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Key Concepts in Feminist Theory - Analysing Gender and Welfare

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Yvonne Hirdman

**Key Concepts in Feminist Theory
Analysing Gender and Welfare**

In the Nordic female academic discourse on Gender and the Welfare State, a sort of scholarly tale is being constructed. The tale goes: there are two sorts of feminist narratives; one with a happy ending, the other a gloomy one. Thus researchers are being divided: the happy ones, or the "Pollyannas" as Helga Hernes once put it, herself being a true Pollyanna in this field, and the gloomy ones, the "Cassandras", where I for one has been put.¹

One reason for this unhappy, and I would say, unscientific division, could be the areas of research. If reform politics are the main objects of research, the tendency to interpret the result in a Pollyanna way is more obvious. If the research area, however, is the Labour Market, a more gloomy analysis is more or less bound to appear.

But the areas also seem to develop different perspectives and concepts: if politics is the area of research, normative questions, whether the Welfare State is "good" or "bad" for women, are easily used as a sort of analytical tool, and of course there is a risk that the answers will end up in line with the ongoing political discourse and self understanding.

When the labour market, on the other hand, is the main area of research, the pattern of segregation is so obvious, that the questions inevitable become more analytical: why is this process of segregation again and again put into action?

¹ See here Christina Bergquist, *Mäns makt och kvinnors intressen*, Acta Universitatis Upsalensis, Uppsala 1994 p 19 ff.

A third reason, I think, when it comes to the positioning of my-self as a mother Cassandra in the Swedish context, is that being a historian I have entered the area "innocently" (or eccentric), that is without putting myself into the "Model" discourse tradition. Instead I have tried to analyse the history of the Welfare State in Sweden, putting the relation of men and women into the centre of the analysis. Or in other words: the gender system.

In order to state my understanding of the role of gender in the Welfare State, I thus have to give you my theoretical reflections upon gender² - in a rather paragraphical way, I'm afraid - before entering the topic itself.

GENDER

Some theoretical reflections

Gender, as you all know, became the conceptual currency from the late 70s. We translated it in the early 80s in Sweden, to genus - a then purely linguistic word, the term for masculinum, femininum and neutrum (and as a matter of fact, also *reale* which we have in the Swedish language).³

² See Y Hirdman, "Genussystemet, Teoretiska reflexioner över kvinnors sociala underordning", *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift* 1988:3, and "Genussystemet" i *SOU 1990:44*, samt stencil, HT 1993 Arbetslivscentrum: *Att förstå Genus*.

³ It is notably that gender as a concept has been developed mostly by anthropologists and historians, see for ex Gayle Rubin, Joan Scott i.a.

This very uncertain word evoked promises that our understanding of the *relation* of the sexes could be brought a bit further. It also underlined the *constructive* element in the entity Woman *and* Man, that by then the concept of sex-roles had lost⁴ without steering away from the perspective of power.

⁴ For an analysis see R.W.Connell, *Gender and Power, Society, the Person and Sexual politics*, Stanford Univ. Press, Stanford 1987.

The concept of gender also opened up the possibility of handling the old dichotomy between "sex" and "construction" without fuelling the dichotomy itself.⁵ This is also why I prefer to use gender instead of a concept like "socially constructed sex" as this concept keeps the imbedded dichotomies alert and healthy: is it "sex" or is it "social" that matters? And please, in what proportions? What, underneath it all, does matter the *most*? Is it not sex, after all? But, as was once said, we have to realize that there is nothing underneath it all. That is the challenge.

Gender, in my way of looking at it, should not be viewed as the result of $1 + 1 = 2$, that is of sex + culture = gender, but only as the outcome, as 2.⁶

⁵ Thus the use of "gender-roles" seems to me rather a step backwards.

⁶ Stating this does not mean that I look upon the body as some sort of uninteresting material, or that our bodies don't experience life in a wide scale of variety - according to positions in time, life, power etc. It simply means that this experience is always interpreted by a mind, which of course *can not* be free from the surrounding culture, practices etc, yes, it even seems that the structure of the mind is to a great degree influenced by the social and cultural surroundings. This kind of thinking is thus contrary to the idea of giving the body - or parts of the body - primacy or some kind of self-agency in the process of thinking. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic

Books New York 1973.

Reasoning like this means that I not only underline the importance of culture, I would also like to complicate the concept of culture more than we usually do. It might confuse the project of emancipation by doing so, as there is a great potential of freedom and emancipation in the idea of humans as a sort of cultural artefacts, with the implicit idea of a possibility of un-doing one-self, once one understands what is wrongly "programmed" into oneself. With an understanding of "culture" as almost "everything", one is more aware of the difficulties of changing it. It seems, on the eve of a new millennium, to be much easier for humans to change nature than it is to change culture as "culture" is a net-work of self going/governing processes, using our minds as their fertile grounds.⁷

On patterns - and gender-systems

It seems to me as if one of the great divisions between feminist scholars today lies in the emphasis upon the importance of patterns, or indeed the presence of patterns at all. Being a historian with a taste for sociology, I for one stress that without the ambition of recognizing patterns in human actions (or as the result of human actions), the "raison d'être" for science is undermined.

The patterns of gender in society are, or should be, the "objects" we deal with and try to theorize about.⁸

⁷ See C.Gustafsson, *Produktion av allvar. Om det ekonomiska förnuftets metafysisk*, Nerenius & Santéus förlag, Sthlm 1994, and D.Dennet, *Consciousness Explained*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston/Toronto/London 1991.

⁸ There is a tendency to day of avoiding patterns as if they belong to the "Great Narratives" and as such having had an imprisoning, deterministic impact on the emancipating possibilities of humanity. I here sympathize with Susan Bordo when she a bit mockingly ironize over these feminists how dare not talk about "women" or "system" as if the feminist thoughts about the suppression of women in history and today in a more systematic way are located on the same level as

Great Men's Great Narratives. To abandon the meta-stories of feminism is rather pathetically to give to them a status they never had, a place of power and significance in shaping the meanings of reality se."Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism"by Susan Bordo, in *Feminism and Postmodernism*, ed Linda J Nicholson, Routledge New York and London, 1990. For an overview of - and criticism of - the this kind of new feminist thinking, se Mary Maynard, Beyond the 'Big Three': the developement of feminist theory into the 1990s, in *Women's History Review*, vol 4 nr 3 1995.

One way of lifting the pattern of gender relations into the light is to give it a certain name - a concept. In spite of the bad reputation the concept of system has got, these days⁹, I still think it is important to stick to the concept of a gender-system. For me system should be read as *the sum* of various complicated and interacting actions, practices, ideas, processes, etc.; like we understand and use the concept economic system, or religious system.

The concept of a gender-system could be open, labelling only the fact that human beings in various ways are gender organized. But it could also be filled with facts of female subordination - facts that "organize" the consisting patterns.

To me, the fascinating thing about a gender-system is that the more knowledge we get about it, the more unavoidable one main systematic pattern seems: the pattern of segregation. One could, of course, treat this pattern with indifference, using it as: a) an evidence that men and women are designed by God, or Nature, or Hormones, or whatever, to "play" different roles on the arena of Humanity or, in a more post-modern context; b) just as signs of differences, created by history (or rather language), not relating them to a (systematic) power structure. But segregation is not only signs of variations between the sexes, due to habits, practises, discourses, but, as is easily seen, *the* means of subordination.

⁹ As if a "system" is equal to a box of deterministic action in a purely meta-functionalist way.

In order to understand the pattern of gender system(s), gender has to be more scrutinized. How is it to be understood? One way of doing so is to organize our knowledge about the *stereotypes* of gender, or Idealtypus, as Weber would have labeled it. It is the abstract categories of Man and Woman as feminist scholarship in history and in philosophy laboriously that have dug up in their/our research.

Since they seem to play such a dramatic and determining role in the processes of gender and power, in the creation of "real" social structures, "real" politics, etc., one to us important issue must be to "re-construct" them. What follows is an effort to shortly summarize some of the most striking insights.

Gender as an organizing principle¹⁰

The gender stereotypes seem to belong to the most powerful organizing principles structuring the minds of humans: The act of understanding and determining human beings as a HE or a SHE seems to operate on the same level as the most basic organizing ideas like light - dark, big - small, good - bad, holy - profane, clean - unclean, life - death, etc. This way of conceptualising the reality seems to be fundamental for the way we move around in the world. We create order out of chaos.

These objects are as we observe, contrasting entities - the one give meaning and form/demarcation to the other. You can't have light without

¹⁰ My ideas on gender should be read as a result - conscious and unconscious of all the feminist literature I have read during the years. It is due to my bad memory and lack of time that I have not been able to give a fair list of references.

dark, you can't understand big without small, round without straight, etc.

If one understands the creation/understanding of humans as He and She on this level, it is not difficult to comprehend the implicit quality of taboo that clings to these figures. The thinking, according to dualistic or dichotomies lines, marks borders not to be trespassed, keeps that which shall not mingle apart.¹¹ This, I think, is a key for understanding the most significant pattern in the gender-system - the pattern of segregation. Stressing the existence of gender on this primary level of orientation also gives gender and gender-system(s) an importance as one of the main organizing principles in history and hence today.

Segregation

The pattern of segregation is obvious when one looks at the **places**, the rooms, the spaces strictly divided for HIM and HER in various societies, classes, times. It is as obvious when it comes to **work** and, as we get more and more research on the field, we get more and more evidence that the gender division of labour is a constant, on-going process.¹²

¹¹ On dichotomies as organizing principles, see Levi Strauss -- Marget Mead -- jmf Sandra Harding who is using the concept of "gender totemism", *The Science Question in Feminism*, Open University press, USA 1986, p. 18.

¹² I will emphasize that theorizing segregation might perhaps be most developed in Scandinavia, as we have had more experience than in any other country of the processes of segregation - vertical as well as

And in that process, ideas of gender **qualities** work in a dialectical way, transporting "gender" between places, tasks and people.

horizontal, mostly on the labour market.

At all levels and areas of segregation there are, of course, a multitude of histories, variations, differentiations. We can see a place, once His, now belonging to Her, a task, once Hers, now done by Him only. It is these obvious shifts that enables us to argue against a "natural order" of gender-division.¹³

But even if some qualities seem to have shifted from being masculine to feminine,¹⁴ we enter a gloomy area - and a problem, I would say, in feminist theory. Why are gender stereotypes so stereotypical? Could one not, inevitably, see the finger of Nature here designing this outcome?

¹³ How these shifts occur is hard empirical labour to show, there seems not to be one mechanism, other than that of the principle of segregation by it self. Good examples within a Swedish context give for ex. Christina Florin, *Kampen om katedern. Feminiserings- och professionaliseringsprocessen inom dens venska folkskolans lärarkår 1860 - 1906*, Almqvist & Wicksell, Sthlm 1987, Ulla Wikander, *Kvinnors och mäns arbeten. Gustavsberg 1880-1980. Genusarbetsdelning och arbetets degradering vid en Porslinsfabrik*, Arkiv, Lund 1988, Lena Sommestad, *Från mejerska till mejerist. En studie i mejeriyrkets maskuliniseringsprocess*, Arkiv, Lund 1992

¹⁴ One example is the ancient conception of women as more lustful and more prone to anger.

Gender formulas: A - a A - B

In order to get closer to an understanding, these stereotypes have to be more scrutinized. One observation easily made, reading what could be labelled as the gender discourse in western civilisation, is that Man is the Main Actor - ironically even so when all the interest and effort has been laid on the construction of Woman.¹⁵ It is not difficult to understand the reason for this: when women are defined or rather when SHE is defined, she is always linked with/connected to HIM, and thus HE is implicitly also defined - but not as thoroughly determined. HE is defined by not being HER. Because in the construction of masculinity we can see one fundamental piece of brick/rock: to be a MAN is not to be a WOMAN. (And one can almost hear the sigh of relief: thank you God!) It is the *opposite* of it. This seems to be true even if one agrees with Thomas Laqueur in his analysis, in which he distinguishes between two central models of sex (nota bene): the one-sex model and the two-sex model.¹⁶ This model could be transformed to describe the process of making gender into a formula: *A - a* and *A - B*: Man and Woman/the little Man, or Man and his opposite, Woman.

But in spite of the underlying construction, whether women is to a (minor) degree like a man: an *a*, or totally different: a *B*, to be a man has to be *A*. And to be an *A* is to have some qualities which are reserved for *A:s* - qualities that in spite of historical varieties seem to be rooted in an understanding of *strength*, of body and soul. An illustration from a

¹⁵ On this discourse one might only give a hint - as women are, which Virginia Wolf so adequately remarked, the most studied animal in the literature. The volumens of *A History of Women in the West*, by Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (gr.Ed.) could here be recommended.

¹⁶ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Harward University press, Camb. N.Y. 1990.

doctor, about 100 years AC illustrates this banality and also imply an explanation to this exclusiveness:

"For it is the semen, when possessed of vitality, which makes us men, hot, well braced in limbs, heavy, well voiced, spirited, strong to think and act."¹⁷

The male norm

¹⁷ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and the Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, faber and faber, London/Boston 1988 p 10, see also page 28 : "The boy's first ejaculation was celebrated by his family at the feast of the Liberalia, on March the 17."

Another way of expressing that the leading person in the gender discourse in history is MAN, is A, is to formulate a bit mechanical, the "second logic of the gender system," to quote myself, that of "the male norm". The idea of using the concept of male norm instead of male hierarchy is to *identify the art* of this hierarchy, to steer the thoughts away from the idea that every Man rules every Woman as a slave, towards the more *abstract* idea of Man, the human being, the model, the rule - the norm, the A in relation to *a* or *B*.¹⁸

The more profound knowledge of the extent to which this norm has been and is operating in our minds, is given to us by Genevieve Lloyd in her marvellous book, "The Man of Reason". Here she shows how the very concept and understanding of the most powerful word - Reason - in western culture has been constructed symbiotically with the construction of MAN.¹⁹

Another way of illustrating the profound "insemination" of the world by the idea that men are the principle, the first order or humanity,²⁰ is to go back to the understanding of gender as an organizing principle, on the same level as the main categories God - Bad, Life - Death, Dark - Light, etc. Because it is not difficult to comprehend that these opposing

¹⁸ Which is my way of reading Simone de Beauvoir.

¹⁹ G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason 'Male' & 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, Routledge London 1984, 1993.

²⁰ To paraphrase Tomas ab Aquino.

categories easily *can be* gendered. Let us make a list of more timeless categories²¹:

HE	SHE
strong	weak
activity	passivity
spirit	flesh
soul	body
hard	soft
right	left
culture	nature

²¹ Asta Ekenvall, *Manligt -Kvinnligt*.

The tendency to divide and create opposites of the most significant cultural elements in a society, elements which are easily gendered, exemplifies what I want to illustrate by using the concept of the male norm, as the historically valuable ones also seems to be understood as fundamentally male. Going concretely into Western History we can thus see how society, both conceptually and in practice, is split and gendered, a split with great political and economical impact. Or expressed in another way: how gender gives meaning to our understanding not only of individuals, but of the world and its institutions, being physical or psychical. Thus we get a hint of how gender takes site of institutions, organizations, situations and areas and how gender in this way not only is preserved and more potent, but how it reflects gender back to the bodies, to humans. An illustration of this reasoning is the dichotomization of gender spheres from the time of industrialization²²:



²² We might play with the dichotomies of to-day - which are they? How are they gendered?

He	right	economy	market	deserving	aggressive	nature	private
She	left	ecology	politics	undeserving	peaceful/civilized	culture	public

HE	SHE
public	private
production	reproduction
culture	nature
rational	irrational/emotional
science	religion
politics	social work
state	family

Gender as meaning

Going back to the main characters of the gender drama we easily see, that implicit in the art of categorizing, *causality* (and henceforth meaning) occurs²³: this thing is big *because* that thing is small. A is A *because* he is not a B or an a. And an A kind should be on the A spot and do A things and have A qualities. The one who operates on an A spot and does A things has to be an A.²⁴ And vice versa. As the category of A is determined by not being an a or a B, it is not difficult to understand that it has been, as it still is, more easy for B to do A things, etc., than for A to be on a B spot, or do B things - *unless he transforms these places and doings*. Contrary, when B enters an A area, B has to become more A like,

²³ For a development, see Claes Gustavsson, "Some notes on Intentionality and Normativity in Managerial Reasoning", ur *Accounting and Organised Action*, ed C.Gustafsson/L.Hassel, Åbo Akademi Press, Åbo 1990.

²⁴ For a concrete understanding of the "essentialism of the places" see R. M. Dekker and L. C van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe*, Macmillan Press, London 1989.

B has to be transformed.²⁵ Thus also we might understand how these stereotypes structure opposite conditions for men and for women.

The answer to the problem of the consisting stereotypical gender pattern then, could be searched for in this area: seeing gender as build into (embedded into) the processes of production of meaning, basically on an ontological level of identification of the Self, where the Self is identical with MAN. And in this identification Woman is used as a correction of what one is not. Here the Body enters as a stereotype on its own: because what differs is the body, the female body which does, in spite of time, contexts, practices, classes, etc., repeat itself in its ability to procreate.²⁶

Gender contract

A more specific way of understanding how the gender stereotypes are lived, experienced, and thus conserved and reproduced in the various practices, but also how change is possible, could be to use the concept of gender contract.

Contract however is a difficult word, with connotations of different meanings in different diciplins as well as in different practices.

²⁵ One might compare here the with idea of a feminine capital which is not convertible outside the female sphere, see Helga Novotny "Hur manlig är vetenskapen" in *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift nr 1 1983*.

²⁶ Simone de Beauvoir talked about the "reptition" in a rather negative way, comparing the ability to give birth with that of a tree having leavs.

I have used the word for the interrelations between men and women, going back to its Latin origin: *con tractere* = to draw/carry/truck together. Once I used the metaphor of a yoke in order to stress this interpretation, which also gives us the possibilities to interpret men's as well as women's actions restricted according to this heavy, imprisoning burden that in a classical Greek-drama way shackle the couple together. This metaphor must of course be used with delicacy, but it points at two important directions: one towards the *togetherness* of women's and men's actions, of the participation not only of men in order to uphold a gender-order, but also of the participation of women in the same drama. But it directs our thoughts further towards this yoke - what is it? How has it changed? How different is the variety of yokes in different times, within different classes, ethnic groups, among races, etc.? And how can it be eased, how can it be transformed, modernised - removed?

But delicacy certainly *is* needed here, as the yoke-metaphor too strongly underlines the structural conditions of humans. So let us remain ourselves that a concept like *contract* is a metaphor in itself, which breads thoughts like: who were/are the signatories of the contract? What were/are the gendered duties and responsibilities, rights and privileges, etc.? How much space were/are there for negotiations, quarrels, for changes, for exits (maybe for enters as well)?

Again, in order to avoid misinterpretation, I certainly do not mean that the signatories of a contract have the same status, are equals according to the 18th century social-contract discourse. One can only think of a slave-contract - but I do mean that women participate to various degrees. This is an empirical question - but we have to reason from the obvious fact that in spite of various modes of suppressing conditions, most women

never were or are deaf, mute, or dumb slaves imprisoned in chains, unable to move.²⁷

²⁷ Here one encouraging thought is that of the many misogynist texts in Western history reflect women acting, out of their "proper places".

Using gender contract in this double metaphorical way (without pressing the metaphors too much) gives us an idea of a space for bargaining situations, for endless negotiations on the content of concrete contracts be it on the labour market, in the family, in politics, etc.²⁸

With an understanding of gender contract(s) in that way, the movements, actions, wishes, etc. of women are always present and we can more easily understand how human beings can both criticise and yet participate in the reproduction of an unequal gender-system.

The problem as I see it now, is not that the concept "travels" between different levels, micro, meso, and macro, as this on the contrary might be an advantage in order to dissolve the dichotomy between actor and structure. Ideas of the responsibilities, duties, rights, etc. of men and women formulated on an "Idealtypus" level, might indeed structure practices on an institutional/meso as well as on an intimate/couple/micro level.²⁹ The problem is rather that the concept travels between agents, as - indeed - a gender contract, much in the Carole Patemanian way, can be

²⁸ Practices concerning the cultural constructed rights and duties.

²⁹ See Hirdman, *Genussystemet, Teoretiska reflexioner över kvinnors sociala underordning*, KVT 1988:3.

seen as a business between men, negotiating *women* between themselves.³⁰

But the problem dissolves if one does not see Woman as what is negotiated about - between men, but, as I have stated above, as a description, a *norm*, about what a Man and a Woman should do in relation to each other. Then, the problem about the shifting actors no longer is a problem, as we might comprehend that, in reality, this normative contract was something according to or against which real women (and real men) had to act, and - in a historical process, might be able to change themselves.

So in order to explain change, or rather, to locate change, the "yoke", or the stereotypical gender contract has to be defined.

And this is not difficult. An archetypical gender contract is easily constructed out of the explicit gender-discourse in the Western history of ideas. Once again, in the process of understanding gender, we hit upon a consistent pattern, a pattern which the following quotes illustrates very nicely:

³⁰ Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1988.

"Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee."³¹

³¹ *The Holy Bible*, Genesis chapter 3:16, see also.

"As Women were principally designed for producing the Species, and Men for other greater Ends: we cannot wonder, if their Inclinations and Desires tend chiefly that way. The great Concern of every Commonwealth, is to keep them within due Bounds; which this present Generation exceeds, to a most flagrant and exorbitant Degree: Not to be railing and exclaiming against them, if, being deprived of the main End of their Creation, as to this Life, they fall into very great Disorders."³²

"The great Use of Women in a Community, is to supply it with Members that may be serviceable, and keep up a Succession. They are also useful in another Degree, to wit, in the Labour they make for themselves, or the Assistance which they may afford their Husbands and Parents."³³

"Man ought to provide for Woman. This is the Natural Law for our species, in Harmony with the being of Woman, which is mostly located in the Home."³⁴

What we might construct out of statements like these is a stereotypical gender contract, a human artefact of considerable age, creating the most self-evident thing there is, operating in the Western culture, giving Man

³² *Women in the Eighteenth Century. Constructions of femininity*, ed by Vivien Jones, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p 77, cit. from 1739 a political leaflet, "Philogamus" from *The present State of Matrimony: or the Real Causes of Conjugal Infidelity and Unhappy Marriages*".

³³ *ibidem* p 69 cit. Daniel Defoe 1726 "from Some considerations upon Street-Walkers with A Proposal for lessening the present Number of Them".

³⁴ Auguste Comte in *Kvinnoideer. Källtextsamling i kvinnohistoria*. Institutionen för idéhistoria Umeå universitet, skftier nr 19 (stencil) Umeå 1984.

(by God) the rights and responsibilities of the provider and Woman the duties and responsibilities of the pro-creator. It is this kind of stereotypical gender contract according to which real women and real men had to manipulate and act, translating this normative text to some kind of reality, a contract that so evidently builds upon a segregating practice and a male norm.

If we accept the idea of the existence of a stereotypical gender-contract with a fundamental content of responsibilities and duties in harmony with the stereotypical gender figures, we might use it in order to analyse the **changing** practices of a transforming reality.

Let me give an example in order to clarify my idea:

At the meeting of the First International the 6th of September 1866 the contrasting entities Women and Work were being discussed. Prudhon and his followers, by then in majority at the International, insisted on forbidding female work outside the home. The true emancipation of women, these early socialists said, were to become housewives. But what to do with these women who were without the protection of a man? Widows, spinsters without fathers or brothers to take care of them? The solution as they saw it, lay in creating a special Women's insurance.³⁵

Here, we can easily see how a stereotypical gender-contract is forming the very concrete solution to a problem, looked upon and described with gendered eyes indeed. Women have to be looked after, be supported, and in lack of an individual solution, the men of the First International suggested a collective care-taker-system, keeping women, unmarried,

³⁵ Drude Dahlerup, *Socialisme og Kvindefrigørelse i det 19. århundrede*, Århus 1973 s 175 ff.

widowed, in a archetypical gender-contract situation. It is also worth noticing the replacement of one, single man with an institution, the insurance-system.

The stereotypical contract created a model of thought, a new kind of institution to be imitated in future welfare programs,³⁶ an institution which created unforeseen consequences when clashing with other social logics and institutions.

This example hints at a way of using gender-stereotypical contracts and contents in analysing history. A more straightforward way of using gender as an analytical tool in the research on the Modern Welfare States is of course to formulate the simple question: what happened to the rationality of the archetypical gender-contract and its institutions in a Welfare State context and how did this gender story form the Welfare State?

³⁶ Especially for unmarried mothers - like in Ireland or in Holland etc.

Welfare state and gender contract

Only lately the understanding that "women" play some kind of role in the construction of the Nordic Welfare States (or rather the Swedish Welfare State which is my object of research) has entered the "welfare-model-talk". The first period, from 1930, has normally been told according to the self-understanding of the Labour Movement itself: this was the heroic period of the New Economic Policy and the beginning of truly welfare social politics. This was the period of the contract between Labour and Capital - starting the famous Swedish "compromise" which granted peace on the Labour Market.³⁷ Women? They never entered the stories, they were the silent background figures who moved into the new-build houses and had free deliveries at the hospitals, as well as free health care for their offspring.

When women do enter the stories of the Welfare state, this mirrors the huge changes of the after-war period. It is also difficult not to notice the dramatic changes in the every-day lives of women from the 1950s to the 1990s, measured by the statistic numbers of female participation on the Labour Market - an expansion from about 40% to almost 90% and in the parliament - from 10 to 40%. The expansion of the Public Sector from

³⁷ For two examples, see Walter Korpi, *Arbetarklassen i välfärdskapitalismen*, Kristianstad 1978, Anders L. Johansson, *Tillväxt och klassarbete - en studie av den svenska modellens uppkomst*, Tiden Sthlm 1989.

the late 1960s and onwards has consequently been linked to "women", as this was their Labour Market, where the former unpaid work was transformed to paid work.

So how does the common explanation go? Actually, these truly revolutionary changes in a society have not been problematised very deeply. Rather, they have either been minimised and/or have been made self-evident. According to the "common-sense" story (very much according to the general understanding of the period itself) there was a lack of labour, due to the expanding economy after the Second World War. The "use of Women", to echo Daniel Defoe, was thus as workers, more than Mothers or Housewives. According to this functionalist theory of the Social/Economic Need as underlying and determining human actions, women were dragged out to the Labour Market, and hence the story of the expanding Public Sector starts, as a consequence of this female movement.³⁸

Neither the "heroic" story of the beginning 1930s, nor the after war story "need" gender to understand what happened, as it transforms the specific, the truly outstanding, to something self evident, uninteresting, and hence the really fascinating questions are never mentioned.

³⁸ A good example of this "normal" understanding see Vogel, Anderson, Davidsson, Häll, *Ojämlighetens i Sverige. utveckling och nuläge*. Rapport nr 51, Statistiska centralbyrån Sthlm 1987.

Like: why did the labour shortage (in the economic prognosis from 1959 estimated to about 220 000 jobs) have to be met with over one million women, mostly working in an expanding public sector? Why not import more guest-workers?³⁹ Why deprive the powerful, victorious (male) proletariat of their housewives? Why did Sweden take a "sonderweg", or maybe more sociological and general, why did small Social-Democratic countries in the North have such different gender politics?

Gender conflict

Using gender as an analytical category in history not only gives us a more complex understanding of our previous history, making these questions visible. It opens up our eyes to the *structural* complications that were almost bound to appear, when an old gender system clashed with a new economic system and new, reforming thoughts of equality - and democracy. I have used the term of a gender conflict in order to point out this clash of disharmonious structures, where the segregating practices and ideas concern gender, battled against integrating practices and ideas of the Modern Project.⁴⁰

³⁹ Gunhild Kyle has written parts of this story, but it still has to be further researched. See *Gästarbetarska i manssamhället. Studier om industriarbetande kvinnors villkor i Sverige*, Liber, Sthlm 1979.

⁴⁰ Y Hirdman, *Women - from Possibility to Problem? Gender conflict in the Welfare State*. Research Report nr 3 1994 (Hirdman 1994).

Further, I worked with the idea of this conflict as a formative factor in the modern, democratic countries, that disguised behind other "questions" on the political agenda shaped many of the most significant reforms of the modern Welfare States.⁴¹

The three contracts

⁴¹ On a theoretical level two possible solutions to the dilemma could easily be detected: that of a limited integration - mostly of unmarried women - and that of a modernized segregation.

Asking the straightforward question imbedded in a gender contract thinking, where and what were, according to the political actors of the various political reforms, women (and men) supposed to be and do in society - one easily locates three important periods in modern Swedish history: that of a slightly modernized, but still Stereotypical Gender-Contract (or House-wife contract), from the 1920s to the 1960s; that of an Equality Contract from the 1960s to 1975; and that of the existing Equal-Status Contract.⁴²

The first period, so empty of "women" in the normal description, was looked upon from this perspective, filled with gender: the various reforms that initiated the Welfare State were all arranged around a stereotypical gender-couple: the breadwinner and his wife. But modern, social ideas of a better living, a better society for people to a degree battled these stereotypes and tried to make them "modern" - especially Her. Focusing on gender gives the traditional self-evident story of the beginning reform period in Sweden much more complexity, intentionality and understanding of how deeply gender ideas structure modern politics.⁴³

⁴² Hirdman 1994.

⁴³ Stressing the *normative* basis of the Household or Housewife contract,

or a truly Breadwinner Model, does not mean however, in a broad historical perspective of this period, that there wasn't opposite discourses and practices going on. The effort by the couple Myrdal for example was strongly towards a more equality directed contract, based on women's integration at the labour Market and with collective solutions to the "problem" of Women. See for ex. Y Hirdman, *Att lägga livet tillrätta. Studier i svensk folkhemspolitik*, Carlssons 1989, parts of which has been translated into english, se Hirdman, *Utopia in the Home*, International Journal of Political Economy, A Journal of Translations, Summer 1992, Vol 22 No 2 (Hirdman 1992).

The norms upon which an Equality Contract can be constructed, are explicitly shown in various reform and programmatic materials from the early 1960s and onwards. According to these new, normative texts, the content of the new contract between men and women, was built upon ideas of equality: men and women should both support themselves economically. Men and women should share the responsibilities for their children, with a considerable help from the state. *Sharing* and *equality* were the key concepts of the time. An example of these *normative* texts could be a new statement of principle formulated in 1969 by the SAP and the LO:

"there are strong reasons for making the two-income family the standard in the planning of long-term changes in social insurance"

The reason to label the period from 1976 as an Equal-Status Contract is due to the institutional form and the explicit texts in order to regulate the gender relations, for example the Equal Status Law of 1980 as well as in various statements by the parts at the Labour Market and in all political parties programs. What also differs is the change from an *equality* (jämlighet) discourse, modelled on the left - right discourse of the Labour Movement to an *equal-status* (jämsliddhet) discourse, explicitly pointing out the gender relation.⁴⁴

The perhaps most interesting question is why and how the shift took place from the first to the second period, from the Housewife Contract to the Equality Contract? Here we have to do more research. I think that the

⁴⁴ Hirdman 1994 for a more detailed history of this contract.

answer to the exceptional after war history of Sweden lies in the combination of a masculine Labour Movement of unforeseen success, looking for areas of political possibilities as an implicit and explicit consequence of the ideology of Social Democratism, and the presence of a gender-system in disharmony with the logics of democracy and the practices of women. It builds on an understanding of the mixing of different, conflicting logics, where stereotypical ideas of gender clashed with "modern", social democratic ideas of equality *and* rationality and the outcome gradually made the content of an old stereotypical gender contract more illegitimate and problematic.

It could, perhaps, more in line with a familiar vocabulary, be expressed as a conflict between an individualistic political approach fighting an older, family-based one. The change from a Housewife Contract to an Equality Contract was a change from looking upon the family to the individual as the smallest entity for social political reforms. The logic of rationality inscribed in a discourse of equality is most probably the reason why women became part of the category of individuality in spite of old gender ideas, strong among trade unionists. Here I would say that the expansion and growing importance of the Trade Union, which in spite of its ambivalence towards women as workers yet transgressed its discourse and methods to its female members, entangled by its own logic.

This logic, which could be called social rationalization,⁴⁵ is a complex one, but with an irresistible expanding "nature" which were almost bound to include women in its "search" for new areas to conquer, if I may express this cultural trend in such an intentional way.

⁴⁵ For a theoretical development and discussion of the concept of rationalization, see *Diese Welt wird völlig anders sein. Denkmuster der Rationalisierung*. Birgitte Aulenbach/ Tilla Siegel (Hd) Centarus-Verlagsgesellschaft, pfaffenweiler 1995.

The discourse of a "rational" equality also implied an equal expansion of goods and here two good things could be combined: that of creating a Labour Market for women of their own and of an expanding Public Sector as an instrument for creating equal benefits and rights in the Swedish society.⁴⁶

The Male Norm - and how to discover it

Using gender analytically gives us an opportunity not only to look at the positions and conditions for women, it also "forces" us to examine the changes in the positions and conditions of men. In doing so, the specificity of the pattern of the male norm is dramatically exposed when the content of the various contracts is scrutinised.

In the first period of the Welfare State from 1930-1960, we see how numerous reforms are designed to help men become providers - and women housewives and mothers. Not only the beginning of the new Social Policy created opportunities for old fashioned gender-stereotypes to be available also for the working class. Other important reforms concerning the regulation between Labour and Capital should also be analysed in this context, like the unemployment insurance, the sick-insurance, or various tax reforms, etc. - they are all gendered, they are all tools in the creation of a Swedish masculinity very much according to stereotypical gender ideas. The method of giving support from the state to the families on a grand, un-personal, no means, testing way, took away

⁴⁶ On the importance of rationality as a structuring principle in the Swedish welfare state, see Hirdman 1992.

the risk of diminishing the masculine honour of being the Supporter, the Breadwinner. The reforms that unburdened a single man the financial pressure, could be perceived as a realization of the romantic free masonarion dream of brothers: one for all - all for one.

On the other hand the reforms from this era that concerned only women were more or less fashioned according to an older Poor Relief Policy of control, personal contact, measured need and help was often given "in natura".⁴⁷

Perhaps as an unforeseen consequence of the inherent logic of these politics, the reforms in line with the Equality Contract did, however, weaken the traditional kind of breadwinner masculinity, as they now became modelled around an individual regardless of sex, thus spreading the universal "method" to "everybody". Here an interesting question arises: what happened to the Swede? Perhaps it is reasonable to say, that

⁴⁷ These were for example food, clothing, a means tested motherhood"money" etc. It is interesting to compare with the result by Linda Gordon of the Welfare system in US, were she sees the same pattern, and explains it with the impact by women on politics in the early 20th cent. and the loss of political impact by women in the 30:es. See *Pitied but not Entitled. Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*, Free Press, N.Y 1994.

the content of the after war masculinity in Sweden become more centred around *work in itself* as a consequence of this unburdening policy.⁴⁸ This masculinity was not threatened by the growth of the paid female work, as female work was (and to a large extent still is) a *different* kind of work, differently valued, differently situated, differently structured (part-time). One could rather say that the strongly segregated Labour Market underlined the masculinity of male work, as the contrast to female work were so easily seen in every aspect.

The ethics of work - the essential idea that a human being in a modern society was/is identical with being a worker - of course increased as women also became wage earners. Thus the transformation of the everyday lives of women rather empowered the societal Male Norm as it was "as men" that women were "empowered".

⁴⁸ For a discussion of masculinities in the Swedish Labour Movement, see Eva Blomberg, *Män i mörker*.

This statement may be banal. Still it points at the many paradoxes that women experience in participating in society - not least at the stupid dilemma of whether women are "different" or "equal". This dilemma is - of course - one very clear evidence of the existing importance of gender-stereotypes, of "masculinity" and "femininity" as universal figures, which are measured and weighed against each other.⁴⁹ Stupid it may be, still it creates a strategic dilemma as it reflects an existing debate, creating real questions with great impact on politics as well as on the Labour Market.

⁴⁹ The stupidity becomes clear if one asks oneself: equal to what man? different to which one?

The efforts and failure of women politicians and trade unionists to change built in "self-evidences" like the 8-hours day, emphasize the strength of this norm and how it conditions the lives of people. Yet one should not underestimate the benefits in expansion, movements, actions of freedom that goes with "as men" - as this category "men" is designed by its greater freedom in almost every human aspect.⁵⁰

Arenas of gender-construction

Bringing up the example of the social democratic Women's League in the 1970s, let us put our focus on another aspect of the use of a concept like gender-contracts. The idea of negotiations. Where are these contracts being negotiated, expressed? And which part did/do women take? Which were the essential *arenas of gender-construction* and were women allowed to be there? Today we might ask, where are the most important arenas of gender-constructions, the places where the new gender contracts are being negotiated? And what is the part of women on these arenas? Have they been admitted? Are they allowed to participate? On what terms are women permitted to participate?

Focusing on arenas, is thus to focus on the places of the "battle". Or in other words, it is to bring power into our research more strongly.

My intention here is not to go into the various histories of arenas - be it the political, the media, the jurisdictional, the family, the Labour Market, the so-called market, etc., but to point at a possibility to analyse the variety of gender contracts and the movement, the drift of gender content that could exist at the same time at different areas or arenas. This could be a way of getting closer to an understanding of contradictions and of

⁵⁰ Again, I talk about the "stereotype", the "idea" of "man".

It is of immense importance to locate the *pragmatic gender contracts*, as they construct the outcome. Here we can discover articulated, explicit ideas: arguing against (or maybe in line with?) the existing normative contract. One example is for instance the discourse concerning Equal Payment for Equal Work, that took place in Sweden in the after war period, where, in spite of a common agreement about the injustice and unfairness of this practice, *explicitly* nothing could be done, not even a ratification of the ILO convention.⁵²

More often, though, silent practises constitute the pragmatic gender contracts, leaning on the heavy heritage of "self-evidence" when it comes to ideas and habits of gender.

Using the various forms of gender-contracts like these, we may be able to locate the contradictions and paradoxes in the history of gender constructions, within the various political reforms, or in the policy of the Trade Union. But they could also be used in order to locate an important shift of focus, concerning the construction of gender contracts and thus make us understand why change occurred.

⁵² Research about the Swedish Trade Union and "Women" in the afterwar period is being done by Ylva Waldemarsson and Yvonne Hirdman.

Looking back at the recent dramatic history of gender and welfare state in Sweden, it is not difficult to locate such a shift: from the Labour Market to the Political Arena, to - ? The so called Market? To the Media?

The power to negotiate gender at the Labour Market in the 1960s changed the indifference about gender at the political arena in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead, the power of formulating the new normative contract moved to this arena. Now, we can with Josef Heller say that "Something has happened" and assume that this power has diminished and that gender is being negotiated elsewhere, in more implicit, more latent ways.

Being a bit paranoid, as feminists tend to be, one could perhaps formulate the suspicion that once women have conquered the possibilities to negotiate, the "real" power to change the contract has moved to another arena, an arena closer to women, more "dark" in contrast to the arenas lit up by the politics of Equal Status.⁵³

When it comes to changing the content of older gender contracts, the preconditions that the political arena should continue to be the focus of equal importance as in previous periods of the Welfare State, do not seem to exist. New conditions have appeared. The new European context, into which Swedish politics have to fit, is the most important. The new Media structure is yet another. The Market, a truly homosocial spot, a third.

Using the analytical tools of gender, we can not dismiss the idea of a possible, almost certain, future segregation - but in which form? Does the new technology arise hope of integration? Of a "deconstruction" of an

⁵³ Thus reformulating the old feminist saying: Where Women are, Power is not.

abstract male norm against which "women" are classified and measured? Will there rather be a reconstruction of the old archetypical gender-contract, now that preferably the Women's Labour Market is highly debated and already shrinking? Will the stereotypical gender figures become even more extreme and essentialized, in a society with a growing suspicion of a rather dark or bleak future?

Criticism

The last gloomy hints evoke *the* theoretical question: Do we look for the pattern of segregation and subordination so hard that we do not see what otherwise would be obvious? Maybe concepts like these even helps to conserve and maintain segregation and subordination? Could we not, with other "key" concepts unlock this prisoning picture and - voila - see the hopeful possibilities of change and more freedom from the yoke of gender?

This fear, I think, is one of the reasons for the unpopularity of concepts like "gender-system" as it points at these systematical patterns and of research areas of differences and discrimination - like the Labour Market. This fear and a longing for something else, but dull results of the same old kind, nurture postmodernist ideas of varieties, of deconstruction of dichotomies, of gender as theatre and gestures, of an unthinkable freedom from these stereotypes.

But as far as I am concerned, that kind of thoughts of a postmodern freedom does not help much in shaping new tools in order to deal with social reality and the subordinated lives of so many real women - measured in terms of possibilities of political, cultural, sexual, and economical matters. Postmodern skepticism has on the contrary created a

climate of "theoretical correctness" which rather turns the researchers away from even posing these questions.⁵⁴

My suggestion then, as this paper is an example of, is to dig even deeper into the "forbidden" stereotypes as well as into the so visible patterns of segregation, using gender and gender contracts in order to do so.

One obvious advantage is that it gives theory what theory must have: a level of firmness, without which "reality" can never be described and analysed. This "firmness" is no obstacle for realizing the varieties of changes, contradictions, wildness, etc., of lives - single or multifarious. On the contrary - it lightens them up and it helps us to locate change.

⁵⁴ See here for example Nancy C.M. Hartsock "Theoretical Bases for Coalition Building: An Assessment of Postmodernism" in *Feminism and Social Change. Bridging Theory and Practice*, ed Heidi Gottfried, University of Illinois Press, Chicago 1996.

Also, in this digging, one must operate with an open and sensitive mind when jumping from theory to "facts" and empiric and back again. One openness must concern segregation. As "segregation" is a word behind which highly different stories hide, it has to be analysed, "deconstructed" in a variety of aspects. Is it "hard" or "surface"? Does it always have to go together with minimizing, marginalisation? In which situations do the gender dichotomies start to work? In what situation don't they? How does segregation on an aggregated level correspond with or contradict segregation on a individual level? And in connection with that question, another difficult question: what does *integration* actually mean?⁵⁵

⁵⁵ As with segregation, one could deal with integration on a primary, secondary and eventually third degree, as well as with a vertical and horizontal level.

Posing these questions at the end may seem unfair as they ought to start, not end, a paper. The reason, however, is to indicate the complexity of the field, the many questions to ask and thus to prevent that kind of simplified criticism which I touched upon in the beginning of this paper. Using and deepening our knowledge of how gender has structured societies and minds ought not to be mingled with what we want. Nor should it give us a feeling of hopelessness because of the strength of the patterns. Freedom from "the power of the thoughts of the dead"⁵⁶ is only possible when exposing these thoughts.

⁵⁶ To quote Alva and Gunnar Myrdal in *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, Sthlm 1934.

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