



## Claims to Authority

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CLAIMS TO AUTHORITY

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# Claims to Authority

Hege Skjeie

## Claims to Authority <sup>1</sup>

While the concept of power long has been central to feminist political theory, there have been relatively few analyses of the closely related concept of authority. When "authority" is taken up, it tends to serve as a key concept for understanding male dominance and female subordination. But often this has been confined to little more than a passing reference. More recent contributions indicate that the meanings and practices of authority are now in the process of gaining focus within feminist political theory. My own point of departure is a set of statements on gendered authority being formulated in two books by Anna Jonasdottir and Kathleen B. Jones respectively. In both, authority is discussed as a concept and a practice which privileges masculinity to the point of effectively preventing women from achieving; being in authority. Contrary to this, I will argue that even traditional notions of authority *can* provide room for women's authority - at conceptual and factual levels alike. Re-examining the familiar weberian ideal types, I try to show that although this room may as yet seem narrow, there are possibilities for expansion. Demonstrating this, I rely on examples from Norwegian party politics. From these experiences, however, I also argue that not all possible expansions would be equally wise to pursue.

Authority is a recurrent theme in Anna Jonasdottir's theory of "love power", presented in her doctoral thesis ("Love Power and Political Interests") and in the book titled *Why Women are Oppressed* (1994). Here Jonasdottir analyses mechanisms that are vital to the sexual authority structure prevailing in formally free and equal, contemporary societies (1994:xiii). The fact that our society is male-dominated in all areas does not mean that women have no influence at all; what we lack is authority – as women, Jonasdottir maintains. Whereas authority implies open acknowledgement, influence means effect, or power which is not always recognized as legitimate. We women do not always face

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<sup>1</sup> A first version of this article was published in Norwegian in Norsk Statsvitenskapelig Tidsskrift no.3, 1993.

opposition when we want to increase our influence – especially not if we hide, as best we can, the fact that we are women. It is mainly when we demand authority – as women – that opposition arises, Jonasdottir states.

In the book *Compassionate Authority. Democracy and the Representation of Women* (1993) Kathleen B. Jones wishes to consider the ways that specific constructions of masculinity and femininity figure in the elaboration of arguments about authority. According to her, our very understanding of authority involves a tendency to associate the authoritative – a forceful, commanding voice – with the masculine, whereas those forms of expression which we connect with the feminine tend to be de-coupled from our understanding of authority. There exists a conceptual split between authority, on the one side, and, on the other, compassion – and this serves to prevent women from achieving authority.<sup>2</sup>

According to Jonasdottir, men's authority is related to how they maintain a self-evident worthiness, and a self-evident right to presence. Women, on the other hand, still have to justify participation on public arenas by means of utility arguments – i.e. reference to women's special, complementary, interests and experiences. As I understand Jonasdottir, authority for women "as women" would imply establishing a self evident presence, similar to that which now applies for men. Jones, however, is clearly seeking an alternative understanding of authority – one which would create space for precisely that which we see as feminine characteristics – more concretely, closeness and compassion. Yet they also meet in a common wish, on women's behalf, that a space be allowed "for emotive and compassionate judgments, so that the cognitive-rational choices will be kept within reason" (Jonasdottir 1994:269).

I agree that this, carefully considered, is an important project to feminism. But I disagree with what I perceive to be two kinds of rather totalizing statements on a current gendered authority structure that this wish for the future builds upon. Partly, this disagreement has been formulated with reference to a set of empirical experiences with women actually claiming political authority - for themselves, and on behalf of women. In all the Scandinavian countries, women and men are in the process of sharing the positions of political power more evenly between themselves. In Norway, a decisive step was taken when in May 1986 the new social democratic Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, appointed the first "Women's Cabinet", as the media were soon to name it. Since then, no

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<sup>2</sup> See also her article "On Authority: Or, Why Women are not Entitled to Speak" in J.R.Pennock and J.W.Chapman (1987).

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Norwegian Cabinet has included less than 40 percent women. Portraits of various Scandinavian "Women in leadership" events have had a world wide distribution; this situation clearly differs from the solitary images which otherwise commonly are transmitted when women occupy top political posts. Here we are instead talking about situations where women have come to parttake on close to equal footing with men in both cabinet and parliament, in regional political bodies, and in the leadership of the national party organisations. In Norway a majority of political parties have adopted a set of regulations on the composition of political bodies; a system of gender quotas which in fact approaches a formal guarantee of equal participation rights. The quota regulations simply state that both sexes are to be represented by a minimum of 40 percent. In this kind of political context, "being a woman politician" is clearly in the process of demystification; by now this seems a far less strange and lonely practice.

In the early 1990s I conducted a research project on women's participation in political leadership in Norway. In connection with this project I also interviewed all members of both the Norwegian Cabinet and Parliament.<sup>3</sup> Doing this kind of work, I came to question what is otherwise claimed to be common feminist recognition; i.e. "the overwhelming masculine nature of symbolic justifications for and practices of authority that are central in maintaining gender inequality and women's subordination" (Acker 1995:467) Accepted at face value, this kind of "recognition" would imply that even when women participate at the very highest level in politics, they cannot be in politics with "as much" authority as men (cf. Jonasdottir 1994). But thinking about authority in the concrete - as something of relevance to actual persons and positions - this kind of factual claim did not seem convincing. As far as I can see, women in the Scandinavian countries *do* participate in politics; speaking and deliberating; claiming authority; not only individually but also - in a collective sense - "as women". Yet how can such claims succeed, if the dominant understanding of authority tends to converge on "a form of masculinized mastery" - as for instance Kathleen Jones (1987, 1993) maintains ?

Admittedly, the Scandinavian experience is rather exceptional. Yet in my opinion, this particular case still has more general implications that ought to be considered in examinations of the meanings and practices of authority. To me, it thus became important to ask whether - and how - even our traditional understandings of authority might provide room for women achieving; being in; authority. Among such figures of thought, Max Weber's ideal types loom large indeed. Undoubtedly, Weber's position is - to put it mildly -

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<sup>3</sup> In this article, citations from Cabinet Members refer to these interviews.

subject to criticism within feminist critiques of "the classics". I still, however, would hold that these ideal types can provide a tool for discussing the possibilities which women have to establish and maintain political authority. Following Weber's distinction between legal, charismatic, and traditional forms of authority, I shall thus discuss implications of these distinctions for women's claims to authority.<sup>4</sup>

Ideal types consider sources for authority - how such claims are based on different types of legitimation. Much recent thought concerning authority, however, concentrates on the tension between authority and autonomy - and on the burdens and dangers accompanying any of authority's practices (cf. Sennett 1981, or Conolly 1987). Similarly, feminist writing have also opted for political alternatives which altogether reject authority. Such critiques are not discussed here. Instead, the focus in this article is on different traditional legitimation bases - on the general assumption that Weberian categories, in spite of criticism, remain a common inheritance - that they still influence our thinking about authority, whether we tend to accept or reject its different practises.

## The Weberian Heritage: Positional vs Personal Authority

The heritage from Weber is apparent in our simultaneous association to both hierarchy and legitimacy. "If authority is to be defined at all, then, it must be in contradistinction to both coercion by force and persuasion", as for example Hannah Arendt wrote in one of the most widely quoted essays on authority, "What Was Authority" (1958).<sup>5</sup> Authority claims, and builds on, obedience. But this obedience is based on consent, and on confidence, trust, or loyalty. When one of these falters, authority is undermined: the "authority" becomes illegitimate, or false. Authority can, however, have different sources - it may be based on varying types of legitimation.

The *legal form of authority* - which Weber terms "modern" and which we also characterize as "rational" and "bureaucratic" - is an impersonal, non-partisan form of

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<sup>4</sup> My presentation of Weber builds on his "The Types of Legitimate Domination" in *Economy and Society* (1968) and "Politics as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber* (1958).

<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this article however was to show, through a historical philosophic analysis, what the original meaning of authority was, and how it "has vanished from the modern world" Thus the title; what *was* authority.

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order.<sup>6</sup> Obedience towards this form of authority is linked first and foremost to the *order* itself, and only secondarily to those in positions of authority. In other words, the legal authority concerns the authority that accompanies a position, rather than lodging in the individual person – and for the individual it remains valid only as long as that person remains in that position. The premises of legitimacy which are established by the legal form of authority are not limited – neither in principle nor in practice – to the administrative part of bureaucracy, but include also the top, political, level. We accept that the administrative head of a government ministry has authority simply by virtue of his or her position. Likewise, we accept that the political head of a government ministry has authority by virtue of his or her position. In the final instance, it is the Minister who is responsible for the decisions taken by the bureaucracy: and also the Minister is bound by regulations.<sup>7</sup> Legal authority is in principle gender-neutral. Once positions are occupied, authority is also transferred to those persons who occupy them, be they women or men. Thus when men renounce their monopoly on political leadership positions – as is for instance formalized through quota regulations – this simply means that they *have* also renounced their hegemony on political authority in this weberian formal legal sense.

I have no difficulty in accepting that this kind of simple reminder is of limited interest to feminist concerns about male dominance and female subordination in relations of authority. Such concerns have mainly concentrated on whether this positionally-dependent authority only seemingly is gender neutral; whether its central characteristics actually contain a hidden masculine coding which works to women's disadvantage (cf. Jones 1993, chap. 3). Within bureaucracies, "technical competence" is the central principle of recruitment. The legal form of authority does not accept any kind of traditionally-based transfer – or usurpation – of positions. Weber saw the legal form of authority to have a clear status-equalizing and equality-creating function, also within the bureaucracy itself - a tendency which mainly follows in the wake of the demand for "competence" as the basis

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<sup>6</sup> To repeat a well-known maxim: legal authority is characterized first of all by having a clearly limited sphere of validity. It is bound by rules; it is organized in the form of a hierarchy with the right of appeal; it demands neutrality and independence, written communication and specialized knowledge.

<sup>7</sup> In terms of ideal types, Weber's distinction between legal and charismatic authority may be read also as a distinction between the "bureaucratic" and the "political". Yet his own description of the legal authority also includes the political level: "An elected president, a cabinet of ministers, or a body of elected "People's representatives" also in this sense constitute administrative organs" (*Economy and Society* p.218)

for recruitment.<sup>8</sup> Yet this adherence to competence has also been claimed to contain such a strong, if hidden, masculine coding that we ought to question its legitimacy (cf. Stivers 1994).

There is little doubt that the premises established by the legal form of authority, including its demand for competence, also influence the way in which we think about political leadership more generally. I would not, however, agree that the premise of neutrality that goes with the demand for competence, *necessarily* disadvantages women. When we for instance demand greater influence for women within the political leadership by referring to "resources of political competence" – then we are drawing heavily on the legitimacy base of the legal form of authority. We are implying that gender-skewed recruitment is due to other – and consequently irrelevant – methods of recruitment. Within this framework it clearly makes no sense for women to claim authority "as women" other than through insisting on the principle of "equal treatment". That is: in the competition for those positions which grant authority, qualifications are what count. Adherence to "neutrality" is not necessarily naive. It does not necessarily mean that we believe that "political competence" exists as a non negotiable, fixed and specified, set of qualifications. Nor does it imply a belief that competence in practice is evaluated irrespective of gender. We are only stating what the norm *is*, and that the norm *should not* be disregarded.

The actual relevance of "competence" for political authority becomes clear also when we consider statements from top politicians on their own political careers. When for instance the members of the first "Women's Cabinet" - in positions of authority from 1986 to 1989 - were asked what they thought were the most important reasons for their own appointment to ministerial posts, the one prominent qualification turned out to be "political competence". References were either made to general experience from parliamentary decision-making processes, or to specific expertise in those policy areas they were now in charge of. Thus confidence in their own specialist knowledge - in the workings and/or the priorities of politics - was what primarily marked the "self evaluation" of men and women alike.

As one Cabinet Minister pointed out:

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<sup>8</sup> *Economy and Society*, pp. 225–226. Discussions of authority after Weber has often stressed drawing a distinction between authority based on competence and authority based on position: the distinction between being "an authority" and being "in authority". See e.g. Ball 1987. In Weberian bureaucracy, however, being "an authority" and being "in authority" go hand in hand.

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It's important to recognize that "politics" constitutes its own field of competence. Being in charge of a Ministry, you clearly benefit from familiarity with the workings of Parliament. This is not something you learn from reading books. You need to *know* this particular workplace.

In Norwegian politics, the party system largely remains too strong to allow too much dominance by single leaders. Nevertheless, in the interview series there were Cabinet Ministers who also stressed the importance of "personalities" - of personality traits like determination and independence; creativity and ideas; ability to inspire; involvement with and care for people. More generally, political authority is, of course, not merely a question of the authority that accompanies a position. Rather, positions can be said to provide a minimum of authority which is necessary to exercise influence. Accepting the authority conferred by positions does not mean that we do not care about the personal qualities of those who occupy the positions – quite the reverse. From our politicians we expect more than factual knowledge and competence. They must follow the rules, and with integrity – but that is far from being enough. We want ideas and visions, we want enthusiasm and engagement. And in placing such demands, we have moved far beyond the framework of the legal form of authority. It has now become a question of Weber's second ideal type: *charismatic authority*. This is a personally, not a positionally, based form of authority. In focus now are the unique personalities – those who by virtue of their special qualities can convince others of the need to rally round them. Charismatic authorities are those who at any given time bring promises of change; they are the ones who challenge inflexible structures and routinized relations.

## Charismatic Authority and Promises of Change

Weber's ideal types indicate classifications, but this is not to say that the categories must be seen as mutually exclusive. Rather, the point is – as Weber notes - "to distinguish what aspects can be identified as falling under or approximating one or another of the categories" (Weber 1968:263).<sup>9</sup> In the same way, charismatic authority in its ideal-type form concerns the one leader and his, or her, enthusiastic supporters. In practice, however, we will look for charismatic traits in more than just one uncontested leader. Weber himself was sceptical

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. also Richard E. Flathman: "If the distinctions are important it is presumably because authority works somewhat differently, enters into social and political life in somewhat different ways, depends upon somewhat different conditions, in each of the major types that Weber distinguishes. And Weber's discussion is indeed an attempt to show that this is the case." (Flathman 1973:100)

to the "formalistic impersonality" of the legal form of authority – which knows neither hate nor passion, but thereby neither involvement nor enthusiasm. It risks becoming authority without substance or goals. Also in modern authority relations we need charismatic leaders. Bureaucracy needs a political leadership capable of formulating goals and creating enthusiasm; a leadership that can show dedication to a cause; a leadership that has personal authority and that can take personal responsibility. But this has to be leaders who at the same time are bound by the competing prerequisites of the positions they occupy; predictability and neutrality. All of us fear the Janus-visage of charisma: the leader who misleads us, the hero who turns despotic. When we think of political authority, then, we are thinking about both position and personality.

Charismatic authority has two important characteristics. First, it is directed towards change and renewal. It first appears as an oppositional authority in the sense of stressing "other" goals than those "now" in focus. At the same time, charisma is also a collective term for personal radiance and attraction. Seen in this light, such authority has an open form, one which is filled by means of the personal qualities possessed by a charismatic leader. Charismatic authority is far from being gender-neutral in the same way as the legal form of authority is: it cannot at one and the same time focus on the person yet ignore gender. The legitimacy that follows from the legal form of authority is one that *has* to be "without regard to gender". Within charismatic relations of authority however, it can be argued that a space *does* exist outside the formal considerations for women's claims to authority "as women".<sup>10</sup>

This space is provided by the very orientation towards change and renewal in charismatic relations of authority. After all, it is the mental category of "women" that represents something new – not all those individuals belonging to the category of "men" who, for centuries, have marched into positions – and out of them again. Political processes might thus develop where individual women come to benefit from the change and renewal that "women" - in this collective sense - are claimed to promise. Consider for instance the following statement from one of the ministers in the first Norwegian "Women's Cabinet":

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<sup>10</sup> I use this phrasing; "as women" in the same deliberately vague sense as for instance Anna Jonasdottir (1994) - cf. also Åstrøm and Hirdman 1992. With regard to the discussions carried out in this article, I think that there really is no need to go into the overwhelming literature on feminist disputes over essentialism; over the "real existence" of common attributes; common interests; or common identity. I still sympathize with Iris Young's claim for "a more pragmatic orientation", that is for an intellectual discourse where categorizing, explaining, developing accounts and arguments are tied to specific practical and political problems (Young 1994).

Obviously, being a woman is itself important – I joined politics largely due to this. I also think that the group of women who became members of Parliament in 1977 – there are five of us in the Cabinet now – received much positive attention. We got better opportunities than the men in our "class"; we were encouraged and put in charge of big political issues.

The most prominent of this Minister's "class mates" is undoubtedly the former Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland. She first took over as head of the Norwegian government in 1981, at a time when the then existing Labour Party leadership had exhausted its capacity through a series of internal status disputes. The advocates of Ms. Brundtland's leadership candidacy came close to portraying her as the party's only possible saviour: only she could represent a clear alternative to all those male veterans of the internal party wars. The popular daily paper *Dagbladet* followed the new Prime Minister on her first tour. In the coastal town of Porsgrunn, so many people assembled that at least 200 had to be turned away from the meeting room. And the journalist reported back to Oslo:

I have been at many an election meeting in the Labour Party. Never have I seen anything like what happened yesterday. Those resigned, grey faces who for so long have dominated Labour gatherings have now taken on colour. Eyes were bright with eagerness. A kind of kowtowing, almost. A bit scary – the way it often is at revival meetings." (Hansson and Teigene 1992:124)

Yet in charismatic relations of authority, "women" may mean more than new faces; new voices. Their appeal might also be linked to the presentation of "new ideas" and "new goals" for political activity. During the past two decades, Norwegian politics has witnessed the gradual breakthrough for what I call a political rhetoric of difference. This means that demands for women's integration into party politics have been supported by a line of arguments which primarily have maintained the following credo: "Gender constitutes an important political category, which need to be fully represented. Regardless of partisan preferences, women have a right to be represented by their own; that is by women. Actual representation is necessary: men cannot negotiate the values, experiences, or interests, of women". Regardless of actual program statements, or policy specifications, a collective promise has thus been attached to demands for women's political integration. While individual party women clearly have demanded fair treatment for themselves in the competition for political positions - in line with those premises which the legal form of authority establish - they have at the same time contributed to underscore a promise of political change following from their interests, experiences, or perspectives, as women. When present in sufficient numbers - this promise states - women politicians will broaden

the scope of political decision making, adding new issues and new values to the political agenda. They might even bring about a whole new set of political priorities. The new agendas, and the new choices, will in turn help create a more "woman-friendly society".<sup>11</sup>

Also writing from within a Scandinavian political context, Anna Jonasdottir has nevertheless claimed that appeals to "new priorities" cannot provide (sufficient) room for women's authority "as women". In this, she stresses a distinction between men's obvious right to participation, and the lack of such a right for women. The distinction she makes applies to men as a group, and to women as a group. But it also follows the individual, acting as a framework that defines the individual's chances of establishing personal authority. For Jonasdottir, it is a major problem that women still have to *justify* presence by means of utility arguments - that is by references to women's "special" resources and experiences. Even when present in equal numbers, women this way remain "the other". And this way, the proof will still rest with women. If we women cannot show that we do indeed represent something different from what men stand for, then the conclusion may easily become that there is no point in our presence.

This is a warning worth listing to. In my opinion, "utility" might well be the single most powerful discursive trap in liberal deliberations on representation. Yet I still think that Jonasdottir somewhat overstates the problem of utility. Firstly, arguments on the political relevance of gender have not been made solely in terms of utility. In actual political contexts, they have rather been stated in two distinctly different ways. Addressing a cross party audience, they have been framed either in terms of "resources", or in terms of "interests". Only the "resource" argument; that women's experiences will represent a valuable contribution to decision making processes, can be said to bear some resemblance to Jonasdottir's utility argument. The "interest" argument, however, has primarily maintained that the conflicting interests of men and women require a balanced representation of both parties. In strategic terms, the former aimed to convince more conservative audiences, while the latter mainly aimed to convince more radical political audiences (Hernes 1982, Skjeie 1991).

Secondly, but as important: Jonasdottir's claim ignores that justifications actually is something we ask of all political activity that involves leadership. The personal form of authority - as described e.g. by Weber as charismatic - is *in general* concerned with justifications. It is oriented towards change and renewal - and must present itself through

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<sup>11</sup> This phrase was coined by the Norwegian political scientist, Helga Hernes (1987); herself a Deputy Minister in The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Cf. also Jones (1990.)

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statements on new goals and new ideas. It is exactly through the presentation of alternatives that new authority creates its own space. True enough, the reasons provided by men are rarely stated with reference to gender. Only women's political participation has been argued in terms of collective justifications that refers directly to gender. But in collectivity, women *are* newcomers to positions of leadership. By presenting themselves in terms of "the alternative", they have thus made use of a well-known political strategy. Collective justifications are *general* attempts to enlarge the room for legitimate authority, and can thus be seen a central way of expressing women's claims to authority "as women". In this respect, they simultaneously offer both tools, and traps.

For the individual, a collective justification will clearly not be the only one provided for a personal claim to authority. Individuals must still demonstrate those personal qualities which will create enthusiasm, and rally support. Yet the credibility of the collective justifications also depend on individuals choosing to embrace them as their own, followed up by different kinds of specifications. Once again, the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland might provide an example to illustrate this. From the outset of her political career, she received strong support from the Labour Party's women's organization. In the early 1970's she had worked with them to secure legal abortion rights. She also supported the demand for an internal quota system for party offices, and explicitly referred to this quota policy as an important guide to her selection of cabinet ministers. With the women's organisation, she continued to give high priority to political measures aimed to further women's economic independence. Through the 1970s and the 1980s, the most important of such measures came to include, on the one hand an equal rights legislation for education and employment, on the other hand an extension of the publicly funded day care service and paid parental leave reforms. In an effort to "bring the father back to the family", leave regulations were also introduced where the child's father must take a fixed minimum leave for the family to uphold rights to the full leave period.

These latter policies have mainly been advocated as "A Politics of Care". This phrasing is intended to signal the equal relevance of such policies to women and men; mothers and fathers; parents and children. But at the same time they are uniformly regarded both as caused by and promoted through women's political leadership. More vaguely, the new political focus within the Labour Party leadership was commented by one Cabinet member as follows:

Just take the title of the new Labour programme – "We need one another" – that hasn't emerged from any traditional male circle. The bosses in the LO (Federation of Trade Unions) – and mind you, I hold nothing against them – they're not the ones behind that particular slogan.

"The new" will, however, soon be embraced by processes of routinization. We grow accustomed to annual announcements of longer parental leave, and stop fretting about a lack of kindergartens. On the other hand, this merely illustrates Weber's point: charismatic authority is always an ephemeral phenomenon. As soon as it becomes established and routinized, that paves the way for a new oppositional authority. After nearly a decade as Norwegian Prime Minister, Ms. Brundtland was regularly confronted by her opponents with an accusation that she appeared, and behaved, like a Chief Executive - or Corporate Director - of politics. Such a title is not particularly honourable for someone in a position of top political leadership. It indicates a politician with *only* the legal form of authority as backup; it signals either lack of charisma, or the routinization of charismatic authority – mainly in the direction of increased bureaucratization.

Yet in spite of these kinds of "routinization", the general impact of a rhetoric of difference remains. A series of studies demonstrate how Norwegian party leaderships largely share the credo of the political relevance of gender. Men and women alike maintain that there *are* differences in the interests, or values, held by men and women politicians. And new women candidates for top leadership positions in turn present new interpretations, and specifications, of what might constitute women friendly policies.

## Authority and Masculinity

Relying on examples from Norwegian party politics, I have so far tried to demonstrate how women's claims to authority might find support within the frameworks of either the legal or the charismatic form of authority described by Weber. Doing this, I have also touched upon a major aspect of feminist criticism against Weber's work. Much of this criticism has been directed towards the value Weber is claimed to attach to what we perceive as masculine qualities. In other words, this is now a matter of the consequences of gender polarizing - of dualistic associations linked to what is masculine and what is feminine <sup>12</sup> -

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<sup>12</sup> These dualisms we know very well indeed – the list could be extended almost indefinitely. In one familiar quote: "We thus construct rationality in opposition to emotionality, objectivity in opposition to subjectivity, culture in opposition to nature, the public realm in opposition to the private realm. Whether we read Kant, Rousseau, Hegel or Darwin, we find that female and male are contrasted in

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and the need to reveal the hidden masculine structures in Weber's writings. Both the legal and the charismatic form of authority are held to contain representations that privileges masculinity. In her chapter on "Gender and the Marks of Authority" Kathleen Jones (1993) argues that rational legal systems only apparently establish authority in gender neutral terms. Following Wendy Brown (1988), she maintains that authority understood as instrumental rationality *is* a masculinized practice: regardless of sex, bureaucratic leaders are "masculinized" because they are above the merely subjective pull of everyday life, while their followers are "feminized" because they are subjected to the soulless commands of rationalized, instrumentalized and institutionalized "manliness" (Jones 1993:111).<sup>13</sup> While acknowledging that charismatic authority may be more capable of accomodating marks of "the feminine" as indicators of authority, Kathleen Jones nevertheless concludes that "Weber's list of those characteristics thought to be charismatic seems more indebted to masculine representations for greatness than feminine ones" (Jones 1993:112).<sup>14</sup>

She then moves on to enquire after an alternative understanding of authority, one that can create room for precisely that which we see as feminine qualities. Jones calls this "compassionate authority" – an understanding of authority which is capable of elevating the role of empathy. To continue in terms of dichotomies, such a concept of authority would involve communication more than command, closeness more than distance. It implies, according to Jones, a more humane, but also more ambiguous, authority: it is concerned with interpretation and meaning more than with order through rules.

She is fully aware that investigations into the "hidden masculinity", run the risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes. Criticizing Weber for his "masculine thinking" however adds another well known problem, that the critics thereby risk appearing as more pronounced representatives of a gender-dichotomous line of thought than Weber himself.

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terms of opposing characters: women love beauty, men truth; women are passive, men active; women are emotional, men rational; women are selfless, men selfish – and so on and on through the history of western philosophy. (Harding 1986:123).

<sup>13</sup> A similar claim is, as already noted, made by Stivers (1994), who maintains that defending legitimacy on the basis of "competence" is problematic because the image of the public administrator thus conceived privileges masculine characteristics while denigrating and/or supressing feminine ones.

<sup>14</sup> In this I think she makes an interpretation similar to for instance Roslyn W. Bologh: "I call Weber's conception of charismatic leadership "patriarchal", because it means taking charge and ruling or commanding.. as opposed to leadership that is more maternal in principle – either by an exemplary type, leading by example or suggestion, or of a representative type, leading by representing or carrying out the wishes of those whom one represents, or of a pedagogical type, leading by teaching and learning from (being responsive to) those whom one teaches." (Bologh 1990:94)

<sup>15</sup> In the feminist case made against the legal form of authority, gender stereotypes might be established were none formerly existed. As already argued, in this case I think the wiser approach would be to keep the ground as neutral as possible - if still soulless. I do, however, agree that the charismatic form of authority provides little gender neutral ground. This is due to the simple fact that being a personal form of authority it cannot at the same time ignore gender. What it does provide, however, is an openness towards different "gifts of grace". To the degree that we choose to focus on dichotomies of masculinity and femininity, we might also choose to look not only for "marks of the masculine". The more we look, the more we might discover *both* to be potentially, or actually, present.

Consider for instance the range of practical political attempts which aim to create legitimacy for women's authority exactly by focusing on "feminine qualities". In the literature on management and leadership there are now an abundance of descriptions of two distinct sets of expectations linked to masculine and to feminine leadership respectively. The masculine leadership ideal portrayed is the strategic-rational: the feminine ideal is the relational. This relational ideal emphasizes precisely such things as communication and dialogue. Nor should we forget that, in the world of politics, this is a leadership ideal which has long been relevant, if not always as clearly focused. The very tension within representation theory has to do with the balance that must be struck between the will to lead and the will to listen, between political initiatives and political obligations. The "new" and "feminine" leadership ideal thus attaches itself to an old vision of change and development through dialogue.

Once again we meet a kind of collective justification. The "feminine alternative", however, addresses broad leadership styles more than general leadership priorities. As of today we meet such justifications in very different contexts. The core is similar, but the specification may vary according to context. To illustrate this, I will present one example from another arena than the party-political, and quote Rosemarie Køhn, the first woman appointed bishop in the Norwegian Church, as she told about a study she had carried out about clergy roles: "The men appeared as "priests of the pulpit". They stressed their importance as teachers in the parish. The women appeared as "priests of the street". They saw themselves as fellow wanderers, and were more concerned with being close to people. They were more relational -, or process-oriented. They saw this as a part of preaching. This

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<sup>15</sup> Concerning this as a more general point, see also Harding 1986, p. 130.

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was an unexpected observation for us who worked on this study. Male and female clergy have two different ways of being in authority. I think we need both in the Norwegian Church." <sup>16</sup>

Again we thus meet justifications that seeks to expand the *general* room for legitimate authority. These attempts to broaden our notions of authority are surely not made without risk. They imply that we must live with the constant danger involved in stereotyping – which actually means that the individual may become not only linked to but instead glued into the group stereotype. I will give one example of how this might happen. In May 1988, the "Women's Cabinet" celebrated its second anniversary, and the newspaper *Dagbladet* participated in the press conference held at Hotel Bristol in Oslo. The women cabinet members had on this occasion planned to inform of new national policies of benefit to women. But *Dagbladet* chose to focus on form rather than on content. And when form was to be evaluated, hardly anyone passed the test. The cabinet ministers communicated "the way politicians do, not the way women do". There was no warmth; no closeness. Instead, the women withdrew – they created distance. What seemed in particular to have annoyed the journalist present, was that the women were so busy. After having delivered their message, they simply hurried away. In some detail she described a "meeting" between a young colleague and the minister responsible for equal opportunity affairs. Ahead ran the minister, followed by the journalist – who carried an information folder on women and leadership, provided by the Ministry. All the way the minister shouted – like the rabbit in "Alice in Wonderland" – that she did not have time, her schedule was much too busy. *Just like clever little men in suits* – the newspaper stated in big headlines the following morning.

What we here witnessed was the boomerang effect of "femininity". Here the collective justification hit women in collectivity: the women's behaviour broke with the expectations as to how women would, and should, behave. In this case, the glue of "femininity" showed itself to be one which easily stuck. And when this happened, the space for individual expressions more or less disappeared. I think that collective justifications which build on notions of femininity are bound to create more dangerous discursive traps than collective justifications which builds on notions of interests or experiences. The former draw far more heavily on dualistic preconceptions, and thus provide less room for individual specifications than the latter. This also means that the trap of "promises unkept" closes more easily.

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<sup>16</sup> *Likt og ulikt*, The Equal Status Council's quarterly magazine, nr. 10, 1993.

Claims to authority based on "the feminine alternative" can thus at best be made on very shaky grounds. I am not sure, however, that claims based on opposite notions - of masculinity - are made from much more solid ground. Hopefully, this can be illustrated through an examination of Weber's third ideal type, *traditional authority*. Within this framework, we primarily meet images of masculinity contained within the figure of "the father".

## Paternal Authority, and its Maternal Counterpart

The traditional form of authority as described by Weber is based on inherited privileges and positions. Obedience is, however, due to the persons who uphold this heritage – and in this sense, traditional authority also concerns personal authority. But traditional authority gives direct associations to the relations in the old, patriarchal family - that is, associations of omnipotent fathers and powerless mothers and children.<sup>17</sup> The legitimacy of a patriarchal form of authority is dependent on whether we can and will accept a male dominance founded in traditions and maintained through inheritance – albeit not necessarily literally – of privileges and positions. In modernity, as Weber observed, this form of authority is clearly a vanishing one. Yet justifications of gender hierarchies by reference to tradition still get approval in lots of settings. And the disputes that arised over the appointment of Rosemarie Køhn to the office of bishop also demonstrated how the church's tradition of male dominance was by some regarded as a forceful argument in its own right. But within the sphere of liberally based party politics such justifications are clearly not legitimate ones; here it would be impossible to maintain "tradition" as a valid reason for male dominance.

On the other hand, the old patriarchal form of authority also has a modern variant. In his *Authority* (1981), Richard Sennett describes this variant as a paternalistic authority – a father-like authority. This then is a form of authority which legitimizes itself not so much by means of direct reference to tradition, inherited rights and privileges. Rather it plays on the traditional role of the father, his promise of security and protection and on our own need

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<sup>17</sup> Weber described two main variants of traditional authority: the patriarchal and the patrimonial. "I. Patriarchalism is the situation where, within a group (household) which is usually organized on both an economic and a kinship basis, a particular individual governs who is designated by a definite rule of inheritance... the patriarch's authority carries a strict obligations to obedience only within his own household. ... II. Patrimonialism...tend(s) to arise whenever traditional domination develops an administration and a military force which are purely personal instruments of the master. By controlling these instruments the ruler can broaden the range of his arbitrary power and put himself in a position to grant grace and favours at the expense of the traditional limitations of patriarchal structures." (*Economy and Society*, pp. 231–233)

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for care. Still the paternalistic authority also implies the existence of an alternative. The Founding Fathers present *one* well-known image of father-like political authority. And the female counterpart is obviously the Mother of the Nation.

Even within the functionally divided family, Mother appears as a figure far less deprived of power than in the old patriarchal family, where the law proscribed her subordination. Within the framework of family-like relations, transferred to public arenas, the counterpart to paternalistic authority is thus the maternalistic, mother-like, authority. In some public settings this image of the mother-like authority is already well established. In pedagogy for instance, we often find descriptions of this kind of authority being at the very base of modern education principles (cf. Dale 1986, also Bologh 1990). True, the image of paternalistic authority is not only that of one who is pledged to protect. More than the maternalistic authority, the paternalistic one will still seem something distant, something elevated – or perhaps someone sitting in judgement (cf. Sennett 1981, also Holter 1991). But through the emphasis on protection and care, there is still a conceptual link between authority and compassion. Thus, when Kathleen Jones argues that we need an alternative understanding of authority which is capable of elevating the role of empathy, we might counter that through both the "father" and the "mother" figure, care metaphors are already represented.

Within the context of Norwegian politics, such metaphors have surely abounded. The public image of the Prime Minister as "Gro" is also one of "Mother Norway". To quote *Dagbladet* again: "well, she may at times talk like a White Paper, but she also has this way of making close contact, even if she hides it in the rush and bustle of the capital city. But get her far off on an island, or deep in the fjord country.. she then opens up and creates contact and warmth". In this - the newspaper claimed - she surely resembles her predecessor: the Norwegian "Father of the Nation" - Labour Party leader Einar Gerhardsen, who had remained Prime Minister for a period of nearly twenty years.<sup>18</sup>

The ideal image of maternalistic authority is the true sense of caring and being close. But we should also bear in mind that the reverse side of the coin is always lurking there. Both paternalistic and maternalistic authority draw heavily on metaphors. They carry the relationships of families into politics. Politics however requires grown-ups. And the images of parent/child-like relations that these metaphors convey, are clearly ambiguous ones. They accentuate the question of true vs. false authority, which to both Sennett and Jones is indeed

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<sup>18</sup> Steinar Hansson and Ingolf Håkon Teigene in *Dagbladet*, 31 Dec 1988.

a central one. Sennett ends up rejecting paternalism as an authority of "false love", claiming that his cases show us leaders who care for others only as long as it serves their own interests.

Powerful mothers can be as frightening (cf. Ruddick 1980) - and opposition to a maternalistic form of authority may assume indeed extreme forms. I shall conclude with one last example, which is based on a book review of Robert Bly's *Iron John*. In this review, the Norwegian sociologist Øystein Gullvåg Holter read the book not only as a mythological description of male longing for a truly paternalistic authority - a father-figure who can lead his young sons in the hunt for genuine malehood. He also read it as a defence of male dominance: the core of "masculinity" portrayed by Bly was stealth, harshness and aggression. Holter's points were taken up and debated by another sociologist, Tord Høivik, who described Bly's book, and at the same time the public "mother-power" as follows: "(The book) is about going into a field that has been repressed, condemned, abandoned. It's all about leaving the field of women and feminist values as to how good boys ought to be. Boys today are growing up in a world of women - neat and tidy, prig and considerate.. Children end up in the soft, frustrated arms of caringness - first with full-time moms, and then in well-manicured kindergartens. Oh, such good boys we were! - Women trained us to be lap-dogs - and that at a time in life when we have to submit or die. And we hated it."<sup>19</sup>

## Authority and Autonomy - a Constant Ambiguity

What concerned Max Weber first and foremost were the different legitimacy sources of authority. Less important for him was the factual issue of consent. By contrast, much recent thought concerning authority takes as its point of departure the ambiguities, the ambivalences, in the tension between authority and autonomy. In Sennett's description, we fear authority, yet we search for it. We see authority as a threat to our freedom and fear its authoritarian face. But at the same time we ask for the guidelines or the security that authority has to offer. And that is why we continue to search for "true" authority all the while strongly doubting that it exists.

This ambivalence between authority and autonomy also finds expression in the dual demands we place on elected leaders. On the one hand, we expect them to show the will to lead and the power to act, and to take independent initiatives. But on the other hand, we

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in *Mannsforskning*, no. 2, 1992.

also expect them to be attentive and to listen, disseminating that which is our will, while they furthermore – to some extent at least – leave us in peace. And often we demand all of this at the same time. We need to tie authority to fixed sets of regulations. But we also want to break away from the established. The ambivalence between fear of authority and the search for it creates a constant tension between assuredness and doubt. In the midst of enthusiasm, we are sceptical: our doubts grow as we wait for things to be taken care of. For the kind of authority that builds on images of "father" and "mother", the ambivalence can become urgent indeed. The need to be cared for encounters the fear of becoming dependent: the fear of totality in a relation which, in its family-likeness, lacks boundaries.

In this article, I have questioned "the overwhelming masculine nature of symbolic justifications for and practices of authority" (Acker 1995). Instead, I have tried to show how women who seek political authority can find support in different aspects of our complex notions as to what authority is. I have argued against the claim that strategies which aim to build collective justifications for women's presence actually prevents us from achieving authority. This claim neglects that justifications are something we ask of all political leadership; that new authority creates its own space exactly through the presentation of alternatives; that collective justifications are *general* attempts to enlarge the room for legitimate authority. I strongly doubt, however, that all such strategies are equally wise to pursue. They all contain traps, but some traps seem more dangerous than others. Collective justifications which draw heavily on dualistic preconceptions in particular risk a boomerang effect, when collective "promises unkept" hit women collectively.



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