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No Kin

Between the Reproductive Paradigm and Ideals of Community

ABSTRACT

This article positions the sinthomosexual in relation to kinship, climate crisis, and vulnerability. By placing Lee Edelman's version of queer in the modern family, the sinthomosexual – here presented in the form of the childfree woman – is positioned not only as against reproduction, but also against certain versions of community and kinship. The article investigate what this position is dependent on and gets subjected to in the wake of the dismantling of the welfare state and the privatisation of economies, communities and identities. This is done by a close reading of the so-called anti-social turn in relation to different feminist versions of kinship and community – from radical lesbian feminism to posthumanism. The article also gives a historical and cultural background to the position of the childfree woman.

Keywords: sinthomosexual, childfree, reproductive paradigm, climate crisis, welfare state, community, kinship, motherhood

They'll spawn themselves to death. (Isherwood 2010, 26)

The slippage from family to kinship to various fictive kin relations or modern substitutes for kinship serves to legitimate a broad array of exclusive and hierarchical economic communities; through the analogy with kinship, they are posited as expressions of authentic. human relationships. (Joseph 2002, 168)

Make kin, not babies! (Haraway 2015, 162)

THIS ARTICLE AIMS to juxtapose the sinthomosexual in relation to kinship, climate crisis, and vulnerability.[1] By introducing a different queer stance on kinship, I place the sinthomosexual position – here in the figure of the childfree woman – not only against reproduction, but also against certain versions of community and kinship and explore what the position is dependent on and exposed to in the wake of dismantled welfare states and the privatisation of economies, communities, and identities. I will do this by reading the anti-social turn with, and against, various feminist positions on kinship and community – ranging from radical lesbian feminism to posthumanism, as well as provide both a historical and cultural backdrop to the childfree woman.

One of the main instigators to the anti-social turn within queer theory, Lee Edelman, gives us a theory of queer that does not aim to subvert kinship into some kind of "queer" version; rather the sinthomosexual is queer because of its lack of kinship – gay or otherwise. So, what do we do with this position in relation to kinship? A common approach is to overlook it and study the different kinds of queer families, legal reforms, and restrictions on reproduction, or how to make queer love and kinship count as love and kinship within the futurist paradigm. The aim is usually to position a specifically *queer* kinship as a challenge to heterosexual, genetic kinships. From an Edelmanian perspective, however, there is no need to challenge this kinship with another kind of kinship; the aim is to reveal the *fantasy* of kinship itself as an investment in a future filled with recognisable extensions of ourselves; a fantasy bound to fail and leave us unable to handle an ethics of bare life and death, as well as enjoyment, and – I would add – an inability to handle the economic and climatic consequences of human reproduction itself.

Edelman is known for positioning the homosexual man as the non-reproductive symbol of the sinthomosexual (though he does not demand an explicit same-sex desire in his literary examples). The critique (e.g., Halberstam 2005) has somewhat missed the point, conflating the symbolic position of non-reproduction with positions of vulnerability ("ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebacks, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed," Halberstam quoted in

Huffer 2013, 181; see also Edenheim 2013). There is, however, nothing in Edelman's definition of the sinthomosexual that signals vulnerability or marginalisation, but still J. Halberstam, and others, seem unable to let go of the idea that the subversive position also has to be a marginalised and vulnerable position. Even the constant symbol of defiance, Antigone herself, was part of the royal family and her wilful positioning against the Law was only recognised because of that very kinship: her choice to stand with the dead kin (her brother) rather than with the living kin (her father) and not obeying the law constituted by this living kin, is a symbolic act reverberating in the sinthomosexual's position as a *memento mori* that refuses "life" in the name of no (living) kin. What does it mean, politically, to see possible subversions and ways of lives in other groups than those we, as feminists and queer researchers, are used to study?

In this article, I would like to propose the late modern, non-reproductive fertile woman (straight or gay) as a symbol of a wilful (rather than functional) sinthomosexual.[2] This position is not an automatically disadvantaged group in society economically speaking and in some studies, general life satisfaction even scores significantly higher for this group (see, DeOllos and Kapinus 2002, 75).[3] Still, the position carries a symbolic stigmatisation as well as risks of social exclusion.[4] Hence, there is an interesting gap here between life conditions and symbolic position that does not follow the usual lines of vulnerability and marginalisation. There is something in this position that cannot be explained using normal indexes of inclusion and exclusion. As British sociologist Rosemary Gillespie (2003) notes:

> Although social change, the support of partners, and women's greater autonomy may be prerequisites for choosing to remain childfree, they do not fully explain why in Western society only a small proportion of women make this choice while the majority continue, at some stage in their lives, to become mothers.[5] (Gillespie 2003, 123; see also Hird and Abshoff 2000)

From Welfare State to Community

Historically, parenthood was reserved only for married heterosexual couples, preserving specific places for women without children such as nuns, widows, nannies, maids, and spinsters. While marked by a stigma of sacrifice, loss, or failure, these positions were still legitimate and quite common positions (Gillespie 2003). The number of childless women was significantly higher historically, for instance during the 19th century it is estimated that one fourth of all women in Sweden were childless, compared to 2016 when only 14% of 50 year old women were childfree (SCB 2018). This indicates not only that regulated reproduction is not a unique sign of modernity, but also that Western modernity cannot claim to have an ethical advantage in relation to the global problem of over-population; even though economic conditions affect the number of children born, it is not necessarily always the main incitement.

In addition, in late modernity, not having *biological* offspring is clearly not the same thing as having no kin. Within LGBT-studies, some efforts have been made to include lovers and friends in the concept of kinship; however, usually parenting of some kind is still implied. Lesbian insemination, gay and straight couples' use of surrogacy, extended families and extra-siblings due to divorce or other arrangements, etcetera, are all examples of "modern families" where kinship still operates around the Child and the reproduction of our own image in the future.[6] It is possible to claim that the reproduction of genetics has been replaced with a reproduction of communities, in some ways asserting the symbolic position of the Child even further. This is particular evident from the symptomatically high expectations any so-called rainbow family is ascribed. In a liberal paradigm, the Rainbow Child, perceived as an innocent representative of a gender blind and non-patriarchal future, is perhaps an even stronger messianic symbol for a hopeful future than the Genetic Child.[7]

Hence, kinship has become more closely connected to *community* – a move usually heralded as progressive even though the idea of community, at least from a European perspective, also carries conservative associations (say it in German – *Gemeinschaft* – and the conservative

aspects becomes clearer).[8] However, within feminist and queer studies, most theorisations of community use an American model, where the long absence of a functioning welfare state has constructed both a dependency and focus on communities – often identity-based, but also to a high degree religious (Joseph 2002). In the Nordic countries, it may be possible to observe a clashing of ideals of communities as necessary for survival (US version) and communities as necessary for recognition (liberal version). Hence, it is not a coincidence that most activists prefer to use the English word *community* rather than the Swedish/Germanic equivalent – *gemenskap*.

Interestingly, according to US studies, the childless woman is commonly secluded from many everyday communities, at a younger age because many everyday community based activities revolve around children, and at an older age because healthcare and social contact are dependent on younger relatives, usually adult children (DeOllos and Kapinus 2002).[9] This is becoming equally true in increasingly privatised and hierarchised Western European nations, where more and more people are becoming dependant on a strong private network for matters hitherto (from the 1960's) being the state's or municipality's responsibility. However, the lack of community network for childfree women is not only a symptom of a crumbling welfare state; as already indicated, the symbolic position of the non-reproductive woman has more to do with the close connection between kinship, community, and reproduction.

Within feminist standpoint epistemology, communities are often seen as an authentic source of knowledge. The assumed connection between speech, truth, and self-expression, what Jacques Derrida calls *phonocentrism*, is presumed to be enabled by the community; it is by belonging to a community that an individual's speech becomes one with the community, effacing the signifier and the politics of language. Poststructuralist critique of this approach to knowledge, speech, and experience is already well known, and I will not dwell upon it here. What is more relevant in this context is the link between community, authenticity, and economy, as it is pointed out by feminist researcher Miranda Joseph (2002):

> While contemporary global/localization discourse is critical of family values where it implies nationalism or an inflexible valuing of a particular set of relationships, I have shown that these authors [such as the neo-conservative political scientist Francis Fukuyama] do like the idea of kinship as an organic force constituting – naturalizing – the boundaries and internal coherence of political-economic formations, and they redeploy it to legitimate the communal (regional, local) economic units they promote. The slippage from family to kinship to various fictive kin relations or modern substitutes for kinship serves to legitimate a broad array of exclusive and hierarchical economic communities; through the analogy with kinship, they are posited as expressions of authentic human relationships. (Joseph 2002, 168)

The reorganisation of society in accordance with neo-liberal regulation is hence closely linked to both practical needs of communities and how advocates of standpoint feminist, LGBT, anti-racist, as well as ethnic communities, tend to define the value of communities. The recent governmental turn to build and promote so-called *resilient communities* (e.g., MacKinnon and Driscoll Derickson 2012; Joseph 2013) is one quite worrying example of this merge of liberal and neo-liberal ideologies. It is as if the queer critique of biological family as the only authentic family has opened up an unintended possibility for a perfect fusion of "liberal family values" and "market rationality," where "community" and "kinship" play a key role. It is, however, not necessarily a role that suits nationalist needs; rather, nationalist discourse tends to cling to heteronormative and homophobic/transphobic discourse to juxtapose itself against global and transnational economic threats towards the nation (Joseph 2002, 165–6). It is hence not a simple dichotomy we are up against here, nor is it an easy merge between binaries.

This change of scenes, if you will, has hence altered the position of the homosexual. In the 1990's, researchers of homosexuality and capitalism tended to place the liberated homosexual – liberated that is from heterosexual kinship – as an example of consumer identity formed by urban and public capitalism, while the heterosexual fam-

ily remained in a position outside of capitalism and modernity (e.g., D'Emilio 1983). Today, this represents the nationalist view (rather than the neo-liberal):

> Gays, freed form the family, like money-lending Jews, then seem to represent abstract value, abstract capital, itself, and become the scapegoats in a romantic or populist anticapitalism where only the abstractness of money and the impersonal corporation are seen as evil [...]. (Joseph 2002, 165)

However, it is also, I would claim, a view that is often ascribed the childfree individual, and then it is not (only) nationalists doing the viewing, but also communities built around the Child, that is heterosexual, homosexual, and queer versions of kinships.

When Judith Butler in 2002 looked to anthropology and its new definitions of kinship, she ended up on a somewhat more hopeful note:

> In this sense, then, the relations of kinship arrive at boundaries that call into question the distinguishability of kinship from community, or that call for a different conception of friendship. These constitute a "breakdown" of traditional kinship that not only displaces the central place of biological and sexual relations from its definition, but gives sexuality a separate domain from that of kinship, allowing as well for the durable tie to be thought outside of the conjugal frame, and opening kinship to a set of community ties that are irreducible to family. (Butler 2002, 37–8)

Communities would allow sexuality to exist outside of kinship in a new way, where the border between kinship and community would be finally blurred and allow for a multitude of lives and desires. Community was ascribed an unnatural, even denaturalising, potential in Butler's text, and not set under scrutiny in the same manner as kinship even though communities tend to legitimise themselves by essentialised identity claims and authenticity demands. What can be said to have happened – or maybe had already happened in 2002 – is a foreclosure of the insight Butler (2002) finds in psychoanalysis:

> But whether we seek entrance to the halls of normalcy or, indeed, reverse the discourse, to applaud our "pathology" – i.e., as the only "sane" position within homophobic culture – we have not called the defining framework into question. And once we enter that framework, we are to some degree defined by its terms, which means that we are as defined by those terms when we seek to establish ourselves within the boundaries of normality as we are when we assume the impermeability of those boundaries and position ourselves as its permanent outside. (Butler 2002, 40)

Community has not managed to move beyond itself, not as long as its members position themselves as outside, non-members, of the surrounding society, and as working together *for* the community, which are positions perhaps embedded in the very definition of community. These kinds of "closed communities" are in that sense depoliticising identities and dependencies rather than denaturalising claims on authenticity and autonomy.

We return then, to the sinthomosexual. Edelman's (2004) literary examples (Leonard in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* and Scrooge in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*) lack both children and communities, or at least any acknowledge versions of communities. When they speak, they represent only themselves and, perhaps because of this, we do not expect truth to pass over their lips. Scrooge is portrayed in quite anti-Semitic terms, while Leonard is portrayed as a narcissistic and vain young man with unclear national background. It is evident that they care only about their own enjoyment, be it money, power, or a nice suit. Both Hitchcock and Dickens imply their villain characters are homosexual, or at least more interested in male companion than female. Hence, it is implied that they could not be fathers, even if they wanted to. In this sense, they differ from the childfree woman, who has voluntarily chosen the position of not having children even though it is both expected of her and usually a biological possibility. It is this choice, made bodily visible by gender, I would claim is queer in the Edelmanian version. Because in relation to community, identity, and authenticity, nothing is more scandalous than choice.

From Compulsory Heterosexuality to Compulsory Motherhood

Within lesbian feminism, the relation between heterosexism and motherhood has been debated ever since the 1970's. Arguments for lesbian motherhood was raised as a radical strategy to change the ideals of parenting and child raising (e.g., Rich 1980) and alternative ways of insemination were both practiced and debated. Others, such as French feminist historian Claudie Lesselier (1991), argued against motherhood all together, in terms both specific for the period, 1981, and strangely similar to Edelman's later (2004) arguments:

> In my opinion it is essential not only that radical lesbians fight against this role [motherhood] which has been foisted on women, but also analyse how "the desire for a child" is a purely social phenomenon [...]. I think it is wishful-thinking to imagine you can be a "different kind of mother" in this society, bring your children up "differently" so they escape the social norms, so your son does not grow up a male chauvinist, nor your daughter repeat the patterns of oppression. [...] Wishful-thinking to imagine you can produce children without reproducing society. It seems to me that a lesbian in particular who wants to become a "lesbian mother" is in fact only asking to be recognised as a "normal woman," TAKING ON, DEMANDING, THE STATUS OF OPPRESSION, AN OPPRESSION GIVEN SOCIAL VALUE BECAUSE OF ITS FUNCTION. (Lesselier 1991, 469)

The mother is always vulnerable in our symbolic order; in need of protection (preferably, a man should provide this protection, but otherwise the government has to step in and provide it: for single mothers through economic subsidies, for lesbian couples through the right to marry and be legal co-parents). I would not hesitate to argue that mothers, *de facto*, are vulnerable: in relation to violent fathers and/or dysfunctional welfare systems, as well as many other legal and social factors that constantly seem to work against mothers rather than fathers. However, in Lesselier's critique, as well as in Edelman's, neither vulnerability, nor

marginalisation do necessarily equate subversive or radical. This is why "queer" in Edelman's (2004, 3) version does not straightforwardly refer to either gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender: "*queerness* names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism."

If Edelman (2004, 10) identifies the cause of futurism in the imagined Child that will bring us wholeness and eternal life and save us from the perpetual lack that desire is constituted by, a similar lack is identified in Lesselier's (1991) (perhaps) surprising use of Sigmund Freud:

> According to Freud, the child is the woman's "penis substitute." It would be difficult to find a more forthright admission that the reproductive function both reproduces and shores up the phallocratic system whereby women are worthless while mothers are valued [...]. (Lesselier 1991, 469)

In the same manner that the sinthomosexual is meaningless in the futuristic paradigm, a woman who refuses motherhood is worthless in the phallocratic system. They are both willingly refusing the privilege of being an intelligible victim, a vulnerable damsel in distress, waiting to be saved.

For an added perspective on women refusing motherhood, we can turn to another psychoanalyst, contemporary with Freud, but much less read, Alice Balint, symptomatically mostly known as the wife of the Hungarian psychoanalyst Michael Balint (who published her texts after her premature death in 1939):

> The institution of abortion is a paramount factor in the relation between mother and child. Women all over the world know of artificial abortion, so that it is women who have the final say about the existence or nonexistence of a child. [...] Moralising condemnation or penal prosecution of artificial abortion are probably defensive measures against the dangerous, absolute power of the woman. It is another defensive measure that the right over the child's life which originally was maternal was transferred to the *paterfamilias*. It argues for the primordality of the maternal

right that it is an informal and private affair of the woman. The paternal right, however, is a social institution. (Balint 2001, n.p.)

Here we find a link between abortion and power; a dangerous power that has to be restricted, regulated, and in some conservative cases, completely obliterated in the name of the paternal family and society. Abortion is a conscious choice to end the life of the Child-to-come, to interrupt the idea of womanhood by exercising a power Balint attributes a primordial origin, paradoxically making this foreclosed power constitutive of being a woman. I believe there is a chain of equivalence to be found here where the nodal point – abortion – interlinks with various symbolic versions of abortion: the barren woman (from a patriarchal perspective probably "wilfully" holding back), the frigid woman (probably just too afraid of life, i.e., of men and sex), the transwoman (tragically never going to be a "real woman" because of the lack of a fertile womb), and of course the woman who just does not want to have children – neither biological or adopted (which in practice can include all of the above). This woman's reasons, however, are less easily explained away by patriarchal reasoning, rather the assumed rationale for her choice is symptomatically provided by *feminism* (she is forced by patriarchy to choose between her career and family!). It is a quite curious position – to be deemed incomprehensible by both patriarchy and feminism; but this is also why feminisms that argue for *not having to choose* has become the most successful versions of feminism in liberal democracies.[10]

Usually feminism and queer theory has been attributed the idea that biological motherhood should not necessarily be seen as the only version of motherhood.[11] This move, however, is also a historically acknowledged way to regulate femininity and class; during the 19th and early 20th century, women from the growing middle-classes that wanted, or needed, to work, were only allowed to pick up professions that could be seen as substitutes to motherhood (nurse, teacher, nanny, etc.). The close connection between motherhood and care work functioned as a legitimate way to leave the private sphere and family life without having to revolt against the patriarchal view of mothering as woman's destiny,

nor question the bourgeoisie ideal of strict boundaries between the genders (as opposed to the working class' constant trespassing). Later on, with the growing need of workforce in the 1960's and onwards, feminist demands for public childcare and maternal leave further strengthened the link between profession and motherhood. When feminists criticised the problems with unequal responsibility for childcare, they unwillingly tended to (re)produce a chain of equivalence, where the discourse of "work-life balance," as Lynne Huffer (2013, 180) points out, positions *work* against *life*, where "'[l]ife' equals 'family' equals 'children.'" Today, most women still work within health- and childcare sectors, but now they are mothers too (and since fathers still work full-time, women with children now need to work part-time instead).[12] It is clear that efforts to detach motherhood from the child and create symbolic versions, tend to promote reproduction in general and do very little to change the idea of motherhood itself. Mothers – genetic or symbolic – are supposed to be selfless and driven by a need to take care of everyone – all children, all kin, the entire community, including the nation and earth itself.[13]

Climate Catastrophes in the Age of Innocence

The idea of selfless-women with more empathic abilities than men is a constantly reoccurring discourse in both conservative and liberal feminist contexts. More relevant for this context, symbolic motherhood is, of course, a recurrent image within eco-feminism and other forms of environmentalist discourses. Embedded in the image of Mother Earth is not only a natural connection between woman and motherhood, but also a holistic ideal where reproduction is not only taken for granted, but also implied as the very reason for struggling to hinder climate change and environmental disasters: we want to save the earth for our children.

To make reproduction the nodal point for environmental mobilisation is in one sense ironic – it is after all over-population that brought humanity to this point – but it is also, I believe, a use of discourse that partially has been enabled thanks to the opening-up of both motherhood and kinship. It is not strange, then, that it is mainly nationalists that typically refuse to acknowledge the climate change, while neo-liberals

rather see environmental concerns as a possible new market (emissions trading, green innovation, etc.) (see, Swyngedouw and Ernstson 2018). Without the "liberalisation" of motherhood, family, and kinship, the environmental discourse would probably have to use another nodal point to interpellate the radical left, feminists, and LGBT movements. It is hence quite likely that *because* the Rainbow Child has replaced the Genetic Child, otherwise conservative family values can now be used to argue for environmental political reforms along almost the entire ideological axis. Edelman (2004) points out this ideologically encompassing use of the Child, but also reminds us that there are, of course, versions of the Child that are more preferable than others:

> The fascism of the baby's face [...] whatever the face a particular politics gives that baby to wear – Aryan or multicultural, that of the thirty-thousand-year Reich or of an ever expanding horizon of democratic inclusivity. Which is not to say that the difference of those political programs makes no difference, but rather that both, as political programs, are programmed to reify difference and thus to secure, in the form of the future, the order of the same. (Edelman 2004, 151)

Having the Child – as well as having a child – is also commonly regarded as caring for the innocent, trying to preserve its innocence as long as possible, not corrupting it, and through this preservation contribute to a better future.[14] This is a paternalistic kind of child caring, but it does not make it less common; that for which you care, fight for, struggle for, is assumed to be authentic, uncorrupted, and without guilt. Like Nature, Kin, Identity, Community. The tendency to purify activism by sorting out what is seen as corrupted (by capitalism, colonialism, modernity, nationalism, gender norms, etc.) is of course an impossible endeavour and a standpoint discouraged by, for example Donna Haraway (1991), for whom innocence is a weak, even dangerous, political strategy. At the same time, it is a luring position since referring to authenticity and innocence is more or less the only legitimate way to be political within a futurist paradigm.

Haraway (2015, 162) presents a feminist attempt to widen the notion of kinship to non-human relations, and in her call to "Make kin, not babies," an interesting connection to Edelman's critique of pronatalist hegemony and Haraway's own environmental ethical stance might be discerned. As showed in this article, the question is if this kind of kinship, too, runs the risk of romanticising communities and excluding other, non-natural but distinctly *human* relations, dependencies, and societies. The infinite interconnections made in deep ecology or feminist new materialism serve to deconstruct the borders between humans and other organisms. There is a positive virtue associated to the ability to identify kinship as beyond your own gene pool, and see the way we are all part of, and dependent on, the same eco-system.[15] However, this stance can also be perceived as a call for *more* care, *more* empathy, *more* symbolic mothering. Edelman's Lacanian position prevents such positive identifications. Not that our dependency on organisms and interconnectedness with the world is untrue, but it is not what makes us human, and thereby subjects of accountability, agency, and desire. From the psychoanalytical perspective that Edelman shares with many other poststructuralists (a.k.a. anti-humanists), our ability to *alienate* ourselves from *ourselves* makes us human.[16] This, Edelman claims, is something we need to be constantly reminded of in order to not loose ourselves in omnipotent and narcissist fantasies of inclusiveness, eternal life, and holistic futures. The always already alienated sinthomosexual serves as such a reminder; where most people see the end of life, the sinthomosexual still lives, but according to another notion of desire.

From a bio-ethical perspective, what makes us human is equally "discouraging." Humans have never lived in harmony with our environment; we just moved on to a new spot in the forest after having emptied the previous one on anything edible. With the invention of agriculture, we could to the same thing but much more efficiently. Just as nostalgia for a pre-colonial, a pre-capitalist, or pre-patriarchal world is both problematic and contraproductive, the common futuristic dream of humans either inventing our way "back to harmony" (the liberal/neo-liberal ver-

sion) or "picking up" old and more ecological ways of living (the nationalist and conservative version) risk foreclosing the reason why it is not until "now" (i.e., the last couple of hundred years) that humankind have reached a point where the environment does not have time to recover from our exploitation. We have included all our civilizations in the futurist paradigm; it is most likely too late to do anything about it, but the sinthomosexual is a reminder of another possibility, a life that is not acknowledged as life but nevertheless she lives her own life, leaving no useful and productive legacy when gone. Only a reminder that a choice can be made, perhaps should have been made a long time ago, and an acknowledgment of just how fatal the futurist paradigm is for all of us and that it really needs to come to an end, or it will quite literally kill us all.

Saving the Earth: The Breeders' Way or the Queer Way?

Liberalism and neo-liberalism are great unifying mobilisers. By presenting complex societal problems as challenges that can be tackled through life style changes, consumer demands, and community rights, an ideal kind of political activism has been formed around the idea that all struggles can be joined into one. From a feminist perspective, we recognise this from recurrent claims that "all power structures are linked" or "it is all part of the same system." It is this dream of consistency, inclusion, and closure that has also de-queered much of queer and feminism radicalism. Instead, queer ecology has focused on how discourses on nature are heteronormative, racist, sexist, and excluding other ways of understanding nature, humans, and other animals (e.g., Halberstam 2007; Giffney and Hird 2008; Sturgeon 2010). Alongside finding queer animals to identify with and use for assimilationist arguments, posthumanist scholars have appropriated the term queer to explain how materialisation is not dependent on either discursive or biological processes, but co-constituted and complex (e.g., MacCormack 2009; Barad 2012). However, following Edelman (2004), these studies have little, if anything, to do with queerness:

> For the only queerness that queer sexualities could ever hope to signify
> would spring from their determined opposition to this underlying struc-
> ture of the political – their opposition, that is, to the governing fantasy of
> achieving Symbolic closure through the marriage of identity to futurity
> in order to realize the social subject. Conservatives acknowledge this
> radical potential, which is also to say, this radical threat, of queerness
> more fully than liberals, for conservatism preemptively imagines the
> wholesale rupturing of the social fabric, whereas liberalism conserva-
> tively clings to a faith in its limitless elasticity. (Edelman 2004, 14)

Homosexual desire is a symbol of desire without purpose, functioning
as an unwanted reminder for heterosexuals that all desire is meaning-
less, that heterosexuality is no less authentic than homosexuality. The
sinthomosexual sees this as an opportunity, as a kind of unacknowl-
edged freedom, not as a lack that has to be filled with substitutes (in
vitro-kids, surrogacy, adoption, community care, etc.). The childfree
woman is a similar symbol for the same reason; what is female desire if
it is not directed towards having a child and caring? Meaningless. As in
the case of the male sinthomosexual, the female version is also posited at
a symbolic level ascribed various phantasms (lonely, miserable, life-less,
failed, asexual, narcissistic, etc.). However, it is a level from which some-
thing can be seen that is usually too painful or too outrageous to admit:

> What the breeders do not recognize is that they will inevitably destroy
> everything and everyone in the world because they reject environmental
> stewardship, and their notions of inheritance and futurity are utterly
> ridiculous. (Anderson 2011, 60)

As any phantasm, the sinthomosexual is usually best represented in
fiction. In her analysis of novelist Christopher Isherwood's *A Single
Man*, literary scholar Jill Anderson proposes a queer ecological reading
that actually addresses the real basis of human overconsumption and
pollution, that is overpopulation. Since Anderson follows Edelman and
proposes yet another gay man as the sinthomosexual, it may look like

women are somehow positioned further away from the symbolic sint-homosexual; as George in *A Single Man* describes a rival woman in one of his misogynist modes: "I am Woman. I am Bitch Mother Nature. The Church and the Law exist to support me. I claim my biological rights." (Isherwood 2010, 75) However, as already mentioned, the gay man is usually pictured as a functional sinthomosexual – he is ascribed a natural inability to breed because he does not desire women. The female equiva-lent is rather ascribed an *unnatural will* to not breed; she is a voluntary sinthomosexual. When looking for literary or cultural examples, how-ever, the possible sinthomosexual woman is usually denied her choice. Compared to Edelman's fictional male sinthomosexuals, who indeed are ascribed a queer choice to be anti-social, possible female characters such as (the fictional) Aileen Wuornos in *Monster* (2003) or Barbara in *Notes on a Scandal* (2006) are both ascribed rationales that diminish, even eliminate, the choice. (Wuornos desire to kill men "has to" come from her being sexually molested as a kid. Barbara is "desperate" for human touch, literally, because she has not been touched since she was a kid). They become hysterics, out of control, with none of the cool and calculating agency that the male sinthomosexual is usually ascribed. In other words, it seems like the futurist paradigm has quite a difficult time even *symbolising* the female choice; it has to be eradicated at all costs.[17]

It is perhaps not surprising then that the one example of a female sinthomosexual I could find comes from science fiction, not social real-ism. In *Alien Resurrection* (1997), something close to a choice is implied and then, interestingly, in relation to *saving the world by destroying the monstrous and fatal Child*. In the very end scene, just after having killed her own offspring Newborn, conceived through gynogenesis with the queen alien, Ripley turns to the other survivor, the female android Call, with a faint smile. Ripley silently states: "You did it, you saved the earth." Call answers: "You sound disappointed. [paus] It's beautiful [earth]; I didn't expect it to be. [paus] What happens now?" "I don't know," Ripley replies, "I'm a stranger here myself."[18]

I believe that this ability to alienate ourselves from earth, to become strangers to it, is key to provide a counter position to the futurist para-

digm. Following Ewa Ziarek's (2001) problematisation of community, via inspiration from Julia Kristeva, I believe in a kind of paradoxal community "made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent they recognise themselves as foreigners." It will indeed "fail to produce a common essence or identity, but it is the only mode of solidarity with others that reflects the democratic ideal of pluralism, antagonism, and diversity" (Ziarek 2001, 144). Solidarity is, after all, only solidarity with the different, the completely alien; any similarity between me and the one I feel solidarity for, will inevitably be partly narcissist and partly reciprocal, and hence disqualify as solidarity. In other words, if our solidarity with the future is only made possible through the Child, through identification of sameness, through a reproduction of "myself" or "my community," we will never be able to change a thing.

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NOTES

1. Sinthomosexual is queer theorist Lee Edelman's (2004) term for having no interest in reproduction and instead enjoying sexuality for its own sake. It is a neologism, consisting of Lacan's concept "sinthom" (the symptom we cannot be without) and "homosexual" (as the symbolic position of non-reproduction).

2. From a Nordic perspective, the differences between being a heterosexual woman without a child and a lesbian without a child, have become less and less obvious the last decade due to legal changes regarding IVF and adoption. The number of lesbian mothers/parents has skyrocketed, and is likely to close in on the heterosexual couple within a very near future. In this specific context, lesbians are hence also included in the expectations of having a child in a manner quite similar to heterosexual women. See also Rikke Andreassen (2018). This will likely bring on a new alliance between childfree gay and straight women, since their living conditions bring on similar reactions. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that other differences would not remain, especially regarding the effects of gender appearance, sexism, and homophobia.

3. The higher scores on life satisfaction is likely to be part of the fact that a higher number of childfree women are found in the higher class and within white populations (see, DeOllos and Kapinus 2002; Gillespie 2003).

4. "The childless respondents of Somers' study (1993) perceived friends and relatives as viewing them more negatively because of their choice to remain childless." (DeOllos and Kapinus 2002, 75–6). For studies on the Nordic context, see Kristina Engwall and Helen Peterson (2010).

5. For example, Sweden has the second highest number of born children in relation to population in the EU (https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/hogt-barnafo-dande-i-sverige/).

6. Jasbir Puar (2007, 31) notes, "the capitalist reproductive economy (in conjunction with technology: in vitro, sperm banks, cloning, sex selection, genetic testing) no longer exclusively demands heteronormativity as an absolute; its simulation may do."

7. Puar (2007, 211) criticised Edelman for only looking at reproduction, and not taking in account regenerative aspects: "The child is just one such figure in a spectrum

of statistical chances that suggest health, vitality, capacity, fertility, 'market virility', and so on. For queer politics, the challenge is not so much to refute a future through the repudiation of reproductive futurity, [...] but to understand how the biopolitics of regenerative capacity already demarcate racialised and sexualised statistical population aggregates as those in decay, destined for no future, based not upon whether they can or cannot reproduce children but on what capacities they can and cannot regenerate and what kinds of assemblages they compel, repel, spur, deflate." I would suggest that Edelman's insistence on the Child as a symbol – not an actual child – for what counts as a legitimate political issue is an example of the requirement of politics to support the regenerative (capitalism, BNP, etc.) in the name of a future that looks like us (our present). Edelman's analyses of Antigone also imply that the sinthomosexual is anyone not contributing in a productive manner, not just the gay man enjoying his own enjoyment.

8. From Benedict Anderson's (1983) connection between nationalism and what he named "imagined communities" to Ferdinand Tönnies' (2001) connection between traditionalist values and *Gemeinschaft*, as opposed to the values of urban modernity – *Gesellschaft*, community refers to a grouping of individuals, working for the collective rather than for private gain. This requires a common moral, and explicit norms for social behaviour and individual responsibility.

9. "Studies generally report that childless couples tend to be better educated, are more likely to live in urban areas, and are less likely to report being affiliated with a religion. Childless females are more likely to be employed than mothers and childless females tend to be more committed to their careers [...]. When compared to elderly parents, elderly childless individuals have fewer social resources on which to draw for assistance." (DeOllos and Kapinus 2002, 73)

10. See also Jenny Gunnarsson Payne (2018) for a similar, but more Žižekian, argumentation regarding choice in relation to children.

11. Felicia Mulinari (2017) is an example of this quite common argumentation. For counterarguments, see Edenheim (2017).

12. The liberal myth that individual women (only) should be able "to combine" work and family is strangely enduring; not only does it result in misdirected resentments (towards perceived inefficient social reforms and work norms rather than towards fathers, nuclear family ideals, and societal pronatalism, see e.g., Carbin et al. 2017). This myth also contributes to the wage gap (the employer's assumption that women will not take their job seriously because they rather focus on their children/kin/community, as well as the assumption that women's professional care work is not worth as much because they like to care. Since women as a group is generalised, this wage gap hits childfree women too, but then without the added social benefits that comes with having a child in advanced welfare states such as Sweden. Meanwhile, alternative feminist versions of childcare and social organisations are

completely foreclosed. See e.g., the governmental *Delegation on Gender Equality in Work Life* (Dir. 2011:80) where a vast presentation of mainstream research on intersectional feminism was published (SOU 2014:34) and then ends up suggesting nothing but reforms regarding paternal leave. In this case, it became quite clear that intersectional feminist research was unable to identify that the problem representation presented by the delegation was in itself quite problematic (Bacchi 2009).

13. For a study on the Swedish formation of femininity and motherhood, see Ulrika Dahl (2018).

14. For a problematisation of this view in relation to race, see Natalia Cecire (2015). She notes that black children historically are "excluded from innocence's claims to protection" (Cecire 2015, 168) because they are positioned as already marked, as resilient, as always already mature. See also Robin Bernstein (2011). It is hence clear that the innocent Child is also figured as white. A somewhat ambivalent image can be found in various campaigns organised by Western NGO:s, where racialised girls from non-Western countries are attributed innocence, but also almost superhuman abilities to make the future more gender equal: all we have to do in the West is donate money to girls' education and then they will do the rest on their own.

15. For relevant critique of how this lack of a constitutive outside risks depoliticising posthumanism/new materialism, see Erik Swyngedouw and Henrik Ernstson (2018), as well as Frédéric Neyrat (2019).

16. The Lacanian mirror-stage is one example of how a separation between the world and an I, is a prerequisite for subjectivity; this sense of a unified body, separate from other bodies, is of course imaginary – Lacan points out the mistake, the *méconnaisance*, where the "I" mistakes the image, the "me" in the mirror or in the language provided from the exterior, for a complete body, a whole self, an autonomous identity. This is where the split takes place, the necessary alienation from ourselves, without which we cannot enter the Symbolic order. This is why Lacan states that the subject is the discourse of the other.

17. State regulation has traditionally strengthen the assumption that homosexual women's desire is of less importance in relation to reproduction than for homosexual men, and hence also defined as in less need of regulation. Here is an example from the Swedish White paper on the decriminalisation of homosexuality from 1935: "female homosexuality is less a hindrance for heterosexual co-habitation than male homosexuality is. Because of the more passive role of the woman in the normal sex act, even a pronounced homosexual woman can have a regular sexual relation (marriage) with a man." (SOU 1935:68, 107–8, my transl.) Lesbians are not mentioned in any state regulation again until 2001, when homosexuality and parenthood became the focus; in all other legal reforms, homosexual men have been used as default. In the White paper from 2001 on homosexual parenthood

(SOU 2001:10), lesbians are default and the will to become parents is defined as natural to all women.

18. There is a strong homoerotic relation between Ripley and Call all through the film, further emphasised by Ripley saving the non-human Call rather than the partially human Newborn, and by that choice, she also saves humankind.

SAMMANFATTNING

Artikeln positionerar den sinthomosexuella i relation till släktskap, klimatkris och sårbarhet. Genom att sätta in Edelmans version av queer i den moderna familjen, placeras den sinthomosexuella – här i form av den barnfria kvinnan – inte enbart mot reproduktion utan även mot vissa versioner av gemenskap (*community*) och släktskap (*kinship*). Artikeln undersöker vad denna position är beroende av, och utsatt för, i kölvattnet av välfärdsstatens nedmontering och privatiseringen av ekonomier, communities och identiteter. Detta görs genom en läsning av den anti-sociala vändningen i relation till olika feministiska versioner av släktskap och gemenskap – alltifrån radikal lesbisk feminism till posthumanism. Artikeln ger även en historisk och kulturell bakgrund till den barnfria kvinnans position.