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## Towards Feminist Ethics of Love and the New Emotional Culture of Late Capitalism

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My paper explores contemporary socio-political aspects of love-as-power within the newly emerging context of feminist ethics of love, as well as in a broader sense of neoliberal commodification of self-centrism and philosophical urgency for articulating love as togetherness, responsibility and solidarity with others. My theoretical analysis begins with the tensions between the early 20<sup>th</sup> century collective consciousness represented by the feminist socialist formulations of love as responsibility for the outside world and the existentialist anxiety as related to individual alienation. My analysis culminates in the re-emergence of non-monogamous bonding in Europe as a trope for a new precariousness of family enactments extending beyond the nuclear heteronormativity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently.*

R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*

*Love is—if it is really love—a form of eternal dynamism and at the same time fidelity to the first encounter. It is a tension, or better, a sort of dialectics. ... The same holds for Revolution.*

S. Horvat, *The Radicality of Love*

## Vulnerability and commodification of love

Facing the diverging memories of Europe, global conflicts across nations, religions, and cultures, it is difficult to speak about a common imagery of intimate relationships,<sup>1</sup> and yet, we often refer to similar acts of bonding across distinct political and cultural frontiers. As I intend to argue in this paper, it is love, one of the most compelling, but also continually under-theorised affect that underpins the seeming contradiction. Historically speaking, the meanings of love have undergone various processes of signification *vis-à-vis* the changing geo-politics of family, sexuality, and friendship. Early Europeans operated on fairly contradictory and politically conflicting enactments of love relying on various traditions, e.g. homoerotic love inherited from ancient Greece, Roman and (early) Christian power-related polygamy,<sup>2</sup> troubadour/chivalry romance, arranged marriages.<sup>3</sup> Over the centuries, these concepts had grown into the European mould of family, serving as a socio-political counterpoint to the “polluting effects” of the colonial encounters with racial, religious, and sexual difference.<sup>4</sup>

Safeguarding the privileges of lineage (class, property), such family construction culminated in the 16/17<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of Enlightenment, subordinating the meanings of love to the legacies of reason (Aristotle, Kant), kinship, and superiority of whiteness. More importantly, in the light of my further discussion of feminist ethics, these legacies were coupled with male parameters of liberty, progress and fraternity (Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume). During this period, ‘family’ consolidates itself as a structure of intimate sociality—based on monogamy, (male) individuality and a sense of European (cultural) integrity—that may, but does not need to, embody the experience of love as an emotional affect. In fact, deriving from such a class-oriented model of family, close bonds have undermined the power of love as a social

1 E.g. R. Phillips, *Sex, Politics and Empire: A Postcolonial Geography*, New York, University of Manchester Press 2006; K. Crawford, *European Sexualities, 1400–1800*, New York, Cambridge University Press 2007; L. Passerini, *Love and the Idea of Europe*, New York/Oxford, Berghahn 2009; M. Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories. Trauma, Ethics, Politics*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan 2013; *Immigrant Protest: Politics, Aesthetics, and Everyday Dissent*, eds. K. Marciniak, I. Tyler; *Praxis: Theory in Action Series*, series ed. N. Naples, New York, SUNY Press 2014.

2 E.g. J. Cairncross, *After Polygamy Was Made a Sin: The Social History of Christian Polygamy*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1974; L. Betzig, *Roman Polygyny*, ‘Ethnology and Sociobiology’ 1992, Vol. 13, pp. 309–49.

3 *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, eds. P. Ariès, A. Béjin, Oxford, Blackwell 1985; A. McLaren, *Monogamy, Polygamy and the True State: James I’s Rhetoric of Empire*, ‘History of Political Thought’ 2004, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 446–80; P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York, Columbia University Press 2008; W. Scheidel, *A Peculiar Institution? Greco-Roman Monogamy in Global Context*, ‘History of the Family’ 2009, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 280–91; C. Nocentelli, *Empires of Love. Europe, Asia, and the Making of Early Modern Identity*, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press 2014.

4 L. McWhorter, *Sex, Race, and Biopower: A Foucauldian Genealogy*, ‘Hypatia’ 2004, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 38–62.

act of sharing, transforming the structure of intimate life into a system of materialist accumulation. While the following centuries engage in the subject of love as affecting individuals in psychically meaningful, erotic, emotional, and political ways, I would argue that it is the romantic and post-romantic subjectivity and its aesthetic exercise of freedom that eventually overcome the “rational” subjugation of the human affects, shaping the modern and contemporary ethics of intimacy and love.

Following on these historical traces, it seems to me also that the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century period of early feminist Marxism (the period of ‘red love’) stems from this romantic subjectivity and plays a significant, although largely overlooked role in shaping the subsequent feminist-conscious relationship ideals. Before discussing this thought in detail—in the second part of this paper—I would like to place the understanding of love in the light of post-Hegelian dialectics and the early Critical Theory at large (Lukacs, Gramsci, Benjamin, Marcuse), as it abandons the consciousness of bourgeois society and pays important tribute both to romanticism and the development of women’s emancipation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The materialist aesthetics builds, in fact, the foundations of a “new” sociality, following the early Marxist ideals of love as a/the socio-emotional power. In order to understand the nature of such revolutionary formulation of love, it is crucial to focus on the intensity of the dualistic conflict between the philosophies of Enlightenment (rationality, reason) and Romanticism (liberty, emotion): these periods are like “thesis and antithesis, the clash of logical calculation of the market and objective forces of freedom.”<sup>5</sup> Of importance is especially the romantic subjectivity (Hegelian energy), which renounces the unhappy (male) rationality based on the accumulation of private goods, property and consumption. While this subjectivity amounts to the synthesis of the conflicting powers and releases the “civil forms of love in the developmental processes of society,”<sup>6</sup> for the moment of history, these processes are void of women’s perspective.

Resting on such intermingling, bourgeois and class-conscious identity formations, the 20<sup>th</sup> century love relationships become—in contrast to ‘family’ as a continued structure of a formal bonding—much more narcissistic and spontaneous, reflecting on existential values of desire, longing for the other, the uncanny and/or unfamiliar.<sup>7</sup> The preoccupations with human anxiety and alienation culminate

5 G. Mažeikis, *Approaches to Romantic Love in Early Marxist Tradition*, [in:] *Politics and Love*, ed. E. Kováts, Budapest, FESBP 2015, pp. 24–25.

6 *Ibidem*.

7 E.g. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson, Oxford, Basil Blackwell 1962; J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. Barnes, London, Routledge 2003; S. Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. J. Strachey, Hogarth Press, London 1953.

in the formula of love based on the archetypal union “between two halves,” *anima* and *animus*, *logos* and *eros*, anchored in the subconscious,<sup>8</sup> but also echoing Hegel’s understanding of love as moving away from individual isolation in itself, i.e. as a form of consciousness that by resigning its existence gains a new potentiality *in* and *with* the other.<sup>9</sup> Following, in this respect, Maciej Sosnowski’s extensive philosophical study on dialectical meanings of love (Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche), love becomes a force of resistance that infinitely acts against “the terror of one’s emptiness,”<sup>10</sup> It is a permanent recognition of desire for oneself and for the other, and of the inherent interdependence between these two. Without the other, there would be no singular existence and without the existence of one, there would be no other. As a paradox of longing, love acts as an affirmation of such dialectics.

Accordingly, most influential social theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continue to understand love in terms of fulfilment of the longing for union<sup>11</sup> that—with the growth of capitalist market—has also become a convenient value at hands of power structures.<sup>12</sup> The increasingly commercialised perspectives on romantic love continue therefore to appear on the grounds of individual choice, replacing religious and moral traditions. In Antony Giddens’ account, for example, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Europeans (Westerners) have moved from the conjugal relationships of the Victorian Age, through the romanticised marital arrangements of the following century towards a ‘pure relationship’ (confluent love) as a subject of free negotiation between autonomous partners.<sup>13</sup> Following on Giddens’ “democratisation of everyday life,”<sup>14</sup> contemporary Europeans commit to family out of *will* rather than traditional obligation, and *choose* among plural lifestyle preferences, whereby sexuality (and erotically satisfying partnership) appears to be most fundamental, overlapping in many ways with the Freudian libido, a mental/erotic force that stands against the death drive.

Not without its psychoanalytical and emancipatory merits (e.g. LGBT rights, non-monogamous bonding), such individualistic and privacy-focused perspective on love

8 E.g. E. Fromm, *Art of Loving*, New York, Harper and Row 1956; G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, *The Collected Works by G. C. Jung*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1959.

9 G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts. Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft*, Helmut Reichelt, Ullstein 1972.

10 M. A. Sosnowski, *Pokochać dialektykę. O pojęciu miłości w filozofii spekulatywnej z nieustającym odniesieniem do Sorena Kierkegaarda*, Kraków, Universitas 2011, p. 22.

11 E.g. J. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, Norton 1977; E. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. R. Cohen, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press 1987.

12 E.g. H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, Boston, Beacon 1955; M. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, Paris, Gallimard 1976; S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, London, Routledge 2004.

13 A. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Stanford, Stanford University Press 1992, p. 94.

14 *Ibidem* p.95.

interprets any outside intervention as a pathological import from the authority (power structures, sociality). My suspicion as to the actual power of such confluent commitment stems from the Marcusean apocalyptic vision of human solitude, self-centrism, and narcissism, whereby all rest on the cult of property and become extensions of commodities, appendages of the commodification of desire. In other words, as desiring subjects, our minds and bodies have already become part of the machinery (system), independently of who and what is the object of desire.<sup>15</sup> This thinking follows Gintautas Mažeikis' work on early socialist (communist) love, in which he describes how capitalist market transforms existential anxieties into controlled depression, producing as such collective disillusionment with societal potential of love and selling simulacra of romance to masses: "St. Valentine's day, red hearts and commercialisation of March 8 are processes of manipulative substitution of social engagement needs."<sup>16</sup> Self-centrism, with its neoliberal focus on the 'private' and the 'individual,' remains particularly troubling in the context of massive, world-wide production of desirables that maintains non-stop consumption of psychic pacifiers and substitutes for intimacy and love. Dietary/plastic surgery obsessions, compulsive on-line dating, hyper-sexuality and various drug-dependencies are examples of such personal preferences tailored to one's needs but controlled by various consumerist acts of exploitation.

Clearly, in agreement with Srećko Horvat's recent publication, love has to be re-invented, or better, revolutionised for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> Both Horvat's 'radicality' and Sosnowski's 'ethicalisation' return to Kierkegaard's reading of love as work that resists the force of habit, stagnation and, in that sense, also the very structure (family, law, power) that maintains it. In his extensive philosophical study, Sosnowski explains that love becomes a constant work of re-invention while it resists contradiction contained in desire that, by its very nature, remains simultaneously directed towards oneself and towards the other. This self-contradictory relation cannot be reconciled, and as much as it is possible for individuals, it lives by the works of love.<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, Horvat refers to love as a revolutionary tension between dynamism and fidelity. "The moment when a revolution stops to reinvent, not only social and human relations, but stops reinventing its own presuppositions, we usually end up in a re-action, in a regression."<sup>19</sup> Love, commercialised and disciplined, becomes thus more vulnerable than ever, its meanings endure confined to the sphere of private European

15 E.g. H. Marcuse, op. cit.; M. Foucault, op. cit.; S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, London, Routledge 2004.

16 G. Mažeikis, *Approaches to Romantic Love in Early Marxist Tradition*, p. 25.

17 Ibidem.

18 M. A. Sosnowski, op. cit., p. 23.

19 S. Horvat, *The Radicality of Love*, Cambridge, Polity Press 2015, p. 4.

homes. Despite differences in European locations, the West meets the East and the South meets the North right in the crisis of emotion, at the crossroads of intimate sociality. This convergence perseveres despite the increasing exposures to globalised conflicts based on socio-economic and/or racial scripts of inequality, and the crisis of solidarity with the other (the refugee, the unfamiliar). Indeed, and especially when discussing love and family, we incessantly focus on the acts of “reconciliation” between care (affects, intimacy) and the outside world (sociality).<sup>20</sup> Love in the family, based on individualised recognition of happiness (desire, care), continues to stand as self-protective entity in opposition to the outside, economy-driven and “foreign” demands while many feminist issues, e.g. unpaid care work, have also been slowly disappearing from research agendas, implying that care-related family pressures are resolved. Love, family, and bonding are sources of existential “security” that subjectively empower or disempower individuals, whereby the key to accomplishment is to strike a balance between the incompatible spheres, as if the private and the social did not cross and overlap in many significant ways.

In the light of such precariousness of love, as well as the decline of the normative family model across European nations, can we speak about any revolutionary concepts of family, any new concepts of love? Is family as a love bond capable of transcending its nuclear entrapment? Does it imply increasing instability of bonding? What does it mean, and what does it require, to love oneself, and simultaneously, to be in love with the other? What does it mean to love the world? In all this, the question, which I address, and to some extent attempt to answer in this article, is whether love, as affected by current politically compressed and unresolved tensions, can be redefined as a concept based on co-existence and solidarity with others beyond the individual household.<sup>21</sup> If, to follow Horvat’s thought on solidarity and revolution, “a truly revolutionary moment is like love, ... a crack in the world, in the usual running of things, in the dust that is layered all over in order to prevent anything New”<sup>22</sup> then are we there, perhaps? Has the time come again?

### **Tensions between the individual (nuclear union) and the collective (sociality)**

Significantly, in the light of the above discussion, the second and, to a large extent, the third wave of Western feminist thought has avoided investments in love as

20 E.g. *A Life in Balance? Reopening the Family-Work Debate*, eds. C. Krull, J. Sempruch, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press 2011.

21 E.g. K. Lynch *Affective Equality. Love, Care and Injustice*, London, Palgrave Macmillan 2009.

22 S. Horvat, *The Radicality of Love*, p. 4.

a powerful socio-emotional affect. Associated with the oppressive structure of patriarchal family, love has been at best referenced as duty, at worse as an emotional entrapment, manipulation and madness within the hetero/mono-normative confines.<sup>23</sup> With the exception of Afro-American stand on love as the erotic and feminine power<sup>24</sup> and its derivative subfields of feminist maternity,<sup>25</sup> love has been associated with women's disempowerment, while its universality as a human experience has been put under scrutiny and abandoned.<sup>26</sup> As I argue, the reasons for such a profound intellectual rejection can be seen both as a strategic political act and an emotional counteraction towards the Western, highly individualistic conceptualisation of love as the ultimate object of human desires, which simultaneously justifies oppression.

To follow on this argument, the explicit tensions between the idealised longing for nuclear union and realities of e.g. heterosexual women are particularly strong in the context of the early feminist socialist formulations of love and responsibility for the social.<sup>27</sup> To begin with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Central and Eastern European Marxist position, Clara Zetkin (a German activist) and Alexandra Kollontai (a Russian revolutionary) have developed a unique theoretical framework underpinning women's liberation to the struggle for equality beyond the privacy of family and household. In resonance with parallel European and intercontinental first wave feminist claims (e.g. Wilhelmina Drucker, Josefina Deland, Fredrika Bremer, Mary Stopes, Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Margaret Fuller, Elisabeth Stanton, to mention a few), Zetkin declared her empathy with all women subjugated to husbands within the

23 E.g. B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, New York, Norton 1977; A. Rich, *Blood, Bread and Poetry*, New York, Norton 1985; L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. C. Porter and C. Burke, Ithaca, Cornell University Press 1985; J. Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* trans. R. Guberman, New York, Columbia University Press 1995.

24 E.g. A. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, San Diego, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich 1983; A. Lorde, *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches*, New York, The Crossing Press 1984; B. Hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, New York, Women's Press 2000.

25 E.g. R. Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, New York, Harper 1992; J. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries. A Political Argument for the Ethic of Care*, New York, Routledge 1993; S. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, Boston, Beacon Press 1995; A. O'Reilly, *Feminist Mothering*, New York, SUNY 2008.

26 E.g. N. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, London, University of California Press 1978; A. Oakley, *From Here to Maternity: Becoming a Mother*, New York, Penguin 1981; Y. King, *Toward an Ecological Feminism and Feminist Ecology*, [in:] Machina Ex Dea. Feminist Perspectives on Technology, ed. J. Rothschild, New York, Pergamon 1983; J. Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, New York/Toronto, Pantheon Books 1988; A. Ferguson, *Blood at the Root: Motherhood, Sexuality and Male Dominance*, London, Pandora 1989; C. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1989; E. Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*, New York, Routledge 1999.

27 E.g. C. Zetkin, *On a Bourgeois Feminist Petition*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1976/women/3-zetkin.html> [15.12.2015]; A. Kollontai, *Free Love*, trans. C.J. Hoghart, London, J.M. Dent & Sons 1932; E. Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, New York, Mother Earth Publishing Association 1910.



capitalist nuclear family.<sup>28</sup> Among these societal strata, she locates the tragic Nora figures (ref. Ibsen's heroine in *A Doll's House*, 1879) that, later on, become the hysterical patients subdued to bourgeois-oriented gaze, analysis and treatment by generations of male psychologists.<sup>29</sup>

Locating the roots of women's oppression in the privatised reproduction (libidinal economy), this early feminist thought clearly recognised that women's subordination within the family is of a larger societal issue than just the so-called 'woman's question' and needs to be approached as part of an overall societal transformation. Addressing the failure of the class-neutral/unconscious 'female sisterhood,' Kollontai writes in *The Social Basis of the Woman Question* that intellectual feminism has not only recognised its own bourgeois class position, but also acknowledged the inability to fight for the fundamental transformation of society on its own.<sup>30</sup> In this, supported by revolutionary work of Rosa Luxemburg, the socialist feminist strategy placed women's subordination equally within the private sphere of subjugation (following on the basis of gender independently on the class belonging) and within the socio-political system based on other inequalities such as class, race, nationality and origin.<sup>31</sup>

Following on these strongly Hegelian endeavours (e.g. the dialectics of master and slave), I would like to argue that the early Marxist feminist thought explicates the revolutionary potential of romantic love for the 'New (emancipated) Woman.'<sup>32</sup> In fact, the red (proletarian) love, following Kollontai, rests on the romantic sense of revolution: the striving for social freedom, which encourages the movement as a spontaneous social friendship, care and solidarity between classes, sexes, and nations. Simultaneously, within the political necessity to formulate class-conscious, socialist ideals, red love enriches proletarian spontaneity with the postulates of sexual liberty that abandons monogamous family structure. The New Woman, to follow Kollontai, is to be freed of the economic dependence on the patriarchal system of production, open to romantic/socialist love, autonomous and revolutionary. Representing a politically active, engaged and creative gender identity as well as a new vision of corporeality, the socialist love negates the patriarchal family norms, desires and traditions

28 C. Zetkin, *On a Bourgeois Feminist Petition*.

29 J. Sempruch, *The Fantasies of Gender: The Witch in Western Feminist Theory and Literature*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press 2008, pp. 47–54.

30 A. Kollontai, *The Social Basis of the Woman Question*, [www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1909/social-basis.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1909/social-basis.htm) [15.12.2015].

31 E.g. R. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. A. Schwarzschild, London, Routledge 2003; H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1958.

32 A. Kollontai, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*, New York, Herder and Herder 1971.



of bourgeois society, i.e. prostitution and/or selling the body for sexual, accumulative, and reproductive purpose.<sup>33</sup>

Such transference of the romantic logic (of love) into the social dialectics of everydayness rests on, and, indeed, becomes possible only under the premise of rejection of the traditional hetero(mono)normativity. Amounting to a fundamental feminist milestone towards societal liberation of sexuality and affects, the feminist Marxist definition of 'free love' is of particular significance in the light of my further discussion of non-monogamous bonding in the 21st century. As advocated by Kollontai in her *Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations* (1921), free love is not about carnal promiscuity, carnivalesque temporality, or anarchy, although it can amount to such, but foremost about the conviction that social equality and love towards community cannot be achieved without eradication of the property-oriented oppression of female sexuality.<sup>34</sup> Both Zetkin and Kollontai define marriage as the legacy of capitalist endeavours that render wives the individual property of their husbands. In a similar vein, Emma Goldman, a prominent American anarchist, offers a thoughtful critique of the bourgeois family as imprisoned in heteronormativity and its political alienation from the class-conscious positions. She postulates a *different* (non-monogamous) sexuality, drawing attention to the emotional spontaneity of love that liberates gender (women and men) from the state-controlled, instrumentalised family, opening other anarchist horizons.<sup>35</sup> In accord with Rosa Luxemburg, Goldman focuses on practices of resistance targeted equally against the patriarchal society and the misogynist character of the communist party and its (male) revolutionaries.

These practices are, in fact, inherent to the system, since the subjugation of women sustains patriarchy independently on class (e.g. in wealthy families, women are "tools" to reproduce male wealth, while working-class women serve to reproduce generations of labour power), and leads to theoretically important, but, in reality, difficult to achieve alliance between upper and middle-class women, the latter either gravitating toward the bourgeoisie or identifying with the interests of workers. In consequence, and arguably more readably today than it was possible in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the difference between the revolutionary socialists, with Luxemburg as one of the leading figures, and the bourgeois intellectuals was not due to minor strategic standpoints but based on crucial political decisions as whether to fight for global or partial (class- and

33 A. Kollontai, *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle: Love and the New Morality*, Bristol, Falling Wall Press 1972, p. 18.

34 A. Kollontai, *Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations*, [www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1921/theses-morality.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1921/theses-morality.htm) [15.12.2015].

35 E. Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, New York, Mother Earth Publishing Association 1910, p. 177.

race-related) women's suffrage. In 1916, Luxemburg, imprisoned in Germany for organising anti-war demonstrations, completed one of her most significant works, *The Russian Revolution* (1922). In this book, deeply critical of Lenin and forecasting dictatorship of the Party, she famously declared that "freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently."<sup>36</sup>

In the light of such insightful philosophical recognition of difference, feminist socialists represented most radical vision of global societal transformation, which they believed could only be achieved gradually, through a process of socio-political revolution of the patriarchal family structure. Following on these feminist socialist readings of love as a creative, socio-emotional, and revolutionary power, romantic love (sexuality and affects) must return to the factories, manufactories, labour collectives, research institutions, but foremost to the private homes. This thinking clearly recognises that women's liberation requires an end to the global devaluation of care work and the unpaid labour inside the family, an issue still unresolved today.<sup>37</sup> While most contemporary research on family begins to target the phenomenon of love, the undeniable validity of early socialist proposals for the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to be placed in the light of continued tensions between the Eurocentric individualisation (the increasing instability of nuclear romance) and contemporary feminist and eco-political forms of collective sustainability (e.g. communities, groups, villages, cooperatives). The latter, as a socialist legacy of love towards society, illustrates the urgency with which to formulate such questions as to whether family, as a love bond based on choice, is capable of transcending its nuclear entrapment. In developing my argument further on why the early socialist feminist ideals are interesting to compare with current decentralisation of family structure, and more importantly, how they contribute to the emerging feminist ideals of bonding, I will rely on my own empirical research as well as on the feminist post-socialist thinking about family.

### **New research horizons on non-monogamous bonding**

The enormous ethical work of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century women philosophers with respect to the recognition of love for the sociality is currently reflected and, as I argue, finds its revival in the growing visibility of non-hetero(mono)normative family bonds across various geo-political locations of Europe.<sup>38</sup> The emergence and proliferation

36 R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, New York, Workers Age Publishers 1940.

37 E.g. *Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics*, eds. M. Bjørnholt, A. McKay, Bradford, Demeter Press 2014.

38 E.g. *De-centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, eds. R. Kulpa, J. Mizielinska

of community-oriented families, e.g. LGBT/families of choice, polyamorous constellations based on friendships and commitment certainly attest that alternatives to heterosexual nuclear family forms are on the rise.<sup>39</sup> While I have already argued that the early 20<sup>th</sup> century women socialists have broken new grounds in the perception of close relationships, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reveals even more complex vulnerability of bonding in the face of the continued bio-social and political forces of commodification.<sup>40</sup> Following on these manifestations of change, I do not mean that the traditional meanings of family are either dead or dying, or that there is less need for stability in love bonding as such. Rather, it is the changing conditions of life (migration crisis, mobility, local/global inequalities) that make the existing/old forms of bonding crack under the strain of internal and external conflicts, while—simultaneously—new forms are generated.

Above all, and before I begin any (cultural) analysis of non-monogamous bonding, I would like to emphasise that non-monogamy has never been, straightforwardly, friends with any form of feminism. This is due to the overwhelming phenomenon of historical and contemporary polygamy, which—with a few globally registered exceptions—subjugated a number of socio-economically dependent women (slaves) to privileged men (patriarchs), who could afford such female groups.<sup>41</sup> Having said that, the newly emerging socio-political meanings of love, frequently articulated in connection with contemporary contestations of family structure, have much more in common with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist collective consciousness than any non-monogamy practiced under patriarchal law. The reason why contemporary non-monogamous bonds might be different and therefore relevant for my discussion stems from their potential connections with the early feminist awareness of responsibility and

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London, Ashgate 2011; C. A. Santos, *Social Movements and Sexual Citizenship in Southern Europe*, London, Palgrave Macmillan 2013.

39 E.g. D. Easton, C. Liszt, *The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities*, San Francisco, Greenery Press 1997; E. Cook, *Commitment in Polyamory*, 'Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality' 2005, Vol. 8.; H. Aviram, *Make Love, Not Law: Perceptions of the Marriage Equality Struggle among Polyamorous Activists*, 'Journal of Bisexuality' 2008, Vol. 7, No. 3/4, pp. 125–148; L. Ward, J. Carvel, *Goodbye Married Couples, Hello Alternative Family Arrangements*, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2008/jan/23/socialtrends> [15.12.2015]; K. Labriola, *Love in Abundance: A Counselor's Advice on Open Relationships*, Eugene, OR, Greenery Press 2010; D. Morgan, *Rethinking Family Practices*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan 2011; S. Roseneil, *Changing Landscapes of Heteronormativity: The Regulation and Normalisation of Same-Sex Sexualities in Europe*, 'Social Politics' 2013, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 165–99.

40 E.g. G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press 1987; J. Kristeva, op. cit.; Z. Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, London, Polity 2003.

41 E.g. F. Suraiya, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, New York, I. B. Tauris 2005; M. K. Zeitzen, *Polygamy: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*, Oxford/New York, Berg 2008.

care for the community, i.e. something larger than the private (nuclear) love. Relying on the available studies of contemporary non-monogamous practice, it is yet too early to draw any substantial conclusions.<sup>42</sup> At the moment, I would rather refer to polyamorous groups or constellations practiced by individuals across European regions, who identify themselves with polyamory, and yet represent various and sometimes conflicting views on the actual meanings of their experience. In my discussion, I therefore refer to the socio-political potential, rather than any outcome or result, of such bonding practice in terms of building new forms of socio-emotional sustainability. This is significant both in the light of current structural precariousness of non-normative bonding and in the light of political urgencies across and beyond European borders attesting to the growth of economic and cultural inequalities. So what characterises the newly emerging polyamorous bonds? What kind/s of ethical values would make them sustainable and fair from a feminist point of view?

Building upon 6 years of my comparative transnational research on family and work-life balance in the urban contexts of Toronto/Montreal, Zurich/Basel and Warsaw (2004–2010),<sup>43</sup> I decided to continue the work by familiarising myself with the socio-political fabrics and focusing on community-building work beyond academia. In 2011, I registered a non-profit organisation, Women Matter: Foundation for Women's Issues, Rights and Affairs, an NGO in a South-stretching region of Warsaw, devoted to women's family issues and to my on-going research on the subject of the changing structure of family.<sup>44</sup> During that time, I was aware, albeit theoretically, of current family pressures in Poland, falling especially on women. The post-socialist economic transition, deregulation of paid work, and the increasing Catholic-oriented family model have sharpened home-centred care-giving demands on femininity. But it was only upon my engagement in a direct work with families, both women and men, as well as with youth growing up in children's homes that I have experienced the complexity of the Polish family load. In contrast to the advanced democratic economies, where individuals, especially mothers, can rely on various family policies and programmes (even if such programs are disputed<sup>45</sup>), in Poland I have witnessed profound loneliness and vulnerability of individuals faced with limited and inadequate public

42 D. Cardoso, I. Martins, S. Coelho, *Debating Polyamory as Research: An Autoethnographic Account of a Round-Table on Polyamory and Lesbianism*, 'LES Online' 2013, Vol. 5, No.1.

43 Comparative results of this research have been published as part of an International Conference Report 'Home Is Work and Work Is a Political Matter', Warsaw 2014 [http://domtopraca.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/justyna\\_semperuch\\_szachowicz.pdf](http://domtopraca.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/justyna_semperuch_szachowicz.pdf) [15.12.2015].

44 For more information see the website at [www.studiosprawkobiet.pl](http://www.studiosprawkobiet.pl) (available in Polish and English).

45 E.g. *A Life in Balance? Reopening the Family-Work Debate*, eds. C. Krull and J. Sempruch.

support<sup>46</sup> and a long-term distressful family situation, leading to such symptoms as hysteria, possessiveness, revengefulness, drugs- or alcohol dependency.

During this fieldwork, I have collected very detailed empirical material on the growing precariousness of (nuclear) family structure and the significance of other forms of bonding in relation to love, friendship, and trust. My research results, based on 87 questionnaires, 69 in-depth interviews (2012–2015), and semi-participant observation of monogamous and non-monogamous relationships (at various support groups, workshops, and meetings), suggest that individuals define their bonding as ‘healthy,’ ‘voluntary’ and ‘happy’<sup>47</sup> only as long as they are able to maintain a well-balanced socio-emotional connection within (the bond) and outside (of its nuclear structure), e.g. friendships, working environment, communities, and social media. This socio-emotional connection involves and is foremost based on the freedom to express affects, the ability to follow on one’s passions and to maintain an economic independence from the partner/family/bond. Other connections, e.g. culturally sanctioned, political (“because we are married” or “believe in the same values”), habitual (“because we’ve got used to each other”), or non-committal (friends with benefits, on-line dating), appear secondary and insufficient to build a *psychic bond*, otherwise but through enforcement, convenient arrangement, and/or manipulation. In my research, these types of “insufficiencies” have amounted to the average emotional landscape (72% of the interviewed) of stagnation, anxiety, and depression (43%), but also willingness to change (56%). Moreover, conflicts, abuse, and inequality appeared to exist across the axis of differences based on culture, nationality, race, sexual orientation, religion, health, and/or age. The number of people who declared their longing and/or have already practiced bonding as an alternative to hetero(mono)normativity (23%), i.e. families of choice, communities, polyamorous constellations, friends with benefits expressed higher exposure to (existential) precariousness, but also hope and willingness to act together.<sup>48</sup>

The common feature of this new ‘existential precariousness’ of bonding is the challenge and the actual questioning of the normative family structure. In particular, the strong referencing to openness and emotional safety (i.e. open non-monogamy as opposed to secrecy, fear, and infidelity) is significant in the light of currently emerging

46 E.g. D. Szelewa, *Gender and Class: Comparing The Situation of Single-Parent Households in Seven European Countries*, ‘European Journal of Social Security’ 2013, Vol. 4.

47 All three concepts are methodologically defined as a part of the qualitative research analysis based on 140 questionnaires by individuals living in the region of Warsaw in bonds differentiated by cultural and national belonging, sexual orientation, and other (individually defined) preferences (J. Sempruch, *The Precariousness of Love, the Meanings of Family*, London, Palgrave Macmillan 2016, forthcoming).

48 J. Sempruch, *The Precariousness of Love, the Meanings of Family*.

feminist conceptualisations of love as a socio-emotional power. The philosophy and practice of open, consensual agreements about standards of how, with whom (and with how many) the bonding should take place, stand, in fact, in direct relation to the meanings of collective responsibility, care, and respect for the others.<sup>49</sup> I would therefore argue that currently documented precariousness of bonding (e.g. growing number of divorces, short-term relationships, on-line dating/flirting, promiscuity) has also undergone a significant semantic and thus philosophical transformation. Most interestingly, in the light of non-monogamous, community-oriented plural forms of love that is shared and practiced among individuals, precariousness has begun to reflect on every love relationship as enacted subjectively, i.e. as a socio-emotional performance, free, or at least rejecting any structural, property-based constraints.

Situating these findings in the light of growing instabilities across geo-political, cultural, and socio-economic differences of Europe, I have also become interested as to whether the increasing precariousness of bonding, especially in its non-hetero (mono)normative forms, simultaneously implies its increasing uncertainty, temporality, and instability, or whether this precariousness might not, in fact, become a precondition for its new socio-political and emotional sustainability. Although fragmented and under-documented yet, contemporary polyamory, especially in female-centred forms (e.g. a woman in a consensually open relationship with several men who might, but do not need to practice reciprocal emotional and/or erotic proximity with one another) marks therefore a significant turning point in thinking about love beyond the normative context. I therefore see this phenomenon as a new ethics of encounter based on consensual openness that speaks against the usually discussed alienation of desire in the age of ‘cold intimacies’,<sup>50</sup> i.e. the non-committal culture of friends with benefits, on-line met ‘fuck buddies’/‘fuck bodies’ and other/anonymous behaviour, including white lies and cheating. Indeed, we have reached “the point of social fatigue—too many networks with too much information, all the time (Moore), and begun to suffer from the illness of hyper-connectivity.”<sup>51</sup> Following the social (collective) meanings of bonding on a more theoretical note for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I build my argument for love not only as a socio-emotional, but also a political power, in terms of active will, knowledge, and awareness of being together in the world. Despite idealistic, if not utopian, undertones of this suggestion that undeniably

49 E.g. A. Newitz, *Love Unlimited: The Polyamorists*, ‘New Scientist’ 2006, July 5; D. McCullough, D.S. Hall, *Polyamory: What it is and what it isn’t*, ‘Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality’ 2003, Vol. 6; T. Taormino, *Opening Up: A Guide to Creating and Sustaining Open Relationships*, San Francisco, Cleis Press 2008.

50 E. Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, Oxford/Malden, Polity 2007, pp. 40–66.

51 S. Horvat, *The Radicality of Love*, p. 38.

echoes the early socialist formulations of free, unrelenting power of relationships, the ethics based on the consensual openness of bonding speaks for many feminist ideals of equality, justice, and respect, and, thus, for values that are hard to find under patriarchy. I also believe that consensual openness, if practiced and shared by various communities and groups, might lead to a new emotional culture of late capitalism, articulating such profoundly important aspects of bonding as togetherness (community) and solidarity with others. Current European revisions of thinking about and practice of bonding are therefore linked to broader socio-economic and political transformation, while to look at the family today is to look at the significance of love in building and maintaining its power structures in cosmopolitan relation to the community (city, nation). Such urgency of current societal transformation is undeniable and speaks to concrete impacts on policy regulations with respect to wide-ranging rights of individuals.

### The feminist ethics of love

Recent feminist-informed, and in that sense, pioneering formulations of love as a subject of knowledge, have clearly addressed the above discussed urgency of transformation, moving beyond Eurocentric traditions and engaging in a trans/feminist exchange across frontiers of social, political, and gender theories.<sup>52</sup> Tracing especially the growing feminist interests in the socio-emotional significance of love,<sup>53</sup> a worldwide, and, in my view, revolutionary awareness of this powerful affect has already begun to emerge in form of interdisciplinary knowledge exchange (e.g. Feminist Love Studies Network, Orebro University), pointing to the continually transformative power of love and its significance for the societies at large.

In the face of the shifting socio-political grounds of European institutions (on the one hand, growing secularism, on the other hand, nationalist and religious fundamentalism), psychic transformations in the perception of love as an indispensable human affect are on the feminist horizon.<sup>54</sup>

52 E.g. A. Jónasdóttir, G. V. Bryson, K. B. Jones, *Sexuality, Gender and Power: Intersectional and Transnational Perspectives*, New York, Routledge 2011; L. Ferry, *n Love: A Philosophy for the 21-century*, Cambridge, Polity Press 2013; *Counting on Marilyn Waring. New Advances in Feminist Economics*, eds. M. Bjørnholt, A. McKay, op. cit.; *Immigrant Protest: Politics, Aesthetics, and Everyday Dissent. Praxis: Theory in Action Series*, eds. K. Marciniak, I. Tyler, op. cit.

53 E.g. E. Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*, Cambridge, Polity 2012; A. Jonasdottir, A. Ferguson, *Love: A Question for Feminism in the Twenty First Century*, New York, Routledge 2014.

54 E.g. L. Gunnarsson, *The Contradictions of Love: Towards a Feminist-Realist Ontology of Sociosexuality*, New York, Routledge 2014.



In this respect, post-Durkheimian sociology speaks about revolutionary potentials of intimacy, currently transforming the institution of family, while the emphasis remains on the fluctuating relationship between the collective and the individual within human being.<sup>55</sup> It is this constant fluctuation, as I would like to suggest, that explains the need for interlocking the global-local interdependencies of economies and cultures, and thus for the love-as-power to revolutionise the concept of family and bonding. Precisely this thought compels me to formulate love as bio-socially embedded, but subjectively defined capacity/power of individuals, a subject that cannot be studied through separately existing family models but in relation to their current heterogeneity and its opened-ended structure. Such love-centred, but also difference-sensitive perspective defines bonding as an affect based on care and responsibility that is not only a concern for individuals who are in love with one another, but a broader social issue that extends beyond private households and affairs. In this, revisions of thinking and practice related to marriage, family, sexuality, and intimacy are inevitably linked to global socio-economic and political transformations with a concrete impact and necessity for new policy regulations with respect to wide-ranging rights of individuals, such as the right to same-sex marriage, abortion, practice of consensual non-monogamies, or protection against domestic violence.

Thus, it is both the *earlier* and *new* feminist-informed understanding of bonding that is currently changing the paradigms of knowledge about the socio-emotional significance of love, reflecting on the growing recognition that the world is one and that humanity, in the interest of its cultural survival, is bound to work together across various personal, cultural, national, and religious boundaries in order to settle the rising ecological, socio-economic, political, and security issues.<sup>56</sup> In particular, important voices emerge in research on the human right to love (care, preserve, sustain) i.e. the right to values globally eroded through enforced migrations, deteriorating labour contracts and various denials of affects.<sup>57</sup> A key metaphor for the interconnectedness of contemporary bonding, precariousness is both about the incompatibility and its conscious, subjectively defined enactments of family (e.g. Luxemburg's practices of resistance, Butler's parodies of the normative structure). As such, precariousness as a new emotional culture might offer a clean break with the mainstream reasoning

55 I. Eulriet, W. W. Miller, *The Dualism of Human Nature: Translators' Note*, 'Durkheimian Studies' 2005, Vol. 11, pp. 33–34; W. W. Miller, *Rethinking The Dualism of Human Nature*, 'Durkheimian Studies' 2010, Vol. 16, pp. 137–144.

56 E.g. B. Hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*, New York, Women's Press 2000; E. Illouz, *Cold Intimacies*, op. cit.; *Counting on Marilyn Waring. New Advances in Feminist Economics*, eds. M. Bjørnholt, A. McKay, op. cit..

57 E.g. S. Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, London, Duke University Press 2010; L. Ferry, *On Love*, op. cit.

about family and love, whereby the feminist ethical value of difference (e.g. sexual, cultural, religious) is crucial to this formulation.

The political potential of such transformation is undeniably immense as it points towards making useful political connections and alliances of difference. In this light, the growing precariousness of bonding might also imply that categorising love bonds into any exclusive definitions as stable, rigid, and lasting (be it a nuclear, single parent, blended, same-sex, polyamorous, or any other) can be very limiting. This new political focus projects love as borderless and fluid, containing all or any of these categories as intersecting in a given cultural, socio-emotional, but also temporal arrangement.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, individuals might be able to *move* from hetero-mono-sexual (nuclear) relation to various intersecting forms of love bonds that involve broader community, friendship with animals and non-human nature, based on respect and expanding beyond human desire to protect, sustain, and control. Whether they do, and under what conditions, is a question of further investigations with significant impacts on ways through which to understand contemporary love and family bonding.

## Abstrakt

### W stronę feministycznej etyki miłości i nowej kultury emocji późnego kapitalizmu

Artykuł zgłębia współczesne socjo-polityczne aspekty miłości jako siły/potęgi w kształtującym się kontekście feministycznej etyki miłości, jak również w perspektywie szeroko pojętej neoliberalnej komodyfikacji egocentryzmu i filozoficznej potrzeby wyrażania miłości jako bytu wspólnego, wspólnej odpowiedzialności i solidarności z innymi. Analizę teoretyczną zaczynam od napięcia i różnic pomiędzy feministycznymi opracowaniami początku XX wieku dotyczącymi kolektywnej świadomości i odpowiedzialności za świat zewnętrzny a sformułowaniami egzystencjalizmu na temat lęków związanych z osamotnieniem jednostki w świecie. Punktem kulminacyjnym mojej analizy jest powrót do niemonogamicznych więzi w Europie jako przejawu nowych form niestabilności ustanawiania rodziny, przełamujących nuklearną heteronormatywność XXI wieku.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. L. M. Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity. Understanding Women's Love and Desire*, Harvard, Harvard University Press 2008.

