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Love Power – An innovative or anachronistic Concept?

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In the opening pages of her book: 'Love Power and Political Interests' Anna poses the intriguing question: '*Why, or how*, do men's social and political power positions vis-à-vis women persist even in contemporary Western societies...' (1991: 11). Answering this question Anna coins the concept of *love power* making care and erotic ecstasy the basis of patriarchy and thereby making, I believe, a major contribution to feminist theory (Dahl, 1993).

In the following essay I will reflect upon and discuss the relevance of some sociological theorizing for Anna's theory. I will briefly discuss the relevance of theories of recognition, masculinity and post-modernity and investigations about leadership to Anna's idea of a hegemonic form of authority pervading gender relations. In short, I consider whether the concept is still applicable through a series of questions, or strategic interventions, if you like. The questions are intended as an invitation to dialogue. Although Anna deals with both care and erotic ecstasy in her theorising, I will mainly discuss care in a rather broad vein such as care in heterosexual relationships and care towards others. My perspective is upon gendered beings, but I will briefly discuss us as sexual beings in relation to discussions about a transformation of intimacy taking place.

Lack of Love Power=Misrecognition?

The concept of 'love power' has an intuitive appeal - it provocatively bridges concepts usually relegated to different fields: the private and the public (Meyer, 1991). It also disturbs our usual way of thinking about power as something negative, or as power over. Simultaneously 'love power'

plays on existing discourses of ‘women who love too much’ (and correspondingly of men who love ‘too little’). Anna’s contributions to feminist theory are related to bringing radical feminism back in and insisting upon contextualised, historical social and political theory.

In her thinking Anna returns to some of the insights of radical feminism and its focus on the emotional, the intangible and the non-economic, although paradoxically she bases her interpretations on historical materialism (Dahl, 1993). Building upon a matrix of exploitation she argues that there occurs a transfer of love power understood as socio-existential power from women to men in intimate *and* public places. Women’s love is alienated due to a lack of reciprocity in the exchange. Through love power men become endowed with a ‘surplus worthiness’ (Jonasdottir, 1991: 224) that gives them authority, which seems to be based upon their structural position as men (Dahl, 1993). Authority is legitimate power in contrast to influence.

Love power is an existential resource necessary for autonomy and independent action (Jonasdottir, 1991: 50, 99, 103). It’s about self-esteem and a gendered form of authority in heterosexual relations between men and women. It masks itself as generally human but is in fact, according to Anna, a form of hegemony (Jonasdottir, 1991: 224). One consequence of the exploitative love process is that women continuously: ‘...struggle on the boundaries of “poverty” in terms of their possibilities to operate in society as self-assured and self- evidently worthy people...’ (Jonasdottir, 1991: 222).

In light of recent theoretical developments I wonder whether Jonasdottir’s theory and especially her concept of authority could benefit from a meeting with normative theories of recognition. Nancy Fraser (1997; 2003a), a prominent American feminist political philosopher would consider women described by Anna as misrecognised. They lack respect, esteem and prestige/value. She would

consider these women as struggling to be seen and heard – struggling to become recognised as *‘full partners in social interaction’* (Fraser, 2000; 2003a). In Fraser’s view, misrecognition is rooted in socio-cultural patterns of representation, interpretation and communication. Women and/or femininely coded activities or characteristics are being rendered invisible via the authoritative representational practices of one’s culture,¹ being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations or being subject to patterns of communication that are alien to one’s own culture (2003: 13).² Fraser’s theory of recognition has an attention to two aspects, institutionalised patterns of misrecognition and struggles for recognition (Fraser, 2003a; Dahl, Stoltz and Willig, 2004)³. Fraser’s theory intends to identify both relatively stable aspects, i.e. the institutions of socio-cultural values, and the dynamic aspects, such as contemporary struggles for their transformation. Here Fraser’s general approach mixes the two traditions within Nordic feminist research: the power critical (gender system) as well as the empowerment aspect (dignity/agency) (Skjeie, 1999). Can new insights be gained and the idea of a gendered form of authority be developed in a dialogue with a contemporary feminist theory of recognition? Are the concepts of misrecognition and alienated love similar concepts? Are struggles about recognition similar to struggles for a more androgynous form of authority?

Moving beyond recognition of women as a group and an identification of the institutionalised obstacles for recognition, we need also to consider a diversity perspective. Hereby I refer to a perspective of intersectional where the intersection of different identities are analysed (Crenshaw; 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006) and applied to a meso level of theory with the lived experiences of

¹ Please compare Fraser’s notion of misrecognition with Kathleen B. Jones’ notion of an androcentric authority excluding female voices of authority based upon a genealogical reading of the classical fathers of political theory (Jones, 1987; 1993)

² Also the German social theorist Axel Honneth’s main concern is to identify the main social institutions creating misrecognition, but he also intends to specify the socio-psychological processes involved (1993).

³ Issues of recognition were originally seen as related to socio-economic issues of distribution through a perspectival perspectivism, but Fraser has redesigned her critical framework into a multi dimensional theory with an attention to: Redistribution, Recognition and Representation (Fraser, 2003b).

differently gendered subjects in a particular historical context. How do different groups of women fare? Bringing in a historical perspective, one wonders whether an increased differentiation between women has occurred. Have some women lost out in the quest for women's paradise? Has a differentiation between well-educated, white middle class women with financial independence and a group of women where gender and class (and possibly also ethnicity) intersects in detrimental ways taken place? Publicly employed care giving workers such as in elderly care have been the subjects of institutionalised patterns of misrecognition and disrespect, an effect of gendered discourses, a gender insensitive universalism and new discourses such as New Public Management (Dahl, 2004). Gender and class seem to intersect in detrimental ways where one group of women seem especially to lack recognition and authority to make their voices visible; this group seems to suffer from a limited access to the dominant form of authority.

Changes in Masculinity: A Trans-national Business Masculinity versus a Caring Model?

Anna insists upon the relevance of context. Her framework refers to the specific context of the contemporary Western societies, or more specifically, the Scandinavian countries as a basis for her theorising about dominance in formally/legally equal societies. The delimitation to the Scandinavian countries is seen indirectly in her definition of what constitutes the area of validity for her theory (Jonasdottir 1991: 11; Dahl, 1993). Here Anna is on the leading edge of what later became an argument for more contextual theory (Siim, 2004). One of the aims of her specific theory of contemporary patriarchy is to 'inform empirical studies' (Jonasdottir, 1991: 17) and one wonders if empirical studies on contemporary changes in masculinity can inform her theory?

Contemporary theorists such as the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell have argued that contemporary masculinities are plural, hierarchical, collective and dynamic (2005).⁴ With the emphasis upon new global forms of masculinity such as the *trans-national business masculinity* characterised by an increasing egocentrism, a declining sense of responsibility towards others and a 'growing tendency to commodify relations with women' (2005: 44) Connell seems rather pessimistic.⁵ The neo-liberal discourse on the political agenda with retrenchment, contracting-out and a new line of thinking (Dahl, 2005) in most Western states further seems to be 'closing down historic possibilities for gender reform,' enforcing and creating a standstill or even a backlash in certain Western countries (Connell, 2005). Such a global development in masculinity would also seem to reinforce a continued transfer of love power and the predominance of male authority disguised as a more general, human form.

The American, feminist philosopher Joan C. Tronto has coined a concept of *privileged irresponsibility* theorising the relationship between emotions and gendered obligations. Tronto argues that some persons (mostly men) are in a privileged power position not to care about particular others and their needs for care (1993: 146). One wonders whether questions of care and authority are related echoing a long discussion within feminist theory (Jones, 1993). Is a kind of privileged irresponsibility closely tied to the dominant form of authority? Can we transfer a concept generated in a different socio-economic context such as the US to the Scandinavian countries with different gender relations?⁶

⁴ However, she warns us that the instability of gender is not a permanent phenomenon in a critical comment to post-structuralism (2005: 45).

⁵ Other forms of masculinities such as a *new sensitive man* present within the urbane intelligentsia globally is mentioned by Connell, but doesn't seem to be *the* hegemonic form

⁶ In his earlier work Connell emphasized the importance of different spheres, and how different forms of masculinity are hegemonic in different context (Connell, 1987), e.g. abstract masculinity in university contexts. Summarising his former argument, he argued that differently structured fields enabled different kinds of masculinity. Such a focus upon the meso level is important if we want to link macro level changes and existing structures.

The Nordic region is characterised by a late modernisation and industrialization, a peripheral position, the development of the Nordic welfare state model and its 'passion for equality' (Holter, 2003; Hernes, 1987). This historical trajectory has had an impact on forms of masculinity and femininity prevalent that, comparatively speaking, are more androgynous than the rest of Europe (Holter, 2003: 23). In a survey of recent changes in the Nordic countries the Norwegian sociologist Øystein Gullvåg Holter argues that the 'companionate type of marriage has been strengthened' due to conservative forms of masculinity in decline (2003: 129). These changes occur simultaneously with a new form of masculinity: 'During recent decades, the Nordic region has displayed the significant beginning of a caring model of masculinity' (Holter, 2003: 25).

Despite this progress Holter identifies a sprinkler system that reproduces economic incentives to keep men out of care related activities in professional and private life. Similarly, in a recent study of heterosexual couples, their practices and discursive strategies concerning household work, the Swedish psychologist Eva Magnusson has shown that couples are differentiated neither according to educational levels (class) nor the number of children. Instead three kinds of rhetorical strategies are identified: unequal, in-between and equal couples (Magnusson, 2005: 161). Whereas the unequal couples often apply biological rationales and dual standards, the equal couples often refer to gender equality discourses and silence more traditionally gendered notions. The in-between couples are more divided and conflicting than the unequal couples, since they inhabit relatively unstable discursive positions (Magnusson, 2005: 157). Despite the emergence of new, more equal and caring forms of masculinity, more traditional forms of masculinity persist where women are denied authority and the ability to control the satisfaction of their needs, such as in the identified unequal couples in Magnusson's study.

This muddled picture is also found in recent Danish research revealing the dynamic and ambiguous character of contemporary masculinity, particularly in relation to fatherhood and care giving work (Hjort and Nielsen, 2003). Two Danish researchers argue that there has occurred a cultural revolution in men's relationship to care both professionally and in private life (Hjort and Nielsen, 2003: 12). Recent research has shown that masculinity is closely related to fatherhood and that a new understanding of *fatherhood* has been generated. This new understanding emphasises presence and attentiveness ('nærvær') towards the child/children (Mosegård, 2006). The interesting question becomes whether new discursive constructions of fatherhood also have an impact upon their relationship with their spouses? According to the Swedish sociologist Lisbeth Bekkengen (2003) this is not automatically the case. The new child centred masculinity forms the ideal of the good man stressing values such as the child's interest and the pleasures of having a child (2003: 189). On one hand the child centred conception works as a precondition for changes in the relations between dominant masculinity and femininity, and on the other is there is no direct relation between changes in masculinity and in heterosexual relations. Furthermore, a key question becomes whether relations are becoming more equal in the sense of a more reciprocal exchange of love power? Do women gain more authority as a result of sensitive fathers spending more time with their children and being more attentive towards their needs? Is there a struggle about masculinity at the moment? And if so, is the hegemonic model of masculinity attacked with potential consequences for the dominant model of authority?

Post-modernity: a Democratisation of heterosexual Relationships?

Changes in masculinity are often related to global changes or more specifically to the Nordic socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-politico heritage. The British sociologist Anthony Giddens,

however, points to the fact that these changes are also engineered by late modernity. Giddens (1992a, 1992b) has both identified major societal changes in late modernity *and* investigated the relationship between sexuality and love in heterosexual relations⁷. In late modernity individuals tend to become more focussed upon self-realization and reflexivity. Identity becomes a relatively open project continuously being reconstructed through an adjustment of the narratives of the past (Giddens, 1992a+b).

In his book *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992b) Giddens argues that the socio-sexual domain is the most dynamic place in society in agreement with Anna's more historic materialist analysis of the struggle about the conditions of love being a primary nexus of change (Jonasdottir, 1991; 2002). Whereas Giddens emphasises the negotiations taking place between equals (1992b), Anna remains committed to a structural analysis on the macro level (1991; 2002). Giddens argues that a democratisation has taken place in the private sphere in contrast to Anna's identification of gendered institutions reproducing a structured field in which the negotiations taking place.

According to Giddens, relationships are increasingly liberated from the needs of sexual reproduction which increasingly marks them as *pure* relationships: 'It refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, from what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another' (1992a: 58). Love becomes much more contingent than in earlier epochs, since it is no longer based upon a non reflexive norm or tradition. Love becomes dependent upon the continued experience of intimacy and friendship and relationships rely upon a continuous intimacy building confidence and love in a positive, self confirming circle. If his analysis is valid, does the prevalence of pure relationships grant women a different kind of

⁷ The latter based on a review of existing therapeutic literature, i.e. various self-help handbooks etc. supplemented with existing scientific literature such as the Hite report (Dahl, 1993b)

influence? Has it had an impact upon women's experience of authority? Giddens' presents a rather rosy picture of the extent of contemporary changes in heterosexual relationships, and he indirectly challenges Anna's theory through his idea of pure relationships, the new discourse on intimacy and the democratisation taking place. Are they competing understandings of the dynamics of present gender relations? And are their differences due to broader predispositions such as an optimistic versus a pessimistic perspective?

The Increased Importance of Emotions and a new Idea of Leadership

Changes occur both in intimate relations as described by Giddens and also in the public sphere, where we can identify a new discourse on emotions. Anna describes this discourse in the following way:

'In a relatively short time span a new conceptual language has been applied in the socio-economic sphere (and its discourses). A terminology of love has been woven into the already available terms of work and capital. 'Love', 'care', 'trust' and 'mutual recognition' have mixed and applied simultaneously with 'work', 'achievement orientation, 'money' and 'competition' (Jonasdottir, 2002: 28, my translation HMD).

Anna seems to refer to the market when she writes: '...the bosses in today's capitalist economies' (2002: 28, my translation HMD), but interestingly the new discourse is also dominant within the state as can be seen from Danish research (Andersen, 2001; Dahl 2005). New words like 'commitment' and 'emotional capital' are frequently used by state employers. Qualifications become coded in a new language of emotions and love⁸ and with modern forms of leadership stress increasingly the self-management of emotions (Andersen, 2001). This emotional discourse is related to a new idea of leadership where leadership is no longer hierarchical but leadership of oneself. The reformulated notion of leadership embodies self-engineering and self-motivation, where continuous development becomes a normative, self-referential obligation (Dahl, 2000). This

⁸ Love to be understood from a Luhman inspired analysis referring to a system of communication with love-non love as the key signifier.

circular, self-referential argument can be detected in a dominant mode of logic in contemporary discourses on leadership where the argument can be paraphrased to be: Development is good because development is good. Work has in a sense been sensitized, since soft qualifications are increasingly stressed (Bovbjerg, 2001).

However, we disagree in the identification of causes. Anna identifies a new intensified state of capitalism (and capitalist exploitation) due to increased global competition and the increased importance of services: ‘...the enhanced need for love in the production processes of capitalism is a decisive new condition of existence’ (2002: 29, my translation HMD). I am not sure that the causes are to be found in the so called material (neither in a narrow nor in a double sense) conditions exclusively. Based upon the analysis of the American sociologist Arlie R. Hochschild (1983) there occurs an enhanced management of the heart and this emotional management is likely to flourish due to the proliferation of service work. However, other factors such as new discourses are at play as well. Discourses are as effective as material circumstances changing our imaginaries. One of these factors is the new idea of leadership prevalent in Human Resource Management (HRM) that again forms part of the dominant New Public Management discourses (NPM).

Within the last two decades, New Public Management has become a dominant state strategy in Western countries and their public sectors; indeed it has spread throughout the OECD (Marcussen, 2002). NPM has spread from the intergovernmental level (OECD) to the national and local levels. It can generally be characterised as a rising body of managerial thought and as a change in culture, ideologies and practices introducing a focus on efficiency, leadership and change (Clarke and Newman, 1997).

This new hegemonic project of NPM (with elements of HRM) shapes the discursive struggles taking place in various policy fields. One interesting field is state regulated elderly care. My own case study has shown that the discourse on leadership engineering emotions is ambiguous for one of the recipients of this discourse: publicly employed home-helpers. It's both empowering and disempowering. The empowering aspect of this discourse relates to the increased attention to caregiver's' qualifications thereby enabling a struggle about professionalisation. And successful (elite) struggles for professionalization as we know from Weber result in increased autonomy and status in both socio-cultural and socio-economic terms. The aspect of disempowering relates to the increased disciplining of emotions through the discursive obligations, amongst others, established through the sentence: 'learn to develop yourself through your work' (Dahl and Kantola, 2005). An obligation to develop your knowledge, attitudes and personality that establishes a continuous self-reflective gaze aimed at improvement of qualifications that never ceases.

The discourse on emotions is ambiguous: enabling and disciplining at the same time. The particular outcome of this ambiguity depends amongst others upon struggles between various state agents and between different forms of knowledge. However, I also believe that this new discourse on leadership changes the terms of authority. The conditions of possibility are transformed, since a discourse stressing soft qualifications enables new, differently recognizable subject positions. Depending upon the outcome of contemporary struggles it could potentially enable new forms of authoritative behaviour to develop, or alternatively modifications in the hegemonic form of authority to occur. This does not imply that everything is free-floating, but that the field of gender relations in the public sphere (generally speaking) is undergoing restructuring, potentially enabling less unequal exchanges of love power. The key question is very much whether the changes are a new form of an androcentric authority or a new form of authority that is potentially; at least, open

towards the aspects of authority that have historically been excluded – excluded aspects that have been made visible by Jones (1993).

Conclusion

I have raised many questions; Perhaps too many questions? Within theories of gender systems there exists one important dividing line relating to the interpretation of changes (Walby, 1990) Are changes primarily about a change in form? Or, alternatively, are changes to be interpreted as reduced exploitation or decreasing oppression? Thinking through locations such as suggested by American philosopher Donna Haraway (1984), I belong to the latter category with its focus upon power. Both the socio-democratic welfare state, often represented as the potentially women-friendly welfare state, and socio-cultural changes of masculinity as well as the increasing prevalence of pure/companionate forms of relationships have implied progress for women both historically and comparatively. This, however, does not imply that we have in fact achieved a gender neutral society defined as a society, to paraphrase American political scientist Harold Laswell, where ‘who gets, what, when and how’ is not related to gender. As I have pointed out elsewhere detrimental intersections between gender and class are still strong (Dahl, 2004).

Despite the progress, new forms of suppression seem to arise. Anna pinpoints the increased use of emotional terms in the public sphere where emotions become engineered through the prevalence of HRM. This increasing importance (and disciplining) of emotions seems to present both new openings in terms of a redefinition of leadership paving new avenues for femininely coded persons, while at the same time reproducing and creating new forms of suppression for employees in the care giving sector.

More questions could be raised such as the spread of pornography into mainstream movies and advertising, and I am sure that we would have long and lively discussions. We are unlikely to agree on all issues, especially on the usefulness of post-structuralism for feminist theory. Anna's theoretical framework continues to inspire and haunt me, and was one of the main inspirations (along with Foucault and feminist theories of care) in my desire to analyse discourses on state provided care in my PhD.

I very much appreciate Anna's provocative and novel way of thinking going against the currents, and especially I want to thank her for openness to discuss ideas with me when I was a young MA student back in the beginning of the 1990s. Her openness towards other theoretical perspectives is another fine personal qualification that marks a great intellectual!

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