

Work in progress

**The Post-Social Democratic Condition:
Feminist Activism in Sweden and Germany**

by

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The backdrop of this study is the shift from a social democratic state to a neoliberal one. In civil society, the distinction between the two lies in the extent of personal freedom, including sexual and reproductive rights, and whether interpersonal engagements are marked by commercialization and inequality or by mutuality and equality.¹ Antonio Gramsci makes an analytical distinction between civil and political society. The former is made up of organizations such as schools, families and cultural institutions, while the latter manifests itself in state institutions, such as the army, the police and state administration all of whose roles are based on executing direct power.² Civil society in Gramsci's writing is sometimes for the state, other times against the state. Feminist activism in Sweden does both, sometimes aiding the state and sometimes opposing it, while the German feminist tradition is more autonomous, historically not working in tandem with the German state.

Scholars who have summarized the era of postmodernism have pointed to the 9/11 attacks in 2001 as the symbolic date for the main change in both theory and politics.³ Aggressively neoliberal, right-wing economic politics, 'the so-called war against terrorism,' climate change, increasing global inequality, poverty, and a lack of social justice have been credited for the

¹ Sylvia Walby (2009) *Globalization & Inequalities. Complexity and Contested Modernities*, London: Sage, p. 279.

² Antonio Gramsci (1992 – ongoing) *The Prison Notebooks*, New York: Columbia University Press.

³ Perry Anderson (1998) *The Origins of Postmodernity*, London: Verso; Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003), London: Allen Lane, 2003; Francois Cusset (2008) *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Colin Davis (2004) *After Poststructuralism: Reading, Stories, and Theory*, London & New York: Routledge; Gary Hill and Clare Birchall (eds., 2007) *New Cultural Studies*, The University of Georgia Press; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Durham: Duke University Press.

resurgence of Marxist theory and class issues in both critical theory and feminist activism. The post-political ‘third way thinking’ beyond the left and right is dismissed in Chantal Mouffe’s *On the Political* (2005), where she argues for visible conflicts and passionate politics stressing the importance of creating forms of anti-essentialist collective identification around democratic objectives.⁴

The title of this study, *The Post-Social-Democratic Condition*, alludes to Jean-Francois Lyotard’s influential *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (1979), where he defined the postmodern condition as the death of the grand narratives, the religious, metaphysical, or ideological systems explaining life as a whole, such as Christianity, Hegelianism, Marxism, or structuralism, which he claims are no longer valid. Masterminds like Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Heidegger had long dominated the intellectual debate in France. Lyotard challenged them by proclaiming a new form of paganism, embodying a secular approach to society.⁵

The grand narratives were replaced by partial, fragmentary, subjective and provisional ‘truths’. Those grand narratives of the science, Enlightenment and the modern scientific era simply collapsed. Modernism as a dream of linear progress and human emancipation was replaced by the postmodern condition of multiple individual approaches, no longer united by meta-narratives into a universal social movement. Lyotard placed the conflict, a disagreement that did not strive towards consensus, at the center of his theoretical agenda. Postmodernism emerged as a new and more radical form of pluralism. Lyotard’s path from Marxism to Post-Marxism is characteristic of the French intellectual circles 1970s and 1980s. The grand narratives, which he says had lost their relevance, concerned Marxism in particular, but from our historical distance they have an unmistakable post-Marxist character.

Although unintended, Lyotard’s ideas fit remarkably well into the neo-liberal way of thinking that had its breakthrough in European politics. But the story did not end there. Neoliberal policies of the 1990s and 2000s, the political swing to the right, global social inequalities, and increasing poverty contributed to it and the return of the class concept. After 1989, Third Way politics, initiated by the ex-labor leader Tony Blair, and even cherished in his day by Göran Persson (former chairman of the Social Democratic Party in Sweden) the social democrats missed their chance to promote social-democratic politics and turned toward neoliberalism.

Today activist groups and social movements are engaged around feminism, anti-racism, queer politics, human rights, and environmental issues, but none of them individually have much

⁴ Chantal Mouffe (2005) *On the Political*, London & New York: Routledge.

⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, Paris: Édition de minuit.

power. Their challenge is to create ever-greater political coalitions. The French socialist Stéphane Hessel, who in his 2010 manifesto *Indignez-vous!* denounces political indifference, asserts that a good governance and democracy in our educational institutions and in our daily lives should support and encourage cultural activities.⁶ This is central to the active citizenship upon which civil society is founded. Hessel says that the worst attitude one can assume is to say, "I cannot do anything about it. I have my own business to manage." Hessel, a survivor of Buchenwald and several wars in Europe, encourages a hopeful attitude and a peaceful revolt, perhaps best summed up as militant optimism, as Ernst Bloch once defined it. This stance offers us other options than consumerism, contempt for the arts, *Bildung*, and hate for the most vulnerable groups in society. It counteracts a social system where everyone competes with everyone else. The slogan 'to create is to resist, to resist is to create,' concludes Hessel's manifesto.

Identified challenges for contemporary feminism

The failed 'multi-culti project' as declared by Angel Merkel's October 2010 speech "Multikulti ist absolut gescheitert" [Multiculti has absolutely failed] is one of the major turning points in contemporary European history. As the chancellor of Germany and the chairwoman of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Merkel is one of the most influential politicians in the European Union. Therefore, her speech brought a legitimized xenophobia at a high political level to the foreground. The following challenges for contemporary feminist activism in Germany and Sweden with regard to racism and xenophobia may be identified:

- right wing populism: the co-opting of feminist vocabulary by xenophobic forces
- post-political choices and difficulty in prioritizing policy
- neoliberal flirtation(s): liberal (consumerist) feminism versus anti-capitalism
- tense relationships with the labor movement, social democracy in particular
- identity politics, intersectionality and multi-solidarity

The Post-Social Democratic Condition

Nowadays Sweden has given up the Swedish model of a social democratic welfare state. The

⁶ Stéphane Hessel (2010) *Indignez-vous*, Montpellier: Indigène.

murder of Olof Palme in 1986 was a clear watershed in contemporary Swedish history. This brutal act, the confused police investigation that followed, the various conspiracy theories that appeared in the media, and the capture of a murder suspect who was later released, created a national trauma that never entirely healed. Something happened to confidence across the nation. The interest in the person of Olof Palme has recently resurfaced in a number of biographies, in theatre director Carolina Frände's collage performance *Palme* (2009) at the Uppsala City Theatre.⁷ It seems not only to express nostalgia for Palme as an individual, but also mourns the loss of vision of a social democratic nation.

Lo Kauppi, a feminist performer is grateful for her upbringing in the social democratic Sweden. Her performance *Bergsprängardottern som exploderade* [The Rock-Blaster's Daughter who Exploded] was one of the most successful shows of the 2004-2005 season. In it she delivered a naked, powerful, and candid account of her life and class origins, giving her audience both social reportage and the energy to keep going. Her upbringing took place in a working-class environment in a family of addicts, where, she says, they used to argue about who was the sickest. This was followed by years of drug abuse and other social problems. "I'm incredibly grateful that I grew up in Olof Palme's Sweden. It doesn't matter what the Conservatives say. I would never have survived in a more competitive society," she concludes, thanking Sweden's social democratic society for her life.⁸

The Swedish journalist and author Göran Greider emphasizes Palme's dominant notion of democratic socialism and the need for the systematic social criticism he represented. Greider writes:

Those who drill down into Olof Palme's political action agenda discover a radical heritage that official history has often repressed, the Marxist left has rarely understood and conservatives would rather not hear about - because his was, after all, the case of a democratically governed and well-regulated socialism [...] Democratic socialism is not just a fancy garment one puts on for special occasions, but practical work clothing suited to a society with a large public sector. When this progressive reform socialist tradition is made known it broadens the political field dramatically.

⁷ Henrik Berggren (2010) *Underbara dagar framför oss. En biografi över Olof Palme*, Stockholm: Norstedts; Kjell Östberg (2008) *I takt med tiden: Olof Palme 1927-1969*, Stockholm: Leopard; Kjell Östberg (2009) *När vinden vände: Olof Palme 1969-1986*, Stockholm: Leopard. Göran Greider (2011) *Ingen kommer undan Olof Palme*, Stockholm: Ordfront is following on Göran Greider (2010) *Det måste finnas en väg ut ur det här samhället*, Stockholm: Ordfront.

⁸ Tiina Rosenberg (2012) "Solidarity Lost and Found: Reflections on Contemporary Feminist Performance", in Anja Klöck (ed.), *The Politics of Being on Stage*, Hildesheim: Olms Verlag (forthcoming).

Those who try to make Olof Palme out to be a lofty statesman do not want to deal with the legacy of democratic socialism, because it still remains deeply controversial, even for social democracy itself, which has long celebrated the internationalist Palme more than the democratic socialist.⁹

Greider points out Palme's ideological position at a time when he is most remembered as a statesman. Instead of highlighting an important individual Greider shows democratic socialism to be the basis of Palme's vision of social democracy. Göran Persson officially abandoned socialism in 2006 in prime time on Swedish Public Television. He explained that the word socialism implied false associations with fools who were 'Communists and National Socialists'. Therefore, he declared, the word socialism was a useless political term for him. That was a deathblow to Palme's vision of a democratic socialism, and the question is whether the Social Democrats continued to be social(ist) democrats at all.

The main characteristic of the post-social democratic condition is the so-called capitalist realism, the feeling that there exists no alternative to capitalism. There have been many theories about why the Left has lost political ground, especially with regard to structural changes in the traditional manufacturing sector and the emergence of a growing middle class. However, the Marxist theorist Terry Eagleton explains it differently writing that it is not likely most leftists changed their views of the system between the 1970s and 1980s because there simply were fewer textile industries around. What prompted them to dump Marxism with their sideburns and headbands was a conviction that the regime they faced was simply too difficult to shatter. They had no illusions about capitalism, but were disillusioned as to the possibility of changing it in a decisive way. Many former socialists explained away their gloom by claiming that the system could not be changed. It was this lack of belief in an alternative that proved decisive. As the labor movement had become so battered and the political left so heavily pushed back, all prospects for the future seemed to have disappeared without a trace.¹⁰

More than anything else, a feeling of powerlessness and political impotence characterizes the post-social democratic condition. The social democrats have moved further and further rightward in the 1990s and the 2000s and Göran Persson's explicit repudiation of socialism confirmed what was already obvious. The social democrats had lost both their history and identity. Since the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the Swedish social democrats embarked on the

⁹ Göran Greider (2011) *Ingen kommer undan Olof Palme*, Stockholm: Ordfront, pp. 136-137. Translation mine.

¹⁰ Eagleton (2011), s. 16-17; see further Mark Fisher (2009) *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, London: Zero Books ; David Harvey (2006) *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*, Verso; David Harvey (2010) *The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis of Capitalism*, Oxford University Press.

Third Way was inspired by Tony Blair's program for New Labour. Instead of defending democratic socialism the social democrats chose a neo-liberal path that led straight to the post-social democratic condition we now find ourselves in. This made it easy for the conservatives to sharpen their rhetoric and create their version of Swedish history. The new narrative of the Swedish welfare state was born and we are still waiting for countermeasures from the social democrats. The crucial question remains: how was it possible for this major ideological shift not to have been better articulated and strongly criticized by contemporary social democrats in Sweden?¹¹

Contemporary Right-Wing Populism in Europe

René Cuperus, who works for the Wiardi Beckman Foundation and is connected to the Dutch social-democratic party (Partij van de Arbeid), the Dutch Labor Party has summarized right-wing populism in Europe as follows:

- Right-wing populism replaces the old conflict between the political Left and Right with a new conflict between the "establishment" and the "people";
- right-wing populism is a revolt against the so-called second modernity, based on individualization, the abandonment of traditions, cosmopolitanism, neo-liberal capitalism and the global network society;
- right-wing populism is the revolt of the working class and lower middle-class against the dominance of academics in society and public debate;
- right-wing populism is the revenge of the working class in a postsocialist and post-social-democratic societies where the neoliberal downsizing of the welfare state has taken place;
- right-wing populism is a dangerous, xenophobic revolt against poorly managed migration policies on a large scale;
- right-wing populism is a revolt against a world that is changing too rapidly, and where traditions, identities and social security are no longer a priority
- right-wing populism is a romantic, irrational, emotional revolt against inhuman governmentality which controls both the market and the state;
- where socialism and Christianity no longer slow down the globalization process, populism fills the empty space;

¹¹ Nora Hämäläinen (2011) "Palme för samtiden" [Palme for the Contemporary], *Ny Tid*, nr. 11, p. 10.

- right-wing populism is a rebellion against the ruling political class, unable to control globalization, financial markets and the technocratic logic of the European Union.¹²

A Case Study anno 2010: Alice Schwarzer

In 2010 Alice Schwarzer, one of Germany's most prominent feminists, published a book about Islam threatening German society. It was not the only book written on that topic, but since the author was such a well-known feminist, the case is of special interest. Schwarzer's book *Die grosse Verschleierung - für Integration, gegen Islamismus* [The Grand Veiling: For Integration, Against Islamism].¹³ On the cover is a silhouetted outline of a faceless black shadow, a woman in a headscarf. Schwarzer has been the chief editor of *Emma*, Germany's largest feminist magazine, where the articles collected in this book were previously published. She was not the only one who has debated integration in Germany for the last thirty years. The social democrat Thilo Sarrazin, author of the (in my opinion a racist book) *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* [Germany abolishes itself: How We Put Our Country at Risk] and the judge Kirsten Heisig, author of *Das Ende der Geduld: Konsequenz gegen jugendliche Gewalttäter* [End of Patience: Consistently Against Juvenile Perpetrators of Violence] have also discussed the failed 'multi-culti-politics'.¹⁴ Even the lavish coffee-table book that was released on the magazine *Emma*'s thirtieth anniversary in 2007 had articles on this theme.

Die grosse Verschleierung opens dramatically with a chapter on fanaticism that argues it is no longer possible to ignore the Islamic crusaders who are now among us. Their flag is the veil, the visible sign of the oppression of women. The contents of *Die grosse Verschleierung* include chapters following the same theme such as 'Will Germany become Islamist?' 'European Union and the Turks', 'Democracy or God's Government?' 'Bullying Girls without Veils', 'There Is Only One Civilization' and 'The Veil Ban Is a Success'. The book addresses the issue of honor killings, forced marriages, gang rapes, and girls who have been taken out of sexual education and swimming classes in schools. Above all, it shows an almost obsessive concern with the veiling issue, die grosse Verschleierung.

¹² Erica Meijers (2011) *Populism in Europe*, Wien: Planet Verlag.

¹³ Alice Schwarzer (2010) *Die grosse Verschleierung - für Integration, gegen Islamismus* [The Grand Veiling: For Integration, Against Islamism], Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witzsch; AnnaMaria Larsson (2011) "Vän eller fiende?" [Friend or Enemy?], in *Bang*, nr.4, pp. 58-59.

¹⁴ Kirsten Heisig (2010) *Das Ende der Geduld: Konsequenz gegen jugendliche Gewalttäter*, Freiburg: Herder; Thilo Sarrazin (2010) *Deutschland schafft the ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*, München: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt.

The veil for Schwarzer is a deliberately provocative, political symbol, totally incompatible with anything but an oppressed woman, Islamism and the visibility of a clear enemy. The book's denunciation of 'multiculti huggers' and its image of the author as one of the few citizens who have 'seen and understood' the true state of things threatening the nation did not go unchallenged. Other feminist newspapers, as the more pop feminist *Missy Magazine*, the leftist *Wir Frauen* [We women] and the intercultural *Gazelle*, spoke out forcefully. Many of Germany's prestigious publications, such as *Die Zeit*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *Der Spiegel*, also criticized Schwarzer. Christian bishops called for dialogue and tolerance, Muslim men and women came forward and spoke of their realities, and scholars from various academic disciplines countered with substantive research on Islam.

Aside from the shock created, one wonders why these dogmatic and often purely racist views come from a leading European feminist. Connections between Germany and Nazism were made by the media, as well as with European right-wing populist racism and fear of Islam. In fact, Schwarzer has been at war with Islam since the 1980s. She can be seen as the product of German political culture of certain generation(s) with a volatile past. The now 70-year-old Schwarzer came from a wounded West German post-war generation, which produced both the Baader-Meinhof urban guerillas and a society where women's place continued to be built on the slogans of Kinder, Küche, and Kirche. The movements of the late 1960s rebelled against their parents' generation of Nazis, but at the same time lived in the polarized world of the Cold War where the rhetoric consisted of the binaries friend-enemy, East-West, and communism-capitalism.

Germany is still a country where ideological debates are more prominent than in the more pragmatic Sweden. Harsh words and dogmatic statements are common to all German political factions. To mention one example, there is a large conservative population, a strong Catholic minority and the Christian Democratic Party today being the largest, groups with a well-established place in the public sphere. This creates a climate in which consensus (a key word for anything Swedish) and dialogue between different political groups is more difficult. In a country with 82 million inhabitants, one can always find enough people of one's own kind to speak with so there is no real need to talk to others.

At the same time with the debates on *Die grosse Verschleierung* there was (and still is) a struggle going on between the different generations of feminists. The younger groups feel ignored. Feminism in Germany is today marginalized and segregated, and almost homogeneously white with a clear middle-class perspective, and is often perceived as being dogmatic. The group around Alice Schwarzer and the magazine *Emma* symbolizes that space.

One wonders if it is healthy for a movement to have the same self-appointed spokesperson for over 30 years. Why does she refuse to listen to other perspectives? Whom does she actually win over with her racist rhetoric? Nevertheless, Schwarzer has survived thirty years of German politics and is respected by many.

The author and founder of the magazine *Gazelle*, journalist Sineb El-Masrar, a Muslim, was among those who sent open letters to Schwarzer.¹⁵ El-Masrar thanked Schwarzer's efforts on behalf of women's issues and rights, but asked for respect and solidarity that went beyond the white feminist frameworks. El Masrar pointed out that she neither wanted her politics of representation to be performed by men, nor by a white middle-class feminist. El-Masrar accused Schwarzer for contributing to cultural racism in splitting people in an "us versus them", something that made life difficult for Germans with a Muslim background.

In an interview with Melanie Stutz, the editor of the leftist feminist journal *Wir Frauen*, El-Masrar, discussed the case of Schwarzer ('der Fall Schwarzer') and Islamophobia. El-Masrar claimed that Schwarzer seemed to be marketing her own brand with its Islamophobic message to a male-dominated 'Öffentlichkeit' (public-at-large) already saturated by Islamophobia. She viewed that Schwarzer as seeking affirmation and wanting to make money by any means possible even if she did so at the expense of the Muslims. El-Masrar saw parallels between the current debate on Islam in Europe and the one that was on Jews in the 1930s and during World War II. Both religions have been accused of having a secret agenda as a part of a worldwide conspiracy for domination and oppression of others.

The most heated debates are now over, but Schwarzer continues her crusade against Islam from her pulpit at the journal *Emma*. Those who seek an open, respectful intersectional dialogue find it hard to reach Schwarzer. The younger feminist generation, especially the activists, ask themselves if it is not best to simply wait until she retires. Perhaps then they can form a more pluralistic movement that has not simply sprung from black-and-white Cold-War rhetoric that has been such an important part of West German nation building.

Intersectionality

In the 1980s and 1990s, post-structuralist theoreticians began to challenge the dichotomies and categories that had been applied fairly indiscriminately in studies of power relationships and the exercise of power up until that time. The focus switched from material to cultural analyses, and to studies of various forms of normative power and counter-power. In the 1990s, post-

¹⁵ Stephanie Lehner, "Ein 'Muslim-Girl' bekämpft Klischees", *Die Presse.com*, 2012-01-01.

colonial and queer studies emerged more strongly, highlighting the importance of language in the exercise of power. Meanwhile, class and gender, key concepts in Marxist and feminist studies, continued to play essential roles in social and humanistic research. Since studies normally focused on one analytical category at a time, the intersectional perspective came into play in the 1990s as a means of analyzing how power relationships are interwoven.

Since that time, the intersectional perspective has become a debated and, at least in theory, a popular concept in Swedish gender research. As a theoretical term, intersectionality is both a unifying (from the Latin *inter*, ‘between, linking’) and a divisive term (Lat. *sectio*, ‘cut’). To examine inequality of the vast field of race-related, class-based and sexuality-orientated gender studies requires a sound knowledge in what is specific to these areas of research. Since skills in individual fields of research are rarely attained overnight, scholars of gender studies in Sweden have been skeptical of the intersectional approach as an “and-so on-perspective”.¹⁶ In an additive approach of this kind, a number of aspects of a phenomenon are listed without performing a deeper analysis of any of them. Concern has been raised among feminist researchers that women would once again be marginalized if all conceivable categories were mixed, although it is also a feminist axiom that social and cultural phenomena rarely act autonomously but always interact with each other.

As I see it, the intersectional approach has developed in opposition to the prevailing normative and hegemonic positions. Its critical edge has been aimed not only at society and research but has also involved an internal feminist critique. The gender scholar Nina Lykke has proposed an intersectional analysis based on adhering to the gender axis, selecting the most relevant sections, and explaining any exclusion. The point of Lykke’s intersectional analysis is to demonstrate how different power axes interact and construct one another. Consequently, it is never sufficient to simply add different power asymmetries to one another. However, Lykke does not define how many, or which, sections should be included, but considers that this should be determined by the analysis and the research material.¹⁷

The idea of different, interacting social and cultural factors in studies of inequality has long been present in feminist history of ideas. Lykke maintains that an intersectional approach, as the term was explicitly defined in the 1990s already existed in feminist theory. However, the

¹⁶ Nina Lykke (2005) “Nya perspektiv på intersektionalitet. Problem och möjligheter” [New Perspectives on Intersectionality], in: *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* 2-3, pp. 9-10.

¹⁷ Nina Lykke (2003) “Intersektionalitet – ett användbart begrepp för genusforskningen” [Intersectionality: A Useful Term for Gender Studies], *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, no. 1, pp. 47-56; Nina Lykke (2005) “Nya perspektiv på intersektionalitet. Problem och möjligheter” [New Perspectives on Intersectionality: Problems and Possibilities], in: *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* 2-3, pp. 7-17.

intersectional approach lacked the hub that a common term could have provided.¹⁸ Lykke traces the origins of intersectionality back to the nineteenth century women's movements and their connection with the anti-slavery sentiments that led to a focus on the relationship between gender and race. She points out that the nineteenth and twentieth century socialist women's movements consistently emphasized the interrelationship between class and gender as key categories of political and theoretical analysis. Lykke calls this broader intersectional tendency an implicit theorizing of intersectionalities, referring to such tendencies as feminist Marxism, post-colonial feminism, various aspects of psychoanalytical feminism, queer feminism, and feminist studies of youth cultures, all of which thematized intersectional thinking in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁹

Invisible whiteness

The roots of the concept of intersectionality can be sought in anti-racist feminism. Kimberlé Crenshaw's classic essay on intersectionality, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour" (1995), brings the discussion back to racified structures and the discrimination they cause.²⁰ In North American debate, intersectionality has become a signifier for race, while in Europe the debate has taken another direction in which the focus on racial discrimination is not always as distinct.

The complexities of the fight against colonialism and the effects of imperialism predate the notion of post-colonial. The term was coined in the 1970s to signify literature in English produced outside the UK. The women who were drawn to the anti-racist movement and black feminism in the early days are therefore central to the emergence of intersectionality. Classic texts such as *All the Women are White. All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave* (1982) and Angela Davis's *Women, Race, and Class* (1981) with their explicit intersectional perspectives, were some of the first challenges to hegemonic white feminism. Thanks to this protest and the unrelenting efforts that lay behind, gender, ethnicity, class, and even sexuality, have at least occasionally been combined on a theoretical and historic level, rather than being pursued as only a single aspect as before. Of course, there have always been scholars, theorists, and activists who have analyzed several aspects simultaneously, but they are exceptions. The reason intersectionality has been resisted within feminist theory and politics is

¹⁸ Lykke, (2005), p. 9.

¹⁹ Lykke, (2005), p. 9.

²⁰ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1995) "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", in K. Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory. The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, New York: The New Press, pp. 357-383.

that its perspective engenders many complicated and often disturbing questions that, nevertheless, need to be asked and debated.

According to the post-colonial scholars Paulina de los Reyes and Diana Mulinari, hegemonic feminism in Sweden implicitly and explicitly ties the formulation of femininity to the Swedish nation, thereby constructing Swedishness as a privileged position. Thus, it is no coincidence that post-colonial voices have been central in introducing the concept of intersectionality in Sweden. Feminist hegemonic discourses, according to de los Reyes and Mulinari, are characterized as in any other discourses on power not only by what is said, but also by what remains unsaid and unexpressed as part of the feminist field.²¹ The analysis of Sweden's position in the world order with regard to gender equality is based on the victories of a specific group of women, particularly Western middle-class women. What do these victories entail in relation to other groups of women. De los Reyes and Mulinari ask what these victories entail in relation to other groups of women who are excluded from their benefits and live in perpetual and deepened exploitation.²² They see a connection from an intersectional perspective between the privileged position of some women and the exclusions of feminist strategies.²³

The anti-racist perspective in feminist politics and critical race studies in research are crucial to the understanding of marginalization on grounds of colour or ethnicity. De los Reyes and Mulinari are more specific in the selection of categories for their intersectional analysis: gender, ethnicity, class, and occasionally also sexuality. They recommend analyses based on gender perspectives always be complemented with power and inequality analyses based on race, ethnicity, class and national boundaries. Hegemonic Swedish feminism must, therefore, differentiate its analytical concepts in order to understand how different power regimes interact and enhance one another.²⁴

Since intersectional criticism was formulated in feminism's non-white margins, it has occasionally been disregarded as a minority perspective that redundant obstructs the women's movement in feminist politics and obscures gender studies. The marginalization of critical voices in feminism is an unfortunate phenomenon, but has led to a mobilization among feminist 'minorities' including anti-racist and post-colonial feminist theorists, queer feminists, feminists focusing on age, class, and disabilities. Intersectionally orientated feminist theory

²¹ Paulina de los Reyes & Diana Mulinari (2005) *Intersektionalitet: Kritiska reflektioner över (o)jämlighetens landskap* [Intersectionality: Critical Reflections on the Landscape of (In)Equality], Malmö: Liber, p. 83.

²² de los Reyes & Mulinari, (2005), p. 84.

²³ de los Reyes & Mulinari, (2005), p. 84.

²⁴ de los Reyes & Mulinari, (2005), pp. 7-13.

has become a meeting point for the former feminist minorities that have now grown strong and influential.²⁵

Queer theory

Post-colonial theory has a great deal in common with queer theory. Both have their roots in the human rights movements; the former in the civil rights, anti-colonial and contemporary anti-racist movements; the latter in the lesbian and gay movements and queer activism. With their definition of intersectionality, de los Reyes and Mulinari seek to move on from the identity-oriented political movements to a more radical and non-existentialist analysis of structures of inequality, with a focus on non-normative sexualities and non-normative sex/gender.

Queer theory is neither a homogeneous nor systematic school of thought, but a mixture of studies that focus critically on heteronormativity, i.e., those institutions, structures, relations, and acts that support heterosexuality as a consistent, natural, and all-embracing primordial sexuality. Queer theory bases itself on the theoretical discussions within lesbian feminist theory and gay studies relating to the dominant and normative position of heterosexuality in Western society.²⁶

During the early days of queer theory, in the 1990s, thinkers shared had a common base in textual analysis and the interpretation of visual culture and politics, and most had their starting point in women's studies, feminist theory, and lesbian and gay studies. The relationship between queer theory, lesbian and gay studies was initially a bit fraught. In its introductory phase queer theory was accompanied by much euphoria since it was thought that old structures would now be demolished. However, in the 1990s and increasingly in the 2000s it has become clear that the structural imbalance between heterosexuality and homosexuality cannot be easily abolished despite the enthusiasm and energy that characterized the early phase.²⁷

Like feminist studies, queer studies have applied an implicitly intersectional approach to gender variation and non-heterosexual practices, and other possible aspects, such as ethnicity, class and also disabilities have also begun to be acknowledged. In addition, an intra-

²⁵ Nira Yuval-Davis (2005) "Gender mainstreaming och intersektionalitet" [Gender Mainstreaming and Intersectionality], *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, nr. 2-3, p. 21.

²⁶ The year 1990 marked the reintroduction of the word queer. It was when Queer Nation distributed its manifesto 'Queers Bash Back', Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble* and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick published *Epistemology of the Closet*. It was Teresa de Lauretis, however, who launched the theoretic term queer in 1990 at a conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The queer word was first discussed in 1991 in the feminist journal *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, a special edition of papers presented at the conference. The historian George Chauncey discusses the use of the word queer in the early twentieth century in *The Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*, New York: Basic Books, 1994.

²⁷ Rosenberg (2002), pp. 13-14.

categorical problem has become increasingly apparent during the queer 1990s and early 2000s. Just as for many years a gender perspective was missing in gay studies, a queer perspective was similarly lacking in gender studies. One could also question the utility of studying lesbians, gay men and transgender people as a single group, since these categories show significant differences in their composition. Queer scholar Judith Halberstam points with regard to queer historiography and queer biographies that it is pointless to study lesbians and homosexual men as a group. Although similarities exist, their histories are different in many respects. Similarities can be found in gender variations among queer people, but again Halberstam claims that their respective histories are different.²⁸

A central aspect of queer studies is that they did not focus simply on heteronormativity, but, like post-colonial studies, also maintained a tradition from lesbian and gay studies of supporting continued research in the field of LGBTQI. However, the gay male norm in this field of research has often been criticized, and Halberstam poses the intriguing question of whether emerging interdisciplinary work in the gender field will also enrich queer studies.²⁹

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is used as a concept to analyze the structural privileges associated with heterosexuality. The term has come to replace Adrienne Rich's concept of compulsory heterosexuality, Monique Wittig's heterosexual contract and, to some extent, Judith Butler's heterosexual matrix. Heteronormativity owes its established status to queer theory, which has been through numerous and often-vicious discussions on the meaning of the word queer. In Sweden today, the word queer has three principal meanings. First, it serves as an umbrella term for the LGBTQI group and the studies that focus on it. Second, it is as an expression for a militant form of LGBTQI activism, also known as queer activism with its uncompromising in-your-face attitude. Third, queer represents a political and theoretical critique of heteronormativity.³⁰

The sociologist Steven Seidman finds that Rich's term compulsory heterosexuality differs historically from the more modern concept of heteronormativity. He claims that it is no longer possible in the West, as it was in the 1980s, to speak of compulsory sexuality having direct repercussions in the form of criminalization or pathologization. Seidman believes that we have

²⁸ Judith Halberstam (2005) *Queer Studies, A Companion to Gender Studies*, in Philomena Essed, David Theo Goldberg & Audrey Kobayashi (eds.), Blackwell, pp. 62-70.

²⁹ Halberstam (2005), pp. 62-70.

³⁰ Rosenberg (2006), p. 17.

moved from compulsory heterosexuality to an era of institutionalized norms, although this is not to say that heteronormativity has ceased to exist.³¹ However, the Finnish gender scholar Leena-Maija Rossi, in a review of the etymology and history of the concept of heteronormativity, states that the norm and the concept are still associated with laws and sanctions, and thus remains linked to existing asymmetries in power between hetero- and homosexuality.³²

The critique of heteronormativity is the most central and useful theoretical aspect of queer theory.³³ There are great similarities in the theoretical use of the concepts whiteness and heteronormativity.³⁴ Both terms critique and analyze hegemonic structures and discuss issues such as minoritizing, identities, power, repression, inclusion and exclusion. Here the concept of minoritizing is of great interest for both queer and whiteness studies. Taking a long view the minoritizing attitude to homosexuality confirms heteronormativity, since it paradoxically presupposes heterosexuality. However, this does not imply that non-straight identities are without meaning. But if homosexuality is regarded as an integral part of heteronormativity, which defines heterosexuality as normal, it becomes more obvious why claims of a non-heteronormative identity as a category of equal value do not fundamentally challenge the heteronormative order. In this respect queer theory is relevant, but many scholars and activists have also pondered whether queer theory is adequate in analyzing power and repression. Identities may be a social construct, but this does not make them less real or necessary in the prevailing political and social reality. Still over time, striving for social justice might benefit from the anti-assimilationist and anti-separatist approach of queer theory.³⁵

³¹ Leena-Maija Rossi (2006) "Heteronormatiivisuus. Käsitteen elämää ja kummanstelua" [Heteronormativity: The Life and Wonders of a Term], *Kulttuurintutkimus* (Cultural Studies), special issue on sexuality, nr. 23: 3, p.21; Rossi refers to Steven Seidman's lecture "Heteronormativity and Queer Theory" at the conference *Hetero Factory* in Norrköping, Sweden 15.6. 2006.

³² Rossi (2006), p. 21.

³³ The term heteronormativity was established as a theoretical concept in gender-orientated feminist and queer studies in the 1990s. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler had previously used terms such as heterosexism (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, pp. 30-32) and heterosexual matrix (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 151: footnote 6) or heterosexual hegemony (Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 4-12). Monique Wittig writing in the 1980s, referred to a heterosexual contract (Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind*, pp. 40-43), while Adrienne Rich launched the term compulsory heterosexuality (Adrienne Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, *Signs* no. 5/1980). The first use of the term heteronormativity is usually attributed to Michael Warner in his introduction to the anthology *Fear of a Queer Planet* (pp. vii-xxx). Warner had discussed similar issues in an article entitled "Fear of a Queer Planet" in *Social Text* no. 29/1991. Another early reference to the term heteronormativity is found in Chris Brickell, who quotes a 1992 article by Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, "Putting the Heterosexual Order in Crisis" (*Mediations*, 16 [2], pp. 17-23). In the anthology *Fear of a Queer Planet*, the concept of heteronormativity was also used by Steven Seidman (p. 130), and Diane Richardson discussed the notion in her introduction to *Theorising Heterosexuality* (1996).

³⁴ Rosenberg (2002), pp. 100-103.

³⁵ Rosenberg (2002), pp. 100-103.

The two guiding principles of heteronormativity are 1) exclusion of deviation from the norm by a division into the categories “us versus them”; and 2) assimilation by incorporating deviation within the norm. The first principle accords with the Western tradition of thinking in dichotomies. It describes two parts of a unit that are seen as opposites in an either/or relationship. The dichotomy inevitably leads to a hierarchical order that entails privileges for one category at the expense of the other. The consequence is inequality and social injustice legitimized by presenting constructed divisions as being natural. Dichotomies reduce existence into two distinct categories, thereby oversimplifying a complex reality. The dichotomic perspective emphasizes the differences between categories, while paying inadequate attention to their similarities or internal differences.³⁶

“Deviant” and queer signify a particular sort of individual so much as they do a way of underlining and specifying heteronormativity as an excluding and separating practice. The heterosexual norm persists by appearing to be natural and ordinary, thereby coming across as desirable, while homosexuality is problematic, and has to be constantly explained. The perception of the deviant as problematic and the norm as natural creates a chasm between “us” and “them”, whereas one’s own norm is naturalized and unquestioned.

While the distance between “us and them” is reinforced, the heterosexual norm appropriates deviations. This incorporation, of deviations into the norm is an effective way of disarming the ‘deviants’ politically. It is a form of putative acknowledgement, by which the deviation or deviant is unmentioned and rendered invisible. Neutralizing and making ‘deviants’ invisible rob them of their uniqueness.

The second guiding principle of heteronormativity is based on the concept of a universal humanity and uses assimilation as its method. In practice this means that previously excluded groups are expected to join the culture. According to Iris Marion Young, assimilation always requires the excluded parties to join in a game whose rules have been established beforehand and which have begun long ago.³⁷ On these premises the disenfranchised have to try and assert themselves. Such an assimilation policy tacitly accepts the principle that privileged groups are

³⁶ Rosenberg (2002), pp. 100-103. The guiding principles of heteronormativity resemble the categories identified by the Swedish historian Yvonne Hirdman as the gender system in *Genus: Det stabila föränderliga former* (*Gender: The changing forms of stability*), Malmö: Liber, 2003. According to Hirdman, the gender system rests on the logic of separation (*segregation*) and the primacy of the male norm (*hierarchization*). Hirdman’s notion of the gender system has been extremely influential in Sweden, but her achievement has simply been to take over Gayle Rubin’s concept of a sex/gender system already presented in 1975, in her article “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex”. In addition to defining the sex/gender system, she also discussed a theory of the origin of women’s oppression and formulated a radical feminist critique of Marxism. Hirdman, however, speaks only of gender, not of sexuality.

³⁷ Iris Marion Young (1990) “Social Movements and the Politics of Difference”, in *Justice and The Politics of Difference*, pp. 156-191.

the ones who define the criteria by which everyone is measured. One of the privileges of dominant groups is that they can pretend these criteria are not culturally or historically specific and can blatantly present their norms as universal and neutral in relation to race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. But since there are actual differences, the vulnerable groups often find it difficult to live up to the expectations, demands and norms of the dominant groups. Thus, the existing power relations and hierarchies remain intact.³⁸

Assimilation into the universal and ‘human’ norm allows the privileged groups to ignore the fact that they themselves are merely a group among other social groups. By turning a blind eye to discrimination they can maintain their cultural domination. The values that express the experiences and intentions of the privileged groups held up as good for mankind. Universalism is based on the assumption that everyone can place herself or himself on common ground from which they can create or recreate themselves as whatever kind of a person they wish to be. Without external interference, according to this view, people would blossom and no one would be like anyone else. However, since there is no neutral group consensus of what is good and proper, in practice the strongest groups define the norm for how everyone should be and behave. According to such a putatively neutral ideal, the marginalized groups will inevitably be perceived as special and different. The privileged groups, on the other hand, are normal.³⁹

The supposedly normal (read: heteronormative) often generates self-loathing and an internalized derogatory attitude toward one’s own group. Assimilation with the prevailing norm requires that queers “fit in”, that is, that they adjust their behavior, values, and desires to the norms of the dominant group. However, since the norm does not change, they will be branded as deviating and different, no matter how hard they try to fit in. The assimilation requirement confronts the vulnerable individual with an insoluble dilemma: in order to participate in society she is forced to adopt an identity she does not have, and when she tries to do so, she and others continuously remind her of the identity she has – but is not permitted to have.⁴⁰

In “Gender Regulations” Judith Butler discusses the norm, and makes an analytical distinction between social norms, rules, and laws. Like Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, Butler notes that the more or less explicitly active norms operate in social practices by means of normalization that is, by being turned into something ‘ordinary and inconspicuous:

A norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of *normalization* Although, a norm may

³⁸ Young (1990), *ibid.*

³⁹ Young (1990), *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Young (1990), *ibid.*

be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its operation. Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects they produce.⁴¹

“Gender Regulations” is part of Butler’s overall discussion of social comprehension. She explains that a norm is not the same as a symbolic position.⁴² Heteronormative preconceptions are embedded in traditions and institutionalized rules and procedures. They manifest themselves in the social consequences of rules and procedures when they are generally accepted and obeyed.⁴³ In the spirit of Michel Foucault, Butler notes that both compliance and resistance take place within the norm. Therefore, norms should be perceived as active doing, whether by restricting or liberating.

Although intersectionality can open up many rewarding perspectives, its critical potential can be undermined so that it is transformed into a conventional social technique.⁴⁴ De los Reyes and Mulinari are critical of an intersectional analysis based on political identity, on the grounds that this would only reinforce essentialist tendencies in feminism and weaken the theoretical and political potential of intersectionality:

The revolutionary power of intersectionality lies, we believe, primarily in the development of a theoretical perspective that links power and inequality to the individual’s potential to act as a subject within the framework of society’s structures, institutional practices and prevailing ideologies. This also entails a critical stance with regard to the potential of knowledge production to institutionalize and naturalize a non-egalitarian social order. The political content of both knowledge production and academic practices is consequently a key element of our understanding of intersectionality.⁴⁵

The anti-essentialist interpretation of intersectionality is a fruitful one. The minoritizing perspective on homosexuality in many ways confirms heteronormativity inasmuch as it paradoxically is dependent on heterosexuality. This does not imply, however, that LGBT identities are without significance. If homosexuality is regarded as an integral element of

⁴¹ Judith Butler (2004) “Gender Regulations”, in *Undoing Gender*, New York & London: Routledge, p. 41.

⁴² Butler (1997), p. 41; Lauren Berlant & Michael Warner (2000) “Sex in Public”, in Lauren Berlant (ed.), *Intimacy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁴³ Young, “Social Movements and the Politics of Difference”, pp. 156-191.

⁴⁴ Lykke (2005), p. 15.

⁴⁵ de los Reyes & Mulinari, (2005), p. 16. Translation mine.

heterosexuality, that makes heterosexuality normal, it becomes even clearer why the promotion of a deviating identity as a category of equal value cannot challenge the heteronormative order. At the same time, it is hard to attack the hegemonic and normative culture from within. Even if an identity is a social construction, this does not make it less real or necessary in the prevailing political and social reality.

As the feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out, there appear to be only two viable approaches to identity: either you allow excluding and self-promoting ideas of identity to reign unchallenged, or you accept an unstable identity concept, in which your own (racial, class-based, sexual, national, etc.) identity is regarded merely as a strategy. Mohanty maintains that instead of seeing it as a source of knowledge and a possible basis for progressive mobilization, the concept of identity would, in this perspective, be regarded as either naïve or irrelevant.⁴⁶ However, both theory and practice also depend on solidarity. Whose side you are on and whose banner you are flying will decide the outcome of the battle.

Identity political understanding still required

If identity politics have mainly been about the other and hidden stories, it cannot only be limited to things that are positively charged. In the Nordic countries, xenophobic parties have been successful in promoting their racist Nordic identity politics and activism. Even worse, they also make use of pseudo-feminist and gay-friendly arguments in their Islamophobic political rhetoric: they proclaim that the Christian, white and truly Nordic culture has been sacrificed to social democracy and multiculturalism. Regrettably, such negative identity politics have been successful lately, revealing how identity politics can be misused in different ways. We can no longer embrace identity politics the way it was done a few centuries ago. Political action is not only a choice between different options that exist in a pre-defined order, but an intervention that redefines the existing societal rules and the way things have been moving in a more democratic and inclusive direction. Although the economy is the base and the most crucial factor, it is still in the symbolic order, where the decisive battle is taking place. To strive for collective liberation today means to stand up in opposition to the tendency of everything, even the digital space, to become privatized.

Neither scholars nor other citizens can grasp the global reality in all its complexity, but tries to make sense of the fragments, and above all of the voices that would otherwise be silenced,

⁴⁶ Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) "Introduction: Decolonization, Anticapitalist Critique, and Feminist Commitments", in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1-13.

and the stories that would be ignored. It is the scholar's task to be an attentive and respectful listener, and equally important, place and analyze these stories in a larger social and political context. A dialogic politics aims at social change, even if it only happens on a small scale. In politically coherent communities a common need for change might create consensus in the group. But identity political insight would be needed, given the problems that arise when an intellectual (often white, male, straight and middle class) takes on a subordinate group. The belief that dialogue will solve all problems is naive the situation of many people is too desperate (poverty, war, hunger) for any dialogue to even be conceivable. Wherever people come together, power relations are activated and social injustice undermine people's ability to live freely and independently. The 'free' relations are fundamentally problematic because being a human means being interdependent. It is rather sad that we continue to promulgate sexist, racist, and homophobic structures, even though we see through them intellectually and dismantle them verbally and theoretically. In order to do something about this *Wiederholungszwang* still requires identity political insights of the more progressive kind.⁴⁷

Multi-Solidarity

The empty space created by post-social democratic condition has been filled by right-wing populist and xenophobic forces that reduce politics to invoking an enemy: the ethnic groups they proclaim do not belong in Europe and who they warn are inimical to European culture. In such an atmosphere the prospects for political solidarity look grim. The aim of progressive leftist politics is the same as it always has been, namely, to explain and define the need for social justice for the entire population, to create solidarity in the economic sphere and to cultivate a society where people are sensitive to each other's needs. This has definitely not been the case in the new capitalist culture, writes sociologist Richard Sennett.⁴⁸ The way in which our Western societies are living is not sustainable. A viable alternative to the current late capitalism social order is to return to the concept of the common that can be contrasted with the capitalist compulsory privatization of state property. The common is not being understood as unified or uniform, but rather as sharing common resources and the results of human labor in a society based on solidarity.

The post-social democratic condition is also based on the idea of socialism that has been left

⁴⁷ Tiina Rosenberg, "Identity Politics", *Theatre Research International*, Cambridge University Press, Vol. 36, Number 1 / pp. 80-82.

⁴⁸ Richard Sennett (2007) *Den nya kapitalismens kultur* [The Culture of New Capitalism], Stockholm: Atlas, 2007, p. 10.

behind. This empty space is now filled by neofascism, nationalism, and racism, as was the case in Germany in the 1930s. The question that several left-wing theorists and intellectuals debated in recent decades how the identity of political movements became increasingly preoccupied with its own questions and drifted away from finding solutions to global social problems. Terry Eagleton argues that the transition from traditional production to a post-industrial condition based on consumerism, communication, information technology, service industry, a deregulated labor market and a weakened labor movement has meant that old class loyalties weakened, while focus shifted to identities based on location, gender and ethnicity.⁴⁹

Eagleton is not alone in his critique of identity politics for having turned its eyes away from the ‘important’ issues. There are those, particularly on the Left, who believe that the common struggle was weakened and shattered by a variety of social movements concerned with their own issues without any unifying political movement. But identity politics is not primarily about the ‘others’ policies concerning women, children and minorities. It is that part of the policy, if successful, that will be on the agenda when male-dominated political agendas. From this perspective feminist, sexual political, and anti-racist issues may be said to be not about identity but about citizens with inadequate access to shared democratic influence and power.

But the critique of identity politics also has a point, as the political theorist Nancy Fraser has pointed out. Bourgeois feminist policy places women’s liberation within the framework of capitalist system of entrepreneurship, making the ultimate form of self-realization.⁵⁰ It sees the presence of women in high social positions as the main goal of feminism. The lack of a broader social analysis that shares political insight and an ethos of solidarity has given way to a neo-liberal, consumerist, and imperialistic non-politics that embraces feminism without deepening critical analysis of capitalism or developing political action for the society in greater breadth.

Human life and social justice always requires solidarity, but solidarity cannot only be the sole issue. New social movements and their specific coalition politics often refuse to let themselves be guided by political parties or parliamentary systems. On the other hand, they make room for the many novel social movements that have appeared, on the other, they have failed to achieve a more durable, comprehensive solution without falling into totalitarianism.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Terry Eagleton (2011), *Why Marx Was Right*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Nancy Fraser (2009) “Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History”, in *New Left Review* 56, March-April, pp. 1-11 ; Nina Power (2010) *One Dimensional Woman*, London: Zero Books.

⁵¹ Tiina Rosenberg (2006) “Om socialism, feminism och multisolidaritet” [On Socialism, Feminism and Multi-Solidarity], in Alexandra Franzén & Matz Larsson, *Efter ett kvartssekel av nederlag. En debattantologi om arbetarrörelsen och framtiden*, Stockholm: Byggnads & Socialdemokratiska Studentförbundet, pp. 29-39; Tiina Rosenberg (2006) ”Multisolidaritet” [Multi-Solidarity], in *Mana*, nr. 2-3.

If political empathy makes us empathize with the feelings and experiences of others, that which makes us human, solidarity becomes a principled attribute. Empathy can foster individualization or a group-specific collectivization of emotion, but may not necessarily extend to social issues in a broader perspective. It is also in the recognition of the other's needs that politics begins, a process that also plays an important role in art.

Feminists cannot only focus on gender, just as socialists cannot only to focus on social class relations. While contemporary leftist politics that deal with commonalities do not require uniformity in the political ranks, they must stress multi-solidarity. Democratic intervention should be in agreement with the Declaration of Human Rights that acknowledges that all sovereign power is held by 'the people', but who are the people? A difficulty at the core of democracy is that although power comes from the people it does not belong to anyone.

The journalist Henry Mellström observed in *Arbetaren* [The Worker] in the fall of 2008 that in the face of contemporary complex political analysis both left and right try to re-establish a unified social body:

With a fool's obstinacy the unions and the parties seem to stick to their the traditions from ancient times, while the power that previously poured life into the Left no longer exists. The people are gone. But once the scene is taken over by something that could be called people, their monstrosity terrifies the institutionalized Left: protesters from the 1980s AIDS activists to undocumented migrants today are perceived as eccentric and menacing.⁵²

Many people find it hard to understand multi-solidarity. Being a member of the anti-racist struggle should make it easier to have a feminist perspective on racism, to tie the fist against homophobia and believe a clear-cut boundary will always exist between rich and poor. After all the years of neoliberalism the word 'I' is heard everywhere, even in contexts where people should know better. For neoliberalism is the personal success is everything, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and class. The trend has continued for an unusually long time.

To perceive oneself as part of an anonymous public does not appeal to many in an age of so much concern with individualization. Still, there is hope and an ongoing dialogue between different social movements. A new negotiating position has arisen: the hand that carries the red flag now also bears a feminist flag, a rainbow flag and anti-racist banners. The journalist Anna-

⁵² Henrik Mellström (2008) "Monstrets nya kropp" [The New Body of the Monster], in *Arbetaren, Zenit*, nr. 44, p. 3. My translation.

Klara Bratt writes:

Here are protesters accustomed to speak of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, either individually or all at once. There are activists, hardworking feminists, political academics and union veterans; some are even all in one, and always with an international outlook. Many of the pink protesters take the socialist cause to the Pride Parade, the sexual revolution to socialist demonstrations, class perspective in feminist circles, and keep the whole package hot in the universities. Added to it is that it usually does not happen without resistance.⁵³

Intersectionality means that various forms of marginalization och discrimination rarely occur alone. Thus, the subordination of women is linked to class, ethnicity / racialization and sexuality. If the word intersectionality feels clumsy in real politics, it can in everyday language be translated into a more understandable political concept, namely multi-solidarity. It means that even if you most feel at home in one of the social movements, you must also bring in other perspectives. Even Antonio Gramsci realized that when he claimed in contrast to "scientific" socialism, that once characterized both social democracy and Leninism in Europe, that the Left needs to incorporate new social movements regardless of their momentary ideological status. The price for not including the new (and old) social movements is reaction and ultimately fascism as the dominant classes and their representative's feel their interests threatened, which is implicit in such movements.

Multi-solidarity is not divisive but inspiring. It forces us to cooperate with each other across borders, not at the expense of one another. Class struggle priority was already used in the early labor movement as an argument against addressing specific demands of women for action. It was argued that the two main divisions, class and gender, would not be able to coexist and that class struggle must always take precedence over women's struggle. Not until the 1970s did socialist feminists dare to question this and connect the two concepts in a new slogan: 'No class struggle without women's struggle, not a women's struggle without class struggle.' Multi-solidarity encourages you to complicate your analysis with multiple parallel perspectives. The one form of discrimination recognizes the others and then conveys the thoughts and commitments to a larger social movement in which political questions are asked and negotiated. Freedom requires interpersonal solidarity, ethics, meaningful work, cultural richness, and

⁵³ Anna-Klara Bratt (2008) "Intersektionell solidaritet" [Intersectional Solidarity], in *Arbetaren* nr. 19, p. 2. My translation.

shared prosperity. People can only be free together, not separately.

