



Home Economics in Higher Education 1945–1955: The Academic Home Economics Education at Aarhus University and the Emergence of a Female Figure

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Abstract • In 1945, Aarhus University established the first advanced courses in home economics within the Nordic countries. This reflected the idea of a modern university that provided the blueprint for Aarhus University. However, hidden in the archives are various controversies surrounding the establishment of the courses. Based on 17 applications from 17 women educated within home economics, this article paints a picture of the women who chose to enrol in the academic courses in home economics, as well as the background for its development and the negotiations that took place around higher education for women within the field of domestic services. Sara Ahmed's figures of "the stranger" and "the willful subject" provide a theoretical foundation for examining which female figures emerged due to the early academisation of a professional education programme for women. By drawing on these figures, the article concludes that a specific female figure emerged as a bridging figure linking notions of the housewife and the female academic.

Keywords • women's educational history, higher learning, home economics, Aarhus University, feminist theory, female figure

Introduction

For about seven years [I have] been an assistant teacher at the teacher's training college – which I still am – and now I want to go out and learn some more.¹

The above quote is from a female Norwegian applicant to a course in home economics at Aarhus University in 1946. She was among the first women to apply for and enrol in the "Special Courses in Home Economics at Aarhus University" (*Specialkursus i Husholdning ved Aarhus Universitet*). Her argument for being admitted to the course was short and to the point: she wanted to expand her knowledge within her professional field.

In this article, I argue that with the establishment of the home economics courses in 1945, a female figure emerged at the border between profession and university. While there were already female university students at this point in Danish history, this figure differed from previous generations by combining the role of the female academic with the more traditional role of the housewife. Although Danish women had gained new educational opportunities in the late nineteenth century that allowed a small but growing number of university-educated women to enter various professions, by 1945, the

1 "[...] i ca. 7 år [har jeg] vært assist. lærerinne ved Lærerinneskolen – hvor jeg fremdeles er – og vil nu gjerne ut og lære mer." Norwegian applicant, 24.07.1946. Husholdningshøjskolen: Sager og korrespondance (1933–1992) 2: Kursets første årgange 1946–1947 m.m. Unless otherwise stated, the translations are mine.

proportion of women who completed a higher education was only 15 percent.² Hence, the women admitted to the home economics courses were part of a pioneering generation of female university students, who helped link the previously separate fields of professional education and academia in the Nordic countries.

The home economics courses were among the first vocational programmes to be offered at a university in the Nordic countries.³ Therefore, in addition to Danish applicants, the courses attracted women from Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland.⁴ However, reading the archival material, including the university's yearbooks, anniversary publications, and newspaper articles from this period, indicates that the home economics courses were not recognised as an academic programme, and the female students were not considered university students but rather course participants.⁵ It is mentioned only as an aside in official accounts of the university's history, and there is no account of the women who applied for and completed the programme and who subsequently had the opportunity to apply for senior positions in the field of home economics.

The aim of the article is to include the women who took part in the special courses in home economics in the history of education in Denmark, including the history of Aarhus University. Applying a micro-historical perspective, I examine who these women were, where they came from, what motivated them and how they encountered the university. I then pan out to a broader perspective that includes the historical development of the home economics courses and the accompanying discussions. This brings me to the question at the core of this article: Which "female figures" emerged in the home economics students' encounter with Aarhus University in 1945/46 following the establishment of the scientific home economics courses?

To pursue this question, I examine applications written by 17 women who were subsequently admitted to the courses in November 1946. These applications were retrieved from the Danish National Archives (*Rigsarkivet*) and, together with other archival material concerning the courses, they can contribute to a better understanding of the female home economics students, the academicisation of their profession and the emergence of a specific "female figure." Hence, the article can be considered a case study of a particular educational initiative that came to play a role in transforming and creating a bridging female figure in the Nordic countries in the mid-twentieth century.

Methodological and theoretical considerations

The article's empirical basis primarily comprises archival material encompassing applications for the first courses, course reports (*kursusbeskrivelser*), written correspond-

2 Birgitte Søland, *Becoming Modern: Young Women and the Reconstruction of Womanhood in the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000), 4; Danmarks Statistik, "Kvinder og Mænd i 100 år: Fra ligeret mod ligestilling," Rosendahl a/s, 24, <https://www.dst.dk/Site/Dst/Udgivelser/GetPubFile.aspx?id=22699&sid=kvind>.

3 The first vocational programme to be set up at a university in Denmark was a higher education course for nurses at Aarhus University in 1938.

4 Applications, 1946, Husholdningshøjskolen: Sager og korrespondance (1933–1992) 1: Beretninger 1946–1963 m.m.

5 e.g. H. C. Larsen, "Statens Husholdningshøjskole," *Tidsskrift for Husholdning* (1933), 195–96; Kit, "Set med hendes Øjne," *Jyllands-Posten*, March 25, 1950, 4; Edwin S. Spencer and Ellen Margrethe Hansen, "Om Specialkursus i Husholdning ved Aarhus Universitet," in *Aarhus Universitet 1928–1978*, ed. Gustav Albeck (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus 1978), 589–96.

ence, official ministerial documents, and university documents, as well as various newspaper clippings. In addition, I have studied several publications marking anniversaries in Aarhus University's history.⁶ Another important source for my research has been issues of the Danish journal of home economics (*Tidsskrift for Husholdning*) from the period 1930–1968.

My methodological and analytical approach to this body of material is inspired by Karen Barad's diffractive reading. I employ this analytical strategy to work through the material from multiple perspectives, enabling new patterns to emerge.⁷ This approach allows me to extend my findings from analysis of the 17 applications and other material to a broader perspective on home economics within the context of higher education and what it indicates about the changing roles and positions of women within the university and society. According to Barad, who is inspired by the work of Donna Haraway (1992/2004)⁸, diffraction refers to a method for mapping interference: "Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of differences appear."⁹

With their background as a physicist, Barad refers to the phenomenon of waves passing through a two-slit diffraction grating and forming a diffraction pattern; likewise, diffractive reading is a method that causes the reader to follow the stories or the narratives as they develop, and thus to follow the movements and patterns in the material. Maria Tamboukou, professor in Feminist Studies, explains it as follows: "Understanding, or rather feeling a story is not simply about taking up situated positions, but rather about following the motion of meaning, its leaps, interferences and diffractions, in short, the activation of a story in becoming."¹⁰

Theoretically, I position myself within a critical, poststructuralist approach to new materialism, inspired by the feminist theorists Sara Ahmed and Maria Tamboukou. In my analysis, I incorporate Ahmed's theoretical figures of "the stranger" and "the willful subject."¹¹ These figures exist through performative actions; they are constantly *becom-*

6 e.g. Gustav Albeck, ed., *Aarhus Universitet 1928–1978* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus 1978); C. F. Møller, *Aarhus Universitets Bygninger*, (Universitetsforlaget i Aarhus 1978), Gustav Albeck, ed., *Student i Aarhus: Femten Erindringsbilleder samlet af Gustav Albeck* (København: Gyldendal, 1979); Johan Fjord Jensen, *En Århus-Historie: Erindringslinjer* (Aarhus: Klim, 2004); Henning Lehmann, *Leopardspor: Kollegierne i Universitetsparken i Aarhus 1935–2010* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2010); Aarskrift for Universitetsundervisningen i Jylland vol. 1–40 (1929–1968).

7 Karen Barad, "Meeting the Universe Halfway: Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction," in *Feminism, Science and the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Lynn Hankinson Nelson and Jack Nelson (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 161–89; Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003), 801–31; Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *Parallax* 20, no. 3 (2014), 168–87.

8 Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *The Haraway Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 63–124.

9 Barad (2003), 803.

10 Maria Tamboukou, "Narrative Rhythmanalysis: The Art and Politics of Listening to Women's Narratives of Forced Displacement," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 24, no. 2 (2021), 155.

11 Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (New York: Duke University Press, 2012); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2014a); Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014b); Sara Ahmed, *Et uheldigt Arkiv: Udvalgte tekster af Sara Ahmed* (Copenhagen: Forlaget Nemo, 2020). "Willful" is Ahmed's American spelling.

ing rather than being. According to Ahmed, the stranger is a figure that is invisible, but at the same time recognised as a stranger. Hence, the figure contains an unavoidable anonymity, because it is unknown and could in fact be anyone. However, the stranger is recognised as not being from here or a part of “us,” and as someone who comes from outside and invades the space.¹² In extension of the stranger figure another figure emerges: the willful subject. The willful subject has the potential to create change and, besides being self-determining, is a figure that does not always behave as expected. It has its own agenda. Thus, like the stranger, the willful subject is a figure that is noticed because it is bumped into, and because it does not allow the gaze to flow through the room. However, this figure has a strong will and the potential to create change. It is when things move in a different direction than expected that the willful subject becomes and keeps moving.¹³ I use these feminist figures to form a picture of the female home economics students at Aarhus University – of their doings and their constant becoming as women at the border between profession and university. As such, the figures of the stranger and the willful subject should not be understood as attributable to the personalities or identities of specific individuals, but rather as a way of outlining forms of womanhood in a particular historical, geographical, and cultural context.

As a supplement to the archival material, I interviewed a woman named Katrin (1951–2021). This interview took place in February 2021, before I began my archival studies. Katrin told me that her mother (1913–1990), who came to Denmark from Iceland, had studied home economics at Aarhus University. Katrin did not remember the exact year of the course, but she did recall that her mother had remained in contact with some of her fellow students. When I began my archival studies, I encountered 17 applications from women who had applied for and were admitted to the advanced courses in home economics in Aarhus. Surprisingly, Katrin’s mother was among these applications. I consider such encounters and interferences part of my diffractive approach to the material, where I seek to chart the rhythms and the waving movements of the archive, emphasising the archive as a living organism. With inspiration from Tamboukou, I want to follow the narratives’ tracks and traces, and to pay attention to the “serendipities” that occur on my path of investigation.¹⁴

Structure of the article

The article is divided into three sections: The first section provides an overview of existing research in the field of women’s educational history with a focus on higher education and home economics. This overview is divided into three parts, focusing respectively on Danish, Nordic, and international research.

The second section traces the history of home economics in Denmark. Here, I include excerpts from the negotiations that took place between the women’s movement, the home economics associations, Aarhus University, and the Ministry of Education (*Undervisningsministeriet*) that reveal some of the challenges associated

12 Ahmed (2012), 13; Ahmed (2020), 10.

13 Ahmed (2020), 176–84.

14 Maria Tamboukou, “Archival Rhythms: Narrativity in the Archive,” in *The Archive Project: Archival Research in the Social Sciences*, ed. Niamh Moore et al. (Oxford: Routledge 2017), 71–95; Maria Tamboukou, “Feeling Narrative in the Archive: The Question of Serendipity,” *Qualitative Research* 16, no. 2 (2016), 151–66.

with the establishment of an advanced academic programme in home economics in Denmark.

Section three presents analytical findings based on the 17 applications from the home economics students found in the archives. In the analysis, I use the feminist figures of the stranger and the willful subject to argue that the Nordic women who enrolled in the home economics courses at Aarhus University during their first years of existence came to represent a specific but still marginal female figure.

Using feminist theory, I conclude that these women balanced on the border between profession and university where they performed a kind of womanhood that combined the figures of the housewife and the female academic.

Existing research in the field of home economics and other female professions *Danish perspectives*

Prior to the early twentieth century, there were limited higher educational opportunities for Danish women. Although women had gained access to university in 1875, only few had the opportunity and support to pursue an academic degree.¹⁵ Therefore, the university continued to be a male-dominated institution throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Bente Rosenbeck has argued that, as late as 1970, it was difficult to reconcile femininity with the student role in a male-dominated academic world.¹⁶

Overall, there has been greater focus on the development and significance of female professions within Danish research than on the home economics subject. Henriette Buus, Nete Balslev Wingender, Susanne Dietz, and Gunilla Svensmark, among others, have studied the emergence of the nursing profession, and the female authorities, such as health visitors, that came with the training of women as professional nurses.¹⁷

Bente Rosenbeck has studied Danish female pioneers within higher education, exploring how women fought their way into university as an institution dominated by men, and how they negotiated their femininity along the way. In addition, a few Danish scholars and historians have written about home economics as a female profession with an emphasis on home economics as an issue in the Danish women's movement, and on the importance of home economics for the Danish welfare state and for the modern

15 e.g., Lisbeth Haastrup, *Husarbejde – kvindearbejde, tjenestepiger – husmødre, 1880–1925: en kultur- og bevidsthedshistorisk analyse* (Institut for Nordisk Filologi, 1984); Hanne Rimmen Nielsen and Eva Lous, eds., *Kvinder Undervejs: Dansk Kvindesamfund i Århus 1886–1986* (Aarhus: Håndbibliotekets Veninder, 1986); Bente Rosenbeck, *Kvindekøn: Den moderne kvindeligheds historie 1880–1980* (København: Gyldendal, 1987); Bente Rosenbeck, *Har videnskaben køn? Kvinder i forskning* (København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2014); Karen E. Andreasen and Anette Rasmussen, "Husholdningssagens betydning for den lille bys modernitet – Kvinders uddannelse og erhverv inden for husholdning 1890–1940," *Erhvervshistorisk Årbog* 69, no. 1–2, (2020), 67–91.

16 Rosenbeck (1987), 57–58; Rosenbeck (2014), 112.

17 Nete Balslev Wingender, *Firkloveret og ildsjælene: Dansk Sygeplejeråds historie 1899–1999*, 1–2 (Århus: Dansk Sygeplejeråd, 1999); Henriette Buus, *Sundhedsplejerskeinstitutionens dannelse: En kulturteoretisk og kulturhistorisk analyse af velfærdsstatens embedsværk* (København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2001); Susanne Malchau Dietz, *Køn, kald & kompetencer: Diakonissestiftelsens kvindefølesskab og omsorgsuddannelser 1863–1955* (Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, 2013); Gunilla Svensmark, *Kald og profession – sygeplejerskehistorie 1863–2001* (Roskilde: FADL, 2020).

development of small towns in rural areas.¹⁸ However, what has not previously been investigated in a Danish context is *professional* women's encounter with university, and their *becoming* as women through this early process of academicisation. In addition, the development of home economics as an academic discipline at Aarhus University has not previously been explored in depth. It is these gaps in the research field that the article will address.

Nordic perspectives

Throughout the Nordic countries, domestic education has had a significant impact on girls' and women's access to various occupations and positions in society.¹⁹ However, domestic educational programmes have been implemented at different times and with different results across countries. What seems to be a common characteristic is that the desire for education in home economics has been a matter for the women's movements and to some extent also a welfare state project. According to Åsa Broberg, Viveca Lindberg and Gun-Britt Wärvik, domestic education became recognised as a branch of vocational education and training (VET) in Finland and Sweden earlier than in the other Nordic countries, alongside the implementation of agricultural VET for male students. In Helsinki, the first practical school of home economics was established in 1878,²⁰ while in Sweden, schools for home economics were established during the 1860s.²¹ According to Broberg, Lindberg, and Wärvik, this indicates that the relation between national prosperity and the prosperity of the family, including women's contribution to productivity, was considered important in both Sweden and Finland.²² Education in home economics thus became a responsibility of the state, prioritising women's expertise in the fields of childcare, food preparation, clothing production, cleaning, and keeping livestock. In Denmark, Lisbeth Haastrup, among others, has described a similar rationale, writing about the 1910 proposal to introduce conscription of women to educational programmes within home economics – a proposal that was never implemented.²³ Denmark established its first home economics school in 1895 in Sorø, and the first school kitchen for young schoolgirls was set up in 1898 in Copenhagen at Østre Gasværk School.²⁴ The first home economics school in Norway

18 Ninna Kiessling, "Kampen for en videnskabelig husholdningsuddannelse," in *Kvinder Undervejs: Dansk kvindesamfund i Århus 1886–1986*, ed. Hanne Rimmen Nielsen and Eva Lous (Aarhus: Håndbibliotekets Veninder, 1986), 124–36; Andreasen and Rasmussen (2020), 67–91; Jette Benn, *Fra kvindelig husgerning over hjemkundskab til madkundskab: Historie, filosofi og didaktik* (København: U Press, 2016); Søland (2000).

19 Åsa Broberg, Viveca Lindberg, and Gun-Britt Wärvik, "Kvinnors yrkesutbildning: en osynlig historia," in *Kunskapstraditioner och yrkeskunmande: Kvinnors yrkesutbildning i historisk belysning*, ed. Åsa Broberg, Viveca Lindberg, and Gun-Britt Wärvik (Göteborg: Makadam, 2022), 22; Gerda Petri and Minna Kragelund, *Mor Magda – og alle de andre: Husholdning som jag fra 1900 til i dag* (København: Forlaget Komma, 1980), 9–15, 19.

20 Åsa Broberg, Viveca Lindberg, and Gun-Britt Wärvik, "Women's Vocational Education 1890–1990 in Finland and Sweden: The Example of Vocational Home Economics Education," *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 73, no. 2, (2021), 222.

21 Broberg, Lindberg, and Wärvik (2021), 223.

22 Broberg, Lindberg, and Wärvik (2021), 218.

23 Lisbeth Haastrup, "Husmødre og velfærdsstat," *Folk Og Kultur, Årbog for Dansk Etnologi og Folkemindevidenskab* 29, no. 1 (2000), 99–116.

24 Benn (2016), 40.

was established in 1865 in Østre Aker,²⁵ and the first school of home economics in Iceland was founded in Reykjavik in 1897.²⁶

In the Nordic countries, around the turn of the century, education for women in home economics became a means for transforming society. At the same time, the women's movements had a significant influence on the establishment of women's vocational training, including training in domestic work, in all the Nordic countries, as well as in Great Britain (GB) and the United States (US). Brita Åkerman has studied home economics as a feminist project in Sweden in 1930–1960.²⁷ Among other things, Åkerman describes how women became organised in-home economics associations, how they brought the issue of domestic work to the fore in newspapers and magazines, and how they sought to establish home economics schools. A similar story can be found in a Danish context by Ninna Kiessling in the book about the Danish Women's Society in Aarhus. Here, Kiessling writes about the various women's organizations, which despite their disagreements, stood together in the fight for a scientific home economics education.²⁸

International perspectives

Turning to international studies, the field of research within home economics seems to be somewhat broader.²⁹ Esther H. Stocks, Michael W. Whittier, and Flora Rose have

25 This school is not considered part of VET, as it was established on a private initiative and was closed in 1881 when the founder retired. Stig Kvaal, "Ud for at lære husholdningsfag: Om etableringen av husstellundervisning i Norge," in *Matens Meglere: Kontroll, kvalitet og kunnskap i den industrielle matens tid*, ed. Terje Finstad et al. (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2022), 100.

26 Ella B. Bjarnarson, *Kvinder der banede vejen: Den stejle vej til uddannelse 1850–1920*, (B.A. Thesis, University of Iceland, 2020), 77.

27 Brita Åkerman, *Den okända verdagen: om arbetet i hemmen* (Stockholm: Akademikerlitteratur, 1983).

28 Kiessling (1986).

29 Maresi Nerad, "Gender Stratification in Higher Education: The Department of Home Economics at the University of California, Berkeley 1916–1962," *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 10, no. 2 (1987), 157–64; Annemarie Turnbull, "An Isolated Missionary: The Domestic Subjects Teacher in England, 1870–1914," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 1 (1994), 81–100; Sarah Stage and Virginia Bramble Vincenti, eds., *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Bird, "High Class Cookery: Gender, Status and Domestic Subjects, 1890–1930," *Gender and Education* 10, no. 2 (1998), 117–31; Nancy K. Berlage, "The Establishment of an Applied Social Science: Home Economists, Science, and Reform at Cornell University, 1870–1930," in *Gender and American Social Science: The Formative Years*, ed. Helene Silverberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 185–231; Megan Elias, "Model mamas: The Domestic Partnership of Home Economics Pioneers Flora Rose and Martha van Rensselaer," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (2006), 65–88; Megan J. Elias, *Stir it Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Jenny Collins, "Beyond the Domestic Sphere? A Home Science Education at the University of New Zealand 1911–1936," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 41, no. 2 (2009a), 115–30; Jenny Collins, "Creating Women's Work in the Academy and Beyond: Carnegie Connections, 1923–1942," *History of Education* 38, no. 6 (2009b), 791–808; Marelene Rayner-Canham and Geoff Rayner-Canham, "The Rise and Fall of Domestic Chemistry in Higher Education in England During The Early 20th Century," *Bull. Hist. Chem.* 36, no. 1 (2011); Amanda McCloat and Martin Caraher, "The Evolution of Home Economics As a Subject in Irish Primary and Post-Primary Education from the 1800s to the Twenty-First Century," *Irish Educational Studies* 38, no. 3 (2019), 377–99; Tanya Fitzgerald, "Claiming Their Intellectual Space: Academic Women at the University of New Zealand 1909–1941," *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 6 (2020), 819–30; David Philippp, "Ellen Richards's Home Economics Movement and the Birth of the Economics of Consumption," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 43, no. 3 (2021), 378–400.

written about home economics at Cornell University, which was the first university to set up a home economics course in 1903.³⁰ With Cornell University providing a blueprint, home economics proved to be a progressive profession that introduced science to the farmhouse and brought women into higher education and leadership positions in public education, academia, government, and industry. However, looking at other studies, home economics was not well received at the universities. In 1908, the Home Science and Economics Department opened at the Women's Department of King's College, University of London. This new department offered a three-year programme and was aimed at upper-middle-class women, preparing them to teach domestic science at the secondary level. However, a fierce debate arose in England about whether the next generation of young girls should learn "real" chemistry or if they should learn domestic chemistry as a component of domestic science. In most cases, the conclusion was that domestic science could not be considered a real science.³¹ At University of California, Berkeley, a department of home economics was established in 1916. The department was dominated by women but, and perhaps because of this, it was also low in power, prestige, and privileges.³² In England in 1926, minutes from a meeting of the senate at the University of Bristol stated that the Faculty of Science was sympathetic to a proposal to approve a curriculum suitable for candidates wishing to specialise in domestic science. This curriculum involved three years' study in general science at the university with a fourth year at the Gloucestershire Training College of Domestic Science, studying cookery, housewifery and laundry, needlework, hygiene and applied science or household work, home management, and institutional management. The degree was to be awarded by the university's Faculty of Science. However, the faculty was declared only to be *associated* with the university, which separated the "domestic" and academic parts of the education.³³

These examples from the US and UK testify to the difficulties in including home economics, home science or domestic science as a university subject; when such programmes were established, they were not considered equal to other university subjects. According to Tanya Fitzgerald, the case was somehow quite different in the British colony of New Zealand. Here, the Department of Home Science at the University of Otago formed an intellectual space for female academics from 1909 and onwards. Here, women could define and shape their own disciplinary expertise and professional knowledge about home science – knowledge that was acknowledged and respected by peers without having to compete with men. One explanation for this positive development could be that the women were appointed professors and associate professors, and therefore they were also given exclusive rights over their own research area.³⁴

Despite a difficult start, professional home economics became a great success in the

30 In the US, agricultural land-grant colleges, teacher training schools as well as state schools had introduced home science as a subject in the late nineteenth century. In this article, I consider Cornell University as the first academic institution to set up a home economics course. This, because Cornell University initiated three courses relating to home and family life offered with an exam in 1903. Esther H. Stocks, Michael W. Whittier, and Flora Rose, *A Growing College: Home Economics at Cornell University* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969).

31 Rayner-Canham and Rayner-Canham (2011), 38–40.

32 Nerad (1987).

33 Bird (1998), 123–25.

34 Fitzgerald (2020), 828.

US and functioned as a model for the establishment of university programmes in home economics in many other countries. In the US, education within home economics also played an important role in the consumer marketplace around the mid-twentieth century where the ideal was a rational consumer. Thus, the second generation of home economists understood consumption as a key element in improving people's living conditions and made the issue of standards their central concern.³⁵

Two ways of presenting home economics, its development and societal significance are particularly prominent in recent historical research. On one hand, home economics has been portrayed as having an important social purpose, facilitating the empowerment of young women through the knowledge and practical skills required for everyday life. On the other hand, home economics has been criticised by feminists as a subject endorsing a belief that women's primary role is in the home and promoting a middle-class domestic ideology.³⁶ I choose to situate my research somewhere in between these two interpretations. My material suggests that the home economics courses offered at Aarhus University to a certain extent helped shape well-educated women who, with their university qualifications, attained higher positions in society, for example as headmistresses of home economics teacher training schools. At the same time, my material shows that home economics was never really accepted and recognised as a scientific subject at the university, which is why the female home economics students were in some respects unable to escape traditional ideas of women's domestic role.

My study differs from the previous studies as I start with a micro-historical perspective in the form of the women's applications that I then expand to encompass women's educational history within home economics and higher education. This analytical strategy is inspired by Maria Tamboukou who in several of her scientific works has engaged with the narratives in the archives, mapping storylines based on a matrix of rhythmic vibrations, opening micro-sociological analyses that focus on processes, deterritorialisations, and becomings.³⁷

“Women must learn something to be something”

Historically, women's primary areas of expertise in the family and in society were obstetrics, nursing, and domestic work. It was thus also in these areas that the first education programmes for women arose in Denmark with the birth foundation (*Fødselsstiftelsen*) in 1750, teacher training for women in 1859, education as a deaconess in 1863, and the first home economics seminar in 1902. The first *public* school for training home economics teachers was established in 1930.³⁸ Until that point, such schools were aimed at the daughters of the greater peasants in rural areas as well as the daughters of the bourgeoisie in the cities.³⁹ However, learning how to manage a house-

35 Philipppy (2021), 396.

36 Andreasen and Rasmussen (2020); McCloat and Caraher (2019), Broberg, Lindberg, and Wärvik (2021); Stage and Vincenti (2017).

37 Maria Tamboukou, “Portraits of Moments’: Visual and Textual Entanglements in Narrative Research,” *Current Narratives* 3 (2011); Maria Tamboukou, *Women, Education, And the Self: A Foucauldian Perspective* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Maria Tamboukou, “Machinic Assemblages: Women, Art Education and Space,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 29, no. 3 (2008), 359–75.

38 Rosenbeck (2014), 31; Andreasen and Rasmussen (2020): 70, 80–83.

39 Andreasen and Rasmussen (2020), 80–83.

hold was considered essential to the education of any young girl, who were therefore taught home economics as an independent subject at primary and lower secondary schools from 1903 onwards.⁴⁰

In 1893, a teacher at a municipal school, Birgitte Berg Nielsen (1861–1951), proposed the establishment of a scientific education in home economics in affiliation with an academic institution such as the Danish Agricultural University (*Landbohøjskolen*) in Copenhagen.⁴¹ For Berg Nielsen, home economics was an issue for the Danish women's movement. Berg Nielsen did not believe that women were born housewives, arguing that they had to learn something to be something.⁴² However, Berg Nielsen was met with a lack of understanding from people in the school system, as well as politicians and granted authorities. In 1901, the Danish Women's Society in Aarhus (*Dansk Kvinde-samfundets Aarhuskreds*) stepped in and supported the cause. This women's movement was from 1919 led by another teacher, Hulda Pedersen (1875–1961), who would prove to be a crucial figure at the forefront of establishing an academic programme in home economics. Home economics was an important issue for Pedersen as she was concerned about young women transitioning directly from school to factory or other industrial work without any knowledge of their tasks as housewives. She also believed that developing a scientific approach to home economics would generate more respect for women's work in the home and that young women would then remain within the domestic sphere. Another important purpose of establishing home economics as a university subject, according to Pedersen, was that women should have equal opportunities for higher education.⁴³ At the same time, societal developments such as women gaining access to the university in 1875, girls being admitted to the municipal secondary upper school (*gymnasium*) in 1903, and women's right to vote in 1915, alongside ongoing industrialisation and urbanisation, led to a growing interest in education among women in Denmark.⁴⁴

From 1901 to 1919, several proposals were made for the establishment of a scientific home economics programme at a higher education institution.⁴⁵ All proposals were rejected either by the Danish Agricultural University, the Ministry of Education or when the plans for a business faculty (*Erhvervsfakultet*) at Aarhus University were dropped. However, Hulda Pedersen had gradually developed a strong network of female academics who supported her case. As such, the establishment of home economics as an academic discipline was a cause led by the Danish Women's Society and strengthened, primarily by networks of women within higher education even though also some men supported the case for example the chairman of the University Society of Aarhus (*Universitets-Samvirket, Aarhus*) barrister C. Holst-Knudsen. The emergence of women's networks as seen in the case with home economics is in line with Joyce

40 Rosenbeck (2014), 38.

41 Spencer and Hansen (1978), 589.

42 Kiessling (1986), 124–30.

43 Miss D., "Skal Kvinden betale Krisen med sit Selverhverv?" *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, February 17, 1934, 4; Karen Harrekilde-Petersen, *Landsudvalget til forberedelse af en videnskabelig husholdningsundervisning i tilknytning til Aarhus Universitet: Redegørelse for udvalgets virksomhed igennem 25 år* (Aarhus: Aarhus Stiftsbogtrykkerie, 1959), 3–4; Spencer and Hansen (1978), 589–94.

44 Rosenbeck (2014), 38–40.

45 Spencer and Hansen (1978), 589.

Goodman and Sue Anderson-Faithful's conclusion that, throughout history, women have formed strong networks with other women as a strategic way of engaging and being heard in educational debates.⁴⁶

In a letter from the Danish Women's Society to the Danish Ministry of Education in 1926, the argument was made that a scientific programme in home economics could have financial benefits for society, as housewives would encounter the latest knowledge about nutrition and hygiene, leading to improvements in family health.⁴⁷ This suggestion was not immediately rejected. When Denmark's second university, Aarhus University, became a reality in 1928,⁴⁸ it was suggested that such a programme in home economics be established as part of the business faculty. However, when the plans for such a faculty were put on hold, the plans for a scientific programme in home economics once again fell through.⁴⁹

One of those who opposed the establishment of a scientific programme in home economics at the university was H. C. Larsen (1870–1955), head of department at the Danish Ministry of Agriculture (*Landbrugsministeriet*) from 1916. In an article in the home economics journal in 1933, H. C. Larsen writes as a response to the Danish Women's Society:

[I find] reason, however, in order to have a clear conscience as the Ministry of Agriculture's representative on the commission, to advise the Danish Women's Society against putting much work into applying to establish state institution for the academic education of home economics teachers in Aarhus or elsewhere at this point in time, just as I believe that it would not be in Aarhus University's interest to take on such a 'dead weight' in addition to, I dare say, an already somewhat heavy load (...). Doing so would probably only lead to even more 'beautiful, wasted efforts' on the Women's Society's long and difficult road in this crucial societal matter.⁵⁰

According to H. C. Larsen, the existing home economics seminars already fulfilled the task of educating women in the field of home economics. He therefore saw no need for additional programmes in this subject. In a letter sent 15 December 1936 to Rebekka la Cour, the chairwoman of the home economics committee of the Jutland farmers' associations (*de jyske landboforeningers husholdningsudvalg*), he wrote: "Above the home

46 Joyce Goodman and Sue Anderson-Faithful, "Turning and Twisting Histories of Women's Education: Matters of Strategy," *Women's History Review* 29, no. 3 (2020), 377–78.

47 Letter from Hulda Pedersen to the Danish ministry of education, 1926. *Husholdningshøjskolen: Sager og korrespondance (1933–1992)* 4: Oprettelsen af et husholdningsfakultet 1933–1949.

48 In 1928, the University Teaching in Jutland (*Universitetsundervisningen i Jylland*) was established for a period of three years. This was the beginning of what later became Aarhus University. Møller (1978), 16.

49 Kiessling (1986), 125–26.

50 "[Jeg finder] dog Anledning til, for at have min Samvittighed som Landbrugsministeriets Repræsentant i Kommissionen helt i Orden, at fraraade Dansk Kvindesamfund at sætte noget større Arbejde ind paa for Tiden at søge en Statsinstitution til videnskabelig Lærerindeuddannelse i Husholdning oprettet i Aarhus eller andet Sted, ligesom jeg tror, at det heller ikke vil være i Aarhus Universitets Interesse at indtage en saadan 'Dødvægt' i sin i Forvejen vistnok noget tunge last (...). Det vil sikkert kun føre til, at endnu flere 'skønne, spildte kræfter' bliver at finde paa Kvindesamfundets lange og besværlige Vej i denne samfundsvigtige Sag." (H. C. Larsen, *Tidsskrift for Husholdning*, Nr. 17, 06.09.1933).

economics schools and seminars, they are thinking of setting up a scientific institute for the training of such highly modern housewives that it is highly unlikely that many of them will be needed in our time.”⁵¹

Despite several rejections over the years and degrading remarks about the acceptance of home economics at the university in Aarhus, it seems that Hulda Pedersen and the home economics committee relentlessly continued their struggle. Pedersen never publicly complained about the struggles and the degrading comments about her or home economics. However, by reviewing letters to Pedersen, her memoirs, notes, and minutes from meetings held by the Danish Women’s Society, the long and tough struggle to establish a home economics programme within higher education emerges. The personal archives of Johanne Appel (1869–1957), chairwoman of the main board of the Danish housewives’ associations (*De danske husmoderforeninger*), likewise testify to the huge amount of work involved, with a multitude of initiatives, meetings, correspondence, and applications.⁵² These archives also show that there was a strong network, especially women, supporting the proposal, but they did not always agree on the details. For example, there was disagreement about the admission criteria, the length of the courses and the balance between practice and theory.

In 1942, the Danish Women’s Society submitted another proposal for a home economics programme affiliated with the university, where students would be awarded the title of *candidatus rerum domesticarum*.⁵³ The application process was delayed due to the German occupation. In 1945, it was finally decided to establish teaching in home economics at Aarhus University, but as three separate five-month courses instead of the proposed two-year programme. Furthermore, instead of a final examination bestowing a master’s degree, the women were only given a statement.⁵⁴ Thus, on one hand, home economics became part of the university in terms of physical location and course title. The female students were taught on campus by Aarhus University’s (male) professors, as well as by leading women, recruited from the training schools for home economics teachers. Other course lecturers came from Aarhus Municipal Hospital (*Aarhus Kommnehospital*), the Danish Health Commission (*Sundhedskommissionen*), Aarhus Technical School (*Aarhus Tekniske Skole*), Jutland Institute of Technology (*Jydske Teknologisk Institut*), Jutland School of Business (*Den Jydske Handelshøjskole*) and the University of Copenhagen.⁵⁵ On the other hand, home economics was not established as an academic discipline, and participants were not recognised as university students or sit a final exam.

While located within the university campus, the home economics courses were provided by a self-governing institution, separate from the university itself, with its

51 “Ovenover Husholdningsskolerne og Husholdningsseminarerne tænker man paa at sætte det videnskabelige Institut til Uddannelse af saa højmoderne Husholdningskvinder, at der næppe i vor Tid bliver Brug for ret mange af dem.” (Letter from H. C. Larsen to Rebekka la Cour, 15.12.1936. UVM Komm. uddan. husholdningslærere, H.C. Larsens embedsarkiv: Embedspapirer (1918–1938) 1.

52 Erhvervsarkivet: Appel, Johanne 1924–1950, Taler mm.

53 This could be translated as “candidate for domestic affairs.”

54 Spencer and Hansen (1978), 592–94.

55 Course reports, 1946–1963. Husholdningshøjskolen: Sager og korrespondance (1933–1992) 1: Beretninger 1946–1963 m.m.

own board and its own funds for the construction of buildings.⁵⁶ Comparing with experiences from other countries that had established domestic science as a university subject some years earlier, it did not seem to be advantageous that the courses were split between departments. In Aarhus, it was necessary to accommodate the interests of various stakeholders to establish home economics at the university. The women's organisations and home economics associations were dependent on the Danish Ministry of Education, the management of Aarhus University and the University Society of Aarhus. The women were not in charge in Aarhus; the first head of the home economics courses at Aarhus University was Professor of Hygiene, Skuli V. Gudjonsson (1895–1955), who was succeeded in 1955 by Professor of Biochemistry Fritz Schönheyder (1905–1979).

The applicants

In 1946, 48 women applied for the home economics courses at Aarhus University. The call for applications had been printed in Nordic journals targeted at school kitchen teachers and home economics teachers. Danish women had priority but, apart from the first year, all applicants who met the course requirements were admitted. For each year, a small number of course participants dropped out or failed to start their course.⁵⁷

The educational programme was divided into three courses, each with its own thematic focus: Course A focused on dietetics, Course B on home economics technology, and Course C on household economy. Each course initially lasted five months and was free of charge. Later the courses were extended to nine months. Participants had to cover expenses for books, excursions, and the cost of living.⁵⁸

The class enrolled in Course A in dietetics in the winter of 1946 consisted of 17 women: eight from Denmark, six from Norway, one from Sweden, one from Finland and one from Iceland. All the women had an educational background within home economics. The Danish women had either completed a two-year programme at the home economics seminar at Ankerhus in Sorø (*Ankerhus' Husholdningsseminarium*) or from the home economics seminar of Ingeborg Suhr (*Det Suhrske Husholdningsseminarium*). A few had qualifications from the state teacher training school (*Statens Lærerhøjskole*). The foreign students had similar educational backgrounds. Reading the 17 applications that were sent to head of studies Mrs Karen Harrekilde-Petersen (1902–1986), it appears that the female applicants were an average of 34 years old when they submitted their applications. The youngest participant was 22 and the oldest 54.⁵⁹ This suggests, in terms of age alone, many of these women differed from other university students, with male students having a mean age of 19 and female students 22 when they began their university studies.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Spencer and Hansen (1978), 591.

⁵⁷ Course reports, 1946–1963. Husholdningshøjskolen: Sager og korrespondance (1933–1992) 1: Beretninger 1946–1963 m.m.

⁵⁸ Spencer and Hansen (1978), 589–96.

⁵⁹ Applications 1946. Husholdningshøjskolen: Sager og korrespondance (1933–1992) 1: Beretninger 1946–1963 m.m.

⁶⁰ Rosenbeck (2014), 59; Else Hansen, *Professorer, studenter og polit.er: Om velfærdsstatens universitetspolitik 1950–1975* (København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2017); Katrine Charlotte Busk, *Den første generation af kvindelige akademikere* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitet, Historisk Institut, 2000).

The women all appear to be unmarried at the time of their application to the course. Some of the women were living in housing provided by their place of work, for example at a home economics school, while others lived with their parents. About half of the 17 women asked to be allocated a rental room in the city of Aarhus when they applied for admission to the courses. According to her application, Katrin's mother, who came from Iceland to study home economics at Aarhus University, was 35 years old and neither married nor had children in 1946.⁶¹ Shortly after the interview, Katrin wrote me an e-mail where she further explained:

As I said, she [Katrin's mother] attended the Special Courses in Home Economics at the "Women's University" (Aarhus University) in the winter of 1946–47, where Karen Harrekilde "ruled". My mother was friends with Karen Harrekilde but did not live at the dormitory in the University Park, but in a dormitory on Kløvermarksvej, where she met my father. Upon returning to Iceland, in 1947/48 she became the principal of Kvennaskolen/the home economics school in Blönduós in the North. Then she married my father and moved to Denmark. I think the plan was for her to teach the special course, but [she] was prevented from doing so as my older brother unfortunately suffered brain damage from measles when he was 5.⁶²

The Danish applicants came from most of the country, both large cities and provincial towns. The Nordic applicants predominantly came from larger cities.⁶³ Katrin's mother, for example, had studied home economics in Reykjavik, but returned for a few years to the smaller town of Blönduós after completing the course in Aarhus. In the post-war period, it was not unusual for women to travel alone. Especially unmarried women with the necessary resources and a strong will travelled, sometimes over great distances, for educational purposes. Travelling was for some women a strategy for finding their way into the world of education.⁶⁴ What is notable about the women who travelled to Aarhus to study home economics was thus not that they travelled, but rather that they travelled even though they had already obtained an education. They travelled to obtain *further* education. In addition to the physical distance travelled by some of the women, enrolling in the courses also involved moving from a professional setting to enter the world of academia. It must be noted, however, that the students were all privileged in terms of having the means and the opportunity to travel and move around. According to Katrin, her mother paid for the travel to Aarhus herself:

61 Interview with Katrin 18.02.2021.

62 "Hun [Katrins mor] gik, som jeg fortalte, på Specialkursus i Husholdning på 'Kvindernes Universitet' (Århus Universitet) i vinteren 1946–47, hvor Karen Harrekilde 'regerede'. Min mor var ven med Karen Harrekilde, men boede ikke på kollegierne i Universitetsparken, men i et kollegie på Kløvermarksvej, hvor hun mødte min far. Da hun kom hjem til Island, blev hun 1947/48 forstander på Kvennaskolen/husholdningsskolen i Blönduós på nordlandet. Derefter blev hun gift med min far og flyttede til Danmark. Jeg tror, at planen var, at hun skulle undervise på specialkurset, men [hun] blev forhindret, da min storebror desværre blev hjerneskadet efter mæslinger, da han var 5 år." (E-mail from Katrin 31.03.2021).

63 From Denmark, the women applicants came from: Kongens Lyngby, Aarhus, Juelsminde, Hjørring, Vedbæk, Copenhagen, Ranum, and Ribe. From Norway they came from Bergen, Trondheim, Lillesand, and Stabekk. The Swedish applicant came from Stockholm, the Icelandic applicant from Reykjavik, and the Finish applicant from Helsinki. (Husholdningshøjskolen: Sager og korrespondance (1933–1992) 1: Beretninger 1946–1963 m.m.)

64 Goodman and Anderson-Faithful (2020), 377–95.

The Icelandic students on the special courses paid everything themselves. They saved up, however that was possible. But of course, we must remember that Iceland very suddenly became very wealthy because of the American base in Keflavík. Even ordinary housewives knitted socks, sweaters, and mittens for the soldiers, who were not used to the cold. (...) A cheap way of travelling for Icelanders who wanted to study “abroad” = Denmark, was to travel 2nd or 3rd class on the ship Gullfoss. It took 3 days.⁶⁵

A specific form of womanhood seems to have emerged in step with the founding of home economics schools. Women were recognised not only as housewives but also as a citizen of the nation-state since, from World War I until the 1960s, it was the housewife who united all the central tasks that the state set for family and household.⁶⁶ From the perspective of the women’s movement, gaining an education in home economics helped to emancipate women, and thus created a different, more intellectual and progressive housewife figure.⁶⁷ The historian Birgitte Søland argues that in the first half of the twentieth century, young women tried to create a new, more up-to-date style of housewifery and a more flattering image of the role as housewife. This new image was based on professionalism, scientific knowledge, and rational work processes, among other things.⁶⁸

From profession to university

The Special Courses in Home Economics at Aarhus University were considered a continuation of the basic home economics training provided at the Danish home economics schools and seminars. They had to be scientific in the sense of introducing the students to advanced academic and theoretical content, made possible, among other things, by the students being taught by professors and associate professors at the university.

The subjects that the home economics students were taught at the university varied depending on which of the three courses they attended (A, B or C). Some subjects were common for all three courses while others were specific to the individual course. For example, the subjects “Family Sociology” (*Familiesociologi*) and “Business Geography” (*Erhvervsgeografi*) were only part of Course C, which focused on household economy. After the first course period, the curriculum was adjusted based on evaluations by former students. In the case of Course A, teaching in basic chemistry was increased from six to twelve hours per week, as well as the addition of a further six hours of exercises in physics per week.⁶⁹

65 “De islandske studerende til Specialkurset betalte det hele selv. De sparede op, hvordan det så end kunne lade sig gøre. Men vi skal selvfølgelig huske, at Island meget pludseligt blev meget velhavende på grund af den Amerikanske base i Keflavík. Selv almindelige husmødre strikkede sokker, trøjer og vanter til soldaterne, der ikke var vant til den kulde. (...) En metode til billig rejse for islændinge, der ville studere ‘ude’ = Danmark, var at rejse med 2. eller 3. klasse på skibet Gullfoss. Det tog 3 dage.” (E-mail from Katrin 29.03 2021).

66 Haastrup (2000), 113.

67 Elias (2008), 8–9.

68 Søland (2000), 168.

69 Course report. Beretning fra Specialkursus i Husholdning ved Aarhus Universitet. Omfattende Kursusperioden November 1946–Marts 1947. Husholdningshøjskolen: Sager og korrespondance (1933–1992) 1: Beretninger 1946–1963 m.m.

In a newspaper article in 1946, a home economics student at Aarhus University describes her stay at the university. The woman explains how she is taught physics at the Department of Physics, and microbiology is taught by a veterinarian in a laboratory. She also describes how the students put the knowledge they gain about micro-organisms into practice by studying them under a microscope, helping them understand how butter, cheese and beer are produced with the help of bacteria.⁷⁰ This description shows that the courses at Aarhus University were scientifically oriented and that the laboratory, the location of the teaching, was important for the scientific nature of the courses.

In 1950, the home economics students moved into their own dormitory, Dormitory 7, in the University Park in Aarhus, making them more visible to other university students and attracting the public's attention. The dormitory was built using funds raised by the Danish Women's Society, with the rooms reserved for the home economics students. Thus, in popular parlance, the women's dormitory was named the "Faculty of Meatballs" (*Frikadellefakultetet*)⁷¹, which attests to the contrast associated with introducing home economics to an academic setting.

Two images of the female residents are especially prominent in the articles published in newspapers 1945–1950. On one hand, the home economics students are portrayed as pioneers in their field of home economics – as part of something new in Denmark that had already been implemented in countries such as the US and the UK. On the other hand, they were referred to first and foremost as women, with an emphasis on their role as housewives and questioning whether home economics was real science. One example is a drawing by the Danish artist Storm P., depicting a laboratory in which a tall woman stands alongside two much shorter male scientists (Figure 1). One of the scientists is holding a thermometer that is immersed in a pot, with a speech bubble stating: "Right then, now the potatoes are boiling."⁷² The other scientist utters something in Latin (the name of a flower). The drawing is subtitled: "The aim is to use science in the service of the household."⁷³ In addition to the humour in the drawing itself, there is an underlying understanding that rather than making home economics scientific, science is domesticated.

70 Mary Aage Nielsen, "Paa Husholdningsstudium i Aarhus," *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, June 26, 1946, 7.

71 Jytte Mørup, "Om at være pige på kollegium," in *Universitetskollegierne i Århus 1935–1985* (Aarhus Stifts Bogstrykkeri, 1985), 79.

72 "Saa – nu koger Kartofflerne," *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, November 17, 1946.

73 "Man sigter at tage Videnskaben i Husholdningens Tjeneste," *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, November 17, 1946.



Figure 1. Storm P. drawing. Source: *Aalborg Stiftstidende* 17.11.1946. This version of the drawing is a copy of the original drawing, which today belongs in the Danish Museum STORM.

This portrayal of the female home economics students makes clear a central point in this article: that the women were at the border between profession and university. They practised a traditionally female profession which came to be affiliated with the university without being admitted as part of the academic world. Thus, they were *doing* a different way of being a university student. Being at the border between university and profession may have contributed to the courses appearing “out of place” at the university when reading the archival material. Being “out of place” or being treated as “space invaders” are concepts presented by Sara Ahmed in her work on diversity

in institutions. Based on her own experiences of being pointed out as a stranger, Ahmed writes:

[...] it was an experience of not being white, of being made into a stranger, the one who is recognized as “out of place,” the one who does not belong, whose proximity is registered as crime or threat. As memory, it was of becoming a stranger in a place I called home. (...) [I]t led me to think and write about the politics of stranger making; how some and not others become strangers; how emotions of fear and hatred stick to certain bodies; how some bodies become understood as the rightful occupants of certain spaces.⁷⁴

Based on this thinking, the home economics students can be seen as strangers who invaded the space of others, the university. According to Ahmed, it is the activities in and around the institution that define who are included and who are excluded from the institution. Hence, establishing the courses in home economics at the university helped shape a certain type of modern institution. However, by not placing these courses on an equal footing with other university subjects, the institution was for some people more than others. To use Ahmed’s words, the activities shaped an institutional sense. Thus, some were more “at home” at the university, while others became “strangers.” This did not align with Aarhus University’s stated goal of inclusivity in relation to first-generation students and towards women.⁷⁵

As can be seen from the subtitle of Storm P’s drawing, there was a notion that the women attending the home economics courses had invaded a space that was not meant for them – science was invaded by domesticity. Despite the caricatured nature of the drawing, it is nonetheless the same image of the women that is portrayed in accounts from the dormitory and in newspaper articles from this period.⁷⁶

Home economics students as willful strangers

The home economics students followed a different path to university and completed their course in an academic setting despite being pointed out as strangers. This shows that the home economics students kept on moving against the current. They completed their higher education, the programme continued to exist, and women continued to apply. In a sense, both the women engaged in the women’s movement who had fought for the establishment of a home economics programme at the university and the students who later enrolled in this programme were strong-willed women who wanted something *more*. Some were motivated by a goal of gender equality and gaining respect for their profession. Some were motivated by gaining a higher position within the profession. Considering this, I argue that these women possessed the potential to change the academic field in Denmark. Compared to the US, where home economics was recognised as a university subject with its own department at a much earlier stage,

⁷⁴ Ahmed (2012), 2.

⁷⁵ Ning de Coninck-Smith, “Gender Encounters University—University Encounters Gender: Affective Archives, Aarhus University, Denmark 1928–1953,” *Women’s History Review* 29, no. 3 (2020), 416–17, [special Issue: *Turns and Twists in Histories of Women’s Education*, ed. Sue Anderson-Faithful and Joyce Goodman]; Albeck (1978); Møller (1978), 11.

⁷⁶ e.g., Kit, “Hos kvindelige Kollegianere,” *Jyllands-Posten*, January 28, 1952, 5–6; Kit, “Dukkestueleg med Perspektiver: Paa Specialkursus uddannes ‘Boliglærerinder,’” *Jyllands-Posten*, September 22, 1952, 5.

it is striking that the Special Courses in Home Economics at Aarhus University were not established until 1945. Part of the explanation could be that home economics in the US was implemented at coeducational agricultural land-grant universities in the 1870s, while a similar proposal in Denmark in 1893 by Birgitte Berg Nielsen was rejected. Offering farmers and their wives' information about "scientific farming" seemed to be a strategy that American women engaged in the field of home economics used. By 1900, about 30 colleges in the US had developed domestic science programmes and departments. The American women also met resistance – they were either considered too practical for academia or too abstract for domestic science.⁷⁷ However, it seems that the American women found it easier to define common goals within their movement. In Denmark, there was a lack of consensus within the Danish Women's Society and between the Danish Women's Society and the household and housewife associations, among other things regarding the structure of the education and the syllabus. Furthermore, the American women followed a different route – agriculture and scientific farming geared specifically towards farmers' wives – that paved the way to university faster than in Denmark. It is also worth noting that many new universities were established in the US at the beginning of the twentieth century, which led to a rapid expansion in women's educational opportunities, not least because of the growing number of women's colleges. Among other things, this development allowed women to define their field of expertise within the universities to a far greater extent than was the case in Denmark and the other Nordic countries.⁷⁸

The conditions in the US played a role in the home economics case in Denmark. Members of the Danish Women's Society sometimes referred to relations abroad and were inspired by home economics programmes in other countries. For example, in 1931, Mrs Harrekilde-Petersen, who later became the first head of studies at the Special Courses in Home Economics at Aarhus University, travelled to Canada and the US on a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation to study the conditions at home economics departments at American universities.⁷⁹

Had the plans for a business faculty at Aarhus University come to fruition, a higher education programme in home economics might have been established earlier. A department of home economics with female professors and lecturers could perhaps have provided a different framing of home economics as a subject within the history of education in Denmark. Nonetheless, the establishment of the home economics courses at Aarhus University was one of the first steps in a more comprehensive shift towards professional and vocational disciplines within Danish higher education. Thus, studying the case of the home economics students contributes to a broader understanding of Danish university history because, as I have argued in this article, the women encountered resistance and obstacles along the way that led them to seek different paths into the academic world. These women were persistent and strong-willed, and they stuck together creating strong female networks. Hence, more broadly, my findings in this article suggest a need to move beyond narrow conceptions of feminist pioneers within the field of education and to pay attention to the women who sought different paths to higher learning.

77 Elias (2008), 18–19.

78 Berlage (1998), 187–95.

79 *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, October 23, 1945.

Concluding remarks

The aim of this article has been to examine which female figures emerged when home economics students encountered Aarhus University in 1946. Based on 17 applications from women who applied for and were admitted to the Special Courses in Home Economics at Aarhus University, I sought to follow the rhythms in the archives, which led me to explore a broader perspective involving the Danish Women's Society, the history of home economics in a national, Nordic and international context, negotiations with government ministries, the structure of the scientific course, and newspaper and magazine coverage of the courses and students. Through a diffractive reading of the empirical material, the analysis started in the archives, where I followed certain storylines, plots, and characters that led me to new encounters, new tracks, new traces. Thus, the empirical material has revealed itself to me in patterns and waves, leading me through narrative assemblages and discursive entanglements to analyse the various components through one another while engaging with previous research.

Through the diffractive method, I encountered specific female figures in the material. In a quest to capture the home economics women analytically, I turned my attention towards Sara Ahmed's feminist figures as a theoretical template. Particularly noteworthy was the appearance of the women as bridging boundary figures, constantly transforming, negotiating their womanhood, and moving at the border between profession and university. The home economics students were first and foremost seen as women and therefore portrayed as strangers at the university, as intruders and as out of place. Alongside the feminist figure of the stranger emerged the figure of the willful subject. My analysis shows that the home economics students, as well as the women engaged in the women's movement, stood out as willful figures because of their will to pursue further education despite the resistance they encountered. The specific female figure that emerged at the border between profession and university was thus the figure of the "academic housewife." What made this female figure specific in the context of post-war Nordic countries was the inclusion at the university without being accepted as a university student, and the status as a pioneer within her field while still being regarded as a housewife. Still, the establishment of a higher education programme within home economics seems to have been an important factor for these women in the post-war period: completing the course improved their job opportunities and allowed them to take up higher positions in society. The home economics courses at Aarhus University also played a symbolic role, showing that women did not necessarily have to settle and could strive for something more than the housewife role.

Also, the article has shown that the Danish Women's Society played a significant role in the struggle for a scientifically oriented home economics programme as also seen in the US. Even though home economics at Aarhus University were more than 50 years in the making, the establishment and the later building of a women's dormitory were considered milestones for the Danish women's movement. However, the structure of the programme in home economics did not live up to the initial hopes and ambitions and home economics did not seem to gain the same recognition as an academic discipline in Denmark as in the US. At Aarhus University, home economics was not seen as equal to other university subjects and unlike in New Zealand, a department of domestic science with female professors was never established. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask

whether the impact on higher learning and women's influence within academia would have been different if home economics had been accepted as a scientific subject at the university at an earlier point in Danish history.

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