed deep regret that the bill did not introduce full gender equality. According to her, this breaks with a development in which men and women have become equal to the law since women gained equal political rights with men in 1915. The bill thus reflects an “outdated view.” Her views on full gender equality in the succession to the throne are supported in a minority recommendation by Aksel Larsen, and are added to the recommendation of the Constitutional Committee. This means that it seems to be possible to find traces of arguments in favour of fuller gender equality and maybe also indirectly women’s ability to rule in the preparatory works for the 1953 Act.

¹¹ Several solutions were discussed including full gender equality to the throne. On the political context surrounding these negotiations, see: Eigaard, *Idealer og politik*, 199–217.

¹² The term “queen regnant” is applied because a woman who is married to a king also has the title “queen” (a queen consort). A man who is married to a queen regnant has the title “prince.” Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between queen (regnant) and queen (consort) in the Act of Succession. Margrethe II’s husband Prince Henrik several times expressed in the media that he felt discriminated against because his title was only “Prince” whereas a woman who marries a King will get the title “Queen.” This practice of course originates from a time when only a man could be a monarch, and everyone would assume that a “Queen” was not the Monarch but the spouse of the Monarch. However, if the Queen’s husband has the title “King” he might be mistaken to be the ruling Monarch. We find the same practice in the UK. Since the Danish Constitution refers to the “King” and not to the “Monarch” or “Regent”, the title of “King” is in the current Constitution tied to some specific competences for the Regent/Monarch. On Prince Henrik’s life and role as a male consort in the Danish Monarchy, see: Isaksen, “The Prince Who Would Be King,” 241–260.

This leads us to the most recent amendment of the Act on Succession to the Throne, which finally introduced full gender equality in 2009. Whereas the 1953 amendment was a necessity if Princess Margrethe was to inherit the throne, the 2009 amendment was not based on a similar necessity. The Danish Crown Prince Frederik had married Mary Elizabeth Donaldson from Australia in 2004 and on 15 October 2005 their first child, Prince Christian, was born. In 2007 they had a girl, Princess Isabella, and finally in 2011 twins, Prince Vincent and Princess Josephine. This means that when the Act of Succession was amended, it was already known that Denmark's next monarch after Crown Prince Frederik would be male. Hence, there was no pressing need to introduce full gender equality based on the gender distribution of the present line of succession. Nevertheless, full gender equality was introduced in 2009. In the preparatory works, the amendment was explained by the fact that the government sees no reason to uphold the privileged position of men provided by the Act on Succession. During the debate in parliament on the bill there was full support to the introduction of full gender equality. Many speakers stated that gender equality was a core value in Denmark, which should be reflected in the Act of Succession, and that this should have been introduced much earlier (Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Inger Støjberg, René Skau Björnsson and Morten Østergaard). Margrethe I was referred to as the greatest ruler in Danish history (Søren Krarup) and Margrethe II's great powers as a monarch in contemporary history were emphasized (Søren Krarup and Inger Støjberg).¹³ Furthermore, the 2009 amendment of the Act on Succession changed the term “king” to “king or queen regnant” throughout the Act.

The final document to consider is the Act on Civil List Annuity. As a starting point, there does not appear to be a gender issue as regards the appanage to members of the royal house who were born into the royal family. The right to and size of the appanage is not based on gender—it is based on role and status in the monarchy. However, for members of the royal house who married into the royal family the situation seems different. When Crown Prince Frederik married in 2004 and his appanage was increased, a minority in parliament expressed the view that the fact that his wife only received 10% of his appanage was an expression of a lack of gender equality (equal pay for equal work).¹⁴ It should be mentioned that if Crown Prince Frederik should die, his wife would receive half his appanage. As regards Queen Margrethe's husband, Prince Henrik, who also received 10% of the Queen's appanage, it was stated that the above-mentioned problem also related to his situation to some extent; however, in this case some inequality had to be expected since there is a difference between being monarch and prince (consort).¹⁵ From 1984, Prince Henrik's appanage was separated from the appanage of Margrethe II in the annual Finance Act. Before 1984, Margrethe II would provide Prince Henrik with 10% of her appanage. Both female and male spouses to monarchs receive 10% of the monarch's appanage. The difference in appanage between a monarch and their spouse could be explained by the fact that the monarch has royal blood, constitutional obligations to fulfil, castles to maintain, and so forth. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the spouse of the

¹³ Parliamentary Debate, 7 October 2008, “Succession to the Crown Act,” accessed 14 May 2018, <http://www.ft.dk/samling/20081/lovforslag/L1/BEH1-45/forhandling.htm>.

¹⁴ The Political and Economic Committee, 31 March 2004, *Parliamentary Report on the Act concerning Crown Prince Frederik's Appanage*, accessed 14 May 2018, <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=97175>.

¹⁵ *Parliamentary Report on the Act concerning Crown Prince Frederik's Appanage*.

monarch also plays an important public role—including in the media, in charity work, and when the monarch visits foreign countries—and that more equality in relation to appanage could be considered in a modern society.

A Legal Perspective: What Powers Does the Monarch Have and What Role Does Gender Play?

The legal basis for the monarchy is found in Article 2 of the Danish Constitution: “The form of government shall be that of a constitutional monarchy. Royal authority shall be inherited by men and women in accordance with the provisions of the Act of Succession to the Throne of March 27, 1953.” The powers of the monarch are limited by the representative institutions and the courts. The king is not answerable for his actions and the ministers are responsible for the conduct of government (Article 13). This means that the monarch has a non-political position and that they act on the responsibility of ministers. Most of the provisions in the Constitution that mention the “king” are today interpreted as meaning “the government.” For instance in Article 3 on the separation of powers: “Legislative authority shall be vested in the King and the Parliament jointly. Executive authority shall be vested in the King. Judicial authority shall be vested in the courts of justice.” The analysis below is structured in the following way. First, the monarch’s formal powers and the role played by gender are analysed. Second, his informal powers and influence and the role played by gender are analysed. Finally, the possible differences in the powers that a king and a queen have, based on cultural notions of gender, are analysed.

As regards formal powers, the monarch has lost significant actual power since the first Constitution of 1849. The most important formal powers remaining are as follows.¹⁶ The Council of State is presided over by the monarch (Article 17). The monarch signs resolutions relating to legislation and government (Article 14). The resolutions must, however, be counter-signed by a minister in order to be valid. One might ask whether the monarch can refuse to sign a bill, but it is considered unthinkable that the monarch should refuse to sign a bill because of his or her non-political position. If it happened, it would create a constitutional crisis and the king would most likely have to abdicate. Is a bill valid without the King’s signature? In an interesting case from 1998, a bill did not receive a royal signature by mistake. The bill was introduced once more before parliament and went through the legislative process again.¹⁷ The monarch still signs international treaties of importance (Article 19). However, these are also contra-signed by a minister. The king dismisses and appoints members of government (Article 14). This has a purely formal character today and the monarch signs a resignation contra-signed by the prime minister.

The king also plays a formal part in the formation of a new government through a practice called *Dronningerunden*. Directly translated it means “queen round,” and it denotes a

¹⁶ The formal powers of the monarch are also covered in: Helle Krunke, “The Monarch’s Constitutional Functions in Denmark,” in *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy*, ed. Robert Hazel and Bob Morris (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2020), 26–32.

¹⁷ L 109 [Act on Social Pensions] (26 June 1998, session 1997-98) and L 85 [Act on Social Pensions] (13 November 1998, session 1998/99). The debate in Parliament regarding the re-introduction of the bill shows that several political parties acknowledged the necessity of a new introduction of the bill in parliament.

round of consultations between the Queen and representatives of the parliamentary parties with the purpose of finding a new government. Seen from a gender perspective it is significant that such an important constitutional practice is gendered towards a female monarch when the Constitution itself is gendered towards a male monarch. It will be interesting to see whether the term will change to “king round” when the Crown Prince Frederik becomes king. The formation of a new government is not described in detail in the Constitution. A majority government must be preferred to a minority government. During the negotiation process the king might receive conflicting advice given by different political parties. If the situation becomes difficult, the king must as a starting point follow the advice of the retiring prime minister. The king’s actions are throughout the process carried out on the responsibility of the retiring prime minister.

When the Queen celebrated her fortieth anniversary as monarch in 2012, the Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt expressed the view that the Danish Royal House was fully a part of the modern Denmark, and that this required a certain sense of balance from the monarch. According to the prime minister, the Danish Royal House has successfully managed to renew itself as part of a living democracy through three generations, and this also included the Crown Prince.¹⁸ Furthermore, the *Dronningerunde* ensures that everything is carried out the right way and that we have an unassailable setting of democracy.¹⁹ Danish prime ministers over the years have generally supported the Queen’s role in the constitutional setting with respect of democracy, as the above statement shows.

In conclusion, the legal analysis of the powers of the monarch supports the two main arguments of this article. As is shown, gender plays no role as regards these formal powers of the monarch, and the formal royal powers are quite limited nowadays.

The monarch has a number of more informal powers or rights. At first glance, these powers or rights might not seem very important, but they are mentioned here because, in practice, they provide the monarch with considerable influence.²⁰

First, the Queen can bestow royal orders, medals, and titles. When a ministry recommends a person for an order, the Queen has always followed the recommendation.²¹ However, the Queen makes the final decision in every case.²² The Queen’s rights in this field still have a quite strong symbolic importance. Thus, even though this right might not seem very important, it does actually give the Queen informal power since it is still very attractive for high ranking civil servants, judges, and others to receive these orders. It caused much debate when the Danish queen visited Bahrain in February 2011 and decorated the King of Bahrain with one of Denmark’s most prestigious orders. Shortly after the Queen’s visit to Bahrain, a demonstration for democratic reforms in Bahrain was brutally handled by the police. The

¹⁸ “Thorning: Kongehuset har fornyet sig” [Thorning: The Royal House has Renewed Itself], *Ritzau*, 15 January 2012.

¹⁹ “Thorning”, *Ritzau*, 15 Jan. 2012.

²⁰ The informal competences of the Monarch are also covered in: Helle Krunke, “Day-to-Day Political Functions of the Monarch in Denmark,” in *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy*, ed. Robert Hazel and Bob Morris (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2020), 74–79.

²¹ See the statement of the Chief of Office in the Secretariat of the Royal Cabinet, in: Lars Fogt and Andreas Karker, “Bendtsens ven fik Ridderkorset” [Bendtsen’s Friend got the “Knight’s Cross”], *Berlingske Tidende* (online), 29 March 2009, <https://www.b.dk/nationalt/bendtsens-ven-fik-ridderkorset>.

²² Jørgen Larsen, Thomas Larsen, and Bjarke Ørsted, *Amalienborg* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2010), 177.

critique in the media concerned how Denmark could, on the one hand, promote democracy and human rights in its foreign policy, while on the other hand honour a dictator with a prestigious order. A discussion arose on whether the Queen's bestowal of medals was part of the foreign policy of Denmark or part of the Queen's private actions. The outcome was that the latter is the case.²³ When it comes to foreign policy it seems quite difficult in practice to uphold a clear distinction between Danish actions towards foreign countries as part of the Queen's private actions and as part of a formal Danish foreign policy. The Queen is the Head of State and when she confers an order on another head of state or a prime minister it seems quite theoretical to believe that the receiver is always aware of the distinction and sees it as a cultural exchange with the Queen rather than a state action.

Secondly, the Queen visits foreign countries and she hosts foreign heads of state and government leaders. Though this may not formally be considered as the Queen exercising foreign policy it does in reality affect Denmark's foreign relations and status, internally. These are two sides of the same coin. In general, Denmark also benefits from the Queen representing Denmark, when visiting foreign heads of state and having foreign heads of states or of government as her guests. However, these visits strengthen the Queen's position because even though she formally does not exercise foreign policy, in reality she acts as a player at the international scene in these situations. This gives her informal influence both internationally and internally in Denmark.

Third, the Queen and the rest of the royal family visit Greenland on a regular basis. Greenland is part of Denmark but has gradually gained more and more self-determination. The Queen is popular in Greenland, especially among the older generation. The Queen's close relationship with Greenland might have had an impact on the relationship between Denmark and Greenland, influencing the speed of the self-determination process. Even though the Queen's interest in Greenland's people, culture, and nature seems genuine, she indirectly plays an important role for the political relations between Denmark and Greenland.²⁴ This also strengthens the Queen's political importance in Denmark.

Fourth, it is a tradition in Denmark that the monarch speaks to the Danish nation on New Year's Eve. The recurring themes for the New Year speeches of Margrethe's predecessors Christian X and Frederik IX were the events of the past year, the events to come in the new year, and finally they would thank everybody who made a special effort in the Danish society.²⁵ The present queen, Margrethe II, attaches a great deal of importance to her New Year speeches. Her speeches carry a good deal of weight among the Danish people and are a very good example of the Queen's informal power.²⁶ The Queen's speeches must be approved by the Prime Minister. His government officers write a first draft for the Queen to

²³ The Parliamentary Ombudsman, *Letter to Journalist David Tarp* (11 January 2012) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Letter to Journalist David Tarp* (1 March 2012).

²⁴ On the Queen's relationship with Greenland, see: Jens Andersen, *40 år på tronen [40 Years on the Throne]* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2011), 413–426; and Bo Lidegaard, "Danmarks politiske Dronning" [Denmark's Political Queen], *Politiken*, 1 January 2012, Section 3 (PS), 1.

²⁵ Claus Buttenschøn and Olaf Ries, *Kongemagt og Folkestyre [Royal Power and Democracy]* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2003), 69. See also: Claus Bjørn, *Blot til pynt? [For Decoration Only?]* (Copenhagen: Fremad, 2001), 259. Since 1958, the New Year's speeches have been televised live (and transmitted in the radio) from the King's/Queen's study at Amalienborg Castle.

²⁶ The New Year's speeches have no legal basis.

work on. The Queen is known to make many alterations and give the speeches a very personal touch. The content of the speeches is the prime minister's responsibility (Article 13 of the Constitution). On 17 March 2020, the Queen made a public speech to the Danes concerning the Covid-19 situation. This is the first time since right after World War II that a Danish monarch has made a speech on public television to the nation, apart from the annual New Year's speeches. Furthermore, Queen Margrethe celebrated her eightieth birthday during the Covid-19 period and for the first time ever she made a public speech on television on her birthday.

Fifth, the Queen's portrait is on the Danish coins. This has a strong symbolic effect. In the public debate surrounding the Danish referendum on Denmark's accession to the Maastricht Treaty, there was public concern as to whether the Queen's portrait would still be on the coins if Denmark joined the monetary union.

Sixth, the Prime Minister keeps the monarch updated on the political situation. The meetings are informal and have no legal basis in the Constitution nor in statutory law. Minutes are not taken and thus it seems to be possible for the king to comment freely on the political situation during these meetings,²⁷ in which the minister of foreign affairs may also take part.²⁸ This is an example of the important distinction between formal powers and actual influence. Even though the monarch does not have many formal powers left there is still room for considerable influence.²⁹ One might recall Walter Bagehot's famous definition of the monarch's role in a constitutional monarchy: "the right to be informed, the right to warn and the right to encourage." Former Danish Prime Minister Poul Schlüter has stated that he valued the meetings with the Queen and that she had often given him good advice—she did not tell him what to do, rather what she would do.³⁰ These informal meetings most likely constitute the most important direct informal power for the monarch. They have no direct legal basis in the Constitution but should probably be seen as part of the monarch's role as head of state.

In conclusion, the legal analysis of the informal powers of the monarch supports the two main arguments of this article. The Queen has the same informal powers as a king would have, and not only the formal, but also the informal royal powers are quite limited nowadays.

Even though the formal and informal powers of the monarch are not formally influenced by his or her gender, one might wonder whether there could in reality be a difference in the powers that a king and a queen have. Such differences could be based on cultural notions of gender. However, based on statements from former prime ministers this does not seem to be the case. Margrethe II is said to be much more active in her role as Head of State than her father, Frederik IX.³¹ Former Prime Minister Anker Jørgensen has expressed the view that the Queen takes a much more active part in the Council of State and in the cooperation with the government than Frederik IX did.³² Apparently, she is very interested and

²⁷ Bjørn, *Blot til Pynt?*, 93–94.

²⁸ Larsen, Larsen, and Ørsted, *Amalienborg*, 187.

²⁹ Max Sørensen, *Statsforfatningsret [Constitutional Law]* (Copenhagen: Juristforbundets Forlag, 1973), 64.

³⁰ Andersen, *40 år på tronen*, 232.

³¹ The Queen's father, Frederik IX, was the first Danish king who stayed out of politics. Nevertheless, among the Danish people he was known as "the first 'social democratic' (Labour Party) King." Frederik IX often underlined that it was part of being Danish to make sure that also the weak groups in society profited from the technical and material developments in the Danish society. See: Buttenschøn and Ries, *Kongemagt og Folkestyre*, 61.

³² Anker Jørgensen, *I smult vande, Fra mine dagbøger 1975-1977, bind 2 [In Calm Waters. From My Diaries 1975-1977,*

often asks the Prime Minister to elaborate on subjects; she comments on matters and has her own opinion.³³ This is supported by the above-mentioned statement of former Prime Minister Poul Schlüter, who described how much he valued the meetings with the Queen and how she often gave him good advice and told him what she would do.³⁴ As mentioned above, the Queen is also known to make many alterations to the draft New Years speeches she receives from the Ministry of State, and to give her speeches a very personal touch.

The Queen seems to be well aware of her responsibilities and her powers, formal as well as informal. She apparently attributes much significance to her constitutional duties, and she expresses this on a regular basis in interviews. In 2005 she was asked how she sees her own role in the Danish constitutional system in the future:

Interviewer (Annelise Bistrup): When the Danish Monarchy has survived for more than 1000 years it is because of its ability to adjust to the shifting times. Therefore, the present debate about the Royal House is not about abolishing it but about modernising it. Regarding a possible revision of the Constitution, it has been proposed by, among others, politicians from *Socialdemokratiet* and *Det Radikale Venstre* to further limit the Queen's constitutional functions so that the monarchy would be reduced to a historic symbol with only ceremonial and ritual functions.

The Queen: It is a very serious question at any rate. But sheer ceremony can easily become a very thin cup of tea. Nothing fastened with roses! Much of what is ceremonial has its roots in the Monarch's constitutional position. One gives colour to the other. The ceremonial surrounding the Head of State gets some of its justification/entitlement from the actual role of the Head of State. There is an underlying seriousness in the pure constitutional work, which also rests with the King. It is something I take very seriously and which I feel is significant and important. We are not here merely to entertain the tourists and the press.³⁵

Another example is from an interview with Margarethe II in a Danish newspaper in 2010. Here she stated that “even though one is not a co-player in political life—and one is not—I still believe it matters that one is an active participant in the country's constitutional life.”³⁶ A similar view is expressed in an interview from 2012 when the interviewer, Bo Lidegaard, asked “But in a certain sense you do play a political role even though it is of course not party-political?” To which the Queen responded: “Yes, one does, because one is part of the country's form of government. Then one surely plays a role. And I would like to say that it is a part which I take quite seriously.”³⁷

When reading these statements, it is quite clear that the Queen takes her constitutional

Volume 2] (Copenhagen: Fremad, 1989), 196. See also: Jens Otto Krag, *Dagbog 1971-1972* [*Diary 1971-1972*] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1973), 115: “The King is a nice man, well-liked and well-meaning, without political thoughts and without the desire to spend more of his and our time on the necessary functions than necessary. We have meetings in the Council of State which last less than 20 minutes ... A new Queen could be more difficult to cooperate with. Furthermore, she has political knowledge which is not necessarily an advantage.”

³³ Bjørn, *Blot til Pynt?*, 258–259.

³⁴ Andersen, *40 år på tronen*, 232.

³⁵ Bistrup, *Margrethe*, 259–260. The book is written in Danish and the author of this article has translated the quotes into English trying to be as true to the Danish version as possible.

³⁶ Annelise Bistrup, “Interview: Dronning Margrethe: Jeger her jo bare” [Interview with the Queen: I am just here], *Jyllands-Posten* (online), 11 Apr. 2010, <https://jyllands-posten.dk/protected/premium/indblik/article4315554.ece>.

³⁷ Lidegaard, “Danmarks politiske Dronning.”

duties and powers very seriously and that she attaches substance and importance to the constitutional rules/conventions in which she plays a part. When the Queen insists on keeping her formal powers one must remember that if she loses those, then she may also lose important informal ways of influence. This shows a Queen keenly aware of her responsibility, role, and rights in Danish constitutional life. There is no sign that her position is less powerful because of her gender.

In fact, her gender may have been an advantage. In the above-mentioned interview in 2012 she stated:

I knew that people would not make a direct comparison [between Margrethe and her father] because that is not possible. Had I been his son, they would have said ‘the old King always used to’ but you do not say that when it is a Queen, because then you realise that things will be done in slightly different ways, in some circumstances at least.³⁸

It seems that the Queen might actually have had more space to define her own identity as a monarch than she would have had if the former monarch had had the same gender as she did. The Queen also believes that her son, Crown Prince Frederik will enjoy a similar advantage as he will be taking over as king after a queen.³⁹ In an interview from 2020, the Queen was asked what she believes she will be remembered for in the future. She replied: “Then a lady came along. And then that was how things became.”⁴⁰

The Queen has emphasised that her future role and duty was already decided when she was thirteen years old, when the Act of Succession was amended to make it possible for her to become queen when her father passed away. She did not play an active part in this and therefore, in her opinion, her fate cannot be compared to that of other women: “I have always viewed it the way that I was destined to succeed my father in my life. That I am a woman has essentially nothing to do with the job.”⁴¹

Finally, one might wonder which role gender played in the upbringing of the Queen. In the interview from 2012, the Queen also explained how she was educated to become a monarch by her father, how proud he was of her, and how his unconditional trust in her ability to rule as a monarch was an important support and made her confident that she would be able to fulfil her role as a monarch.⁴² This seems to reflect that the focus was on her future duties and not her gender.

In conclusion the legal analysis of the formal and informal powers of the monarch show that gender does not affect the substantial content of these provisions and practices. We then asked whether there might be cultural factors—outside the legal provisions and practices—which in reality create differences in how much power a male and a female monarch, respectively, enjoys. However, nothing in the public statements from the Queen and former prime ministers supported such a thesis. Thus, the main argument of this article was substantiated. While gender inequality was present until 2009 as regards succession to the throne, gender has no impact on the formal and informal powers and rights of the monarch.

³⁸ Lidegaard, “Danmarks politiske Dronning”; and Corfixen, “Det vigtigste er, at man er tro mod sig selv.”

³⁹ Lidegaard, “Danmarks politiske Dronning.”

⁴⁰ Corfixen, “Det vigtigste er, at man er tro mod sig selv.”

⁴¹ Lidegaard, “Danmarks politiske Dronning.”

⁴² Lidegaard, “Danmarks politiske Dronning.”

How Does the Royal Family View Gender Equality in Society?

It is slightly paradoxical that while Queen Margrethe II is a role model and admired by most Danish women—not only due to the high position that she holds but also due to the way she fulfills her role—the Queen has several times expressed that she is not a feminist.⁴³ For instance in a radio interview from 1973, the Queen expressed some statements on equal rights for women in general and in relation to the Act of Succession from 1953.⁴⁴ Here the Queen stated that she did not support the women's movement nor did she support the introduction of full equality of the sexes in the Act of Succession. This caused much debate within the feminist movement of the 1970s. Nevertheless, there seems to be no doubt that the Queen as a female Head of State—in the 1970s few women held such high positions—and by virtue of being a very competent, dutiful, and active monarch travelling all over the world, representing Denmark and Danish values, has had a societal impact on gender equality not only in Denmark but probably also abroad.⁴⁵

Denmark did not get a female prime minister until 2011, when Helle Thorning-Schmidt became the first female prime minister of Denmark. Seen in this light and in a gender perspective, the Queen must be said to have been an important symbol of gender equality, even though the monarch does not have many formal powers left. In the most recent biography of the Queen, written in 2016, she also seems to embrace all the gender developments in society in a predominantly positive fashion.⁴⁶ In 2012, the Queen was asked whether gender, and the fact that women's role in society had changed fundamentally during the forty years of the Queen's rule, affected who she was and what she has become. The Queen replied: "Yes and no. Yes, because I am part of society and live in these years where the role of women has changed quite a lot. No, because since I was 13, I have been the one who should succeed my father."⁴⁷

The distinction which the Queen makes between her role as a private person and as monarch is also reflected in Trond Norén Isaksen's description of the Queen's role as monarch and wife, respectively:

While the Queen has naturally been the main person on the public stage, it seems the Prince Consort has been the dominant person in private. That a male consort to a female monarch takes the role of head of the family is not unusual; indeed, the same seems to have been the case in Britain, both in the current reign and in the reign of Queen Victoria. In neighbouring Sweden this was formalised in 1647 by a parliamentary committee which decided to distinguish between two roles if Queen Christina were to marry: while Christina as a monarch would be superior to her husband and retain her regal powers

⁴³ Andersen, *40 år på tronen*, 168; and Thomas Larsen, *De dybeste rødder [The Deepest Roots]* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2016), 287, 277–291.

⁴⁴ Gretelise Holm, *Hvorfor er feminister så snerpede? 30 spørgsmål om køn og ligestilling [Why are Feminists so Prudish? 30 Questions on Gender and Equality]* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2008), 92–93, where parts of the above-mentioned interview are quoted.

⁴⁵ When debate arises about the future of the monarchy, the critique is never aimed at Queen Margrethe and how she fulfills her duties. The critique is either aimed at the monarchy as such in relation to a modern democracy or at other family members of the royal house.

⁴⁶ Larsen, *De dybeste rødder*, 277–291.

⁴⁷ Lidegaard, "Danmarks politiske Dronning."

undivided, Christina as a woman would be subject to her husband's authority.⁴⁸

Though Isaksen is able to show parallels to the current British monarchy and historic parallels to this division between female monarchs being heads of state, while their husbands are heads of the family, this arrangement might seem rather old-fashioned seen from a modern gender perspective. That it has not always been easy for the Queen to live according to this strict division between her duties as head of state and her private life as the wife of Prince Henrik, can be seen in the following reflections by the Queen on the Prince's crisis regarding his role as male consort: "Although he had also been master of the house in her eyes, she acknowledged that she had on too many occasions made decisions without consulting him, leaving him to be informed by others about what the queen had decided."⁴⁹

One generation later, Crown Princess Mary is active in promoting women's rights worldwide as part of her royal duties, through initiatives such as "Women Deliver" and by travelling together with the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs to countries in which women have few rights.⁵⁰ At the same time, Crown Prince Frederik is a "modern" man who actively takes part in the life and upbringing of his children. It therefore seems that the royal family has developed a more modern view on gender equality in society over the past decades.

Conclusion

In Denmark, the development towards gender equality within the monarchy has been slower than in the rest of society. This is seen from the fact that full gender equality in succession to the throne was not introduced until 2009. At the same time, gender equality is normally considered a core value in Denmark (and the other Nordic countries) and Denmark often promotes gender equality in international *fora*. That could seem like a paradox. One might say that the monarchy as such is an anomaly in a modern democracy—it already has a special character, not only in relation to gender. Nevertheless, the monarchy survives in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The Danish royal family is very popular. Somehow, they have found a way to be part of a modern democracy. Importantly, they provide an identity and a continuity that appeals to people in the modern age where everything else changes at a rapid pace. A more formal legal reason for the slow development as regards gender equality could be that since the first step was taken in 1953, allowing Margrethe to become Queen, the Danish Constitution has not been revised. In such a revision, it would have been natural to consider the introduction of full gender equality as regards succession to the throne. The Danish Constitution also does not have a general provision on gender equality, in contrast to some of the other Nordic constitutions that have been amended in more recent times.⁵¹ In this way, the Constitution itself is also an old-fashioned element in a Danish society with modern values and a modern appearance to the outside world.

If one considers the fact that Denmark did not get a female prime minister, Helle

⁴⁸ Isaksen, "The Prince Who Would Be King," 245.

⁴⁹ See: Isaksen, "The Prince Who Would Be King," 251, with a reference to Bistrup, *Margrethe*, 91–92.

⁵⁰ Larsen, *De dybeste rødder*, 290–291.

⁵¹ Helle Krunke and Björg Thorarensen, "Concluding Thoughts," in *The Nordic Constitutions: A Comparative and Contextual Study*, ed. Helle Krunke and Björg Thorarensen (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2018), 205.

Thorning-Schmidt, until 2011, but had a female monarch, Margrethe II, from 1972, the significance of Queen Margrethe's succession to the Danish throne in a gender perspective becomes clear. There is no doubt that the prevalent public and political opinion of Queen Margrethe is that she has fulfilled her royal duties in a very competent and responsible way. She has thus gained much respect during her period as the monarch of Denmark, even among critics of the monarchy as a form of government.