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**ALL
EQUALLY
REAL**

FEMININITIES AND MASCULINITIES TODAY

ANNA PILIN'SKA AND HARMONY SIGANPORIA

‘All Equally Real’

Critical Issues

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**‘All Equally Real’:
Femininities and Masculinities Today**

Edited by

Anna Pilińska and Harmony Sigamora

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Table of Contents

Introduction	ix
<i>Anna Pilińska</i>	
Part 1	Truth Is Stranger than Fiction: Femininities and Masculinities in Literature and Film
The Portrait of Three Women, by Woody Allen <i>Ana Paula Bianconcini Anjos</i>	3
‘You Force Me into the Corner and You Trap Me’: The Crisis of Hegemonic Masculinity in Steve McQueen’s <i>Shame</i> (2011) <i>Barbara Braid</i>	9
Problematic (Male) Homosociality: Youth, Marriage and ‘Adulthood’ <i>Frank G. Karioris</i>	19
Too Good to Be True: Virtue Rewarded in Cinderella <i>Elaine Pigeon</i>	29
Femininity and Masculinity in Gail Carriger’s <i>Soulless</i> and <i>Changeless</i> : Victorian Society Redefined <i>Aleksandra Tryniecka</i>	37
Nurturing or Neutering? Women in Bobbie Ann Mason’s <i>Shiloh & Other Stories</i> <i>Anna Pilińska</i>	47
Gender in War, Gender at War? Femininities and Masculinities in Contemporary British War Novels <i>Miriam Wallraven</i>	57
‘I Bear Two Women upon My Back’: Intersectionalist Hybridity in the Poetry of Audre Lorde <i>Yomna Saber</i>	69
Queer Narratives in Contemporary Latvian Short Fiction <i>Kārlis Vērdiņš and Jānis Ozoliņš</i>	79

Part 2	All The World's a Stage: Femininities and Masculinities Performed	
	Orientating Queer Femininities: Theorising the Impact of Positionalities on the Performative Embodiment of Queer Feminine Subjectivities <i>Alexa Athelstan</i>	91
	Croatian Tales of Long Ago: Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's Covert Autobiography <i>Vivijana Radman</i>	103
	Crafting the Sphere of Femininity: Women Impersonators on the Parsi Stage <i>Harmony Sigamporia</i>	111
	Subversive Bodies: Anti-Aesthetic Gender Images in Contemporary Flamenco <i>Idit Suslik</i>	121
	Cruising for a Bruising: Heterosexual Male-Artists Creating Queer Art <i>Ladislav Zikmund-Lender</i>	133
Part 3	The Personal Is the Political: Femininities and Masculinities in Socio-Political Contexts	
	Mrs. Private Property <i>Hande Çayır</i>	147
	Embodying Womanhood?: Doing Pregnancy, Doing Research <i>Gemma Anne Yarwood</i>	159
	Contemporary Maternity: Independent Reproduction with Assisted Technology <i>Carla Almeida, Carla Valesini and Jonia Valesini</i>	169
	The Representation of Ideal Femininities and Masculinities in Kabyle Folklore <i>Sabrina Zerar</i>	179
	Gender and Family Relations: The Question of Social Security in Kosovo <i>Tahir Latifi</i>	191

Women in Search of Social Security: Hostage of Family, Tradition and State <i>Elife Krasniqi</i>	203
Civil Society Discourses of the Kemalist Women's Organisations in Turkey: Engendering Civil Society? <i>Asuman Özgür Keysan</i>	215
Women's Conscientious Objection: Is It Enough to Be Side Simply (Not to Battle) on the Side of Peace? <i>Cemile Gizem Dincer</i>	229
Being Muslims, Diasporic and Male: The Emergence of the 'Perfect Muslim' in the European Context <i>Valentina Fedele</i>	241
Femininity under Globalisation: Doing Gender in Transnational Space <i>Bih-Er Chou</i>	253
Displacement and Subalternity: Masculinities, Racialisation and the Feminisation of the Other <i>Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos</i>	267
The Construction of Sexuality Knowledge in Human Sexuality Textbooks <i>Monika Stelzl and Brittany Stairs</i>	279

Introduction

Anna Pilińska

The present volume is an inspiring collection of research papers presented during the third edition of the ‘Femininities and Masculinities’ held in Prague, in 2013. While the title of the conference – despite the plurals it employs – may sound somewhat limiting, it encompasses larger, non-binary realms. In truly interdisciplinary spirit, the authors of the chapters demonstrate that gender identities are anything but monolithic concepts. Behind ‘femininities’ and ‘masculinities’ lay an entire spectrum of possibilities.

Gender identities cannot be avoided or escaped, even though at times they might be transparent or ignored as seemingly irrelevant. While there is a certain resistance to being labeled in contemporary discourses on sexuality – as manifested, for instance, in the notion of ‘pomosexuality,’ i.e. postmodern sexuality which refuses to be identified and described on the basis of gender identity and sexual preference – gender identities influence how we interpret the world and how we function within it. On a daily basis, we exist amongst patterns, models, and behaviours, as well as among people who virtually demand to be labeled as one thing or another, because, to them, this forms the basis of a stable identity. This comes from subscribing to certain premises, or by identifying themselves with/positioning themselves against others on their quest for self-knowledge. Identities inevitably differ due to factors such as ethnicity, sexuality, political environment, rigidity of social norms in a given cultural context, the number of genders recognised within a given culture, a variety of other identities which may serve as points of reference, canons of beauty, preconceived notions of gender roles, or stereotypes functioning within a given community. All these factors are inextricably linked with one another.

Conferences such as ‘Femininities and Masculinities’ remind researchers that there is more to be discovered outside of their own respective fields of study, even though working in gender studies is what constitutes the common denominator for all of them. The richness and variety of topics is a reminder that every single project explores gender on a micro-scale almost, and they also clearly show that there is still so much to be done in so many walks of life. As various cultural perspectives and realities are given voice, we are shocked into awareness that privileges we might have been taking for granted are unobtainable elsewhere. As the curtain of one’s own cultural context is lifted, this privilege is – even if for a moment – no longer invisible.

The following volume is divided into three sections, each focused on a different perspective of gender identities. In Part One, chapters are dedicated to literary and filmic representations of femininities and masculinities. In her chapter titled ‘The Portrait of Three Women, by Woody Allen,’ Ana Paula Bianconcini Anjos focuses on female protagonists in motion pictures directed by Woody Allen, particularly in

the film *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*. Anjos discusses the different types of femininities and masculinities presented in the film, using in her analysis the concept of the male gaze and paying attention to factors such as the protagonists' ethnicity and social class. The use of Laura Mulvey's essay on male gaze links this chapter with "'You Force Me into a Corner and You Trap Me": The Crisis of Hegemonic Masculinity in Steve McQueen's *Shame* (2011)' by Barbara Braid. Referring to Mulvey's canonical text as well as to Connell's discussion of hegemonic masculinity, the author explores the dangerous dynamics between the two protagonists of the movie, analysing how female presence acts as an unsettling force in the life of the male protagonist, ultimately calling the concept of hegemonic masculinity into question. In the chapter titled 'Problematic (Male) Homosociality: Youth, Marriage and "Adulthood"' Frank G. Karioris also discusses a motion picture: Seth MacFarlane's *Ted*. The film serves as an illustration of the homosociality-versus-adulthood dilemma, for which the theoretical framework is provided in the form of Kimmel's *Guyland* and Bourdieu's *Bachelor's Ball*. Elaine Pigeon's 'Too Good to Be True: Virtue Rewarded in Cinderella' is an analysis of several versions of Cinderella, linking them with such texts as a ninth-century Chinese tale 'The Golden Carp,' Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson. Drawing a detailed characteristic of the fairy tale's eponymous character, Pigeon traces a pattern in the depiction of Cinderella-based protagonists in various renditions of the storyline. In 'Femininity and Masculinity in Gail Carriger's *Soulless* and *Changeless*: Victorian Society Redefined,' Aleksandra Tryniecka discusses gender identities in steampunk fiction, demonstrating how the balance of power between male and female characters is negotiated and shifted within the context of the fictional worlds of Carriger's two novels. Anna Pilińska discusses female characters in Bobbie Ann Mason's short fiction, in the chapter 'Nurturing or Neutering? Women in Bobbie Ann Mason's *Shiloh & Other Stories*.' Contrasting Mason's depiction of women from the American South with the notion of 'the Southern Lady,' Pilińska focuses on various aspects of femininity embodied by Mason's protagonists, and points to the inevitable impact their choices and decisions ultimately have on male characters. Miriam Wallraven in 'Gender in War, Gender at War? Femininities and Masculinities in Contemporary British War Novels' chooses a very specific context of contemporary war prose, offering alternative answers for questions posed mostly by sociologists. Sociological findings, Wallraven argues, are reflected, expanded, and challenged in fictional accounts of war. Yomna Saber's "'I Bear Two Women upon My Back": Intersectionalist Hybridity in the Poetry of Audre Lorde' discusses the phenomena of intersectionality and hybridity, both linked to Third-Wave feminism. Audre Lorde, as a black, non-heteronormative woman, actively resists dominant, hegemonic discourses through her artistic creations. Finally, Kārlis Vērdiņš and Jānis Ozoliņš offer a queer-oriented contribution to this part. In the chapter titled 'Unreal People: Queer Narratives in

Contemporary Latvian Short Fiction,’ the authors discuss the appearance of queer themes in Latvian fiction across a few generations of writers, pointing to how non-normative characters would receive similar treatment in postmodern Russian literature.

The common thread running through the second section of this volume is the performance of gender identities across art forms and canons. It opens with Alexa Athelstan’s piece on ‘Orientating Queer Femininities: Theorising the Impact of Positionalities on the Performative Embodiment of Queer Feminine Subjectivities.’ The author presents results of her research on performing queer femininity. Athelstan, parting from the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, and Sarah Ahmed, analyses how gender identity is conceived and projected using various points of reference, focusing especially on the issue of positionality. In ‘Croatian Tales of Long Ago: Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić’s Covert Autobiography,’ Vivijana Radman presents the silhouette of a canonical Croatian author of fairy tales and children’s books. This strategic choice of genre allowed Brlić-Mažuranić to express her creativity despite the constrictions imposed on her by societal understanding of gender roles – there is, Radman argues, a hidden emancipatory agenda behind her literary world of fairy tales. The chapter titled ‘Crafting a Semiosphere of Femininity: Women Impersonators on the Parsi Stage’ by Harmony Sigantoria offers insights into the lived reality of female impersonators in late-nineteenth-century Parsi theatre, and how the modern Indian woman of the nationalist imagination was an entity crafted in full upon the body of male performers, despite the presence and availability of female actors for the stage. Performance is also the core of the chapter titled ‘Subversive Bodies: Anti-Aesthetic Gender Images in Contemporary Flamenco’ by Idit Suslik. The author demonstrates how very specific and highly codified gender roles are inextricable from this particular form of artistic expression, and how, at the same time, contemporary flamenco artists attempt to alter or distort the notion of physical, bodily ‘beauty’ in flamenco performance while mastering and showing their skills as dancers. From the fusion of flamenco with contemporary dance techniques, a new, subversive body emerges. Ladislav Zikmund-Lender’s ‘Cruising for a Bruising: Heterosexual Male-Artists Creating Queer Art’ is a presentation of Czech heterosexual artists from different domains producing queer – or queered – art. The creations Zikmund-Lender discusses were not conceived with a queer reading in mind, but were eventually interpreted as queer by their audiences.

The focus of the chapters within the volume’s last section is ‘the personal.’ In two chapters, authors draw on personal experiences to address a more general issue. In ‘Mrs. Private Property,’ Hande Çayır describes her struggles and concerns connected with the change of surname, providing the cultural context for this particular practice. Çayır’s research evolved into a multimedia project, as she made a documentary film encapsulating the experience and process of changing one’s last name in the Turkish socio-political context. Gemma Anne Yarwood’s initial

research into parenting in the UK resulted in an additional, very personal project on the relationship between the researcher and the researched, which is the focus of the chapter titled ‘Embodying Womanhood?: Doing Pregnancy, Doing Research.’ As a pregnant researcher, the author was involuntarily involved in particular discourse practices, but her discomfort seemed irrelevant to her interlocutors, as her pregnancy experience was now a common denominator between her and her participants. Conversely, fatherhood is problematised in ‘Contemporary Maternity: Independent Reproduction with Assisted Technology’ by Carla Almeida, Carla Valesini, and Jonia Valesini. In this chapter, the authors present results of research focusing on assisted reproduction in Latin America. The figure of a biological father is thus absent from the onset of the procedure. The authors signal that the growing popularity of assisted reproduction is not without impact on gender dynamics: the family as an institution, and the notion of motherhood as a much more individualistic project. Family relations are also the focus of three other chapters, by Sabrina Zerar, Tahir Latifi, and Elife Krasniqi. Zerar’s ‘The Representation of Ideal Femininities and Masculinities in Kabyle Folklore’ revolves around codified gender relations within the Kabyle community, and the author analyses Kabyle-Algerian folklore as a potential source of representation for myriad gender identities. In ‘Gender and Family Relations: The Question of Social Security in Kosovo,’ Latifi presents the outcome of a research project conducted in Kosovo, exploring changes in family and gender relations, and the importance of applied legal solutions in this very specific geopolitical context. The author emphasises the power of customary law over public laws, and elaborates on the condition of patriarchy in this postwar reality. Krasniqi’s chapter, ‘Women in Search for Social Security: Hostages of Family, Tradition and State,’ is in dialogue with Latifi’s findings. Discussing the same temporal and spatial reality of postwar Kosovo, Krasniqi focuses on the condition of women as a marginalised and dependent group. In the chapter titled ‘Civil Society Discourses of Kemalist Women’s Organisations in Turkey: Engendering Civil Society?’ Asuman Özgür Keysan focuses on two women’s organisations functioning in Turkey in order to demonstrate how female voices are commonly marginalised within the confines of what is termed ‘civil society,’ and analyses whether the actions of the discussed groups perpetuate, contribute to, or constitute a challenge to patriarchal discourse. Cemile Gizem Dincer’s ‘Women’s Conscientious Objection: Is It Enough to Be Side Simply (Not to Battle) on the Side of Peace?’ presents a peculiar perspective on women’s entanglement and involvement in militaristic discourse, by discussing the phenomenon of female conscientious objectors in Turkey. War discourse and national discourse, Dincer argues, cannot exist without women, for they are the subordinate subjects against whom the remaining elements of the puzzle can identify themselves as dominant and powerful. ‘Being Muslim, Diasporic and Male: The Emergency of the “Perfect Muslim” in the European Context’ by Valentina Fedele contributes to a newly-emerging discourse on Muslim

masculinities, focusing specifically on the Muslim diaspora in Europe, and with a particular emphasis on the role of religion in the construction and performance of gender identities. Bih-Er Chou's 'Femininity under Globalisation: Doing Gender in Transnational Space' investigates the representations of female gender identities in the globalised world. While gender identities of women from lower social strata have generally received more attention since they are considered to be the ones most impacted by globalisation, Chou offers an analysis of the other end of the feminine spectrum, within the context of Taiwan and China. Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos discuss constructions of diasporic gender identities and power struggles of immigrant men in Lisbon, in 'Displacement and Subalternity: Masculinities, Racialisation and the Feminisation of Other.' The authors mention factors such as the immigrants' country of origin, ethnicity, or stereotypes functioning within the binary male-female division, while describing the subjects of their study attempting to participate in the category of hegemonic masculinity. In 'The Construction of Sexuality Knowledge in Human Sexuality Textbooks,' Monika Stelzl and Brittany Stairs focus on how the contents of several twenty-first-century textbooks on human sexuality are constructed on the basis of biological determinism, disregarding the social, political, and cultural factors in shaping sexuality. The authors argue that the audience of these textbooks does not receive a complete and exhaustive picture of what human sexuality is, but they may treat it as such, associating a textbook with the voice of authority.

The following volume is a result of an extremely fruitful, inspiring, eye-opening, and horizon-expanding event. The chapters cover an impressive range of subjects, from fictional representations of gender, through political and social contexts, to very personal experience. The multiplicity of perspectives and approaches to gender identities demonstrates how vital these are in our everyday lives. Femininities and masculinities are not abstract, fictional concepts floating around in a vacuum. They are both personal and political, permeating and shaping our lived reality in numerous ways.

Part 1

Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction: Femininities and Masculinities in Literature and Film

The Portrait of Three Women, by Woody Allen

Ana Paula Bianconcini Anjos

Abstract

In the work of Woody Allen, the subject of women is at the core of the analysis. The representation of women in Allen's films follows a voyeuristic or fetishistic male gaze in narrative film. The ideology of the patriarchal order and of the illusionistic narrative film, as shown in Allen's work, is constrained by the point of view of a male character. In this sense, the traditional dialogue shot reverse shot montage as presented in classic Hollywood narrative films shrinks and goes toward the 'inner monologue' to reveal the inner struggle, 'the feverish train of thought,' as Eisenstein states, of a male perspective. Focusing on *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008), this chapter aims to depict the portrait of three women as: a) reflections of the third person voiceover narrator; b) projections of the male / voyeuristic / patriarchal perspective represented by the character Juan Antonio and his mates; c) the implied author's reflections on the European 'structure of feeling.' In this regard, Vicky and Cristina represent the wealthy American tourists of the 21st century, while Maria Elena figures as a Spaniard alternative constantly suppressed by her male companion. In this film, Allen constructs a metaphor for European integration and sketches a portrait of the beneficiaries of the process, represented by the executives of transnational corporations and artists. The mingling between them is the focus of Allen's critique. The description of wealthy American women intertwined with the world of international tourism bears similarities with the work of Henry James at the turn of the 19th and into the 20th century, especially in the novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881).

Key Words: Woody Allen, Henry James, fetishism, feminism and film.

1. The Female Voyeuristic Gaze

This chapter proposes an analysis of *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (VCB) starting with Laura Mulvey's seminal article on visual pleasure and narrative cinema. Secondly, it examines Henry James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady* as a description of female psychology under patriarchy, and finally, it explores the idea of the 'international theme' and European decline as essential both to James's and Allen's work. The film discusses the possibility of a union that was suspended. It also poses the question of unfulfilled desires. In VCB, the American desire of a European alternative is centred on the characters Juan Antonio (Javier Bardem) and Maria Elena (Penélope Cruz). The Spanish couple Cruz and Bardem are globally known as beauty icons in the star system. Through the use of the subjective camera, Juan Antonio is presented as an object of desire from the point

of view of female American tourists, and he stands as if he was a product on exhibition: his first appearance on the screen is 'coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.'¹ Vicky, Cristina and Judy chat about him and gaze at the Catalan painter as if he was an exotic commodity. In an art gallery, these wealthy American executives mingle with some local artists and 'a number of collectors.'² After chattering about the purchase of some paintings for Mark's office's walls, they focus their attention on 'the gentleman in red shirt.'³ According to Judy, he is an eccentric painter whose 'hot divorce'⁴ with a beautiful woman was in all the newspapers. The conservative American couple, Judy and Mark, 'don't move in those bohemian circles,'⁵ but they appreciate the rupture of the couple, described by them as a social column gossip: a 'big thing in the art world.'⁶ The tragic and violent denouement of Juan Antonio and Maria Elena's marriage is seen as an exotic spectacle for affluent American executives and art collectors. In VCB the gaze of the spectator joins that of the female characters: the male character is also displayed as a sexual object and target of the erotic spectacle. However, this mere change of perspective does not mean an emancipation of either the spectator or the characters: on the contrary, it sustains the same patriarchal order and maintains a voyeuristic gaze. Functioning in the same repressive system but in inverted terms, the presentation of Juan Antonio works on two levels: 'As erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen.'⁷

The second appearance of Juan Antonio reaffirms the same idea from the point of view of the male character. In a local Catalan restaurant, Juan Antonio Gonzalo presents himself to his admirers as a passionate and wealthy painter, a male conqueror similar to a contemporary and aristocratic Don Juan, who invites them for a weekend in Oviedo to visit a sculpture that is very inspiring to him. Although, he claims that he does not want to 'negotiate it like a contract,'⁸ he stresses the aspect of trade, as if his invitation was part of a commercial transaction: 'I came over here with no subterfuge and presented my best offer. And now I hope you'll discuss it and give me the pleasure to take you with me to Oviedo.'⁹

The character Maria Elena is also presented as an object of desire. She is first described, by Mark and Judy as a 'beautiful woman that was nuts'¹⁰ who tried to kill her husband. Then, in front of the sculpture of Christ crucified, inside San Julián de los Prados's church in Oviedo, the idea of suffering related to Maria Elena reappears as Juan Antonio describes her as 'the most incredible woman'¹¹ who in the end 'put a knife into him.'¹² Hence, Maria Elena's description is twofold: she first symbolises a magnificent beauty and secondly, a female threat. As a woman in a patriarchal society, she crystallises this paradox of being pleasurable in form and threatening in content. Her first appearance on the screen reaffirms this tendency: she returns to Juan Antonio because she tried to kill herself. According to him, she's fragile and dependent on him, a menace to

Cristina, but her beauty takes Juan Antonio's and the spectator's breath away. Maria Elena enters her own house as a guest, an outsider in the middle of the night; her entrance as an alien presence strengthens her beauty and freezes the flow of action: 'the female image as castration threat constantly endangers the unity of the diegesis and bursts through the world of illusion as an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish.'¹³

In the meantime, Maria Elena becomes an element of Cristina's observation. And the American tourist is a constant target of Maria Elena's siege. As they become friends, Cristina discovers her own artistic expression by taking photographs of Maria Elena. It is also important to stress that Maria Elena imitates the gestures of the prostitutes in El Raval and that the same neighbourhood reappears throughout the film. Maria Elena becomes a subject of artistic interpretation, a source of inspiration. In a flashback, Cristina tells her American friends about her experience with Maria Elena: 'We were down in the dark room and I was just working on some of my photographs, things that I wouldn't have done if she hadn't inspired me.'¹⁴ While Cristina narrates her relationship with Maria Elena to Doug and Vicky, the spectator accompanies Cristina's flashback: in the dark room, most of the photographs taken by Cristina are portraits of Maria Elena. The latter admires her own self as a photographic object; in a certain way the characters fall in love with their own reflected images as erotic icons. Cristina's flashback is also accompanied by extradiegetic music, the song 'Big Brother,' which corroborates to this idea of images under siege. In the restricted space of the dark room, both actresses represent beauty patterns in the star system and they share the same passion for their images reflected as objects of contemplation. In VCB, the venal aspect of love is intensified, and in this sense, it is possible to recapture Marx's famous definition of fetishism in which a social relation between men assumes the fantastic form of a relation between things.

2. Fetishism

In this case, as always, fetishism hides the social labour that is necessary to maintain the mystified veil of culture. In his analysis of Henry James's works, Terry Eagleton stresses that culture is the 'element' that unites Americans and Europeans: 'For James, the real affinity between the earnest Americans and the elegant Europeans lies in the pact that it takes the disciplined work of the former to produce the culture consumed by the latter.'¹⁵ During lunchtime, the Americans in VCB discuss the role of labour in their lives. It is important to notice that labour is intertwined with culture. The voiceover narrator says that lunch was served after Judy's husband Mark got back from his golf course, and although the narrator is describing the actions of the wealthy Americans, the camera focuses on the housemaid. On one hand, Mark asks his guests about their occupations: Cristina made a twelve-minute film 'about why love is so hard to define'¹⁶ and Vicky is getting her Master's degree in Catalan identity; and on the other hand, Judy

predicts Vicky's future: 'You don't have to do something, you know... She's marrying this wonderful man in the fall and all of her conflicts will be resolved when he makes her pregnant.'¹⁷ For the wealthy Americans, the sphere of production is a mystery, a minor detail in comparison to culture. However, the entrance of the maid reveals that 'for this decorous civilization to survive, a less decorous truth must be repressed: the fact that it is parasitic on the sweated labour of anonymous millions of men and women, who are excluded from the very 'civility' they help to create.'¹⁸

While James's fiction is 'much preoccupied with voids, absences [...], one of the most ineffable secrets of all is the hard labour which makes all of this civilized elegance possible in the first place. It is a world of which James is well aware, though he allows us no direct vision of it.'¹⁹ Woody Allen reiterates scenes in *El Raval*, portraying the work of the prostitutes in Barcelona: the neighbourhood is Juan Antonio's favourite part of the city and he 'was friendly with all the whores and thought that they would make wonderful subjects'²⁰ for Cristina's work as a photographer. On one hand, the portraits taken by Cristina represent her own tourist/artistic development and aesthetic; on the other, the film inserts some elements, such as the housemaid, prostitutes, and the pictures of immigrant children, to represent low wage work and immigrant labour in Spain. In this sense, it is crucial to stress that the private and exclusive luxury of those wealthy families represented in the film is sustained by the precarious conditions of work in Spain.

There is also another important aspect that is similar in Henry James and Woody Allen: their portraits of wealthy American entrepreneurs in Europe present a 'perpetual deferment of pleasure.'²¹ The puritanical self-repression in American society prevents the characters from revelling in end-products.²² This repression and secrecy can be illustrated by the denouement of the plot, in which the voiceover narrator concludes that

Vicky went home to have her grand wedding to Doug, to the house they both finally settle down, and to live the life she has envisioned for herself before the summer in Barcelona. Cristina continued searching, certain only of what she didn't want.²³

This circular train of thought, presented by the narrator (he starts his description with Vicky and Cristina's arrival in Barcelona and ends with their departure) reiterates the same circle of repression: back to New York, the American ladies 'will perform in perpetuity the circular rituals of ownership and objectification, freedom and imprisonment, aggression and submission.'²⁴ By contrast, the European couple violently discusses their relationship and artistic works in the middle of *El Raval*, amongst the prostitutes, without even noticing them: 'If you have an excess of material wealth, you can create a culture which seems

autonomous of that wealth, averts its eyes disdainfully from it, and can be savoured as an end in itself.’²⁵

Notes

¹ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1975)’, in *Movies and Methods: Volume II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 309.

² Excerpt taken from *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (VCB), Woody Allen, The Weinstein Company, Mediapro, Gravier Productions, Spain, 2008.

³ Ibid..

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure’, 309.

⁸ *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure’, 314.

¹⁴ *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*.

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction*, “Henry James” (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 216.

¹⁶ *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Eagleton, *The English Novel*, 217.

¹⁹ Ibid., 216-217.

²⁰ *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*.

²¹ Eagleton, *The English Novel*, 218.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*.

²⁴ Beth Ash, ‘Frail Vessels and Vast Designs: A Psychoanalytic Portrait of Isabel Archer’, in *New Essays on The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Joel Porte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 160.

²⁵ Eagleton, *The English Novel*, 218.

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‘You Force Me into the Corner and You Trap Me’: The Crisis of Hegemonic Masculinity in Steve McQueen’s *Shame* (2011)

Barbara Braid

Abstract

Since its premiere in September 2011 at Venice Film Festival, *Shame* (dir. Steve McQueen) has been interpreted as a cinematographic illustration of sexual addiction. Set in contemporary New York, it presents Brandon Sullivan, a professional in his early thirties, as he indulges in sexual excess and pornography. The arrival of his sister Sissy, a needy and neurotic artist, shakes his carefully constructed routine and forces him to face his compulsions. But a much more subversive aspect of this film is provided by the problematic relationship between Brandon (Michael Fassbender) and Sissy (Carey Mulligan); it has become the subject of a heated debate among the film’s viewers, who ponder on the possible traumatic source of the characters’ mental disturbances as well as a conceivable past and/or present incestuous desire. However, their corresponding first names (Brandon/brother and Sissy/ sister) would suggest a possibility of a more symbolic nature of the conflict between the siblings, one which would posit these characters as metaphorical representations of a heteronormative masculinity and femininity immersed in the concrete jungle of the patriarchal context. Brandon’s objectification of females through his male gaze and avoidance of all intimacy correspond to R. W. Connolly’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, a preferred gender performance for males in a patriarchal society. Sissy, on the other hand, represents femininity, understood as those aspects of one’s identity which are externalised and rejected by hegemonic masculinity. Together, Brandon and Sissy represent two binaries, doppelgängers at war with each other. Brandon’s instantaneous attraction and repulsion toward Sissy may symbolically signify the crisis in which hegemonic masculinity (Brandon) finds itself, threatened and engendered by femininity (Sissy). Only when Brandon engages in an extreme sexual objectification of himself is he able to accommodate the female vulnerability into his identity. The objectification of the male body this film seems to practice by an extensive display of Michael Fassbender’s full frontal nudity underlines the message that once masculinity incorporates a possibility of ‘female’ elements in its identity performance, it will be able to free itself from the demands of patriarchy.

Key Words: *Shame*, Steve McQueen, hegemonic masculinity, the gaze, homosociality, full frontal nudity.

1. Introduction

Since its premiere in September 2011 at Venice Film Festival, *Shame* (dir. Steve McQueen) has been interpreted as a cinematographic illustration of sexual addiction. Set in contemporary New York, it presents Brandon Sullivan (Michael Fassbender), a professional in his early thirties, as he indulges in sexual excess and pornography. The arrival of his sister Sissy (Carey Mulligan), a needy and neurotic singer, shakes his carefully constructed routine and forces him to face his compulsions. But a much more subversive aspect of this film is provided by the problematic relationship between Brandon and Sissy; it has become the subject of a heated debate among the film's viewers, who ponder on the possible traumatic source of the characters' mental disturbances as well as a conceivable past and/or present incestuous desire. Tempting as such readings seem, they might actually simplify a much more complex reality of elaborate gender performances played out by both characters, more importantly by Brandon, whose behaviour, I argue, represents a desperate attempt to comply to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity. I would therefore suggest a reading of McQueen's film which analyses this work as a possible critique of hegemonic masculinity performed in the concrete jungle of the 21st-century patriarchal society.

2. Hegemonic Masculinity

It was R. W. Connell who first used the term 'hegemonic masculinity' in her early work, in which she followed the idea of 'hegemony' introduced by Gramsci to signify social relations characterised by domination. This should not be understood as pure brutality, aggression or violence, although this more abstract ascendancy is often sustained by a threat or realisation of physical force.¹ It is, however, a more subtle and sophisticated 'play of forces.'² In her next book on masculinities, Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as a 'configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.'³ According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity is not an object, or often not an actual realisation of masculinity by men in power,⁴ but instead 'processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives;' it is 'a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effect of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.'⁵ What transpires from this description is the fact that hegemonic masculinity cannot be defined otherwise but by putting it in relation to femininity and other, non-hegemonic performances of masculinity; this relation is always one of subordination of those gender realisations to hegemonic masculinity.

Consequently, hegemonic masculinity should not be perceived as a total gender practice which eradicates all others; it rather dominates them (as in the case of women or homosexual men) or compels them to compliance,⁶ as in the case of

heterosexual, non-hegemonic men, who might not fulfil the hegemonic ideal themselves, but support it, as it helps to sustain ‘the practices that institutionalize men’s dominance over women.’⁷ The core of hegemony is therefore the rejection of femininity, either in the form of misogyny or homophobia, as it is male homosexuality which is seen as most threatening to hegemonic masculinity: ‘[g]ayness, in patriarchal ideology, is a repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity’ and it is ‘easily assimilated to femininity.’⁸ It would be a mistake, however, to see hegemonic masculinity as a character type or a concrete group of people; most visible hegemonic men, Connell claims, are fantasy figures or unattainable ideals, like celebrities.⁹ Neither are they always the most powerful men.¹⁰ Yet, even though the majority of men might not practice the hegemonic ideal accurately, most men benefit from hegemonic masculinity as a prevailing social force for the upholding of patriarchal subordination of women. Therefore, even if they do not consider themselves hegemonic men, in a patriarchal context, they comply with the hegemonic project.¹¹

3. Male Full Frontal Nudity and the Gaze

Before I proceed to discuss Brandon as a representative of hegemonic masculinity, I would like to touch upon one of the opening scenes, the one which caused some controversy due to the full frontal nudity of the main character. This scene is important for my argument both from an intra-diegetic and meta-diegetic perspective. To start with the latter, I would like to refer to the theory of the male gaze, proposed by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay ‘Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.’ Mulvey defines this prevalent practice in cinema of classic Hollywood era as scopophilia, the pleasure of looking at a female erotic object, mixed with narcissism of the viewer’s identification with the male hero.¹² The male gaze works on several levels: it is the one of the filmmaker, as well as of the male character in the film; but it also reflects the male gaze of the spectator.¹³ In this undoubtedly dichotomic and essentialist understanding of the dynamics of looking in cinema, masculinity is associated with activity, control and domination, while the female object is the passive embodiment of ‘to-be-looked-at-ness.’¹⁴ Moreover, Mulvey asserts that the masculine ‘cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification.’¹⁵

This last statement has attracted most criticism, as contemporary visual art, film and popular culture provide innumerable examples of men being the object of the gaze. Steve Neale in ‘Masculinity as Spectacle’ (1982), for example, discusses the problematics of feminisation of the male object of gaze, who potentially becomes an object of homosexual desire.¹⁶ A more detailed discussion of a possibility of a male subject and female gaze is discussed by Kenneth MacKinnon in his book *Representing Men* (2003). He notes that in the cinema of the 1980s, male bodies of actors such as Sylvester Stallone or Arnold Schwarzenegger were presented often naked, thus potentially subject to an erotic gaze, either the female or the

homosexual one, but they are at the same time shown while performing herculean tasks, thus preserving their hegemonic masculinity in spite of this possibility of a feminised position. This possibility is not even acknowledged by the camera's gaze or by intra-diegetic gaze; we might be witnessing a disavowal, MacKinnon claims, of something which is obviously happening, but is described as not happening at all.¹⁷ The narrative protects the male spectator from the responsibility of male spectacle by a 'common sense scenario,' where the hero might take his shirt off not to be eroticised, but because the script offers a plausible excuse for his nakedness, thus providing an 'alibi' for the (female) gaze.¹⁸ MacKinnon notes an interesting contrast between a male and female gaze:

The erotic look at the female star is without alibi, overt and even blatant, because the more the female is objectified, the more masculinity seems to be guaranteed to the hero – and thus, to follow Mulvey's logic, to the male spectator. The look at the male star is heavily alibied, covert, confusing, its erotic qualities projected on to females and, occasionally, gay males. (...) However, this protection is extremely simple when compared to the inventive range of protection it gives to its male spectators in particular for looking at the male in a sexual or erotic manner. Masculinity is shored up, and all threat of homoeroticism and feminization kept at bay.¹⁹

A similar problem is noted by Richard Dyer (1989) in his discussion of men as subjects of the erotic gaze displaying a passivity of being looked at which undermines their masculinity and invites the look of the female, also hinting at a possibility of the repressed homosexuality of the spectator. That implies gender inversion: an active female spectator is in contrast with the expected gender performance. Therefore, mechanisms are used to eradicate the passivity of the male object; they may include a taunting pose, the muscularity of the model or implied active male roles, referring to sports, typically masculine jobs, or usage of uniforms.²⁰ It may be concluded, therefore, that according to these analyses of cultural representations, masculinity still associates with power, domination and activity, even if it is the object and not the perpetrator of the gaze.

In this context, the opening scene of full frontal nudity in *Shame* offers a crucial and paradoxical comment. On the one hand, Brandon's nakedness after a night of casual sex may be read as a symbolic representation of his hegemonic need to dominate and control his life and his relationships with his penis, or in other words, with his masculinity. By extension, Brandon's sexual obsessions may be perceived as a desperate attempt to subordinate others to his need to control – an interpretation which I shall develop in more detail below. However, on an extra-textual level this scene is an even more interesting commentary on the role of the

male in the dynamics of cinematic voyeurism. This is obviously not the first case of male full frontal nudity in cinema, but it would be perhaps true that it is one of few examples of male nudity scenes in mainstream cinema which resist MacKinnon's description of 'alibied, covert, confusing'²¹ representations. Brandon's genital area is not glimpsed as if by accident, somewhere between the sheets or the folds of clothes, and the scene lasts comparatively longer than an average shot of this kind. In spite of McQueen's claims that the purpose of the scene was purely to create a realistic representation of a morning of a sex addict, the scene is slightly taunting, the camera is positioned on a level of Brandon's genitalia, and its gaze is not averted. Such an unabashed depiction of male nakedness in the context of the male gaze perhaps explains the disproportional alarm this film raised in the Hollywood establishment, earning NC-17 rating. This is disquieting to the hegemonic male gaze for two reasons: on the one hand, a pleasure which might result from watching a male nude results in a homophobic panic; on the other, the identification with the male character, which Mulvey recognised as a part of the cinematic gaze, puts the male spectator in a position of an object of the gaze, thus feminising both the character and the spectator. Therefore, such a scene unhinges hegemonic masculinity of the spectator via its two main taboos: femininity and homosexuality. It could be concluded then, that even though on an intra-diegetic level Brandon's full frontal nakedness symbolically embodies his hegemonic masculinity, on a meta-diegetic level it is its ironic criticism and intimidation.

4. Brandon's Hegemonic Masculinity

As it has been mentioned before, *Shame* is generally perceived as a film discussing the issue of sexual addiction. Usually the viewers and the critics look for possible psychological explanations of Brandon's state of mind and his unrestrained compulsions. The script, however, offers little explanation in terms of the character's background which could have explained the source of Brandon's problem. It is rarely, however, that the film is analysed from the point of view of gender problematics, and it is from this perspective that Brandon's unrequited need to engage in casual sex and masturbation rituals can be explained. Interestingly, and perhaps significantly, Michael S. Kimmel's well-known 1994 article on hegemonic masculinity is subtitled 'Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity',²² as he claims shame is an unavoidable element of patriarchal masculinity in the life-long attempt to attain the unattainable hegemonic standard, which results in repudiation of femininity, the need to prove one's manhood in a homosocial environment, homophobia, heterosexual promiscuity and possibly violence.²³ I would like to focus, therefore, on Brandon's relationships with other men and with women, especially his sister Sissy, to analyse his compulsion to fulfil the hegemonic ideal and where this leads him in the end of the story.

The only men surrounding Brandon in this film are his boss and his colleagues from work. They seem to build a homosocial environment, in which business expertise and sexual prowess are the sole requirements of manhood. The relationships between these men are based on proving oneself in those fields. Brandon wins the friendship of his boss, David, because he is proficient at both – he manages to win the company a big contract, and during their outing that night to celebrate the achievement, he proves to be effortlessly successful with the ladies, something David himself cannot accomplish. However, Brandon seems to despise David; he does not approve of his married boss seducing his sister Sissy; perhaps what Brandon really loathes is his own hegemonic masculinity reflected in David's behaviour. With other men, Brandon's relationship is based on rivalry and an attempt to dominate – his colleague from the office is constantly ridiculed for being a faithful husband, and Brandon also calls him a 'dick' and jokes about sleeping with his wife to tease him. Brandon's colleague represents the 'weaker' masculinity Brandon feels he can easily dominate.

Brandon's relationship with almost all of the women in his life, on the other hand, is purely sexual. He engages in casual sex with women he meets in bars or prostitutes. He also uses pornography and practices cyber sex and masturbation. That such a life style represents sexual objectification of women is an obvious conclusion. But I would also suggest that there are two equally important drives in his sexual practice as well: the need to subordinate women and the need to control. The first argument may be illustrated by the subway scene which constitutes a narrative frame of the film. On his way to work, Brandon notices a young, pretty woman sitting opposite him in a subway car. Immediately his look becomes seductive; it is the gaze of a man on a sexual hunt. At first she is flattered, she even invites his look by revealing a little more of her thigh under her skirt. But soon she refuses to play the seduction game; the viewer notices a wedding ring on her finger. Brandon nevertheless follows her once she steps out of the car, insatiable in his desire to possess her. Hiring a prostitute is of course another practice which aims at subordination and control. It seems that Brandon performs a ritual when inviting a sex worker to his flat; he controls the act and gives orders. More significantly, the scenes of masturbation also serve the purpose of regaining control. This time, however, they are aimed at himself. The instances of masturbation presented in the film correspond to those moments when Brandon feels he loses control: when his sister calls him, which causes distress as he does not want to talk to her; when his computer at his work station is collected by IT technicians, together with its incriminating porn material on the hard drive; and finally, when his boss invites himself into Brandon's outing with his sister. In all these situations, when Brandon feels he cannot make the people around him subordinate to his will, he resorts to one thing over which he has control – his sexuality.

An even more significant scene illustrating this issue is the failed attempt Brandon makes at dating Marianne. Their shared intimacy in the hotel room is a

situation Brandon cannot control, even though he is the one who initiates the rendezvous. Marianne, however, is not like the woman he is used to, he cannot give her orders; instead, she is equally engaging and passionate in the sexual act. The experience is so intimate and emotional that Brandon fails to perform; curling on the edge of the bath in shame for his failed masculinity. He lets Marianne go, only to be shown in the next scene performing an intense casual sex-act with a random woman or a prostitute, pressed against the window. It seems that his masculinity needs constant reaffirmation via sexual domination.

5. Brandon and Sissy: Masculinity and Femininity

Sissy's arrival to New York disrupts Brandon's lifestyle and shakes his identity to the core. His sister is, to some extent, his opposite: while he implodes, with his emotional restraint and the need for self-control, she explodes with extreme craving for emotional attachment. The marks on her arms suggest she has tried suicide before, so her involvement in casual relationships like the one with David makes her even more exposed. This vulnerability infuriates Brandon, who perceives it as weakness and is afraid of the emotional bond his sister's presence seems to create. I would like to suggest a reading, however, in which the relationship between the siblings goes beyond an emotional power struggle between the need to love and a fear of love. The names of the characters seem symbolic: Brandon-brother, Sissy-sister, and put them in a realm of universal figures representing the male and female elements in gender dynamics.

Thus, Brandon's resistance to Sissy's need to love and her desire to unite with him may perhaps be read as Brandon's rejection of the female vulnerability that he both desires and discards. His hegemonic need to dominate and control does not offer him emotional security, intimacy or any true companionship in his life. Yet, even though he yearns for it, he does not allow himself to be vulnerable, as that would diminish his masculinity. The climax of the film, the conversation in which Brandon rejects Sissy's love, could be read also as an expression of self-hatred and anger. When he says 'you force me into a corner and you trap me,' he is exasperatedly trying to avoid the incorporation of those 'feminine' traits – vulnerability, emotionality, the need for intimacy, submissiveness – which do not correspond with the expectations of the hegemonic masculinity he has so desperately tried to fulfil. Sissy says 'I am trying to help you,' which Brandon does not understand; he does not want to accept the necessity to incorporate femininity into his identity, represented metaphorically by Sissy. The final scenes of Brandon's sexcapade, which include provoking a man in a bar into beating him up, involving oral sex in a gay club, and engaging in a threesome with two prostitutes, chronologically corresponds to Sissy's suicide attempt. Brandon's journey into the New York night, both literal and metaphorical, constitutes both a trial and ultimate humiliation of his masculinity. Metaphorically, once he rejects Sissy from his life,

he is 'killing' her, or killing the femininity inside him, through violence and extreme sex.

6. Conclusion

Still, in the end, Brandon realises the need to reunite with Sissy for full happiness. The scene of Brandon's emotional breakdown on the parking lot of the hospital in which Sissy is recovering represents his moment of realisation, that so far he has been sacrificing his life at the altar of hegemonic masculinity, through a repeated ritual of self-control and rejection of intimacy. The message Sissy leaves on Brandon's phone – 'We're not bad people, we just come from a bad place' – corresponds to the idea that hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily an actual realisation of masculinity, but rather an abstract ideal the patriarchal 'place' (society) burdens men with. Brandon realises that this kind of masculinity performance brings 'fear, shame and (emotional) silence.'²⁴ Paradoxically, the film ends with the reversal of the gaze: the girl from the subway appears again, this time better dressed and obviously flirtatious. She looks at Brandon seductively, but this time her gaze is returned with reluctance: Brandon's eyes are tired and pained. Whether he gets involved in the game and follows the subway girl, the audience cannot know. Perhaps he understands that there is a possibility of a new masculinity, without fear and shame.

Notes

¹ R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 184.

² Ibid.

³ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1995), 77.

⁴ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 185 and Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

⁵ Connell, *Masculinities*, 71.

⁶ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 184-185.

⁷ Ibid., 185.

⁸ Connell, *Masculinities*, 78.

⁹ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 184.

¹⁰ Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

¹¹ Ibid., 79.

¹² Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 837.

¹³ Ibid., 838-839.

¹⁴ Ibid., 837.

¹⁵ Ibid., 838.

¹⁶ Tim Edwards, *Cultures of Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 104.

¹⁷ Kenneth MacKinnon, *Representing Men: Maleness and Masculinity in the Media* (London: Arnold Publishers, 2003), 29.

¹⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Edwards, *Cultures of Masculinity*, 109.

²¹ MacKinnon, *Representing Men*, 30.

²² Emphasis mine.

²³ Michael S. Kimmel, 'Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity', in *Theorising Masculinities*, eds. Harry Bord and Michael Kaufmann (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 126-135.

²⁴ Ibid., 119.

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Filmography

Shame. Directed by Steve McQueen. 2011. London: Momentum Pictures, 2012. DVD.

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Problematic (Male) Homosociality: Youth, Marriage and ‘Adulthood’

Frank G. Karioris

Abstract

This chapter will seek to begin an investigation of the meaning of male homosociality. More specifically, it will re-analyse some of the discourse that currently exists and makes claims about what male homosociality is. It therefore means to not only examine the ‘negative’ version of homosociality, but seeks to begin a conversation in moving the concept of homosociality forward towards a more complicated vision of what it entails. It will do this by looking at the link that is made between homosociality and youth; using the, in many ways contrasting, examples of Michael Kimmel’s book *Guyland* and Pierre Bourdieu’s *Bachelor’s Ball*. This comparison will be augmented through a reading of the recent movie *Ted*, which presents a good example of how these connections are portrayed and seen as playing out, and a reading of a history of American Manhood by E. Anthony Rotundo. Kimmel’s ideas about the relation between youth, marriage, adulthood and male homosocial relations will be compared with Bourdieu’s, who sees the connections between these notions drastically differently. Through both *Guyland* and *Ted*, homosociality is posed as an opposition to adulthood, often in the guise of marriage. In creating this opposition, it not only creates a normative idea about what marriage is, but also one that heterosexual men must marry. Most important for this chapter though, is the normative relating to what homosocial relations are and that they must be, by virtue of this norm, opposed to heterosexual relations. The chapter seeks then to re-imagine homosocial relationships, and to challenge the understanding of its perceived connections to youth and adulthood.

Key Words: Homosociality, masculinity, youth, marriage, men, men’s relations, Michael Kimmel.

1. Introduction

In this topsy-turvy, Peter-Pan mindset, young men shirk the responsibilities of adulthood and remain fixated on the trappings of boyhood, while the boys they still are struggle heroically to prove that they are real men despite all evidence to the contrary.¹

It is in this way that Kimmel opens his recent book *Guyland*. The title is meant to signify the fact that this is a land where men set the rules and which they dominate. The man-boy has been reified as not only a category and state of being, but, in Kimmel, has begun to take shape as a discursive concept. This idea of the man-boy has been intricately linked to the idea of homosociality.² In this way,

homosociality is the concept which can be shown as the cause and reason for the man-boy.

This chapter will begin by investigating the perceived connection between youth and homosociality in these men's (supposed) opposition to adulthood – manifested in the idea of marriage. In doing this, it will start a critique of both the connection that is made as well as the way that homosociality is conceived. The main points of argumentation will come from Kimmel's *Guyland*, which will be given extra depth through a reviewing of the 2012 movie *Ted*. The movie will be critically analysed, seeing it as a continuation of the connection between homosociality and youth, and escape from adulthood. This will be briefly compared to Pierre Bourdieu's book *The Bachelor's Ball* which seeks to examine the transition into adulthood in a village in the South of France, and the impossibility of this for many of the men in the village due to circumstances outside their control.

By comparing these pieces, it will begin a reconstruction of the notion of homosociality, seeing it as separated strictly from youth or adulthood, and thusly to break from this oppositional structuring that poises homosociality not merely as opposite from adulthood, but as something which impedes and negates it.

2. Kimmel's *Guyland*

Michael Kimmel's recent book, *Guyland*, aims to inspect the world young men create in a university setting.³ As the quotation at the beginning of the chapter states, *guyland* for Kimmel is a place beyond reality, beyond responsibility. It is, through his own imagery, associated with boyhood in its most archetypal form: Peter Pan.⁴ It is a very apt beginning to understand how Kimmel sees *guyland* and the men (or boys as he sees them) that inhabit this *Neverland*.⁵

In exploring this *neverland*, Kimmel sees its 'lost boys' stagnating in a state of boyhood bliss. He says that:

It's the "boyhood" side of the continuum they're so reluctant to leave. It's drinking, sex, and video games. It's watching sports, reading about sports, listening to sports on the radio. It's television – cartoons, reality shows, music videos, shoot-em-up movies, sports, and porn – pizza, and beer. It's all the behavior that makes the real grownups in their lives roll their eyes and wonder, "When will he grow up?!"⁶

This quote adequately gets across not just his point, but gives a list of things that he attributes to boys and youth. In putting it more bluntly he says that "Laddism" – the anomic, free-floating, unattached and often boorish behavior of young males⁷ is what most frequently defines and determines the actions of men in *guyland*.

In a way, Kimmel points to the changing paradigms for these men and the changes that have occurred, without necessarily assessing the reasonings. He says that unlike prior generations of men who rushed ‘headlong into work and family lives, as children did in earlier societies, adolescence slows down the process to allow young people to accomplish certain identity tasks.’⁸ It is these markers of adulthood (and, seemingly, manhood) which men in guyland try to escape from. In fact, Kimmel says that this purposeful escape from manhood is guyland’s definition of freedom.⁹

This ‘freedom’ gains corporeal form in the running from responsibility. On the other side of the fence dividing guyland from the rest of the world, ‘women demand responsibility and respectability, the antithesis of Guyland.’¹⁰ It is here in this oppositionality which the shape of guyland takes hold. Guyland is a ‘social space as well as a time zone – a pure, homosocial Eden, uncorrupted by the sober responsibilities of adulthood.’¹¹ In this way the clear link between adulthood and responsibility is shown, especially the oppositionality of homosociality. These statements make clear the link between homosociality and youth, the case of the first statement as also against women. Interestingly, he says that:

Just about every guy knows this – knows that his “brothers” are his real soul mates, his real life-partners. To them he swears allegiance and will take their secrets to his grave. And guys do not live in Guyland all the time. They take temporary vacations – when they are alone with their girlfriends or even a female friend, or when they are with their parents, teachers, or coaches.¹²

It becomes clear that guyland is not merely a state of mind or period of one’s life, but a place one can enter and leave. Though Kimmel sees the possibility of leaving guyland temporarily, for him that there is no reason for these men to leave permanently. ‘With no family to support, no responsibilities to anyone other than themselves, and young women who appear to be as sexually active and playful as they could possibly ever fantasize, they’re free to postpone adulthood almost indefinitely.’¹³ Continuing, he says there is ‘no reason for marriage, or even a serious relationship, if sex is really all you want. Why should they grow up, they wonder?’¹⁴

It seems inescapably clear that for Kimmel homosociality is linked with youth, lack of responsibility, and an avoidance of ‘mature’ relationships with women.¹⁵ These statements seem to be forming a very heteronormative idea of what it means to be an adult and what a relationship entails. This is further shown in the abundant rhetoric which makes it seem that the only way to have a ‘mature’ relationship is through marriage. For him, people today ‘become adults when they feel like adults. They experience a “situational maturity.”’¹⁶ Beyond this, he sees the markers

which once established one as a man now are the markers of adulthood for both sexes.¹⁷ In this world devoid of markers of adulthood, boys must find their own paths to manhood, often turning to each other for their initiation.¹⁸ Masculinity is, for Kimmel, something which is a largely homosocial experience,¹⁹ which is escapism from the reality of heterosexual relations with women.

3. Ted as Embodied Homosociality

While male homosocial behaviour is the unspoken subject of many films, the recent film *Ted*²⁰ tackles this topic head-on. The movie is premised on the story of a young boy John who wishes for his teddy bear to be brought to life. His wish granted, Ted (short for Teddy) becomes John's best friend. Their relationship remains constant through childhood, adolescence, till John is thirty-five. Ted is a heavy-drinking, pot-smoking 'adult' who exists in a state of perpetual adolescence outside the realm of work or responsibility. He is the embodiment of Kimmel's homosocial boy who refuses to accept the onset of maturity and the role of adulthood. Ted represents the way that male friendship(s) play a strong role in the creation of men and the condition of masculine approval. John, following his friend, seeks to try and bridge 'adulthood' – in this case, a long term, committed relationship and a job – with his relation with Ted. The resultant situation, while providing humour, is not positive.

The antagonism in the movie stems from the fixity of this life, with John's girlfriend getting tired of John's lack of drive and motivation. John asks Ted to move out into his own apartment, in an effort by John to try and separate his 'childhood' life from his 'adulthood' life – in a move motivated by the hope of maintaining his relationship with his girlfriend.²¹ His girlfriend tells him that 'I need a man, not a little boy with a teddy bear.' After failing to eliminate Ted from his life, his girlfriend makes him move out of their apartment and breaks up with him. John separates himself from Ted to try and figure his life out. A physical confrontation occurs between Ted and John – and a metaphorical one between adulthood and youth. John says that Ted has 'always seen Laurie [John's girlfriend] as a threat to our friendship.'

Ted ends up going to Laurie and telling her that he will leave forever so that she can have John. In this second try at separating youth from adulthood, it is Ted (youth) who leaves John, forcing him to become an adult. As Ted is dying, he tells John that Laurie is the most important part of John's life now. It is the physical manifestation of the death of youth played out.

All of this leaves the impression of male homosocial relations as ones tied tightly to constructions of childhood forever in opposition to adult heterosexual sexual relations. In this way, it is the film version of what Kimmel seeks to portray. Homosocial relations between men are seen as a singular and uncomplicated bond which is premised on the escapism of men avoiding the 'real' world. The

homosocial man is shown as an overgrown child who is outside of the adult world of responsibility.

4. Bourdieu in Response

The Bachelor's Ball sees Bourdieu examining the gender dynamics at play surrounding the traditional Christmas Ball, which is intended for young men and women to come together and meet in the hopes of finding a suitable partner for marriage. The subject of the study though is not the ball itself, but the men who attend: bachelors beyond the marrying age, who have thereby become eternal bachelors.²² 'By what paradox can [these] men's failure to marry appear to those men themselves...'²³

For these 'unmarriageable' men, their bachelorhood is something which stems from a host of causes, most out of their control. In this society, the logic of marriages is dominated by 'one essential objective, the safeguard of the patrimony... [which is characterized by] the opposition between the eldest son and the younger brother... and the logic of relations between the sexes...'²⁴ The system discourages men from marrying women of higher social standing, 'whereas the opposite is in accordance with the deep-rooted values of the society.'²⁵ Due to this, these men are unmarriageable.

In this way, they are bachelors not out of choice, but circumstantial and circumscribed inability. For these men, marriage, as a marker of adulthood, is out of their reach. Their homosocial relations take on greater importance as their marital chances darken and they resign themselves to the life of a bachelor. 'I was often depressed and spent what free time I had drinking with the fellows, most of whom were in the same situation.'²⁶ Another bachelor says, 'We would spend whole nights in the cafe... We would mostly talk about women; of course we said the worst things about them.'²⁷ Through this we can see the complicated nature of these homosocial relations. They are used as a way of distancing themselves from the women who they cannot marry, while simultaneously being the sole social space – outside of their families – for these men.

Through this lens, one can begin to see a very different version of 'guyland' appearing. Unlike the guyland Kimmel portrays, these men are excluded from the marker of marriage, and thus in some ways, are excluded from adulthood. For these men, homosocial relations become a defining feature of their lives. It is not something tied to youth or avoidance of marriage, but is a byproduct of their inability to marry.

5. A Historical Perspective

E. Anthony Rotundo gives a more historical approach to this topic, and in so doing, presents a very different picture of what male homosocial relations entail, and the ways that they were seen – by men themselves, and the wider society.

Rotundo's work focuses on the 'white, middle-class, Yankee Northerners' in the 19th century.²⁸ So, while focusing on a distinctly different time period, the focus on the white, middle-class (and in many ways, heterosexual) male is not so different from Kimmel's. It is also in this way that it works as a good counter statement to that of Kimmel.

Studying the letters and diaries of men, Rotundo puts forward a portrait of men's relations that is far more 'intimate.' For Rotundo, these friendships 'inverted familiar patterns of male behavior – they were intimate attachments that verged on romance.'²⁹ As such, these relationships took on a role of supreme importance for these men. 'Advocates of homosocial love... declared that their love was "wonderful, passing the love of women."' ³⁰ In this, there is a statement not merely about the importance of homosocial relations, but also of its loving nature.

Though Rotundo paints a very different image of male homosocial relations, he states that 'the intimacy of male friendship was largely limited to the years between boyhood and manhood.'³¹ This is, in part, caused by the 'distinctive conditions of youth – vague social expectations, uncertain career plans, restless wandering, the transitional nature of youth as a phase in life – all created the conditions...' for more intense homosocial relations.³²

This speaks not to homosociality being necessarily opposed to 'adult' relationships as is shown in Kimmel, but as something which the social conditions make more conducive to this period of time. These relations were also a rehearsal for marriage, allowing men to 'play-act the trials and the possibilities of marriage, to test their feelings about adult intimacy in a setting where lifelong commitment was not at stake.'³³

This, for these men, was an apt way of viewing these friendships, for out of all the men that he studied, none of the relationships lasted after they were married.³⁴ It is in this sense that one gains a feeling of the societal pressure to distance these relations, in exactly the way that Kimmel sees that they must be, from the 'adult' relationships of heterosexual marriage. By claiming, as Kimmel does, that homosocial relations are oppositional to heterosexual marriage, he is continuing an old trend. So while Kimmel presents a rowdy, reckless guyland, he forgoes analysing why societal norms seek to eliminate homosocial bonding by posing it as contrary to heterosexual relations, which find their foundation in a heteronormative construction of marriage.

6. Contestations and Conclusions

This chapter has aimed to do something very simple, which is to redress the image and impressions given and received in relation to masculine homosocial relations. While Kimmel paints one picture of this, Rotundo opens up the dialogue in new directions which challenge and contravene Kimmel, and Bourdieu simultaneously examines a rather different case-study confirming the plethora of ways to envision these relations.

While it has sought to present the narratives of these stories, in relation to homosociality and youth, it is necessary also to engage with the concept of homosociality itself. For Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, homosociality is a complex term with a number of loaded connotations: beginning from a basic description of ‘social bonds between persons of the same sex,’ forward to its initial posing in opposition to homosexuality.³⁵ This oppositional posing to homosexuality comes in part from Jean Lipman-Blumen, who sees homosociality as ‘seeking enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex.’³⁶ Adding to this, Sharon Bird says that homosociality provides for distinctions between hegemonic masculinities and nonhegemonic masculinities through the segregation of social groups.³⁷ Sedgwick believes this bonding must be paired with ‘desire,’ forming a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – the entire spectrum being labelled ‘male homosocial desire.’³⁸

To add to these, it is crucial to see homosocial behaviour as that conducted not merely by people of the same sex (or gender), but to also dissociate it from friendships, and understand it as part of the process of group dynamics and group formation. In this way it, as Bird rightly points out, is part of the process of men’s divisional genesis which, in part, sets the tone for their relations as a whole.

It is in this reformulation of the concept of homosociality that further study and theorising is required. Kimmel’s assessment of homosociality as a means of escape from adulthood and marriage speaks to a truncated notion which is not only limited in its utility, but is deceptive in its relation to the true situation of how homosocial relations and bonds work. This is not to say that what he points out does not occur, but it is to see this as merely a singular formation of homosocial relations rather than the entire possible range. Bourdieu provides a necessary counterpoint to the ‘guyland’ Kimmel envisions, seeing these men’s relations as part of a broader spectrum of gendered social relations. For Kimmel, the men of guyland set the rules of all social relations between men and women, while Bourdieu sees these relations as part of wider social structures and forces.

Homosociality is not something which should be solely linked with youth or a distancing from adulthood or responsibility; nor should it necessarily be seen in opposition to marriage. It is crucial to see that homosociality is something which works as part of all relations between men.³⁹ This chapter hopes to reopen the conversation on homosociality and challenge simplistic linkages with youth, marriage, and the escape from adulthood. In this, it should be seen as a tentative first approach towards a re-understanding of masculine homosociality. It sees these relations as crucial for our greater understanding of masculinity, gender, and therefore the broader context in which these relations exist and simultaneously create.

Notes

¹ Michael S. Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 4.

² For the purposes of this chapter, the concept, and definition, of ‘homosociality’ will be kept relatively stable and in line with the uses that the authors make of it. This does not, though, amount to an agreement with them on the terms of what homosociality is, as this author believes the concept is in need of clarification and, in some ways, a redefining entirely.

³ It is not necessarily this setting which this paper would like to address, but through this backdrop to investigate the way that Kimmel poses and portrays male homosociality in relation to youth and to, specifically, an avoidance of adulthood, posed, for Kimmel, in the guise of marriage.

⁴ For fuller investigation of Peter Pan, see: Krystal Lynn Hawkins, ‘Masculine Uncertainty and Male Homosociality in J. M. Barrie’s Peter Pan Stories’ (2008), Open Access Dissertations and Theses, Paper 4680.

http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5702&context=open_dissertations.

⁵ In an interesting turn, in the 2003 version of Peter Pan, the same actor plays Hook and Mr. Darling (a stand-in father figure), signaling the fight not merely against aging, but of growing up and assuming the role of a man – as well as a seemingly clear Oedipal conflict.

⁶ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.* 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

¹⁵ Beyond homosociality being linked strongly with youth, Kimmel also relates it (not fully groundlessly) to homophobic attitudes, saying that it is clear that guys love girls in *guyland*, ‘all that homosociality might become suspect if they didn’t’. *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41. There is a sense here that Kimmel is pushing towards a position which views rites of passage as not merely positive, but, in some ways, necessary. The investigation of rites of passage in America requires further consideration, but is outside of the scope of this chapter.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 and 43.

¹⁹ Ibid., 47.

²⁰ *Ted* (2012): <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1637725/>. Also see: Henry Barnes, 'The 10 Best Films of 2012, No 2: *Ted*', *The Guardian*, 13 December 2012, accessed 18 December 2012,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/filmblog/2012/dec/13/best-films-ted-seth-macfarlane>.

²¹ John tells Ted, 'I just don't know what to do here. I mean, I know it sucks, but otherwise I'm going to lose her.' Her response to him having Ted move out is: 'To step up and change such a huge part of your life just to make your girlfriend happier. I don't know, I guess most guys wouldn't do that.'

²² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Bachelor's Ball* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), i.

²³ Ibid., 9.

²⁴ Ibid., 18. It is added later, that another cause of this issue today is that of geographical space, where the rate of bachelorhood for those in the countryside has doubled in the last generation. Ibid., 39-43.

²⁵ Ibid., 22.

²⁶ Ibid., 32.

²⁷ Ibid., 34.

²⁸ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), ix.

²⁹ Ibid., 75.

³⁰ Ibid., 83. There is, it seems, an echo of a biblical theme here.

³¹ Ibid., 85.

³² Ibid., 86.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 88.

³⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1.

³⁶ Jean Lipman-Blumen, 'Towards a Homosocial Theory of Sex Roles: An Exploration of the Sex Segregation of Social Institutions', *Signs* 1, No. 3 (1976): 16. Furthermore, for Lipman-Blumen, homosociality promotes distinctions between men and women through segregating social institutions.

³⁷ Sharon R. Bird, 'Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity', *Gender & Society* 10, No. 2 (1996): 121.

³⁸ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1-2.

³⁹ Or between women, though in uniquely different ways.

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Too Good to Be True: Virtue Rewarded in Cinderella

Elaine Pigeon

Abstract

In what follows, I will consider various adaptations of the ever popular fairy-tale 'Cinderella,' beginning with the best known version by the French author Charles Perrault, as this is the version Walt Disney drew upon for his 1950 animated film. Perrault's late seventeenth-century adaptation is probably the most 'feminine' of all the Cinderellas, for it is in his version that Cinderella's fairy godmother provides her with a pair of glass slippers, symbolic of Cinderella's transparent virtue. Even more important than the requisite beauty, according to the laws of primogeniture, a female's virginity was absolutely essential in order to form a successful alliance. Of course, in all versions Cinderella is defined by her essential goodness – in particular, her gentle submissiveness, as she never protests against her unjust treatment at the hands of her wicked stepmother or stepsisters. However, in the English tale 'Cap o' Rushes,' it is the father who mistreats his daughter, as he is not satisfied with her display of daughterly devotion. This tale can be traced back to the twelfth century and may have been the source of inspiration for Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Nevertheless, the moral value of the Cinderella tale is that it provides an enchanting model of goodness rewarded, somewhat along the lines of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, who begins as a lowly servant and successfully resists the relentless advances of her master in order to finally marry him. In all of the tales and its variations, the female's reward is an advantageous marriage, yet in the oldest known version of Cinderella, the Chinese tale of 'The Golden Carp,' which dates back to the ninth century, the female protagonist does not get to live happily ever after, but comes to realise just how unhappy her life will be with the greedy King when she loses her magical powers.

Key Words: Cinderella, fairy tales, adaptations, virtue, primogeniture, femininity, abuse, Walt Disney, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, fathers, incest, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, marriage, middle-class, social mobility, magical powers, happy endings.

1. Introduction

Of all the fairy tales, 'Cinderella' is undoubtedly the most popular. Cinderella's story, which has undergone literally hundreds of adaptations, has enchanted both children and grown-ups for centuries. According to Raymond E. Jones and Jon C. Stott, the editors of *A World of Stories: Traditional Tales for Children*, the figure of

Cinderella embodies the very essence of romance: as a girl, she endures neglect, abuse, and obscurity; as a woman, she gains recognition, power, and love. Because it traces her rise through tribulations to triumph, her story exerts a strong appeal for all children and adults who have felt that their true identities are unappreciated.¹

For Jones and Stott, Cinderella is ‘a character whose maturation holds out the promise that one can overcome one’s environment and develop a meaningful and satisfying identity’² – at least, I would add, within the confines of a patriarchal society, since the tale reinforces traditional binary gender codes that objectify the female by focusing on her appearance and subjugating her to the gaze of the privileged male. Evidently, these two scholars are not feminists. Following Freud, they conclude that Cinderella is ‘a potent symbol of wish fulfilment.’³ For the dreams of the lowly but hardworking and virtuous ash girl come true when she is swept up the social ladder and marries a prince. Of all the variations, the best known version of Cinderella is the one by the French author Charles Perrault, the version Walt Disney drew upon for his magical 1950s animated film, which still airs regularly on TV, so this image of Cinderella is firmly implanted in the popular imaginary. Of course, Cinderella resonates well with the American dream; in fact, in Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick*, the quintessential American rags to riches tale published in 1868, soon after the Civil War, Dick, a lowly but hardworking shoeshine boy on the rise, actually refers to himself as a male Cinderella when he is given a suit of relatively new clothes by the son of a wealthy businessman⁴ and, as a result, finds his life transformed. For both males and females, I would argue that to be under Cinderella’s spell is not an innocent seduction. The tale requires serious reflection, as each adaptation reflects the dominant ideology and values of a particular culture and time. Who, we should ask, ultimately benefits from the belief that virtue will be rewarded.

One could say that Perrault’s late seventeenth-century adaptation is the most *feminine* of all the Cinderellas; not only is the French *Cendrillon* thoroughly submissive, but it is in this version that Cinderella’s fairy godmother provides her with a pair of glass slippers, hence the English title, ‘Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper.’ As Jane Garry and Hasan El-Shamy point out, ‘Two of the unique properties of glass are its transparency (purity) and its fragility, thus making it an appropriate symbol of virginity, as exemplified, for instance, in the bridegroom’s breaking of a glass at a traditional Jewish wedding.’⁵ In addition, Jones and Stott note that, symbolically, ‘shoes have connections to sexuality and fertility, a point made apparent by the fact that people still tie shoes to the bumper of a newlywed couple’s vehicle.’⁶ Women’s shoes are suggestive of the female sexual organ, or vagina, thus making it clear that Cinderella’s glass slippers are symbolic of her transparent virtue. Even more important than the requisite beauty, according to the

laws of primogeniture, a female's virginity was considered absolutely essential in order to form a successful alliance. Moreover, in all versions Cinderella is defined by her essential virtue or goodness – in particular, her passivity or gentle submissiveness, as she never protests against her unjust treatment at the hands of her wicked stepmother and stepsisters. In fact, when the tearful Cinderella – who has not been permitted to articulate what it is she wants – admits to her fairy godmother that she wished to go to the ball, her godmother assures her, 'be but a good girl, and I will see that you go.'⁷ At the end of Perrault's tale, Cinderella's essential goodness is reemphasised. When her two sisters realise that Cinderella was the beautiful young woman they had seen at the ball, 'they threw themselves at her feet to beg her pardon for all their ill treatment of her.' Not only does she forgive them, but after marrying the prince, 'Cinderella, who was as good as she was beautiful, gave her two sisters a home in the palace, and ... married them to two great lords of the Court.'⁸ Cinderella, we learn, is the personification of goodness, a paragon for little girls to emulate.

In the later, well known early nineteenth-century German version by the Brothers Grimm, Cinderella's devotion to the memory of her mother is highlighted. There are some other noteworthy differences in the telling of the tale, suggesting a more religious reading. For instance, they suggest that it is the spirit of the dead birth mother and not simply a fairy godmother who watches over Cinderella. On her deathbed, Cinderella's mother assures her, 'Dear child, be good and pious, and then the good God will always protect thee, and I will look down on thee from heaven and be near thee.'⁹ Cinderella soon plants a hazel twig on her mother's grave. This rapidly grows into a tree, under which Cinderella wept and prayed three times a day. A hazel nut tree is symbolic of divination or divine communication, so it is not surprising to learn that a little white bird, evidently the spirit of her dead mother, always appeared and granted Cinderella her wishes. Like the French Cinderella, the German *Aschenputtel* silently suffers the abuse of her stepsisters, who in the Grimm's brother's version are even crueller: not only must Cinderella give her stepsisters all her fine clothes and sleep on the hearth among the ashes, but she must perform impossible tasks such as picking lentils out of the ashes. To demonstrate that the unbecoming feminine behaviour of the stepsisters will be severely unpunished, 'Wilhelm Grimm altered the text published in 1812, adding the incident [at the end] in which the birds peck out the eyes of the stepsisters.'¹⁰ Thus the tale concludes, 'for their wickedness and falsehood, they were punished with blindness as long as they lived.'¹¹ As in the French version, it is a maternal spirit that watches over Cinderella, although in this version, she is frighteningly vengeful; however, in both versions Cinderella's father turns a blind eye and is not punished for his neglect.

In the English version of the tale known as 'Cap o' Rushes,' the mother is entirely absent; it is the rich father who mistreats his daughter when he is not satisfied with her display of daughterly devotion. When he asks his three daughters

how much they love him, Cap o' Rushes says that she loves him 'as fresh meat loves salt.'¹² Convinced that she does not love him, he orders her to leave his home. This tale can be traced back to the twelfth century and may very well have been the source of inspiration for Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The aging King Lear determines to divide his domain between his three daughters. His plan is to give the largest piece of his kingdom to the child who professes to love him the most, certain that his favourite daughter, Cordelia, will win the challenge. Whereas her sisters exaggerate their professions of daughterly love, Cordelia is sincere in her love and simply says she loves him the way a daughter should love her father. Outraged, Lear disinherits her, only to find that his other two daughters treat him miserably when he goes to stay with them. Realising the true nature of these daughters, who are conspiring against him, Lear is driven mad with grief. Following the requisite wars, the tragedy ends in a bloodbath, with Lear dying of sorrow over the body of his loving Cordelia. In contrast, 'Cap o' Rushes' ends happily. After gathering some rushes and making them into a cloak to cover her fine clothes, Cap o' Rushes find refuge in a great house where she offers to do any sort of work in exchange for a place to stay. Shortly thereafter, Cap o' Rushes secretly attends the nearby ball, where the Master's son falls in love with her and soon marries her. Because he lives nearby, Cap o' Rushes' father is invited to the wedding. While preparing the feast, Cap o' Rushes gives the cook strict orders not to add any salt to the food, which ends up being so tasteless that no one will eat anything. Cap o' Rushes' father is reminded of his daughter and finally realizes how much she loved him, so in this tale the two are happily reunited. However, it is worth noting that aside from what she says about the necessity of salt, the father never actually recognises his daughter, suggesting that her individual identity is not important. Equally significant is that except for being identified by her disguise, Cap o' Rushes remains nameless, which underscores how her value and identity are determined by men. Furthermore, that the father only realises how much his daughter truly loves him once her marriage has taken place, neatly avoids the issue of incest, which can be found in other variations. Marriage remains the focal point, but in this permutation of the tale, the prince more clearly becomes a substitute for the father. According to Freud, for the female 'in a male-dominant society, the father-daughter relationship remains the paradigm for her adult relationships with men.'¹³ 'Cap o' Rushes' clearly adheres to this heterosexual model, with the devoted daughter dutifully transferring her desire for the father to an acceptable male.

In viewing the development of English literature, we can also find aspects of Cinderella in Samuel Richardson's early epistolary novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, which was published in England in 1740 and became one of the most popular novels of the eighteenth century. In this novel, Pamela has left her humble home to work as a servant for a wealthy household. Her story begins with the death of her mistress, so that Pamela is left at the mercy of the son, Mr B. Most of the

story concerns his outrageous attempts to seduce Pamela, which would more aptly be described as attempts at rape, and include abducting Pamela to his country estate. Through all this, Pamela rigorously maintains her virtue. The reader learns of Pamela's quintessential virtuousness by being presented with the letters she writes to her parents, letters that Mr B. intercepts and reads. Eventually won over by her goodness, Mr B., who replaces the prince, marries her. That he remains very much the dominant patriarch is emphasized when, at the altar, Pamela accepts the ring from her master with a curtsy and a 'Thank you, sir.'¹⁴ As in all the versions of Cinderella, Pamela is rewarded for her virtuous behaviour. In addition, Pamela became representative of the 'new woman' in that she succeeded in rising above her lowly beginnings and ascending to the middle-class, a factor which undoubtedly contributed to the novel's popularity. More specifically, Richardson wanted his female readers to learn 'not only the 'requisite style and forms to be observed in familiar letters,' but also 'how to think and act justly and prudently in the common concerns of life.'¹⁵ Thus Richardson's novel functions much like an eighteenth-century conduct book and underscores the lesson Cinderella is meant to impart to her young female audience: under patriarchy virtue will be rewarded by a socially advantageous marriage – even if the husband proves unworthy. Of course Richardson hoped that Mr B. would be reformed by Pamela's exemplary goodness, although such a transformation seemed unlikely.

There are however more enlightening variations of the tale in the writings of the new woman that emerged at the end of the nineteenth-century. In 'Cinderella and Her Sisters in New Woman Writing,' Galia Ofek reminds us that 'the Cinderella tale became increasingly politicised by the labour press of the 1890s, as child poverty, urban slums and deprivation were discussed in the *Cinderella Supplement* and at various Cinderella clubs,'¹⁶ which women formed 'to address specific problems associated with children's welfare in England.'¹⁷ Ofek points to women's 'disenchantment with a paragon of femininity defined by suffering, passivity and salvation through marriage'; in contrast, new woman writers 'advocated work, independence and sisterly solidarity.'¹⁸ For instance, the feminist writer Olive Schreiner addressed economic issues in her study *Women and Labour*, and Christina Rossetti promoted the notion of salvation in sisterly love in her popular children's poem, 'Goblin Market,' in which she concludes 'there is no friend like a sister,' suggesting a female friend. In her article, Ofek emphasizes the writings of Ella Hepworth Dixon, in particular, her novel *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), in which she reworks 'favourite fairy-tale plots' such as marriage; however, the heroine's lover proves an 'unfaithful and mercenary prince' who, after years of 'patient expectation,' promptly drops her 'for a richer bride.'¹⁹ Dixon's heroine soon exchanges her Cinderella fantasies for a life of professional work and independence; in Dixon's tale, Cinderella's tiny slipper metamorphoses into a sturdy boot.²⁰ For new woman writers like Dixon, the pen replaced the fairy godmother's magic wand. The word rapidly spread.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, many of these new women became suffragettes. Following WWI British and American women won the vote, so women's agitation subsided and after WWII, women were pushed back into the traditional role of homemakers. The resulting malaise, called the feminine mystique by Betty Freidan, gave rise to a second wave of feminism, in which women gave voice to their discontent and scorned Cinderella's dream of bourgeois marriage and living happily ever after. In her poem of that name, Anne Sexton succinctly sums up the situation:

Cinderella and the prince
 lived, they say, happily ever after,
 like two dolls in a museum case
 never bothered by diapers or dust,
 never arguing over the timing of an egg,
 never telling the same story twice,
 never getting a middle-aged spread,
 their darling smiles pasted on for eternity.
 Regular Bobbsey Twins.
 That story.²¹

In all of the variations of 'that story,' Cinderella's reward for being *a good girl* is a socially advantageous marriage and supposedly living happily ever after, yet in the oldest known version of Cinderella, the Chinese tale of 'The Golden Carp,' which dates back to the ninth century, the female protagonist's lesson is quite different.

In this tale, the fairy godmother is replaced by a golden carp that befriends the sad and lonely little orphan Ye Syan, who is mistreated by her jealous stepmother and cruel stepsister. Like the fairy godmother, the golden carp has magical abilities and grants Ye Syan her wish to attend the king's ball, where she loses her tiny embroidered slipper; however, once the king finds her and marries her, Ye Syan's troubles begin. Although her wicked stepmother ate her beloved fish, the bones retain their wish granting power and the king becomes obsessed with them: 'the temptation of the magic fishbones gave the ... king no peace. He demanded that Ye Syan ask them for more and more precious gifts to fill the coffers of his island kingdom. Although his wealth increased a hundredfold, his thirst for still greater riches was never satisfied.'²² Before long the bones grew tired of the greedy king's incessant demands and would give no more. Deeply saddened, Ye Syan placed the bones in a silken pouch and buried them on a remote beach where they were eventually washed away by the sea.

Thus the original version of Cinderella leaves Ye Syan deeply saddened but much wiser. Clearly, it does not suggest that married life will be fulfilling for the female under patriarchal rule. The current and popular incarnation of Cinderella – which stems from the late seventeenth century – still encourages silent submission,

the acceptance of menial work and dependence. Is this really what we want our daughters to believe? Cinderella cries out for serious revision. These are feminist issues that despite much progress have evidently not been fully resolved.

Notes

¹ Raymond E. Jones and Jon C. Stott, eds., *A World of Stories: Traditional Tales for Children* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Horatio Alger Jr., *Ragged Dick or, Street Life in New York with Boot Blacks* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 16.

⁵ Jane Garry and Hasan El-Shamy, eds., *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature: A Handbook* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 237.

⁶ Jones and Stott, *A World of Stories*, 6.

⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 21.

¹² Ibid., 22.

¹³ Miriam M. Johnson, *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives: The Search for Gender Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 165.

¹⁴ William M. Sale, Jr., Introduction to *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* by Samuel Richardson (New York: W.W. Norton, 1958), xiv.

¹⁵ Ibid., vii.

¹⁶ Galia Ofek, 'Cinderella and Her Sisters in New Woman Writing and Ella Hepworth Dixon's Fiction', *Women's Writing* 19, No. 1 (2012): 25.

¹⁷ Ibid., 38.

¹⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹ Ibid., 28.

²⁰ Ibid., 29.

²¹ Anne Sexton, 'Cinderella', accessed 18 May 2013, <http://allpoetry.com/poem/8505487-Cinderella-by-Anne-Sexton>.

²² Jones and Stott, *A World of Stories*, 11.

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Femininity and Masculinity in Gail Carriger's *Soulless* and *Changeless*: Victorian Society Redefined

Aleksandra Tryniecka

Abstract

Gail Carriger's *Soulless* (2009) and *Changeless* (2010), the first two novels in her *Parasol Protectorate* series, not only feature a prominent female character, Alexia Tarabotti, inspired by a 17th-century feminist, Arcangela Tarabotti, but also introduce a variety of equally engaging masculine figures. Representing the steampunk paranormal romance genre, *Soulless* and *Changeless* evoke the Victorian world in an altered and baffling version. While, traditionally, 19th-century England is identified with the patriarchal principles which 'undermine women's self-confidence and assertiveness (...)',¹ Carriger's neo-Victorian novels offer a new perspective on the Victorian world in which the standards of 'manhood' and 'womanhood' are redefined by giving prominence to femininity rather than masculinity. The Woolfian 'room of one's own' acquires the status of a cherished, private space and the woman, as 'the second sex,' moves to the very centre of events. Consequently, the integrity of the patriarchal world is significantly strained, revealing men's insecurity and fallibility. In her works, Gail Carriger questions the validity of the Victorian discourse, offering a vision of 19th-century London as inhabited by the intelligent, assertive woman and imperfect, but, at the same time, more humane men. Drawing on the feminist theory and the critical writings of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, I examine the construction of Alexia Tarabotti, the main heroine in Carriger's novels, against the concept of the Victorian 'odd woman' – single/unmarried and thus strange. I also discuss various textual representations of the masculine characters, including Lord Conall Maccon, the most prominent of them, with a view to showing the relations of power in this 'alternative' Victorian world.

Key Words: Masculinity and femininity in the Neo-Victorian text, Victorian-centred novel, 'odd woman,' steampunk paranormal novel, the new woman, angel in the house, domestic identity, spinsterhood, bachelorhood, patriarchy.

1. Victorian Society Re-Defined

The Victorian era has never fallen into oblivion. While deluding ourselves to have been shaped by modernity, we still glance curiously at the shadows of the Victorian past. Gail Carriger's novels: *Soulless* (2009) and *Changeless* (2010) (both belonging to the *Parasol Protectorate* series) evoke the Victorian world in the steampunk vein. In the novels, one is introduced to Victorian England overtaken by science, technology, medicine and modernity. As a result, the literary

vision appears greatly altered and baffling: the world of fiction includes both a lady travelling in a carriage and a dirigible floating in the skies. Thus, one is faced with a world of contrasts – a blend of Victorian artefacts with etiquette connected with steampunk gadgetry involving such inventions as glassicals or a parasol weapon. The society presented in the texts exemplifies the most baffling and engaging part of the overall picture. Essentially, it is built upon a certain hierarchy. In her novels, Gail Carriger establishes a double-edged gradation: the first is based on the social status of the individuals, while the other, as indicated by Mike Perschon, rests upon *the hierarchy of soul*.² This interesting manoeuvre incorporates into the novel a set of expressive supernatural characters: werewolves, vampires, and ghosts. While werewolves' social circles are based upon 'pack dynamics,' the vampires are governed by 'hive Queens.' Moreover, these extraordinary creatures are endowed with an excess of soul. However, the bookish England hosts ordinary human characters as well, who can boast an average 'quantity' of soul. Moreover, the hierarchy includes few preternaturals – individuals who are in a soulless state.

2. Alexia Tarabotti as the New Woman

Alexia Tarabotti, the main heroine of *The Parasol Protectorate* series, features a rare 'preternatural character.' At first, she figures in the social order under the label of a 'spinster.' Being twenty-seven, of Italian origin and with low marriage prospects, Alexia is considered a family burden. In the course of events, she eventually marries Lord Conall Maccon – the earl of Woolsey and a well-prospering werewolf – which leads to various eccentricities in Alexia's life. Moreover, Alexia's appearance considerably opposes the Victorian convention: she possesses a dark olive complexion and a prominent nose, and is adorned with a shock of frizzy hair. Even worse for a *typical* Victorian lady, she treats a library as a favourite refuge, showing a deep inclination to become a scholar. Worst of all, she is independent, assertive and pragmatic in her perception of the world. These characteristics push Alexia to the margin of stereotypical Victorian womanhood.

In *Soulless*, Alexia figures as an *outsider* – an *odd woman* who is single, unmarried and thus strange. *Odd women*, a term referring to the uneven number of single women of marriageable age living in Victorian England, acquired a special meaning after the publication (1862) of William Rathbone Greg's essay entitled 'Why Are Women Redundant?' In his work, Greg deplores that England possesses two classes of women, both essentially wretched: the governesses and the old maids, who, unmarried and left to 'useless' occupations, both waste their lives. Greg describes them in the following words:

As we go a few steps higher in the social scale, we find two classes of similar abnormal existences; women, more or less well educated, spending youth and middle life as governesses, living laboriously, yet perhaps not uncomfortably, but laying by

nothing, and retiring to a lonely and destitute old age: and old maids, with just enough income to live upon, but wretched and deteriorating, their minds narrowing, and their hearts withering, because they have nothing to do, and none to love, cherish and obey.³

Therefore, Greg implies that women, in order to bestow reason upon their lives, should undeniably *obey* men. Moreover, Greg argues that females are naturally ‘attached to others and connected with other existences, which they embellish, facilitate and serve.’⁴ In the light of this argument, Victorian women seem to be undeniably connected with men as a decorative and utilitarian commodity of the patriarchal world. However, Alexia Tarabotti finds an indirect retort to Greg’s assumptions. In *Changeless*, Chapter Fourteen, she leads a peculiar conversation with her husband:

“Just a moment,” he said. “I need a small reminder that you are here, you are whole, and you are mine.”

“Well, the first two should be patently obvious, and the last one is always in question,” replied his lady unhelpfully.⁵

While denying that she is the man’s property, Alexia highlights her personal integrity. Thus, she gains the status of a physically and mentally distinctive individual endowed with a liberated mind.

Importantly, the character of Alexia Tarabotti was based on a historical figure, the protofeminist Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-1652), who, in 1643, brought forth a monograph entitled *Paternal Tyranny*, in which she argues against men confining women to unfounded suffering and solitude. Arcangela Tarabotti, confined in a convent herself, poured out on paper her bitter reflections concerning the predatory patriarchal world. ‘Dear Reader,’ she writes,

my heart has never had any personal reason for growing angry against the male sex, although it cannot bear to recall without irritation those devious words proffered by the first man when he blamed the woman given to him by God as a partner (Gn 3:12).⁶

In her work, Arcangela Tarabotti uses the meaningful word *partner*. As *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* states, *partner* is ‘a person who shares.’⁷ Both *partnership* and *relationship* imply equality and mutual understanding. Therefore, both these terms are incomprehensible for such critics as William Rathbone Greg. Moreover, *partnership* as such appears practically unattainable for an average

Victorian woman dominated by the narrow-minded patriarchy. This term seems not to apply in the Victorian reality.

In *Soulless* and *Changeless*, Gail Carriger dwells on the issues of marriage and partnership as well. The authoress pictures the 19th century from a modern viewpoint. A long-term spinster, Alexia Tarabotti, suddenly marries Lord Conall Maccon, a werewolf of high social standing. It seems that the match is based on the social and economic criteria. However, Alexia is not an average Victorian woman who craves society's favour. As Gail Carriger states, Alexia marries Lord Conall Maccon *out of annoyance* rather than *out of love*.⁸ As an overly assertive and pragmatic character, Alexia cannot reconcile herself to the fact that it is Lord Maccon who occupies the dominant patriarchal place. The statement that 'behind every successful man is a great woman' seems to apply to Alexia, as she enjoys her share of supremacy and gladly performs the role as her husband's leader and adviser. As Mike Perschon aptly indicates, 'Alexia is effectively a 21st century woman with a 19th century voice.'⁹ In the person of Lord Maccon she encounters a definitional *partner* who matches her strong personality and domineering skills.

As a werewolf, Maccon is liable to so-called 'pack dynamics.' He perceives himself as the commanding Alpha-male until meeting Alexia. Under the spell of her unyielding personality, Lord Maccon begins to doubt his own Alpha qualities. In *Changeless*, Chapter Fourteen, he emphasises Alexia's strong inclinations to govern everything: 'Someone has to keep you off balance, otherwise you'll end up ruling the empire.'¹⁰

Alexia Tarabotti appears to personify the ideal to which Victorian women could only aspire – she is self-sufficient, assertive and mentally strong. *Soulless*, the first novel from the series, opens with a scene where Alexia defeats an impolite vampire who strives to bite her without employing the proper Victorian etiquette. 'Manners!', Miss Tarabotti bravely instructs the unfortunate creature. The vampire (a potential representative of the patriarchal world) is not prepared to meet a Victorian lady that can be so self-controlled. After the bloodcurdling adventure, Alexia does not faint. Nor does she need smelling salts or masculine support. She appears even displeased when Lord Maccon comes to her belated rescue. 'Do not give me instructions in that tone of voice, you (...) puppy,' she informs the earl.¹¹ In what follows, Alexia straightforwardly criticises the poor quality of service at the party at which she is a guest: 'I was promised food at this ball. In case you had not noticed, no food appears in the residence.'¹²

3. Alexia and the Masculine World

It seems that Alexia possesses ultimate control over her life. This can be attributed to her *lack of soul*, a strange quality which a 'real' Victorian lady cannot acquire. Thus, the *lack of soul* accounts for Tarabotti's practicality, which loudly demonstrates itself at every turn.

When the heroine becomes Lord Maccon's wife, she gains the new status of an 'Alpha-female' who governs the household inhabited by other werewolves, including the earl of Woolsey himself. Elevated above the ordinary domestic routine, she performs the almost military function of an Alpha-leader. In this sense, Alexia's social status stands in a sharp contradiction to William R. Greg's radical assumptions. However, Lord Maccon is boundlessly proud of his decisive wife. Moreover, he readily acquaints her with the particularities of his work as a BUR (Bureau of Unnatural Registry) agent in order to seek her advice. In the course of events, Alexia receives the post of Queen Victoria's muhjah, a position of paramount importance. Thus, in Gail Carriger's novels, it is Alexia's *intelligence* that gains prominence rather than her feminine vulnerability and alleged senselessness. This focus on the heroine's unique qualities positively alters the traditional perception of females as passive, unintelligent and incapable of making decisions for themselves. In numerous Victorian novels, intelligence is an aspect of femininity pushed aside as a gift of secondary importance, hardly ever receiving enough attention, especially in the Victorian texts written by men. However, if intelligence is given any notice, it normally figures as a *cunning* (as in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*) or as *intelligence unemployed*, (because the heroine is bound to lose anyway), as in the case of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf argues that the 19th-century woman was 'snubbed, slapped, lectured and exhorted. Her mind must have been strained and her vitality lowered (...)'.¹³ What Virginia Woolf appears to imply is the assumption that the Victorian woman had to be essentially inferior to the man in order to convince him of his superiority. As Woolf indicates,

we come within range of that very interesting and obscure masculine complex which has had so much influence upon the woman's movement; that deep-seated desire, not so much that *she* shall be inferior as that *he* shall be superior, which plants him wherever one looks, not only in front of the arts, but barring the way to politics too (...).¹⁴

Interestingly enough, Gail Carriger's ingenious female character inexhaustibly paves the way for her political career. Alexia emerges as a semi-contemporary woman who fulfils herself in the domestic space as well as outside its boundaries. A professional career stands as a remote wish for an average Victorian lady. As an example, in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, Caroline Helstone untiringly dreams of a professional occupation. Victorian women, as described in 19th-century texts, seem to be desperately ensnared by tedious domestic routines so glorified by William R. Greg. According to Virginia Woolf, this state of compulsory inaction can be abolished by a woman who possesses 'money and a room of her own.'¹⁵ In the

case of Alexia Tarabotti, it is definitely her unmatched pragmatism that leads her on the path to an abundant and differentiated life. However, the seclusion of the *Woolfian room* offers the heroine an opportunity to develop as a scholar and an independent thinker. Alexia delights in solitude, as it allows her to engage in personal affairs. She particularly enjoys the company of books and of her favourite cup of tea.

While constructing herself as an Alpha-female and the Queen's *muhjah*, Alexia does not abandon her feminine side. Accordingly, Gail Carriger's novels are, to a large extent, occupied with fashion, which serves simultaneously as the expression of the Victorian decorum and a dangerous weapon. In this sense, Alexia combines feminine appearance with practical use. For instance, in *Changeless*, her omnipresent parasol serves not only as an elegant artefact but also as a disguised weapon with poisoned darts. Therefore, Carriger's heroine perfectly combines the stereotypical Victorian womanhood with typically modern, masculine features. In this sense, she resembles a 21st-century woman, blurring the boundaries between typically feminine and masculine spheres.

Alexia appears to perfectly match Virginia Woolf's claim that 'it is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly.'¹⁶ Similarly, in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir rejects the 'black and white' distinction between the two sexes. 'The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers' she indicates.¹⁷ Gail Carriger's novels prove that one cannot be strictly classified as an 'ideal male' or 'ideal female.' It is rather a unique blend of feminine and masculine features that compose such fascinating characters as Alexia Tarabotti.

In *Soulless* and *Changeless*, Gail Carriger introduces a variety of engaging masculine figures who, contrasted with Alexia's inner strength and presence of mind, appear rather devoid of their unshaken patriarchal reputation. However, Carriger does not commit the mistake against which one is cautioned in Virginia Woolf's work: 'it is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance (...).'¹⁸ Carriger's masculine characters do not appear as a modern critique of patriarchal tyranny. Instead, stripped of patriarchal despotism, they inspire deep sympathy and understanding.

The most prominent male character, Lord Conall Maccon, amuses the reader in *Soulless*, where his inapt courtship of Alexia and love perplexities are presented. Earl of Woolsey is depicted as a big, intelligent and good-natured man of Scottish origin with 'tawny brown eyes' and 'ridiculously long eyelashes.'¹⁹ The description brings out the 'feminine' side of the character and points to Maccon's gentler features. What is more, Alexia's presence brings into prominence Maccon's imperfections. Paradoxically, these deficiencies contribute to Conall's positive image: he is not a patriarchal monster, but rather an ordinary man with weaknesses and doubts.

In *Changeless*, Alexia often instructs her husband on various issues, while he eagerly yields to her commands. For instance, Alexia, a straightforward Victorian lady, lectures Maccon that he should 'have a shave' or forcefully leads her husband out of the room so as to prevent him from further disagreement with another man.²⁰ By the end of the second novel, it is actually Alexia herself who governs the pack of Scottish werewolves, solves a dangerous mystery and looks after her injured husband at the same time. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to find Lord Maccon saying: 'So speaks my practical Alexia. Now you understand why I married her?'²¹

Maccon's Beta – Professor Lyall, embodies another interesting male-werewolf character. He is depicted as a mainstay of wisdom and self-command, and repeatedly proves to be Alexia's indispensable adviser.

Apart from Lord Maccon and Lyall, the novel features Alexia's friend – Lord Akeldama, a vampire. Due to his obsession with fashion, he appears as a particularly interesting figure. Faultlessly dressed, the life and soul of the party and a perfect gentleman, Lord Akeldama charms the modern reader with his refined manners and kind-heartedness. Lord Akeldama's eccentricity lies not only in his obsession with clothes and rich house decorations but also in his habit of surrounding himself with a circle of handsome male vampires. He is depicted as a semi-feminine character. However, Akeldama reveals himself as such a warm-hearted person that regardless of his peculiar lifestyle he inspires deep sympathy.

Both novels offer a glimpse at the figures of male servants as well: *Soulless* features Floote, Alexia's butler, who faithfully keeps his lady's innermost secrets. In *Changeless*, one encounters Maccon's valet, Tunstell, who falls hopelessly in love with Alexia's friend – Ivy Hisselpenny. The marriage appears unfeasible due to Tunstell's low social status. Moreover, he is an actor. The reader remains both amused and deeply moved as he accompanies the valet in his attempts to conquer Miss Hisselpenny's heart. *Changeless* hosts a regiment of male werewolves as well and it is Alexia's task to bend the army of males to her single wish, which she accomplishes successfully.

4. Conclusion

Gail Carriger's novels vividly re-define the 'traditional' textual picture of Victorian society. What is unique about *Soulless* and *Changeless* is the range of male characters who come from numerous walks of life. Thus, one is capable of discovering their 'human side' and being reassured that the Victorian era may not have been entirely built on the strict convention of tyrannical manhood and timid womanhood. In Judith Butler's study based on Simone de Beauvoir's thesis, she indicates that '*gender* is the cultural meaning and form that (...) body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation.'²² In this sense, *gender* appears to be a state individually elaborated, blending together one's personality, appearance and modes of behaviour. In effect, one is left with such vivid figures as Lord Maccon

or Lord Akeldama, who had never made their way into Victorian literary canon before. The female character, Alexia Tarabotti, proves that femininity is not a set of rigorously imposed features but rather a mix of unique characteristics that result in a unique persona. In this sense, she abolishes the myth of an ignorant and helpless Victorian lady. However, it appears to me that giving up one's gender for the sake of equality may not be the right path. Rather than that, I am glad to find Alexia Tarabotti as the Woolfian 'woman-manly' figure instead of a creature deprived of feminine qualities. She is strong, womanly, warm-hearted and endlessly rational. In this sense, the presumed notion of *oddity* appears as a faulty measure applied only by narrow-minded individuals. In *Soulless* and *Changeless*, the alleged female *strangeness* becomes a celebrated strength to remain unrestricted and self-conscious in the corrupted world. On the other hand, the masculine characters are often imperfect and dependent on Alexia's presence of mind. Therefore, the society presented is reshaped and stripped of paternal stereotypes. While examining Alexia's persona, one must agree with Arcangela Tarabotti when she writes:

Woman, the compendium of all perfections, was the last to be created. (...) Mary, a woman like all others, was not obliged to beg for her existence from a man's rib! She was born before time itself (...), woman was created *ab eterno*.²³

Notes

¹ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 86.

² Mike Perschon, 'Bustlepunk: The Softer Cousin of Steampunk', Steampunk Scholar (blog), 12 December 2012, accessed 12 December 2013, <http://steampunkscholar.blogspot.com/2011/05/bustlepunk-softer-cousin-of-steampunk.html>.

³ William R. Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1869), 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵ Gail Carriger, *Changeless* (New York: Orbit, 2010), eBook Edition, chap. 14.

⁶ Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 40.

⁷ Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble, eds., *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1061.

⁸ Gail Carriger, 'The Never Ending Interview', *Gail Carriger* (website), last modified 28 July 2013, accessed 12 December 2013,

<http://gailcarriger.com/faq.php>.

⁹ Perschon, 'Bustlepunk'.

¹⁰ Carriger, *Changeless*, chap. 14.

¹¹ Gail Carriger, *Soulless* (New York: Orbit, 2009), eBook Edition, chap. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, chap. 1.

¹³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 71.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, ed. and trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), 15.

¹⁸ Woolf, *A Room*, 136.

¹⁹ Carriger, *Changeless*, chap. 12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 13.

²² Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, ed., *Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1986), 35.

²³ Tarabotti, *Tyranny*, 45.

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Nurturing or Neutering? Women in Bobbie Ann Mason's *Shiloh & Other Stories*

Anna Pilińska

Abstract

The aim of the following chapter is to analyse the construction of female protagonists in the sixteen stories published in the volume *Shiloh & Other Stories* by Bobbie Ann Mason. The female characters of the collection are daughters, wives and mothers living in the conservative American South. The author constructs each and every one of them with great care and attention to detail. The essence of femininity is neither inextricably linked to fertility (some of these women actually undergo surgical procedures which make them infertile), nor does it have to entail submissiveness and unconditional nurturing, even though in most of those stories women are perceived primarily as providers of nourishment. Mason shows the emancipation and silent empowerment of her female characters against the background of bland male protagonists, very often reversing the traditional gender roles and upsetting the dynamics between the insecure men and the women who are about to abandon them. The women's progressive rebellion, albeit not always voiced and not always brought to completion but merely initiated within the frame of a given story, is clearly visible in Mason's short narrative forms. Mason's female protagonists are analysed both in terms of their physicality and personality traits. I seek to demonstrate how the characters' persistent quests for identity and independence destabilise the 'traditional' gender arrangements, and how disrupting this balance and playing with the concept of gender roles demasculinises men portrayed in the stories.

Key Words: Bobbie Ann Mason, construction of femininity, female character, Southern American literature, Southern lady, gender roles, short story.

Throughout the history of the United States, the American South has always been markedly different, regardless of the presence or absence of an official conflict with the rest of the country. The Southern identity results from a combination of factors which may no longer be perceptible or valid today, but which nevertheless contributed greatly to the creation of 'Southernness.' The quality of the phenomenon may be somewhat intangible, but its singular components can be traced to various moments in history and named; Rubin Jr. mentions racial attitudes, rural origins and attachment to the land, worse economic conditions, concrete political affiliations, glorification of the antebellum period and a certain aversion to technological progress.¹ The literature of this particular region is permeated with typically Southern themes even as new generations of writers

enter the literary scene and approach the same issues with different attitudes. Especially in the case of women's writing, a shift of focus can be observed when it comes to the treatment of Southern history, as they introduce previously unheard voices. 'For them,' Pollack writes, 'history is not the chronicle of great deeds and greater battles, borders, treaties, and territories, but an account of lives lived on the margins of official history because, by race, class, or gender, they lacked access to official power and event.'² They also present to the reader of Southern fiction a new kind of heroine. As Tate points out, 'Southern women writers of the 1980s and 1990s are actively redefining what it means to be a woman in the South'³ as they broaden the concept of womanhood and liberate it from the limitations of the 'Southern lady' model. Good describes this concept as follows:

Historically, the ideal of the Southern lady lies at the very core of the culture and beliefs of the American South. The image of the lady and her adherence to a strict code of behaviour, her dignity, morality, and chastity...have resulted in the Southern male placing her upon a pedestal from which she finds it difficult to descend.⁴

The Southern lady is a creation emblematic of the South, idealised, protected and revered – but the idealisation comes with a price, which is the lady's silent agreement to being reduced to a commodity. Departing from the model of a female who is passive and protected by the (white) man, women writers oppose the traditional patriarchal discourse which forces female protagonists into very specific and narrow gender roles.⁵ At the same time, too much of a deviation from the model is not advisable, as Good comments that 'to continue living in Southern society without the label of "lady" is at best uncomfortable and at worst a recipe for misery.'⁶

The questions of femininity, masculinity and gender roles are clearly present in the fiction of Bobbie Ann Mason, whose female characters are consistently depicted as experiencing a need of change or a sense of a somewhat unspecified deficiency. Nonetheless, the author herself does not emphasise the cruciality of feminist discourse to her prose, because it is neither crucial to nor consciously applied by her heroines:

For her women characters, the assimilation of feminist ideas manifests itself mainly in the desire for more personal autonomy, whether this be through the questioning of a marriage or other relationship, exercising more control over their bodies and sexuality, or seeking increased freedom and knowledge through education and travel. Mason has suggested that although for the women she portrays these choices may produce anxiety and be

accompanied by the loss of former certainties about their social role, some sense of empowerment is generally an element of the women's response to them. She has explained that she is "more interested in the cultural effects [of feminism] on men" and how they are adapting to the alteration of their roles and women's.⁷

This 'Southern version' of feminism unconsciously practiced by Mason's protagonists is different in scope from the mainstream feminism; these women are not concerned about fighting for a greater cause, for other women, as Morphew rightly observes:

It is important to see that the downhome feminists of these stories do not want what their city cousins want: equal legal and political rights, equal access to careers, equal pay, government support of child care, and so on. Mason's women simply want breathing space in their relationships with their men.⁸

Mason's collection *Shiloh and Other Stories* is filled with seemingly simple and repetitive patterns: women preparing home-made meals while watching television before they eventually emancipate themselves and leave their partners. This apparent simplicity, as Tate argues, may be the reason behind the stories being misinterpreted or even dismissed by a certain part of the reading audience:

[T]he surface of Bobbie Ann Mason's texts reinforces what they [Northerners] long to know: that the South is becoming just like the rest of the nation and is full of "white trash" who shop at K-Mart. Consequently, many readers think they "get" Mason when in actuality they have only grasped her often misleading surface.⁹

With a few exceptions to the rule, Mason's female characters undertake a quest for self-discovery (occasionally characters from an older generation will not support those quests, wanting their daughters or granddaughters to follow more traditional patterns of behaviour). The author constructs them carefully within the constraints of a short story, presenting them against the backdrop of men, who serve rather as a litmus test than a catalyst to the women's growing self-awareness and eventual liberation.

One of the components Mason uses to construct her female characters' sexuality and gender identity is their physicality. In *Offerings*, the protagonist's grandmother dies of puerperal fever. Years later, her daughter (and the protagonist's mother) neglects an infection and as a result has to undergo hysterectomy. This event is described as embarrassing and shameful:

After Sandra was born, Mama developed an infection but was afraid to see the doctor. It would go away, she insisted. The infection disappeared, but a few years later inexplicable pains pierced her like needles. Blushing with shame, and regretting her choice of polka-dotted panties, she learned the worst.¹⁰

The cause of shame is not specified: it could be the unfortunate underwear, it could be the failure of taking proper care of the woman's own health, it could be the gynecological examination, or finally the prospect of forever losing the biological essence of her womanhood and the reproductive ability. The woman never reveals this fact to her mother-in-law, which may suggest that it is shameful enough to be hidden even from other women. In *Detroit Skyline, 1949*, the narrator remembers a trip to her aunt's house, during which her mother (who reportedly did not realise she was pregnant) had a miscarriage. Norma Jean in *Shiloh* also loses a child, although in this case it is most probably due to SIDS. In *The Rookers*, women casually discuss someone's ovary infection; in *The Climber*, the main character, Dolores, is about to find out whether she has breast cancer once she can no longer postpone a visit to the doctor (it is also mentioned in passing that her friend had a hysterectomy). 'For Dolores, the risk is going to the doctor, for fear of his diagnosis. Some part of her still believes that what you don't know won't hurt you'¹¹ – Mason employs this very familiar yet intimate element which is women's fear or shame of going to the gynecologist, and immediately makes it impossible for the reader to disregard the character's sex. In *Third Monday*, a woman named Ruby has a mastectomy and she actually wonders whether this drastic change in her appearance will affect her relationship:

The man she cares about does not know. She has been out of the hospital for a week, and in ten days he will be in town again. She wonders whether he will be disgusted and treat her as though she has been raped, his property violated. According to an article she read, this is what to expect. But Buddy is not that kind of man, and she is not her property.¹²

Perhaps no other passage in Mason's collection of stories demonstrates so clearly and explicitly a woman's courage, an awareness of her own worth independent of a man's acceptance, femininity independent of physical features. The message that Ruby receives from an article is that she should be ready for rejection. Her condition causes other women to comfort her with stories about their own intimate issues:

Trying to sympathize with her, the women on her bowling team offer their confessions. Nancy has such severe monthly cramps

that even the new miracle pills on the market don't work. Linda had a miscarriage when she was in high school. Betty admits her secret, something Ruby suspected anyway: Betty shaves her face every morning with a Lady Sunbeam. Her birth-control pills had stimulated facial hair. She stopped taking the pills years ago but still has the beard.¹³

There is not a trace of a Southern lady in Ruby's world, except maybe for a faint echo of the old-fashioned thinking in the person of her mother, who suspects that Ruby's choice of job (which involved lifting heavy boxes) caused the cancer, since she must have hurt her chest at some point, perhaps repeatedly. 'When you abuse the body,' the mother explains, 'it shows up in all kinds of ways. And women just weren't built to do man's work.'¹⁴ Mason's heroines are not ethereal and fragile beings whose sex is never spoken of unless their chastity is threatened; they are women made of flesh and bone whose bodies are claimed as their own, and whose worth and dignity are not inextricably linked to a man's acceptance or the lack thereof.

What women are supposed to do instead of lifting heavy things, is to provide care and nourishment for their loved ones. Mason's protagonists do play their nurturer-provider roles and they are often described preparing or serving food, but they are sharply aware of how hopelessly men rely on them in this particular aspect. In *The Rookers*, Mary Lou assures her husband that she would not leave him, as she adds immediately: 'You'd starve.'¹⁵ When he tells her how much he likes her coconut cake, she retorts sarcastically: 'I'll give you my recipe.'¹⁶ In *The Ocean*, it is the man who explicitly verbalises his concern about food:

Bill felt sick. "You would go to a rest home and leave me by myself?" he asked, with a little whine.

"I've a good mind to," she said. She measured an inch off her index finger. "I like about this much away from it," she said.

"You wouldn't do me that way, would you? Who would cook?"¹⁷

Edwin, one of the characters in the story titled *A New-Wave Format*, also associates women primarily with food:

Carolyn had a regular schedule – pork chops on Mondays, chicken on Tuesdays. Thursday's menu has completely escaped his memory. He feels terrible, remembering his wives by their food, and remembering the war as a TV series.¹⁸

At the same time, Mason does not avoid placing her female protagonists in kitchen. Peggy Jo's mother in *Detroit Skyline, 1949* is ecstatic as she visits her sister's kitchen:

And I had never seen my mother sparkling so. When she saw the kitchen, she whirled around happily, like a young girl, forgetting her dizziness on the bus. Aunt Mozelle had a toaster, a Mixmaster, an electric stove, and a large electric clock shaped like a rooster. On the wall, copper-bottomed pans gleamed in a row like golden-eyed cats lined up on a fence.¹⁹

Women are dutifully chopping, cooking and baking, serving platefuls of food and even adjusting to the men's tastes as they replace other women (in *Still Life with Watermelon*, Peggy learns to make casserole dishes the way a man she takes care of likes). It seems that it is their awareness of the pattern they follow that opens the possibility of escaping it if they want to.

Escape and separation are not always completed, but the heroines' longing for a change is obvious even if they stay put as the story finishes. Mason's open-ended closures leave the reader with a handful of potential interpretations. In the case of stories whose female protagonists fail to follow their instinct to leave, the content of the story as a whole will most likely suggest that this stagnation is only temporary, a brief pause before the protagonist's leap into the yet unknown, but wholeheartedly desired. However, many women, in fact, do leave, or at least express their decision. Norma Jean (*Shiloh*) announces: 'I want to leave you,'²⁰ flatly dismissing her husband's objections, as she has made up her mind already. Mary Lou (*The Rookers*) never utters such a desire, but her husband informs their daughter: 'Your mother wants to leave us and go out to California.'²¹ Mary Lou objects, but her husband's inertness and helplessness slowly exhaust her until she realizes how much women scare him, and how powerful she is in her position. Louise from *Still Life with Watermelon* is actually reunited with her husband after a bout of unemployment and a period of relative independence, but it is not a happy reunion. Carolyn Sisson (*Drawing Names*) is divorced and dating, her sister Iris is separating from her husband. In *The Climber*, Dusty destroys her own marriage by having an affair with a student, several years her junior. The narrator of *Residents and Transients* admits in the very first sentence of the story: 'Since my husband went away to work in Louisville, I have, to my surprise, taken a lover.'²² Georgann (*The Retreat*) is unhappily married to a preacher, which she realises all the more evidently at a Christian marriage workshop.

Both male and female protagonists in Mason's stories are affected by their partners' desire for a change, and – as Wilhelm observes – they become either 'doers' or 'seekers.'²³ Wilhelm points out how men turn to particular activities in order to retrieve a lost sense of balance or to avoid thinking about the inevitable.

And so Leroy in *Shiloh* wants to build a log cabin, Mack in *The Rookers* turns to woodworking and joins a book club, Tom from *Still Life with Watermelon* transforms himself from builder into cowboy.²⁴ While commenting on the identity issues in Mason's stories, Morphew states: 'The males, perhaps, seem the more affected, and more ineffectual in their attempts to seize and to create some new center for their lives.'²⁵ They are, indeed, often described by Mason as weak, undecided, lost, puzzled, uncomfortable, anxious and embarrassed. The alpha male seems to be missing from the bigger picture – men are treated as a necessary evil or as children who need to be 'babied.' This is, naturally, not to say that glimpses of a stereotypical gender role for men are absent from the stories altogether. A man who is a vegetarian is by default subject to mockery ('Stephanie comes from a kind of disturbed family. Her mother's had a bunch of nervous breakdowns and her daddy's a vegetarian,'²⁶ we read in *The Rookers*), a man should naturally fall for younger women, a man should never do the dishes, a man should be a cowboy because this is as manly as a man can get. Nevertheless, women dismiss those beliefs as they voice their opinions on equality or the obsolescence of the Wild West myth. With all the break-ups and departures, the stories are still unlikely to be read and interpreted as utterly pessimistic, as the protagonists are depicted at a point of gaining a new perspective and a new self-awareness, which can only propel them to bring about the much needed change. 'With this new understanding,' Brinkmeyer writes, 'these characters, one gathers, are in much more control of their lives, even if they are not entirely happy or have few options on which to act.'²⁷ The upset dynamics between men and women do not call for a revolution by either party – the men are not to stifle the women's rebellion, the women are not to surrender. Mason's South is not inhabited by the Southern ladies and their powerful protectors; it is instead filled with people of free will, whom the author refuses to label and put into neat boxes of gender roles – and if she does so, she switches the labels from box to box until everyone had their fair share of roles to play.

Notes

¹ Louis D. Rubin Jr., *The American South: Portrait of a Culture* (Washington, DC: United States Information Agency, 1991), 17.

² Harriett Pollack, 'From *Shiloh* to *In Country* to *Feather Crowns*: Bobbie Ann Mason, Women's History, and Southern Fiction', *The Southern Literary Journal* 28, No. 2 (1996): 96.

³ Linda Tate, *A Southern Weave of Women: Fiction in the Contemporary South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 8.

⁴ Cherry Good, 'The Southern Lady, or the Art of Dissembling', *Journal of American Studies* 23, No. 1 (1989): 73.

⁵ Tate, *A Southern Weave*, 8.

⁶ Good, *The Southern Lady*, 77.

⁷ Joanna Price, *Understanding Bobbie Ann Mason* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 15.

⁸ G.O. Morphew, 'Downhome Feminists in *Shiloh and Other Stories*', *The Southern Literary Journal* 21, No. 2 (1989): 42.

⁹ Tate, *A Southern Weave*, 172.

¹⁰ Bobbie Ann Mason, *Shiloh and Other Stories* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 53.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹² *Ibid.*, 236.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

²² Albert E. Wilhelm, 'Making Over or Making Off: The Problem of Identity in Bobbie Ann Mason's Short Fiction', *The Southern Literary Journal* 19, No. 2 (1987): 77.

²³ *Ibid.*, 77-80.

²⁴ Morphew, 'Downhome Feminists', 41.

²⁵ Mason, *Shiloh and Other Stories*, 30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Robert H. Brinkmeyer Jr., 'Finding One's History: Bobbie Ann Mason and Contemporary Southern Literature', *The Southern Literary Journal* 19, No. 2 (1987): 23.

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Gender in War, Gender at War? Femininities and Masculinities in Contemporary British War Novels

Miriam Wallraven

Abstract

From Michael Frayn's *Spies* (2002) to Graham Swift's *Wish You Were Here* (2011), a whole literary decade has been influenced by novels focusing on war. While it is certainly true that 'there have always been war stories,'¹ the success of these contemporary British (bestselling and award-winning) war novels is striking as well as their in-depth focus on the representations of masculinities and femininities. While many sociological studies examine the strictly distinguished gender roles as well as the dichotomy of active men and passive women when it comes to war, it is particularly contemporary fiction that serves as a critical medium to negotiate the construction as well as the destabilisation of gender roles in war and post-war times. How are masculinities and femininities depicted in contemporary British war novels? How is the relationship between women and men presented in the novels – is every war a 'gender war' or does it reaffirm pre-war gender roles? How is masculinity constructed and destroyed in war? How can war be depicted as both threatening and emancipatory for women? Is trauma gendered? How does propaganda work with gender roles? When war brings social change, how does this affect gender roles? Do wars lead to an affirmation or a subversion of images of femininity and masculinity? Many contemporary texts focus on wars which are accorded different roles in British history and politics – from the Second World War (for example in A. L. Kennedy's *Day* (2007) and Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006)) and its aftermath (in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004)) to the Crimean War (1853-1856) (in Katharine McMahon's *The Rose of Sebastopol* (2007) and Britain's so-called 'small war' in Cyprus (1955 to 1959). They illustrate how every war fundamentally entails social and political changes concerning gender which shape the post-war times.

Key Words: War, twentieth-century literature, trauma, social change, gender representation, masculinities, femininities, Great Britain.

1. Introduction: Fiction, War and Gender

Particularly after the Second World War, the claim that no representations can do justice to the terror of war has been voiced time and again. Despite this claim, however, it is still true that 'there have always been war stories,' as Jean Elshtain states.² Especially in contemporary British literature of the last years, the sheer number and the variety of textual approaches is noticeable, as well as the success of these novels, many of which have also received literary awards. The most

striking phenomenon, however, is the novels' in-depth focus on the representations of masculinities and femininities.

While many sociological studies examine the strictly distinguished gender roles in war, it is particularly contemporary fiction that serves as a critical medium to negotiate the construction as well as the destabilisation of gender roles. How are masculinities and femininities represented in contemporary British war novels? How is masculinity constructed and destroyed in war? In which ways is war depicted as both threatening and emancipatory for women? How does propaganda work with gender?

Contemporary texts focus on wars which are accorded different roles in British history and politics – from the Second World War in A. L. Kennedy's *Day* (2007) and Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* (2006) to the Crimean War in Katharine McMahon's *The Rose of Sebastopol* (2007) and Britain's so-called 'small war' in Cyprus in Sadie Jones' *Small Wars* (2009). They insistently illustrate both gender constructions and destructions in war.

The multiple perspectives and complex approaches to gender roles and relationships are made possible by the generic positioning of war novels – as 'historical novels' – between 'fact' and fiction. These two poles cannot really be regarded as opposites since Hayden White's studies about the existence of fictional techniques in historiography;³ all of the discussed novels, however, include acknowledgments that emphasise the meticulous research done by the authors. And there is a reason for it: All the texts are written by authors without any direct experience of war. Petra Rau emphasises that such authors only know war

at second or third hand through the memories, stories, and artefacts of earlier generations, and through popular war films, museum visits, pulp fiction, memoirs, TV documentaries, or history books. These sources may come to produce "prosthetic memories" for what is essentially a post-memorial generation.⁴

Concerning gender representations, the war novels find themselves in an interesting double bind: whereas on the one hand, they are based on historical research of war time gender roles, on the other hand they utilise the fictional liberty to explore gender roles in a more experimental fashion – and particularly play through various transgressions in the novels.

How can the representation of gender roles be conceptualised? In the article 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,' Joan W. Scott distinguishes four related levels: 1. culturally available symbols that evoke multiple representations of masculinity and femininity; 2. normative concepts of realising the gender roles, of interpreting and limiting their symbolic significance, which find their expressions in religious, scientific, and political doctrines; 3. institutions that inscribe normative concepts into social organisation; and 4. gender patterns in

subjective identity.⁵ The war novels negotiate gender roles and representations on these different interlinked levels.

2. The Wounded Soldier: Masculinity Defended and Masculinity Destroyed

Historically, the soldier is the most visible gendered representation of war. In this context, propaganda establishes particularly the figure of the airman as a culturally significant symbol of heroic masculinity. This becomes also obvious in Winston Churchill's speeches, for example 'Wars are not won by evacuations' (June 4th, 1940):

I will pay my tribute to these young airmen [...] The Knights of the Round Table, the crusaders, all fall back in the past – not only distant but prosaic; these young men, going forth every morn to guard their native land and all that we stand for, holding in their hands these instruments of colossal and shattering power, of whom it may be said that
Every morn brought forth a noble chance / And every chance
brought forth a noble knight,
deserve our gratitude [...].⁶

The literary reference to Tennyson's 'Morte D'Arthur' illustrates how Churchill draws from national versions of mythology as well as modern cultural symbols. The fragility of this concept is illustrated in the most multilayered novel about traumatised masculinity, A. L. Kennedy's *Day*, where the experiences of a British tailgunner in a bomber aircraft, Alfred Day, who bombs German cities in the Second World War, are in the centre. After Alfred's bomber is shot down, he becomes a prisoner of war in Germany. In the end, Alfred is the only survivor of his crew which had been his 'family' and had made his life meaningful. The post-war time in London is marked by emptiness and trauma. Six years after being a prisoner of war, he returns to Germany where he plays in a film about prisoners of war in order to free himself from his memories.

The lure of the war lies in the promise to liberate Day from his suffocating family circumstances: 'Up in the clean air, up free with the blue, that's what he wanted. [...] Of course he'd fucking volunteer.'⁷ His ideas of the airman as a culturally established symbol which is realised on the institutional level of the military seem to come directly from national propaganda such as Churchill's. Day's motivation to join the army is clearly gendered: 'he'd closed his eyes and prayed again to be a strong, strong man.'⁸

The most important factor that creates a masculine identity in war is the crew of soldiers. What Day calls his 'family' clearly marks the homosocial bonds in war as decisive for defining masculine identity. The trauma of losing his whole crew initiates the destruction of this form of masculinity – a destruction that is driven

further during his time as a prisoner of war: 'By the end of his time as a prisoner Alfred had been different, a new thing and surprising to himself [...] He didn't need to feel anymore, he didn't need to eat.'⁹ Day's expression 'Men who were things'¹⁰ is another clear indicator for the loss of masculinity. After the war, Day is drawn back to Germany to

tunnel right through to the places where he'd lost himself, or rather the dark, the numb gap he could tell was asleep inside him. Something else had been there once, but he couldn't think what. He was almost sure it had come adrift in Germany, in the real prison, in '43, or thereabouts. So it could possibly make sense that he'd turn up here and at least work out what was missing, maybe even put it back.¹¹

His identity has become a jigsaw puzzle that Day cannot put together once the war is over. This is the double bind of military masculinity: while war creates it, war also destroys it again.

Trauma is intimately intertwined with the destruction of masculine identity. It manifests as the uncontrolled mental recurrence of the traumatic events that appear so real that the traumatised person is under the impression of experiencing the situations again and again – situations, however, that are neither mentally nor psychologically accessible. By narrating and by thus reassembling the story, it is possible to regain a form of control over the fragmented memories. In *Day*, for example, we as readers have to cooperate in the process of reading in order to transform the fragmented memories into a story that can be made sense of. While survivors of trauma are faced with immense difficulties to speak about trauma, the potential of literary fiction lies in the textual strategies of representing the unspeakable – from different perspectives.

Sadie Jones' novel *Small Wars* brings together different perspectives by presenting the construction of the masculinity of the soldier and the femininity of the soldier's wife. The text is mainly set in 1956 in Cyprus as the Cypriots seek union with Greece and resist British rule. A major in the British Army, Hal Treherne, takes along his family: his wife Clara and their young twin girls. Hal longs for battles but instead is confronted with his lack of control when violence, torture, and rape are committed by his own soldiers and the British at the same time become victims of terrorist attacks. As he is traumatised, he becomes violent himself and communication breaks down between Hal and Clara, while Clara has to fight her own battles as she remains isolated and frightened with the two small children. When she herself is struck by a terrorist attack and loses her unborn child, they fly back to England and the once so dedicated soldier becomes a deserter.

The beginning of the novel in England already illustrates how masculinity is made in the army on a symbolic and institutional level: By propaganda and strict education, individuality is abolished. In this way, the soldier is born:

The marching feet and rifles and tilted heads made patterns, so that their mothers could hardly tell one [soldier] from another and felt embarrassed about it, but proud too, because their sons had become part of a greater body and did not stand out.¹²

The women – not only the mothers but also the girlfriends – help to transform the boys into men, into soldiers; thus they complete the institutionalised procedure which is based on the symbolic representation of the soldier:

The cadets, though commissioned into their regiments, kept the pips on their shoulder boards covered all through the evening. At twelve o'clock, it was the girls who pulled the short dark ribbons away, and completed their transformation into soldiers.¹³

3. War Versions of Femininity

The clearly defined gender roles in *Small Wars* as well as the strictly separate spheres are created by the war but again destroyed by the war. After a terrorist attack, one army wife says to the other:

I must say you've been an awfully good sport about it. I would have kicked up a hell of a fuss. Your husband must be proud. It makes all the difference in the world to have a wife who doesn't make things harder, don't you think?¹⁴

The reality is very different: The narrative voice time and again juxtaposes Hal's and Clara's different situations and essentially incompatible spheres:

Clara, going back and forth to the bathroom to rinse out the flannel with cool water, and wiping it over the twins' shivering hot bodies, thought almost constantly of Hal. Hal after two hours in the shallow scraping underneath the sharp rock, getting men out one by one, and word back to the signaller, didn't think of Clara at all; if he'd heard her name he wouldn't have recognised it.¹⁵

In the end, after witnessing a particularly traumatic event, Hal rapes Clara: 'He was her enemy. He hadn't known it.'¹⁶

At this point, it becomes obvious that gender is at war. However, once the ‘hero soldier’ is disillusioned with his role, the role of women is also called into question. The gender war can only be resolved when the soldier deserts and thus escapes war masculinity. This enables Hal and Clara to break through the barriers of different spheres, mutual alienation, and consequently the gender war between them.

In war fiction, different versions of femininity are presented. However, whereas an opposition such as ‘traditional’ versus ‘transgressive’ (of pre-war gender roles) may hold in many situations, in war this apparent opposition collapses. Katherine McMahon’s *The Rose of Sebastopol* (2007) is set in the Crimean War (1853-56). In this novel, the cousins Mariella, a shy and homely ‘Victorian’ daughter, and Rosa, a tomboy, outspoken, ambitious and critical of women’s exclusion from many parts of society, represent these seemingly incompatible positions that merge in the end.

In the beginning, Mariella seems to correspond to the ideal of homely femininity – a femininity that her fiancé Henry (who goes to the war as a doctor) praises: “‘You are my ideal,” he said. “So utterly content in your own world. So selfless in your service of others.”’¹⁷ At this time, the war is mediated for Mariella by two – patriarchal and propagandistic – sources: first by the *Times* and second by her father who ‘explains’ the war to her. Mariella believes in these authorities until she experiences the war first hand – when she goes in search of her fiancé and of her cousin Rosa who has gone missing as a nurse – and realises that the official propaganda versions turn out to be wrong.

Gender roles in war are not as predictable as expected. The protagonist’s ‘feminine’ preoccupation with needlework in fact helps her to survive. When she experiences the horrors of the Crimean War, she continues sewing although her servant reproaches her for it: ‘Look at you, sewing a frock while the world is at war.’¹⁸ It soon becomes visible that the symbol of domestic femininity is reinterpreted by her as she sews on the battlefield. Apart from that, she gains her freedom for the first time by a transgression, the love affair with the soldier Max, and she says: ‘I don’t want to be careful. I’ve always been careful.’¹⁹ Hence, the seeming opposition between Mariella embodying homely, obedient, virtuous femininity and Rosa who transgresses everything, turns out to break down. In the end, it is ‘the power of the needle’²⁰ by which Mariella survives the war; she remains sane, while the other characters are mad, missing, or dead.

For Rosa, on the other hand, war promises liberation; her idealism to serve as a nurse like Florence Nightingale, however, is also destroyed as soon as she arrives in the Crimea. Her expectations are based on the romanticised image of the nurse used as a propaganda tool: ‘A great deal rested on the shoulders of those nurses who had become the one romantic spark in an increasingly bleak account of the war.’²¹ Although Rosa appears as transgressive, she is still drawn to the image of a caring, healing, and serving form of femininity. In *The Rose of Sebastopol*, war

serves as a catalyst for the women characters to escape any narrow, preconceived definition of femininity.

4. Total Transgressions? Gender and Relationships in *The Night Watch*

What is transgressive? The transgression of heteronormativity is the crucial topic around which Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* revolves. Since the characters are aware that any minute they could be killed in the London Blitz, this state of emergency makes transgressions possible. Duncan, a young man, exemplifies the individual who stands against national propaganda and the ideology of masculinity defined by the desire to fight, and by heterosexuality. Duncan violates both: he is a conscientious objector and desires his best friend. When his friend commits suicide because he does not want to be a soldier and Duncan plans to kill himself but does not manage to, he is thrown into prison – for his rejection of war ideology and war masculinity. His friend Alec emphasises that the making of a soldier is not 'ordinary' at all:

“I'd rather be a lunatic,” said Alec, tossing his head, “than to do what they want me to do. They're the lunatics. They're making lunatics of everybody else, and no one's stopping them; everyone's acting as if it's ordinary. As if it's an ordinary thing, that they make a soldier of you, give you a gun.”²²

Here, the enforced construction of military masculinity is questioned as much as a heterosexual definition of masculinity.

For the women characters, the war itself has made living a lesbian lifestyle possible. For Kay, this also means a new visible gender identity: ‘People seeing her pass in the street, not looking at her closely, often mistook her for a good-looking youth.’²³ In post-war times, however, the status quo is reinforced again, as Kay has to experience: “‘Don't you know the war's over?’” the man behind the counter in a baker's shop asked Kay. He said it because of her trousers and hair.²⁴ Women's possibilities that opened up due to the war – ranging from dangerous jobs to showing their sexual orientation and living together with other women – are closed again.

During the war, one of the women says: ‘Thank God for the war, is what I say! The thought of peace starting up again, I don't mind telling you, fills me with horror.’²⁵ War, for women, does not only mean horror but also an empowerment leading to different forms of relationships and an occupation. In his speech ‘The Women of Britain’ (September 28th, 1943), Churchill states: ‘War has taught us to make these vast strides forward towards a far more complete equalisation of the parts to be played by men and women in society.’²⁶ In the article ‘The Effect of the War on the Status of Women,’ however, Harold Smith shows that many of the initially emancipatory changes merely constitute a temporary adaptation to the

circumstances which disappear after 1945.²⁷ The existential situation during the war presented in *The Night Watch* makes transgressions of gender roles possible, as Kay emphasises: “‘All’s fair in love and war, isn’t it? Especially this war; and more especially’ – she lowered her voice – ‘more especially, our sort of love.’”²⁸ War opens the possibility of new gender relationships – and contemporary novels explore them.

5. Conclusion: Gender at War?

‘There have always been war stories,’ Elshtain writes, ‘for wars are deeded to us as texts. We cannot identify “war itself” as an entity apart from a powerful literary tradition that includes poems, epics, myths, official histories, first-person accounts.’²⁹ Especially contemporary novels attempt to make the reader understand and experience war. It is striking that young British authors for whom the wars they write about are ‘prosthetic memories’ utilise the generic positioning of war novels between ‘fact’ and fiction in order to create textual ‘test cases’ to explore gender representations, roles, and relationships.

Deer justly argues that

War cultures are shaped by the official effort to impose a dominant vision of war through propaganda, censorship, film, speeches, press and radio statements, recruiting materials and training manuals, as well as the work of officially sponsored war artists and writers.³⁰

Contemporary war novels, on the contrary, do not attempt to blend neither the contradictions of war nor of gender representations into an unfissured whole: the different perspectives reveal the workings of ideology and propaganda. In these novels, as gender roles change, relationships have to be constantly negotiated – gender can be at war as in *Small Wars*, but masculinity and femininity are always constructed and destroyed by war. This negotiation takes place on several interlinked levels, as Joan W. Scott understands gender: it is symbolic, institutional, and it concerns individual identity. Essentially, these war novels are much more than historical novels, since they reflect on our gender roles today.

Maybe there will always be war stories. But gender roles do change – and war might change with them. The full admission of women to the US-Army in January this year – also to direct combat jobs – might create new gender representations connected to the military and to warfare. In contrast to political propaganda, however, fictional literature will remain the medium in which gender roles are negotiated critically.

Notes

¹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'Reflection on War and Political Discourse: Realism, Just War, and Feminism in a Nuclear Age', *Political Theory* 13, No. 1 (February 1985): 54-55.

² Ibid.

³ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), passim.

⁴ Petra Rau, 'The War in Contemporary Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*, ed. Marina Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 207-219.

⁵ Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review* 91, No. 5 (1986): 1053-1075.

⁶ Winston S. Churchill, 'Wars Are Not Won by Evacuations', in *His Complete Speeches 1897-1963*, Vol. VI 1935-1942 (New York: Chelsea House, 1974), 6228.

⁷ A. L. Kennedy, *Day* (London: Vintage, 2008), 46.

⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹¹ Ibid., 35-36.

¹² Sadie Jones, *Small Wars* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009), 1.

¹³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹⁵ Ibid., 95.

¹⁶ Ibid., 244.

¹⁷ Katharine McMahon, *The Rose of Sebastopol* (London: Phoenix, 2007), 47.

¹⁸ Ibid., 219.

¹⁹ Ibid., 377.

²⁰ Ibid., 391.

²¹ Ibid., 146.

²² Sarah Waters, *The Night Watch* (London: Virago, 2006), 447.

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Ibid., 94.

²⁵ Ibid., 242.

²⁶ Churchill, 'Wars Are Not Won by Evacuations', 6855.

²⁷ Harold L. Smith, 'The Effect of the War on the Status of Women', in *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, ed. Harold Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 208-229.

²⁸ Waters, *The Night Watch*, 240.

²⁹ Elshtain, 'Reflection', 55.

³⁰ Patrick Deer, *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and Modern British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

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‘I Bear Two Women upon My Back’: Intersectionalist Hybridity in the Poetry of Audre Lorde

Yomna Saber

Abstract

Third-Wave Feminism digs its roots in intersectionality and coalition, which were not fully realised in Second-Wave Feminism. However, the movement is usually under attack for lacking a clear agenda. Recent scholarship strongly suggests that third wavers get back to third-world writers, like Audre Lorde, to realise an anti-racist and inclusive feminism. Lorde occupies a distinctive position in feminist literature; a poet who resides in too many margins being black, female and lesbian. This chapter draws an analogy between third wave intersectionality and postcolonial hybridity, and argues that Lorde’s use of hybridity is a ‘third space’ that she opens up in her poetry to disrupt spheres of supremacy through its interdependence and reciprocal construction that defy dualisms, hence realising coalition. The analysis is anchored by Homi Bhabha’s definition of hybridity in colonial discourse.

Key Words: Third-Wave Feminism, intersectionality, coalition, postcolonial hybridity, dualism, Audre Lorde, Homi Bhabha.

Third-Wave Feminism digs its roots in intersectionality and coalition, which were not fully realised in Second-Wave Feminism. The notion of intersectionality lies in the meeting point of sexism, classism, racism, and heterosexism; whereas coalition is the endeavour to embrace differences to realise diversity. However, the movement is under attack for lacking a clear agenda and transformative approach. To realise an anti-racist and inclusive feminism, recent scholarship suggests that third wavers get back to writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, Maxine Kingston, Audre Lorde, and others. Lorde occupies a distinctive position in the feminist canon; a poet who resides in too many margins being black, female and lesbian. She celebrates difference and strives to break forms of binaries set by a white, racist, patriarchal, heterosexual discourse. Hers is poetry of resistance which draws much from a coalition that is a union of incongruities. This chapter attempts to open up a new progeny for intersectionality by drawing an analogy between it and hybridity in postcolonial discourse in Lorde’s poetry. I start by defining third waver intersectionality; then I introduce postcolonial hybridity. I further contextualise Lorde’s work arguing that it is both hybrid and intersectionalist.

1. Third Wavers' Intersectionality

Following the anti-feminist backlash in the 1980s and the fact that Second-Wave Feminism failed women of certain races, ethnicities, and classes, Third-Wave emerged to redeem such drawbacks. Although third wavers are still grappling with their agenda and providing clear-cut definitions, they rely on the deep-seated notions of intersectionality and coalition. The term 'intersectionality' was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her work on identity politics for black women who are seen as victims of sexism only or racism only, but never of both. She concludes that such incomplete positionality leaves black women in no man's land for 'feminists and civil rights thinkers as well have treated Black women in ways that deny both the compoundedness of their situation and the centrality of their experience to the larger classes of women and Blacks.'¹ Crenshaw's argument asserts that identity is not a uni-dimensional entity; gender, race, class and ethnicity intersect comprising a different experience and establishing a coalition from the intersecting points. It is through such intersectionality that feminism can eventually reach an all-inclusive approach that does not elide differences and realises diversity.

Intersectionality for third wavers is a milestone in their theoretical explorations of feminist politics and cultural action. Delia Aguilar explains that 'the brilliance of intersectionality inheres precisely in its infinite open-endedness, purposeful ambiguity, and the welcome it extends to any and all interpretations that enterprising academics can concoct.'² Intersectionality encompasses multiple axes of identity, demolishes hierarchies, defies exclusions and rebuts essentialism. The purposeful ambiguity corresponds to postmodernist concepts of identity as fragmented and multilayered, imposing a sceptical stance towards a whole unified identity. Another attribute given to intersectionality is paving the way for new coalitions to materialise. Rearticulating and renegotiating female identities will result in founding feasible coalitions to contest shifting systems of oppression through feminist activism and political action.

As promising as intersectionality might be, it remains fraught with fluidity. It sidesteps many pitfalls of second wavers; still it is not a panacea as it remains somewhat problematic. In order to fulfil their goals, third wavers need to reconsider intersectionality from wider perspectives. Jennifer Nash calls for re-thinking the term in order to deal with assumptions that reinforce it as a vantage point to 'continue working to dismantle essentialism, to craft nuanced theories of identity and oppression, and to grapple with the messiness of subjectivity' which is going to eventually enable feminists to construct 'a coherent and theoretical agenda.'³ In addition to identity theories and the troubling forging of female agency amid aporias of oppressions, intersectionality can benefit from fields addressing similar issues from different positionalities such as postcolonial discourse.

2. Hybridity and Intersectionality: Foci of Differences

Hybridity is one of the tools of theorising differences. Being the outcome of the crossbreeding of two species, hybridity refers to generating a third species that carries their diverse characteristics. Hybridity, however, remains one of the dubious terms in the premise of critical theory as it goes beyond the limits of scientific cross-pollination. By and large, it passes on new transcultural forms that come into existence from the cultural contact. It does not dwell upon a catholic unity, but unity of anomalies falling between the boundaries of self and other. Hybridity lies at the heart of racism; the utopian egalitarianism and equality proclaimed by the eighteenth century were crushed by the nineteenth-century racism. This racism was central to western culture, concealed albeit pungent, where the white race was placed in the zenith and the black one in the nadir. Similar to intersectionality which lies in several meeting points, hybridity lies at the crux of racism, culture and civilisation.

Intersectionality does not attempt to transcend differences, but to embrace them, which is what hybridity does. Hybridity does not exclude historical, economic, political or geographical differences; it acknowledges them, as Robert Young argues: '[h]ybridity is itself an example of hybridity, of a doubleness that both brings together, fuses, but also maintains separation.'⁴ The propensity to de-historicise and de-locate cultures from fixed contexts is a utopian attempt to reach some unanimous concept that can get over differences. However, this is not the absolute solution to such a thorny question. Differences are always there in the actual cultural vista; political and economic inequalities are too manifest to be ignored. Repudiating the differences implied in hybridity would be a misreading of the term.

Intersectionality ventures to dismantle essentialism in feminist discourse. Hybridity also, being the unpreventable process of interrelations taking place among diverse cultures, seeks to cart off essentialist identities. Bhabha sees it as the inadvertent outcome of colonialism; being the true form of postcolonial sedition of imperialism and the implied racism which enforces the essentialist silhouettes of the superiority of one culture over another:

Hybridity is [...] the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal [...] the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power.⁵

Hybridity dislocates power relations as the oppressor is not upper-handed and the oppressed is given the chance for self-expression. Thus the entire construction of authority is challenged opening up new realms for the oppressed by establishing a political inversion in discourse.

Hybridity becomes synonymous to what Bhabha calls the 'Third Space.' He emphasises the reciprocal construction of the subjectivity of the oppressor and the oppressed, arguing that cultural statements are established within the framework of this 'Third Space' being the point at which cultural identity comes into being. This space maintains its ambivalent features that establish the indefensibility of claiming any racial hierarchy. It is in this 'in-between' space that the core of culture is founded. The entire cultural construction submits itself to a drastic change in terms of unravelling self and other; the hybrid moment is neither of them, it is something located in between in which both fuse. Lorde resides in this liminal space; she occupies the margins but refuses to be marginalised. In her poetry, she creates a 'third space' and draws upon her different legacies bringing into existence a hybrid mythopoesis. She celebrates differences as a means of breaking down binaries set by a white, patriarchal, heterosexual discourse and realises intersectionality by fusing her battle against this discourse.

3. Lorde: Intersectionalist Hybrid Poetics of Difference

Lorde occupies an intersectionalist hybrid positionality *par excellence*. She defines herself as someone 'forged in the crucibles of difference.'⁶ She believes that the real problem is not difference, but our reaction to it. Being different in America, according to her, entails being inferior, marginalised, and even wrong, Lorde hence argues that 'we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, as if it is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate.'⁷ All reactions lead to divisions, and ultimately isolation. Lorde's argument calls for acknowledging differences to attain equality; a resonant call since black historical endeavours for integration or assimilation into white America always ended up by suffering some loss while still failing to realise equality. Keeping differences is antithetical to imposing an essentialist identity or universalising one experience while discarding others, it is opening up new realms for hybrid identities to emerge, hence changing the existing conditions instead of re-producing them.

Difference becomes Lorde's means of empowerment, a politics of resistance, and a de-homogenising poetics. To fulfil this, she adopts a dissident enunciation that attempts to forge a reverse in power relations '*for the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.'⁸ To achieve this rupture of power structures, she advocates an intersectionalist unity across differences and multiple sites of oppression. It is a hybrid unity since it

retains all differences while challenging discursive categorisation. Lorde defies the essentialist ideologies of the second wave zeitgeist that fail to acknowledge differences; in her lifetime she had usually been misunderstood, attacked and even ignored for adopting this subversive stance. Hers is a subaltern agency that embraces contradictions, suffers from displacements and displays fragmentation, but manages to celebrate it all.

Lorde sets up a space for negotiating cultural authority through myth which becomes her metanarrative. She returns to what Bhabha calls the 'houses of racial memory' where 'each "unhomely house" marks a deeper historical displacement.'⁹ To conquer this unhomeliness, she has to face it. African myths do not fall into the 'master's tools' which enables her to dismantle his house; they become her legacy. She creates poetic personae occupying enunciatory sites, where they can see the inside from the outside. M. Ball argues that Lorde does not merely use myths; she is a revisionist mythmaker as she 'fills a need in women's mythology, helping women of all colours re-vision their mythic journeys.'¹⁰ As Lorde rearticulates African myths from her respective intersectionalist identity, she subverts its traditional patriarchal norms and re-sets power relations.

'The House of Yemanjá' roams the mythical terrains of the holistic goddess; mother of all gods in Yoruba pantheon. The poem depicts a perturbed mother-daughter relation seen from the daughter's perspective. Dualities are established from the start: 'My mother had two faces and a frying pot.' The double-faced mother cooks up her daughters to become girls in this frying pot; a harsh education for black girls' femininity to come to terms with a racist patriarchy. The persona introduces herself by extending the cooking metaphor through the 'broken pot' for, unlike her sister, she is unable to come up to the expectations of the mother who 'hid out a perfect daughter / who was not me.'¹¹ The gap created between mother and daughter gives rise to the uncanny. The Freudian uncanny occurs when repressed childhood memories emerge to haunt every day existence, keeping the past alive. The uncanny is imbued with insecurities, indecisions, and ambivalences; it captures the awkward moment of homelessness and the inability to surmount an irreconcilable past. This is where the persona is caught, and as Bhabha explains 'it is precisely in these banalities that the unhomely stirs.'¹²

The following lines forge the hybrid identity of the persona: 'I am the sun and the moon' while still keeping the cooking metaphor 'forever hungry / for her eyes.' The hybridity of light and darkness emblematises the African American identity. Rooted in a prior array of racist postulations, hybridity is part and parcel of the black American experience exemplified in Du Bois' double consciousness. The persona articulates this hybrid identity as her means of empowerment while she forces her presence into an absence that the mother is trying to enforce. Hers is a premise of difference and the irregular rhythms of the poem stress that. The mood is one of frustration and the tone is angry at the mother. The alliteration of the rigid

consonants /k/, /g/, /d/, and /b/ reflect the persona's anger and a psyche agitated by the uncanny.

Having established her hybrid identity, the persona declares in the second stanza 'I bear two women upon my back.' The duality grows into a legacy that she gets from her mother. The hiding of the perfect daughter is juxtaposed with the dark mother the persona is carrying 'rich and hidden / in the ivory hungers of the other mother.' The persona breaks the Jungian archetype of darkness, the pictorial symbol of evil, by favouring it over light. The dark mother stands for Yemanjá. The white mother, however, is 'pale as a witch / yet steady and familiar / brings me bread and terror / in my sleep.' The simile draws a myriad of negative attributes arising from the topos of witchcraft and bestows upon this mother supernatural qualities. The white mother stands for Second-Wave Feminism that favoured white women. The structures of power entrenched between the persona and this mother put the former in the periphery and the latter in the centre. The pale mother occupies the positionality of authority where 'her breasts are huge exciting anchors / in the midnight storm.'¹³ However, this does not render the defeat of the persona as Bhabha argues that the presence of authority is 'fixed and empty.'¹⁴ It is a static, not a dynamic entity. The founding underpinning upon which this authority is built is about to be ruptured by the persona's hybrid subject.

The tone changes into strength as the persona confronts the uncanny. Held a hostage by her past, the persona states 'All this has been / before / in my mother's bed / time has no sense.' The uncanny embraces space and time; both shackles are about to be broken by the persona. She embarks on seeking means of empowerment, but she is cognizant of her situation: 'I have no brothers / and my sisters are cruel.' In a world marred by racism and sexism, the persona turns to the black mother. The repetition compulsion is related to the uncanny: 'Mother I need / mother I need / mother I need your blackness now.' The last stanzas are short with run-on syntax to mirror a mood of exigency. The persona proudly celebrates difference. The dialogic synthesis of hybridity enables her to consider her identity in a non-essentialist context. She decides not to confine to an identity expected from her mother, her white sisters or her black brothers.

The final stanza creates the 'Third Space' as she declares being

the sun and moon and forever hungry
the sharpened edge
where day and night shall meet
and not be
one.¹⁵

The persona is captured between white and black worlds and is rejected by both. Her hybrid identity refuses to favour one constituent; hence day and night shall

never be one. Refusing assimilation and integration, differences must be retained to conquer the uncanny and achieve power reverse. Bhabha argues that the

paranoid threat from the hybrid is finally uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and the duality of self/other, inside/outside. In the productivity of power, the boundaries of authority – its reality effects – are always besieged by “the other scene” of fixations and phantoms.¹⁶

The illusions of the oppressors come tumbling down after confronting hybrid subjects. Hierarchies are disturbed and the Third Space is constructed for hybrids to reside in and renegotiate structures of power. Lorde’s use of hybridity is this ‘third space’ that she opens up to disrupt spheres of supremacy through its interdependent construction resisting dualisms. Her syllabic rhythms and diction create a space that maintains features of ambivalence and antipathy destroying hierarchies.

Third-Wave Feminism established itself as a new school of thought, but it still has a long way to go. Intersectionality, being its signpost, can benefit much from other discourses and third wavers need to revisit writers like Lorde. Lorde explores the conceptual boundaries of differences and points to the fallacy of the ersatz homogeneity of a monologic discourse willing to accept only what is white, patriarchal, middle class, and heterosexual, and trying to wreak havoc on any differences likely to appear. Her intersectionalist hybridity unveils the relics of a white, male, heterosexual other; producing a voice that hears itself speaking from a distance and trounces the uncanny nature of differences. Her work embraces a notion of difference in meanings, languages and identities. It provides profoundly inherent varied shapes of associations, tensions, allusions, and conciliations that are apt to appear in the utterance coming from many margins. Her intersectionalist hybridity becomes a coalition that embraces differences while retaining them, a coalition which Third Wave is still trying to achieve.

Notes

¹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and the Antiracist Politics’, *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 147.

² Delia D. Aguilar, ‘From Triple Jeopardy to Intersectionality: The Feminist Perplex’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, No. 2 (2012): 427.

³ Jennifer Nash, ‘Re-Thinking Intersectionality’, *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 4.

⁴ Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 22.

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- ⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 112.
- ⁶ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (New York: Crossing Press, 2007), 112.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.
- ⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 13.
- ¹⁰ Charlene Ball, 'Old Magic and New Fury: The Theophany of Afrekete in Audre Lorde's "Tar Beach"', *NWSA Journal* 13, No. 1(2001): 63.
- ¹¹ Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 235.
- ¹² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 15.
- ¹³ Lorde, *The Collected Poems*, 235.
- ¹⁴ Bhabha, *Location*, 119.
- ¹⁵ Lorde, *The Collected Poems*, 236.
- ¹⁶ Bhabha, *Location*, 116.

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Queer Narratives in Contemporary Latvian Short Fiction

Kārlis Vērdiņš and Jānis Ozoliņš

Abstract

The presence of queer narrative in Latvian short fiction marks the last twenty years – the period of the independent Republic of Latvia. The period began when male homosexuality was decriminalised in 1992 and continued with years of widespread homophobia in society and closeted existence of homosexuals. In these years, Latvian prose writers have explored the possibilities of postmodernism (especially in the 1990s) and have later switched to a more realistic mode of storytelling, based on real life. The homosexual as the ‘other’ in prose written and published by Latvian authors has been present in the stories – from episodic types with stereotypical features to more subtly developed heroes.

Key Words: Latvian literature, queer theory, narratology, homosexuality, postmodernism, post-Soviet culture.

1. Narrative and Sexuality

Some theorists among the creators of the queer theory dealt with problems of narratology and used the intellectual and political potential of this approach to articulate a newly-found lack of cohesiveness in the system of sex – gender – sexuality, and to re-evaluate the apparently stable categories of identity. They learned to reformulate questions about literary texts and to perceive manifestations of marginal sexuality in canonical or apparently heterosexual works. This tactic is known as ‘queering’ the text, and it both characterises queer heroes or behaviour, and reveals how these heroes destroy readers’ notions of sexual identity.

According to structural narratology, the traditional linear plot has been tied together with normative heterosexuality, especially in the plot of marriage that equates a ‘happy ending’ with heterosexual fulfilment and a promise of patriarchal succession. Narratology, influenced by queer theory, explores the ways the structure of a narrative can deviate from such principles of coherence and conclusion of the plot. Some narratives do not develop following the rhythms of heterosexuality and a procreative ending (as in the traditional conclusion of fairy tales – ‘they married and lived happily ever after’) but according to less predictable and changeable sexual practices or towards a less certain future. These readings illustrate the eccentric kinds of sexuality that appear in narratives as subject matters (for example, narcissism, fetishism, anal eroticism) and how expression of such desires makes the progression of narrative allegoric.¹ The coming-out story (the formation of a protagonist’s homosexual identity and his or her self-disclosure to other characters) has a significant place in queer narratology. It became popular in

Western literatures in the second half of the 20th century, in the 1970s and 1980s. During the years of the Gay Liberation movement, such stories propagated the notion of a stable self and the ideal of a unified, homogeneous gay community. Both in autobiographical texts and real life, two dimensions of coming-out can be distinguished: an interior process of self-recognition and an exterior process of making one's sexual orientation public. The coming-out story resembles the *Bildungsroman* and the initiation story – it involves a quest, a mentor figure and a journey. The main difference is that the hero enters a subculture and not the hetero-normative society.

In the next decades when the queer theory starts to proliferate, these coming-out stories lose their topicality. Fantasy and magic realism have been used more frequently to queer the textual world; stories of AIDS lead to new territories of knowledge.

2. Homosexuality and Latvian Literature

When Latvia regained independence, Latvian literature began to absorb a variety of new subjects, previously uncommon in Latvian fiction. Among them were questions of sexuality and gender, especially those connected with homosexuality, a new and challenging subject for readers and writers.

At the end of the 1980s, when censorship of all kinds diminished, Latvian readers had an opportunity to acquire information about sexual subjects, concerning both heterosexual and homosexual themes. Knowledge of homosexuality had to be learnt from scratch – there had been no Latvian homophile movement in the interwar period. Since 1988 various articles on homosexuality, gay men and lesbians appeared in the Latvian youth magazine 'Liesma' and other periodicals, cautiously touching upon the subject – appreciation of foreign gay pop stars went hand in hand with suspicion and mockery of local people who tried to raise the question. An important question was the threat of AIDS, presented to people as a homosexual disease that came from the West where anything goes. Except for USA-born Latvian journalist Kārlis Streips, who moved to Latvia in 1989, there were no publicly gay persons in Latvia, others preferred to stay in the closet even if their sexual orientation was a widely known secret. Slowly, real life stories started to appear about foreign men and also, anonymous stories about Latvian gays. The organisation of Latvian gay liberation was sporadic and ineffective, the government and the public started to discuss the problems of homosexuals only in 2005 when the first Riga Pride took place. Up till then, homosexuals in Latvia were perceived as only physiological beings who secretly engaged in sexual practices and whose existence had no particular connection with culture. This is the background of the first mention of homosexuals in Latvian short prose.

The first closeted homosexual in Latvian short prose dates back to the end of the 19th century in a short story by Rūdolfs Blaumanis 'The White One' (Baltis,

1896). In the story, the painter Jānis adores a simple, pure farmhand, also named Jānis.

Later, in the interwar period, the subject of homosexuality, still criminalized, was mentioned mostly in the tabloid press. There were also some attempts to depict modern urban homosexuality in short stories, emphasising the physiological side and brutality of such contacts. For example, a young and innocent woman gets an invitation to serve in a secret ‘naked club’ for wealthy older men and after the ceremony the mistress of the house forces her to engage in lesbian sex; or – a young and poor male student is trapped in an apartment where cruel mature homosexuals try to rape him.

In Soviet times, homosexuals were just some episodic characters in foreign news or satirical stories about life in the ‘rotten’ capitalist West, thus at the end of the 1980s queer life, quite like sexuality itself, seemed to readers a new and shocking theme.

It took some time for Latvian writers to put homosexuals at the centre of their novels, the first examples appeared at the beginning of the 21st century – ‘Entrance of the Thief of Hearts’ (Siržu Zagļa Uznāciens, 2001) by Zigmunds Skujiņš, ‘1945 Rīga’ (2001) by Ainārs Zelčs, ‘Behind the Glass’ (Viņpus Stikla, 2006) and ‘Insomnia’ (2010) by Ilze Jansone. The first examples were short prose pieces.

3. Latvian Short Stories: The Homosexual as the ‘Other’

At the end of the 1980s, a homosexual in public discourse was merely an object of mockery, a negative example whose existence disciplined men within the framework of, as Robert Connell has called it, ‘hegemonic masculinity.’² The protagonist of a short story by Aivars Ozoliņš (born 1957) ‘Almost One Hundred’ (Gandrīz Simts, written in 1986, published in 1989), Pēteris, tortured by the terrible smell of a man sitting next to him on a bus, does not dare stand up and offer his place to some other man: ‘There were only big fellows around him [...]. How can a young man offer his place to them? He will be taken for mad or, heaven forbid, a poofier.’³

Soon homosexuals appear as real persons, endowed with stereotypical qualities. In Gundega Repše’s (born 1960) story ‘Night of the Century’ (Gadsimta Nakts, first published in 1990), the writer introduces the reader to various people staying at a writer and artist residence, and to their complicated relationships. One of the residents is Justs, an amateur theatre director, ‘very delicate and compassionate’ who spends considerable time comforting Trūde, a painter, whose husband has recently left her. The first thing we get to know about Justs is that he is a homosexual, later this label is accompanied by a remark that he loves to wear different scarves; he also agrees with Trūde that ‘all men are pigs;’ every evening he phones his mother. All these clichés are concluded by a denial of his identity: ‘Justs was raped in juvenile detention, still he’s not a homosexual. He wants Trūde to finally understand that.’⁴ Despite this characterisation that seems to prove Justs’

queer sensibility, he desperately tries to prove to himself and others his 'normality.'

Another episodic homosexual is present in a story by Nora Ikstena (born 1969) 'Loss of Balance' (Līdzsvara Zudums, first published in 1993). The existence of homosexuals is one of the things that make the conflict-ridden protagonist of the story lose her balance:

I am worried because I often meet homosexuals. One of them (even though a foreigner) said that he would marry me if only I was a man. He is a Norwegian, and we spent many interesting moments in his house. [...] Very recently his sister visited me and told me now his lover has AIDS. It turned out that this love affair had gone on for ten years but now it had passionately flared up, leaving him breathless.⁵

Ikstena introduces one of the first AIDS afflicted homosexuals in Latvian prose. Later other authors will follow her example, considering this malady a logical consequence of gay sex.

More detailed characters appear in another story by Gundega Repše, 'Miraculous Fishing' (Brīnumainā Zveja, 1994). Its female protagonist, a humble librarian named Pērle (Pearl), unexpectedly inherits the apartment and wealth of her acquaintance, a society woman Elizabete who has suddenly died in a car accident. Pearl gradually becomes Elizabete's substitute for Elizabete's extravagant friends. One of them is Filips, a homosexual who discretely asks for money to help get his lover Diks out of prison. Diks was the taxi driver at the wheel of the car when Elizabete suffered deathly injuries and now he has to face the trial. As it turns out later, it is all lies – there was no trial, and Diks is an actor, not a taxi driver. When Filips and Diks end their love affair, Filips goes to Sweden and at the end of the story returns the swindled money to Pērle. Homosexuals, as depicted by Repše, are mysterious, untruthful people who have to hide and pretend all the time. Filips complains about Elizabete's other friends who do not accept him: 'They don't love me, they're all normal, proper, do you understand?'⁶ By naming her character Diks (a clear association with the English word 'dick'), Repše is probably hinting at physical contact as the main aspect of gay relations.

Valdis Felsbergs (born 1966) in his debut collection 'Unrest' (Nemiers, 1994) tried to shock the reader, depicting various scenes of sex and violence that would not have passed censorship in Soviet times – among murders, rape and cannibalism there is also homosexuality in two stories. However, according to critic Guntis Berelis, all these 'shocking' actions have been depicted in a very trivial manner.⁷

In Felsbergs' story 'Emancipation' (Brīvlaišana) the narrator, a young man, has been employed in a firm by an older man who turns out to be gay. The narrator has had experience with homosexuals before – he has accepted their invitations to

drink in their apartments late at night but has refused to have sex with them afterwards. This time his relationship with his boss grows more personal, the boss even starts to embody a father figure for the narrator. The culmination of the story is another late drinking bout with the boss which ends in oral sex, with both the narrator and his boss using each other as surrogates – both fantasising about another young man, a friend of the narrator who is now married and unapproachable. The narrator is probably suppressing his own homosexual feelings towards the other young man (the whole story is a narrative in the second person, addressed to the other young man); after sex with his boss the narrator decides to look for another job.⁸

This story depicts the conception of homosexuals as vulnerable, outlawed persons who can be used or blackmailed without any consequences, just as it was in the recent Soviet period.

Another story in Felsbergs' collection, 'Miraculous Beach' (Brīnišķīgā Pludmale), depicts a lesbian couple, the younger one a student of the older one, and their happy holidays in Cyprus. These holidays take place just some months after Latvia regained independence in 1991, so this happy, undisturbed lesbian existence (there is not much action in this story) seems to be a promise of a new, liberal life that is yet to come.

Another kind of queer narrative besides observations of real life is the one Brian J. Baer has attributed to post-Soviet authors of Russian literature like Viktor Pelevin, and Vladimir Sorokin. For them homosexuality is an embodiment of a repetitive and self-referential game without any utilitarian function, it is merely a metaphor for an aesthetic that refuses to obey rules of mimesis. According to this understanding, literature is an aesthetic object and does not pretend to be anything more.⁹ These features in Latvian literature of the 1990s have been associated with the influence of postmodernism.

This concept is important, speaking of such stories as 'Cacao' (Kakao, written in 1997) by the budding writer of the younger generation Ieva Melgalve (born 1981). This narrative in the second person has been told to a young bisexual transvestite who plays bass guitar, thinks of starting a band and wears flowered dresses. He lives with his girl Steidža (from the English 'stage') and at the same time engages in sexual actions with 'old perverts,' unnamed men that Steidža is angry with and calls 'pederasts.' Their relationship ends when the transvestite departs to do military service. The whole story consists of small numbered paragraphs, seemingly mimicking a novel the transvestite is planning to write, thus becoming self-referential. In another story from the collection, 'Consumption' (Dilonis), Melgalve introduces a protagonist without a certain gender identity who has contracted AIDS.

Another writer of the the young generation, Edmunds Frīdvalds (born 1971), in his debut collection of stories published the text 'Rubber Faithfulness' (Gumijas Uzticība, 2001). It is a story of two male lovers, one of them married, who met at a

seaside hotel while on holiday. We meet them during their love making scene on a big stone on a remote beach. The married one, called Hermanis, wears a dress and pearl lipstick, his partner Marx has AIDS (once again!), so their sex has to be safe. However, the condom has gotten hot in the sun and will probably get torn if used. At this point the author leaves his characters alone and starts an essay about faithfulness, whose norms in the contemporary world can be stretched out like rubber, leaving the conclusion of the story, as well as inferences about the moral evaluation of the characters' actions, open.

In his story entitled 'New Poets' (2002) in English Frīdvalds unites homosexuality and creativity, trying to shock the audience with short, unrelated scenes. The first is an idyllic landscape in the late evening in the countryside, the second – a conversation peppered with slang and uncultivated language between two, as it can be inferred from the dialogue, young writers-homosexuals. They try to arrange mutual casual sex at the same time as discussing their creative work and the amount of money they have earned from homosexual prostitution. The third scene features two lesbians who make love accompanied by songs by the 'Velvet Underground.' One of them pretends to write a book by typing imaginary keys on her partner's back.¹⁰

Another self-referential game is the metaphor of a mirror that has been used, for example, by Andra Neiburga (born 1957) in her story 'Provincial Eurydice' (Provinces Euridīče, first published in 2003). The story depicts two friends of the actress Eurydice, a star in a provincial theatre; they are two theatre critics, a gay male couple Artūrs and Artūrs who have come to celebrate her birthday:

Old friends of Eurydice since student years, together already for tens of years, both of them theatre critics, both of them brilliant and intellectual, so to say, too brilliant, too intellectual for this place and time, and, in general, too much – for this town with its single theatre doing five productions a year.¹¹

Similar mirroring of personal names can also be observed in stories by other authors, for example, the homosexual protagonist of Ikstena's story (2006) is called Konstantinovs Konstantinovs.

The homosexual as the 'other' in Latvian contemporary prose has been linked with such features as closeted existence, hiding and lying, silence, creative work (especially literature and music), blurred boundaries between sexes (feminine men and masculine women), and living outside the framework of the traditional Latvian lifestyle. Usually the reader gets to know him/her only for a short moment – authors cannot envision queer existence as enduring in time, it has to emerge and disappear quickly. Sometimes naive or declarative, this type of queer narrative is gradually preparing the reader for the 'queer as self' narrative that has been gaining ground in Latvian prose in the 21st century.

Notes

- ¹ Matthew Bell, 'Queer Theory', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, eds. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 477-478.
- ² Robert Connell, 'Maskulinitātes un Globalizācija', trans. Inguna Beķere, *Mūsdienu Feministiskās Teorijas*, ed. Irina Novikova (Rīga: Jumava, 2001), 315-341.
- ³ Aivars Ozoliņš, *Gandrīz Simts* (Rīga: Zinātne, 1989), 130-131.
- ⁴ Gundega Repše, *Septiņi Stāsti par Milu* (Rīga: Literatūra un Māksla, 1992), 16.
- ⁵ Nora Ikstena, *Starp Divām Durvīm* (Rīga: Dienas Grāmata, 2012), 187.
- ⁶ Gundega Repše, *Šolaiku Bestiārijs* (Rīga: Daugava, 1994), 52.
- ⁷ Guntis Berelis, 'Mīļotās Smadzenes auzu Putriņas Vietā', *Labrīt*, May 12 1994.
- ⁸ Valdis Felsbergs, *Nemiers* (Rīga: Gandrs, 1994), 201-218.
- ⁹ Brian J. Baer, *Other Russias: Homosexuality and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 123.
- ¹⁰ Edmunds Frīdvalds, 'New Poets', *Karogs* 8 (2002): 114-118.
- ¹¹ Andra Neiburga, *Stum, Stum* (Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 2004), 220.

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Part 2

All the World's a Stage: Femininities and Masculinities Performed

Orientating Queer Femininities: Theorising the Impact of Positionalities on the Performative Embodiment of Queer Feminine Subjectivities

Alexa Athelstan

Abstract

This chapter draws on the initial findings of my PhD research, which theorises queer, alternative and subversive feminine orientations, embodiment and subjectivity in everyday life. Using a theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of the habitus, Judith Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity and Sara Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology concerning processes of orientation, I investigate how subjects who identify their femininity as being queer, alternative or subversive, manifest their gender identity according to the affects, objects, people, spaces, aesthetics and positioned intersections of identity that they orientate themselves towards and away from. The project uses a mixed methodological approach involving a discursive analysis of three major queer feminine subcultural texts, Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri's (2003) *Brazen Femme*, Ulrika Dahl and Del LaGrace Volcano's (2008) *Femmes of Power* and Jennifer Clare Burke's (2009) *Visible: A Femmethology*, as well as interviews and visual materials in the forms of collages and photographs produced by 15 queer feminine participants in the UK. This chapter explores the question of why positionalities matter for theorising queer feminine orientations. It discusses how various intersecting positionalities, including 'race,' ethnicity, disability, class, age, sex, gender, sexuality, size and geographical location orientate queer feminine identities, by shaping, limiting and producing specific modes of queer feminine embodiment and subjectivity.

Key Words: Queer femininity, visual methods, positionality, intersectionality, identity, embodiment, orientations, Ahmed.

1. Introducing Queer Feminine Orientations

This chapter draws on the initial findings of my PhD research, which theorises queer, alternative and subversive feminine orientations, embodiment and subjectivity in everyday life. Using a theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of the habitus, Judith Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity and Sara Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology concerning processes of orientation, I investigate how subjects who identify their femininity as being queer, alternative or subversive, manifest their gender identity according to the affects, objects, people, spaces, aesthetics and positioned intersections of identity that they orientate themselves towards and away from. The project uses a

mixed methodological approach involving a discursive analysis of three major queer feminine subcultural texts, Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri's (2003) *Brazen Femme*, Ulrika Dahl and Del LaGrace Volcano's (2008) *Femmes of Power* and Jennifer Clare Burke's (2009) *Visible: A Femmethology*, as well as interviews and visual materials in the forms of collages and photographs produced by 15 queer feminine participants in the UK. This chapter explores the question of why positionalities matter for theorising queer feminine orientations. It discusses how various intersecting positionalities, including 'race,' ethnicity, disability, class, age, sex, gender, sexuality, size and geographical location orientate queer feminine identities. In exploring how intersecting positionalities shape queer feminine orientations, I am particularly interested in theorising the margins of queer femininity to mark out where the invisible boundaries of this identity category lie. I therefore draw on the 'subjugated knowledges'¹ present in the talk of my queer feminine participants and the narratives of the three published texts. The chapter begins by discussing the relevance of positionality for Sarah Ahmed's theorisation of processes of orientation, before exploring how positionalities orientate the gender identities of my queer, alternative and subversive feminine participants. Throughout this chapter, I argue that positionalities are central for theorising orientating processes as starting points that contribute to shaping, limiting and producing different specific modes of queer feminine embodied subjectivities.

2. Why Positionalities Matters for Theorising Queer Feminine Orientations

In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) and 'Phenomenology of Whiteness' (2007), Sara Ahmed describes how processes of orientation help us to find our way in the world. Here Ahmed argues that 'bodies are shaped by what they tend toward,'² or repetitively orientate themselves around, and that these orientating tendencies are anchored in various 'starting points.'³ She describes starting points as being about 'how we begin' and 'precede' from the present 'here,' which constitutes 'the zero point of orientation, the point from which the world unfolds.'⁴ Whilst Ahmed theorises this starting point broadly as 'the "here of the body" and the "where of its dwelling,"'⁵ I argue that the subject and its situatedness in the social world would be another way of understanding this dynamic. Indeed, positionality is already strongly present in Ahmed's theorisation of processes of orientation and their starting points in her drawing on feminist, queer and critical 'race' scholars, including Audre Lorde (1984), Patricia Hill Collins (1991) and Donna Haraway (1991), who theorise 'a politics of location as a form of situated dwelling.'⁶ Positionalities are furthermore present in Ahmed's argument that orientations are 'not simply casual,' but 'organised,' since we inherit our bodily habit(u)s, what is on or off our bodily horizons, proximate or out of reach, as well as the directions that we face and the way in which 'the body gets directed in some ways more than others.'⁷ Thus, Ahmed describes a largely performative self-perpetuating loop

where what we can come into contact with and what embodied subjects can do or become, is shaped by what they are already orientated towards, due to their inherited starting points. Ahmed argues that ‘What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations we have already taken.’⁸ She illustrates this through the example of whiteness and her own mixed-race genealogy, citing these as modes of orientation with inherited starting points that place certain things – including ‘physical objects (...) styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits’ and modes of comportment, behaviour or through – in or out of reach.⁹ Therefore, in so far as the things that we orientate ourselves towards are not casual, but are influenced by our ‘starting points’ (hence our positionalities), orientations are arguably about the situated starting points of ‘race,’ ethnicity, disability, class, age, sex, gender, sexuality, size and geographical location, amongst others.

3. Positioning Queer Feminine Orientations

One major point of orientation – to begin by following Ahmed’s own focus on the body and its dwelling place – is the often unacknowledged positionality of the geographical location that participants inhabit. In contrast to the predominantly city-dwelling femmes depicted in the three published texts, who are situated in what Ulrika Dahl calls the ‘queer urban Meccas’¹⁰ of North America, Europe and Australia, a few of my interview participants reported the impact that living in the countryside has on the embodiment of their queer gender identities – particularly in terms of queer feminine visibility. Sue, a gothic queer feminine participant who positions herself as an aspirational ‘city slicker stuck in rural Wales,’ describes how her geographical location simultaneously limits and heightens the performances of the queer gender identity available to her. On the one hand, Sue argues that ‘living in the countryside, it is easier to stand out as non conformist, which feeds into the ease of access of a non normative performance of femininity.’ On the other hand, she is also restrained by this positionality:

I don’t tend to do the whole Goth thing in Pembrokeshire because people will laugh at you. (...) I’ve come up here [a Welsh city] to teach and I’ve been wearing platforms and stuff, fine. Got off the train in Pembrokeshire, not fine. It’s too much! (...) You don’t have to be quite so far out to be outrageous in a small rural community (...) I went to London and I wore a full length velvet coat to the Albert Hall. No worries. You imagine wearing it in Pembrokeshire. (...) You just don’t have to push it as far, to stand out in Pembrokeshire, I think that’s probably where it falls down to, because if you do push it too far, you become ridiculous.

Not only does geographical location limit how far Sue can go with her queer and gothic gender identity, it arguably also produces a very different economy of what is visible as queerly feminine. Indeed, what is queer, alternative or subversive in the countryside or in a smaller city may be normalised in the big city. In this way, Sue challenges us to question how queer femininities are typically represented and what our queer feminine visual radars are subsequently able to recognise as queerly feminine, or not. Indeed, Sue's account is in stark contrast to accounts by urban queer femmes like Hedwig and Vikki. Both acknowledge their privilege of being able to engage with a relatively safe, diverse and liberating queer community in London, which Vikki describes as offering her a nurturing 'support network' that allows her to explore and express her sexual and gendered choices.

Considering queer femininities and femme are typically theorised as a feminine gender orientation that intersects with a queer sexuality (indeed, historically, a specifically lesbian one), sexuality would seem the most obvious way of orientating queer femininities.¹¹ However, as my 'heterosexual' queer feminine participants show, sexuality can also be a problematic way of theorising these feminine identities, especially when sexuality is invoked as a 'distinction'¹² between 'normative' (heterosexual) and 'subversive' (queer) femininities. These distinctions are particularly troubled by the fact that not all those who would identify with queer femininity – or as having a queer sexuality – are able to fully access and inhabit this identity in their everyday lives. Sue, who is in a monogamous, heterosexual marriage with a cisgendered heterosexual male, describes how she strongly identifies her sexuality as queer – in fact, as gay. However, due to various positioned factors like her working class status, economic dependence, family and rural geographical location, along with her mental health, means that Sue prioritises her need for stability over her sexual desires or identity. Arguably, Sue embodies Biddy Martin's proposition that 'queerness is not always where we might expect to find it.'¹³ Furthermore, Sue highlights that queer identities and communities can be exclusionary of those for whom other parts of their lives or identities take precedence over their queer sexual or gendered orientation, even whilst they strongly identify with and position themselves as queer.

Disabilities, especially mental health, is a further crucial starting point for orientating the queer feminine identities of several of my participants. Particularly in terms of limiting their access to certain typical modes of embodying, conceptualising and rendering queer femininity visible. Their stories highlight that an implicit able-bodied bias lies at the heart of many of the central discourses and practices of queer femininities.¹⁴ Indeed, if queer femininities are typically defined by a fierce display of brazen confidence, the use of certain visual markers or technologies of the body to render queer femininities visible, as well as a desire and ability to deconstruct femininity through spectacular performative failures, then these typical queer feminine visual tropes and performative strategies can be

exclusionary of certain disabled subjects. This point is highlighted by Sarah who describes how suffering from depression and chronic fatigue syndrome, along with her previously lower working class status, orientates what her body can do physically and how she feels about herself psychologically, in her actively seeking and valuing approval for how she performs her femininity:

My representation of self is contingent on feelings of self worth. Also, I want approval. I want people to say nice things to me. I want people to say “awww you look nice today, I like that dress.” So that I can get that sense of “I’ve done it right, I’ve done it right, I look nice, I like this too.” And, then it’s also you’ve got something to chat about, you can feel “I’m doing it correctly, I’m not alienated, I’ve been able to contact people from across that gulf that mental health can create”.

Although Sarah recognises that queer femininities often express a sense of not looking for approval from others. Indeed, queer femininities often operate along the lines of activist fractions like Act Up, with its active disregard approval from mainstream heteronormative cultures. Furthermore, they often embody a Halberstramian ‘queer art of failure’¹⁵ to performatively ‘do’ femininity ‘right.’¹⁶ Sarah articulates how this disregard for approval and these disruptive queer performative failures are simply not a queer feminine gendered performance that is available to her because of her mental health disabilities: ‘I can’t push myself, my mental health isn’t strong enough, I think that it’s something that some people have the luxury to do.’ Similarly, Emma, who describes herself as a ‘failed femme,’ articulates how her chronic fatigue syndrome means that she prioritises comfort and practicality over style and dressing for sociality or being immediately and easily visible as queerly feminine. Sue and Sarah also discuss how their mental health strongly affects their confidence and how they see and feel about themselves, particularly their appearance, from one day to the next. Although evidently brazen, fierce and strong in their own right, Sue and Sarah demonstrate how the hyperbolic bravado of a consistently powerful and confident queer femininity is embedded in an implicit able-bodied bias.

Class also needs to be considered when theorising queer feminine orientations. Crucially, Liz, a young unemployed gender-queer femme, and Sarah, a young research student who grew up below the poverty line, both highlight how one can only be concerned with constructing and consuming a queer feminine identity through engaging with queer feminine technologies of the body once the daily necessities of life are taken care of. Therefore, despite femmes’ historical roots in working class bar cultures¹⁷ and the fact that a number of my participants and those subjects in *Femmes of Power*, *Brazen Femme* and *Femmethology* originally come from working class backgrounds, the ability to participate in the consumption

of queer urban spaces, transnational queer communities and queer feminine modes of embodiment requires a certain amount of ‘economic’ and ‘cultural capital’¹⁸ not available to all. Furthermore – in reference to Beverly Skeggs’ (1997) work on femininity, class and respectability – one could question whether the deconstruction of femininity may itself be a very middle-class occupation. Participants like Sarah, who grew up below the poverty line and suffer from mental health difficulties, may be less willing or able to deconstruct a femininity that they have only recently gained the privilege of accessing:

I reserve the right to, I’ve fought and fought and fought to get where I am and now if I want to spend a stupid amount of money on clothes every so often to treat myself, well fuck it, I will do, because I genuinely get a lot of joy out of it and all those thoughts run through my head that I didn’t used to be able to do this and now I can and that is linked to things like feelings of self-worth and the fact that I now feel that, that I can look nice.

Sarah’s desire to ‘look nice’ and to perform femininity ‘right’ rather than performing disruptive queer feminine failures – actively wanting approval rather than acting disinterested in approval – depicts one of many different possible ways of embodying queer femininity where disability, class and poverty act as orientating starting points.

The materiality of the body, in particular bodily size and shape, constitutes a further starting point. Whilst Peggy articulates how her larger size automatically excludes her from the ‘competition’ of a white western ideal of feminine beauty, which leads her to ‘opt out’ of this competition and embody an alternative femininity according to her own rules. Vikki discusses how for her femininity and fatness are ‘very interlinked’ because it was through her ‘fat embodiment’ excluding her from the ideals of heteronormative femininity, along with her finding fat activism, that she eventually came to her gender-queer femme identity. However, Vikki also articulates how sizeism is inscribed in queer aesthetics by highlighting that Vivien of Holloway, which Vikki describes as ‘queer femme uniform,’ only goes up to a very small size 24. Bobette, a 48-year-old white middle-class transgender participant who defines his queer feminine gender identity as a ‘girly boy,’ describes how his slim frame, with narrow hips, shoulders and a petite bone structure, facilitates the performance of his gender identity as a younger girl, and his shopping for clothes in the teen girl sections of clothing stores. Therefore, Bobette’s petite body acts as one of many intersecting starting points – along with his age, ethnicity and gender – for orientating him towards a queer mode of consumption and embodiment, as an older man who creates his queer feminine identity through orientating himself towards younger and often Japanese-influenced feminine styles. His specific queer feminine embodiment is

furthermore facilitated by his engagement with the kink scene in London, rendered available largely through his white, middle-class and city-dwelling positionalities.

The way that ‘race,’ ethnicity and whiteness orientate queer femininities is particularly evident in the aesthetics and heroines chosen by participants as points of identification. Whilst Jess, a white American participant of mixed European descent, references rock musician Joan Jett and a friend, whom she describes as:

She’s really beautiful in a way that a lot of people aren’t anymore, you know, she has that kind of old world beauty thing that you see in fashion drawings from like the 19th century or, like the pre-Raphaelites, again, I really like their art work, she looks like one of those paintings came to life and put on a pair of jeans, you know *laughter* and what artist wouldn’t like that,

as inspirations for her own idea of feminine beauty and alternative gender identity. Hem, a mixed-race Bengali-Indian Jewish-British participant, who identifies as both butch *and* femme, references a mixture of influences including Hindu goddesses like Kali, fiction that explores the identities of women of colour and fiction concerning marginalised sexualities, as well as Ulrika Dahl and Del LaGrace Volcano’s (2008) *Femmes of Power* and Ann Cvetkovich’s (2003) *An Archive of Feelings*. One could posit the question of whether whiteness functions in the self-perpetuating fashion that Ahmed describes as a ‘bad habit’¹⁹ in many of the accounts by white femmes where colour lines are implicitly present or redrawn, although the opposite is often claimed through a discourse of diversity and inclusion.²⁰ Indeed, despite the inclusion of femmes of colour in queer feminine anthologies and community events, the white starting point and centre of these queer subcultures and embodied subjectivities – its idealised muses, vocabulary and aesthetics – are nevertheless highlighted by many femmes of colour, including T.J. Bryan (a.k.a Tenacious) in *Brazen Femme*:

Femme....

Someone chose this word. Designed it. Refined it. Millions heard it and applied it to Monroe, Hayworth, Dietrich, Leigh, Davis, Garbo, Harlow’s Gold. A cataract-colored iris, blue-veined, cream or pink-tipped tittie, fatally Femme(y) glass menagerie. Not necessarily a legacy for me. I KNOW YOUR SHEROES. DO YOU KNOW MINE?

(...) Maybe this word Femme ain’t all that. Could be Femme’s just some bull sounding’ sweet in another colonizing master tongue. Two solitudes or two hundred, it’s all the same to me.

Peut-être je dois trouver une autre langue. Quelque chose plus vivante. Fièrre. Rempli de ma réalité. Rempli de moi. Comprenez-vous mes autre noms? Répétez ceci après moi: Sapphire. Hoo/chee Mama. Pidgeon. Skeezer. Heifer. Ho.

FEMME? SURE.... I'M A FEMME.²¹

4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored why positionalities matter for orientating queer feminine embodied subjectivities. It has demonstrated how multiple intersecting positionalities work simultaneously to orientate subjects towards and away from specific ways of performatively embodying their queer feminine identities. Indeed, intersecting positionalities form the background and starting point for constructing queer feminine identities and styles of embodiment, yet they also form the end point or foreground since positionalities are not only the point from which we proceed, but also what is performatively (re)produced as they become visually (re)inscribed on the surface of the body. Therefore, positionalities are both the cause and effect of queer feminine styles of embodied subjectivities. Furthermore, positionalities are implicitly present, if not always explicitly acknowledged and consciously articulated, in shaping, enabling, and limiting certain orientations, definitions, constructions, and performances of queer feminine embodied subjectivities. Positionalities function as a starting point by opening up and closing down, rendering available or unavailable, making possible or limiting, through access to certain objects, subjects and discourses, styles of embodiment, identification and disidentification, life events, communities, spaces, texts, affects and experiences, which all contribute to the construction of individual queer feminine identities. Intersecting positionalities are thus a crucial influence in shaping the precise forms that different individual queer feminine subjectivities and styles of embodiment take.

Notes

¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Collin Gordon (Harlow: Longman, 1980), 78-92.

² Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 129.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 and 21.

⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁹ Sara Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', *Feminist Theory* 8, No. 2 (2007): 154.

¹⁰ Ulrika Dahl and Del LaGrace Volcano, *Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities* (London: Serpents Tail, 2008), 24.

¹¹ For previous studies on femme and queer femininities, as these relate to lesbian or queer sexuality see: Joan Nestle, *Persistent Desire* (1992), Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather* (1996), Laura Harris and Liz Crocker, *Femme* (1997), Sally Munt, *Butch / Femme* (1998), Anna Camilleri, *Brazen Femme* (2003), Ulrika Dahl and Del LaGrace Volcano, *Femmes of Power* (2008), and Jennifer Clare Burke *Visible: A Femmethology* (2009), amongst others.

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1984).

¹³ Biddy Martin, *Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being Lesbian* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 14.

¹⁴ Jennifer Clare Burke, ed., *Visible: A Femmethology* (Michigan: Homofactus Press, 2009). See essays by Leslie Freeman, Peggy Munson and Sharon Wachsler, for further insights on queer femininities, disability and ableism.

¹⁵ Judith Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: London: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁷ For discussions of the USA working class lesbian origins of femme please see: Joan Nestle, *Persistent Desire* (1992), Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather* (1996) and Laura Harris and Liz Crocker, *Femme* (1997).

¹⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

¹⁹ Ahmed, 'Phenomenology of Whiteness', 149-168.

²⁰ For a critical discussion on the problematics of 'inclusion' rhetorics please see: Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

²¹ Chloë Brushwood Rose and Anna Camilleri, eds., *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002), 155. Translation: 'Maybe I have to find another language. Something more lively. Fierce. Filled with my reality. Filled with myself. Do you understand my other names? Repeat after me: Sapphire. Hoo/chee Mama. Pidgeon. Skeezer. Heifer. Ho.'

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Croatian Tales of Long Ago: Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić's Covert Autobiography

Vivijana Radman

Abstract

Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić is the first woman accepted as a member of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts and one of the finest writers ever to have written in Croatian language. Being born into a politically prominent family, she accepted the ideals of her circle and enthusiastically endeavoured to fulfil her duties determined by the patriarchal values she idealised as inherently ethical. Writing was not among the duties for well bred ladies, so, to be able to write and still comply with what she considered to be her role, she had to find a form of writing compatible with the role of a woman. Since motherhood is the essence of femininity in patriarchy, and since storytelling is what mothers do, writing fairytales could be understood as a compromise between what she should and should not do as a woman, between the essentially masculine act of writing and essentially feminine act of teaching her children language and values through storytelling. Even if in the choice of genre she was not rebellious, and avoided the confrontation with the masculine authority by not interfering with the realm of the public sphere, but conforming to the privacy of family life and literature, the history of her inner struggle to find creative outlet, to emancipate from limitations imposed on her gender is still central to her work. On the manifest level, her fairy tales promote the dominant ethical values, but the subtext, the hidden conflicts and their resolutions tell an entirely different story, the story of the emancipation of her Self from the authority of the masculine. Her creative strategy, the interplay of the manifest and the latent, the simultaneous divinisation and the rejection of the patriarchal, the subtle subversion of the masculine authority are what this chapter intends to discuss, thus discussing the gender issues reflected.

Key Words: Female duties, masculine authority, creative strategy, female authorship, emancipation, patriarchal values.

Ivana Brlić Mažuranić (1874-1938) is the first woman accepted as a Member of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (1937). Her works have been translated into 40 languages, most recently Japanese, Bengali and Persian, and to this day she remains unchallenged as the most translated Croatian author. Since the time of their first publication, her works have met exclusively with critical acclaim and public admiration, both home and abroad, and she was twice nominated for Nobel Prize in literature (1931 and 1938). Scholarly interest in Brlić-Mažuranić's works equals and reflects her readers' fascination – it is continuous, passionate and

in complete awe of its subject, the appeal of which remains as mysterious as Mona Lisa smile.

After this introduction one must wonder what it was that she wrote to inspire such respect and earn herself a place in the Croatian literary canon. The answer might come as surprise: she wrote books for children and her major work, *Croatian Tales of Long Ago* (1916), is a collection of fairy tales.

So, not only did Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić become the first female writer in Croatia to be recognised by an all-male and in every sense masculine institution as an equal in literary mastery, but she managed to do it through the least likely channel: as a writer of a non-prestigious genre. The choice of this genre I understand as illustrative of her creative strategy, of the ways she devised to find a creative outlet in a context which did not encourage women to write, even if it did, eventually, reward this one who dared and succeeded.

Also, I consider her literary voice to be strongly marked by her gender, i.e. by the experience of being a woman in the specific historical and cultural context, and I find the gender issues she interwove into her writing to be central to the success of her *Tales*, as they subverted the genre from within, pushed it into a new and original direction. It is as interesting as it is significant that, even if her *Tales* have been extensively studied, gender approach has, until recently, been completely lacking and the originality of her voice and the magical appeal of her work attributed to anything but her experience of being of the 'wrong' sex.

She was born into a politically prominent family, the members of which have left a profound mark on Croatia's history and culture. Her grandfather, Ivan Mažuranić, was a renowned epic poet and an accomplished political leader at the time of the nineteenth-century Croatian national revival, a panslavic movement which aimed at a Croatian national establishment in Austria-Hungary through linguistic and ethnic union of South Slavs. She passionately accepted the ideals of her social and cultural circle and enthusiastically endeavoured to live up to her role in the patriarchal order of things, to fulfil and even excel at her duties as a woman and, within the framework of her role and position, contribute to panslavic, romantic nationalist, Mažuranić's cause. The figure of her grandfather figures highly in her writings and always as the highest authority on the questions of morality. The same as she idolised her impressive grandfather, she idealised the patriarchal values he stood for; she considered them inherently ethical and never thought of openly questioning them. She never was, nor intended to be, rebellious, to oppose the authority, to challenge the order and her position within it. She only wanted to please. Only, she also wanted to write.

But writing was not among the duties for well bred ladies: in her *Autobiography* (1916) she said: '...very early in life my own reasoning led me to understand that writing collides with woman's duties.'¹ It was unbecoming for women to write for a number of reasons and the only kind of writing tolerated was the private kind – writing of diaries, letters, recipes and menus. Only the last two

were encouraged; spending too much time writing one's diary, if one was female, was seen as a form of indulgence, a waste of time which could otherwise be put to better use.

So, writing for Brlić-Mažuranić began as a secret indulgence. The diary given to her as a gift by her cousin Fran Mažuranić, himself a lyric poet, was no more than a toy granted to a privileged girl, the toy she must renounce once she is grown enough to take over the role of a real woman. She started writing it when she was fourteen and ended abruptly a month before her engagement at seventeen and a half. It is a typical diary of a teenager: sincere, overexcited and very informative of her circumstances. It is dominated by her emotional life, her awakened interest in young men and her enjoyment of the game of courtship. The diaries reveal other information too.

From the very beginning, she fantasises about a writing career and even conceives of a masculine pseudonym she could use to help her rise to literary heights. But it was just daydreaming, not a plan, something to actually attempt at. Stories she writes at the time are barely disguised wish fulfilments figuring her as a male hero leading the kind of life she wanted for herself, a life modelled after her male role models, a life she, as a woman, could never lead.

Judging from her diaries she saw woman as imperfect man, intellectually inadequate and in many respects his inferior. On the other hand, she revered motherhood beyond any other human accomplishment. Even if, without a doubt, these were learned perceptions of a very young person, it does seem that she did not have an intellectually stimulating female friend, and she would, on occasion, regret being a woman, as she felt different from other girls and identified with men or with what she considered to be masculine in culture and civilisation.

So, she had a big problem. She wanted to please the masculine she admired and wanted to be like, and most of all wanted to be like in the act of writing, but it was exactly that act of writing that was displeasing to the masculine. In a situation like that, it seems that one would have to make a choice: please the masculine by being the woman of his design and give up on the idea of writing, or write in spite of the masculine disapproval.

But Brlić-Mažuranić was able to find a compromise. To be able to write and still comply with what she considered to be her duty she had to find a form of writing compatible with the role of woman. Since motherhood is the essence of femininity in patriarchy, and since storytelling is what good mothers do, the choice to write fairytales could be understood as a compromise between what she should and should not do as a woman, between the essentially masculine act of writing and the essentially feminine act of teaching her children language and values through storytelling.

Even if in the choice of genre she was not rebellious and avoided confrontation with the masculine authority by not interfering with the realm of the public sphere, by not appropriating the epic discourse of her grandfather who addressed the

masses, but conforming to the privacy of family life and literature while addressing those in her care, the history of her inner struggle to find a creative outlet, to emancipate from the limitations imposed on her gender, is central to her work. On the manifest level, her fairy tales promote the dominant ethical values of her society, but the subtext, the hidden conflicts and their resolutions tell an entirely different story, the story of the emancipation of her Self from the authority, the emancipation which took her years to reach for. Her creative strategy, the interplay of the manifest and the latent, the simultaneous divinisation and the rejection of the patriarchal, the subtle subversion of the masculine authority which never even notices being removed from the pedestal is what makes her stories so exceptional, so extraordinary among fairytales.

Ivana Brlić Mažuranić stopped writing her diary abruptly, a month preceding her engagement to Vatroslav Brlić, a descendant of a distinguished family and her father's political ally. The last entries are as involved with her romantic life as ever and Brlić's proposal, though mentioned, is mentioned in passing, almost as something that did not really concern her. At first, she tried to resist the marriage, but being an obedient daughter she eventually gave in to her father's wishes and married Brlić on her eighteenth birthday. In the midst of her teenage infatuations and excitements of life in the capital city, she was taken away from her family to be married to a man 12 years her senior whom she barely knew and move with him to Slavonski Brod, a distant province town, from which she did not return to Zagreb for ten years.

Luckily, Brlić turned out to be a kind and supportive man, and the marriage was a happy one. But the hardships of early years in Slavonia are reflected in the letters to her mother. Together with questions regarding housekeeping matters, there are passages that reveal how much she missed everything she left behind: her mother, her friends, her social and her intellectual life.²

Still, she led a very active life. Apart from tending to her duties as a wife and a mother of seven, she took to organise Brlić family archives and to prepare her father in law's correspondence for publication. Her husband being a member of Croatian Parliament, she joined in local public life and was involved in charity work. Of this period she writes that with all the care for the family and with her public obligations she completely gave up on her dreams of writing.³

Yet, in 1902 she privately published a collection of stories for children: *The Good and the Mischievous: Poems and Tales for Boys*. The publication was intended for friends and family members, and this is what she said of this turning point in her life:

When my children were big enough to develop a desire to read, I suddenly realised that I had found the point where my desire to write makes peace with my understanding of my duties. My children wanted to read – what a joy for me to be their guide...to

open for them the doors into the glorious world every child enters when it starts reading for the first time...How could such work disagree with my duties?!...This peace was made naturally, of its own accord, without me even knowing; one day I simply sat down to write my first book...⁴

Croatian Tales of Long Ago, written when she was 42, are the work of the already established author. The original title could best be translated as *Tales of Long Ago*, but since the first of its numerous translations the adjective *Croatian* is typically added. This addition of *Croatian* as the distinguishing mark of these tales abroad seems to suggest that her stories are folk in origin and that, as such, they somehow reflect the identity, spirit, morals and traditions of Croatian people. Also, calling her stories *Croatian* adds a masculine quality to her prose, legitimises her otherwise illegitimate, female attempt at authorship.

In a letter to her son referring to the popular, mistaken perception of her original work as folk in origin or inspiration, she strongly declares her authorship:

...these stories are in their essence as much as in their execution purely and completely my original work. They are built around names and characters taken from Slavic mythology and that is all and in itself external connection with folk mythology. Not a single scene, a single plot, a single development, a single tendency in these stories was found ready in our mythology.⁵

The originality of her work established, she gladly admits her debt to the masculine and agrees to be the voice of the Slavic experience since it is in harmony with her proclaimed panslavic ideals and her strategy of avoiding the conflict.

It is Slavic emotions, Slavic yearnings, Slavic understanding that our soul is made from. When we succeed to ...write something directly from our heart, then all that is written is indeed a true Slavic folk poetry.⁶

This acknowledgment notwithstanding, it is clear that Brlić-Mažuranić considered the originality of her own voice to be essential to the stories. About storytelling as the realm of articulation of her Self, she explains:

...my children were all grown up, and didn't need a guide anymore; they walked beside me and could understand not only that which they had been told for their own sake, but also that which had slipped my pen out of my heart's desire. ...there is different value in teaching someone and in confiding in someone.

...you only need to find the tiniest passage for your desires, and they will make it into wide open gates.⁷

Since it is beyond the scope of this chapter to thoroughly analyse individual stories, her strategy of embedding her own issues, of integrating her own voice in the traditional genre of the dominant literature, will be illustrated by the short analysis of the first story from the *Tales* entitled *How Potjeh Searched for the Truth*. It deals with the problem of the emancipation of the Self from the authority, and can be considered her declaration of independence.

The story is set in the woods where a wise and just Grandfather lives with his three grandsons. One morning boys inadvertently summon god Svarožić, who shows them all of the world's treasures, all power, all knowledge, and then tells them to: 'Stay with the grandfather and repay him his love.'⁸ Seeing this, Master Demon who hates Grandfather because of the holy fire in his heath, sends his demons to possess the boys and divert them from the righteous path. The demons make two older boys, confused by the experience, lie about what they have seen and heard. They tell the grandfather that they were foretold the future of wealth and might, and then leave to pursue these goals. The youngest, Potjeh, 'who loved the truth,'⁹ resists his demon's influence and declares that 'he doesn't know what he has seen or heard,'¹⁰ which is an interesting choice of words, since 'doesn't remember' would be a more accurate phrase. Against the grandfather's plea not to leave him, he sets into the woods to find/remember the truth or die. Even if Potjeh refuses to lie, Master Demon's goal is accomplished – Grandfather is separated from his children. A year passes, but Potjeh, alone with his demon in the heart of the enchanted woods, is no closer to remembering, because the demon diverts his attention with his constant follies. Finally, Svarožić reappears to tell Potjeh that he only should have listened to his heart when grandfather pleaded for him to stay. Rushing to wash his face before returning to Grandfather, Potjeh falls into the well and drowns. In the meantime his brothers conspire to kill Grandfather for his land. Murdered Grandfather is ascended to Svarožić's castle in heaven, at the gates of which Potjeh awaits for him, because he cannot enter before Grandfather forgives him. He is forgiven and they are both seated at Svarožić's table, first among equals.¹¹

The obvious question here is: why cannot Potjeh remember Svarožić's words, particularly if they are supposedly what his heart desires? It may be because what his heart desires is what he has seen and not what he has heard, and those two are in conflict. He has seen all the wisdom, but cannot pursue it because it is his duty to remain at home and pay his dues to the grandfather who is wisdom personified. To be able to do what he really wants, i.e. gain independence and take over the realm of wisdom, he must block the internalised knowledge of the proclaimed ideology: fulfilling his duty. His pursuit of truth is not the pursuit for the words of Svarožić, but the pursuit of Self actualised in that pursuit. Thus 'how' in the title –

it is not the truth, but the search, the separation from the grandfather, that allowed for the emancipation from his authority.

Even if Brlić-Mažuranić did not have a close, intimate relationship with her grandfather like she might have wanted to, it is not difficult to understand the similarities between her and Potjeh, and see the character as a projection of her own situation. Potjeh might, and, indeed, must be male, but is, in the story, referred to in terms of endearment more appropriate for a female child. Being the youngest, he is, like her, last in the order of inheritance. Most importantly, they both want the grandfather's possession: his wisdom and glory.

The author transfers the blame for Potjeh's illegitimate desire to brothers who kill grandfather for base reason, material possessions, and Potjeh remains untarnished, for he only wanted the 'truth' and his sin is at best that of omission, so he can be immortalised after death and seated next to grandfather like his equal.

This desire, the urge to write and be recognised, is also reflected in an episode she claims to have included in her *Autobiography* for its naivety: after her grandfather died, her father undertook to organise his manuscripts. The sight of such literary treasure made her dizzy and her desire for the world to see her work led her to plant her poem among her grandfather's papers, hoping for it to be attributed to him so it might see the light of day 'without her giving bad example of female authorship.'¹²

Far from being naive, this episode subtly manages to subvert grandfather's authority. For even if she builds her grandfather's character with utmost admiration, he is manipulated into a supporting role: he is cast as an early influence on the heroine. She, on the other hand, is the subject of her own narrative requested by the Academy, conceived as 'a confession about the development of a sensitive and thinking being.'¹³

In a conclusion, I say that, same as Potjeh, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić has accomplished the impossible: she disobeyed the authority and asserted herself without ever entering a conflict. It is exactly this sublime rebellion, and not the conventions of the genre, that make her fairy tales magical and one true and pioneering woman's writing.

Notes

¹ Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, 'Autobiography', in *Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić: Izabrana Djela*, ed. Zvonimir Diklić (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1997), 295.

² Sanja Lovrenčić, *U Potrazi za Ivanom* (Zagreb: Autorska Kuća, 2006), 101-118.

³ Brlić-Mažuranić, 'Autobiography', 297.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

⁵ Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, 'Declaration on the Genesis of the Croatian Tales of Long Ago', in *Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić: Izabrana Djela*, ed. Zvonimir Diklić (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1997), 275.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁷ Brlić-Mažuranić, 'Autobiography', 299.

⁸ Ivana Brlić Mažuranić, *Priče iz Davnine* (Zagreb: Mladost, 1972), 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5-29.

¹² Brlić-Mažuranić, 'Autobiography', 295.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 291.

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Crafting the Sphere of Femininity: Women Impersonators on the Parsi Stage

Harmony Sigantor

Abstract

The early Parsi stage, with its use of the English proscenium and theatre architecture, elaborate stage sets and costumes, song, dance and spectacle, became extremely popular with the newly nascent Indian theatregoing public soon after it was founded in the mid-19th century (circa 1853-1931, the date 1931 marking the advent of the first full-length feature film with sound in India, *Alam Ara*). Beginning with adaptations of Shakespearean plays and the works of Sheridan and other writers of the ‘Comedy of Manners,’ the Parsi stage soon moved into the arena of writing and adapting for the stage stories from Persian mythology and from the Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, before moving into the realm of what came to be known as ‘romantic social drama.’ The particular aspects of Parsi Theatre that this chapter aims to explore are the period of time towards the end of the nineteenth century when both women and female impersonators competed for precedence over the stage and then early film screen-space, and then locating within this sphere of the female impersonator the seeds of an ‘acceptable’ female identity universally lauded and acknowledged as being the template for that pristine paragon of virtue: the modern ‘Indian’ woman. In addition, it also seeks to analyse the bounds of performed femininity, and what this performance meant to the female impersonators who spent their youth and young manhood in ‘borrowed’ garb.

Key Words: Parsi Theatre, Female impersonators, ‘Modern’ Indian women, Identity-crafting, Indian Nationalist Movement, Male gaze.

1. Introduction

Contrary to the argument that performing women were unavailable, records show that the Parsi theatre employed both female impersonators and actresses for a considerable duration. In a sense, they competed against each other, and companies and publics made choices about whom they wished to represent women on stage – men or women.¹

The early Parsi stage, with its use of the English proscenium and theatre architecture, elaborate stage sets and costumes, song, dance and spectacle, became extremely popular with the theatregoing public soon after it was founded in

Bombay in the mid-19th century (circa 1853-1931; the year 1931 marking the advent of the first full-length feature film with sound, *Alam Ara*). Beginning with adaptations of Shakespearean plays and the works of Sheridan and other writers of the ‘Comedy of Manners,’ the Parsi stage soon moved into the arena of writing and adapting for the stage stories from Persian mythology – the story of ‘Rustom and Sohrab’ from the *Shahnamah* is a popular such example – and from the Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, before moving into the realm of what came to be known as ‘romantic social’ drama.

Despite its slightly misleading name, Parsi theatre was actually a site of open secularism, peopled with writers, actors, directors and owners from most every religion. It takes its name from the fact that the earliest theatrical companies and playhouses it used were owned by Parsis for the most part, but neither company nor stage were ever exclusively their domain. Gujarati, Urdu, and Hindustani – these were the primary languages of the Parsi theatre, and it is in fact a play translated from the original Gujarati by ‘Aram’ (Nasharvanji Mehrvanji Khansahab), ‘Sone ke Mul ki Khursheed’ (1871) that is credited with being the first Urdu play written in the India, and it was for the Parsi stage.²

The particular aspect of Parsi Theatre that this chapter aims to explore is the period of time (commencing with the advent of Mary Fenton³ in the late 1870s) towards the end of the nineteenth century (and in some cases or regions, even into the early twentieth century) when both women and female impersonators competed for precedence over the stage, and then early film screen. It does so in a bid to try and decipher the grafting – on the body or form of the female impersonator – the then-nascent category ‘modern’ Indian woman. In addition, it also seeks to analyse the bounds of performed femininity, and what this performance meant to the female impersonators who spent their youth and young manhood in ‘borrowed’ garb. It attempts to engage with what theatre historian Mrinal Pande identifies as a direct connection between the ‘young, baby-faced Parsi theatre players of female roles and the present day portrayal of women in Hindi films,’ for while the ‘femininity’ on display may well be ‘different in scope and degree,’ it is not so in *kind*.⁴ Further, she argues that ‘women in the accepted sense of the term in India, have all been created, not born,’ and therefore, whilst decoding the spectacle of the female impersonator, it is vital to remember that ‘there was much more to this womanhood than a mere stuffing of bosoms.’⁵

2. Introducing the Female Impersonator

With a rich history and established traditions in the arena of female impersonation in India – as evinced in folk traditions such as Bhavai from Gujarat, Marathi Sangit Natak, Yakshagana from Karnataka, and Jatra from Bengal for example – Parsi theatre had a long-standing record of attracting and honing some of the finest female impersonators to have graced the Indian stage. Each company vied for the ‘prettiest’ young boys, with the finest voices, and nurtured their talent

knowing it would reap rich dividends in terms of attracting audience attention and finding takers for their theatrical oeuvres.⁶ As Pande points out, it was not uncommon for the best among these impersonators to develop serious fan-followings, with oral accounts attesting to fans being ‘so overcome by emotions, that they ripped their sleeves and fell in a dead faint in the aisles,’ during performances by people like ‘master Wasi’ from Lahore, or the tragic ‘master Nisar’ whose ‘golden soprano, it is said, could rise above the scales available on the keys of the harmonium,’ before he died very young, of ‘various kinds of addictions, including opium and alcohol.’⁷

All of that changed significantly with the advent of women – British, Anglo-Indian and Jewish actresses in the first instance – into the theatrical companies. From Mary Fenton onwards, there was a significant movement towards an opening up of the public/work sphere of the theatre – hitherto a bastion of male agency – for women. However, the transition was not an easy one, given the rootedness and popularity of the impersonators and the ethos they signified. A lot of companies were averse to taking on women for several reasons: practical considerations such as separate travel/accommodation arrangements; issues of ‘morality,’ such as what it would mean for women in the audience to see other women ‘work’ the stage, and how this would then alter the dynamics and legitimacy of the male gaze that looked upon and consumed the performer/female impersonator – and so on. Most communities, including the allegedly ‘progressive’ Parsis, held such deeply and systematically naturalised notions of gender segregation that they believed ‘the presence of real flesh and blood women in theatre groups and on stage would corrode moral values and lead to extremes of debauchery.’⁸

Besides which, given that actors like Jaishanker Sundari (1888-1967) and Bal Gandharva (1889-1975) were undoubtedly the makers of fashion and shapers of opinion in their times – a story goes that the women of Bombay looked to Sundari and Gandharva to learn anew how to wear/drape their saris⁹ – it was never going to be easy for women entering this arena to live up to or challenge the modes of womanliness perpetuated by their impersonator peers.

One of the leading lights of this class of female impersonators, Jaishankar Sundari said that he relied on a method of ‘total identification’ with women, and even modelled specific roles/adopted mannerisms from female acquaintances he observed at close quarters. In his autobiography, he describes, for example, what he felt the first time he donned a woman’s blouse:

I saw a beautiful young girl emerging from myself, whose shapely, intoxicating limbs oozed youthful exuberance; in whose form is the fragrance of a woman’s beauty, in whose eyes feminine feelings kept brimming, in whose gait is expressed the mannerism of a Gujaratin; who is not a man but a woman...I saw

such a portrait in the mirror. Momentarily, I thought that I was not a man.¹⁰

It is interesting to note the terms in which femininity as a construct is clearly defined by (and for) Sundari: they are clearly physical in form (shapely, intoxicating limbs) but also emotive (in whose eyes feminine feelings kept brimming – suggestive of the Victorian ideal of the suffering, near-consumptive ‘Angel in the House’¹¹). His identification is so complete, he goes to the extent of temporarily discarding, or perhaps even ‘transcending’ his man-liness, indicative clearly that the level of wrought-feeling he describes is outside what would have been considered as acceptable – or even recognisable – behaviour for a man. His choice of words is telling, for the implication here is that – imbibed, and a product of processes of socialisation though they may be – the agency of identification and definition still rests with him, as opposed to being thrust upon his person externally: ‘I thought that I was not a man,’ he says, which is quite different from saying that he was not taken for or thought of as one by the society he lived in and played to.

However, to an even greater extent than Sundari who graced the Gujarati stage, Marathi actor Bal Gandharva was the last word when it came to setting the latest fashions in women’s attire and behaviour, and his photograph was constantly plied to sell women’s cosmetics. He popularised sari styles, items of jewellery such as the ‘nathni’ or nose-ring, the use of flowers to adorn and scent the hair, and carrying handkerchiefs on one’s person. It is said that photographs of him in his most famous roles, such as ones where he played a ‘pati-vrata’ middle-class housewife adorned the rooms of many an elite family’s homes.¹² He is said to have had an immensely sweet singing voice, and the idealised diction of a presumably upper or upper-middle class speaker. ‘The necessity of the female impersonator’ therefore, as Hansen says, ‘having an appropriate voice and physical features indicate(s) that hearing and seeing were the senses actively engaged’ in by the audiences that came to witness these spectacles.¹³ What this suggests is that women were, in effect, being instructed to model themselves on what was to all intents and purposes a cross-dressing (and therefore) transvestite, as opposed to ‘fearing’ this person, because ‘through the sphere of the tragic woman, the wronged wife, the victim (*abala nari*) the female impersonator was rendered non-threatening, a stimulant of tears rather than titillation;’ a fact clearly much more palatable to the men in the audience, who could then look at Gandharva’s ‘Shakuntala’ and weep for her, even as they might have felt uncomfortable at some level about leering at ‘her.’¹⁴

For a glimpse of the contours that this new Indian ‘woman’ was taking on and an examination of symbols which came to denote her position in Indian society, one cannot do better than to turn to the autobiographical account of a leading female impersonator, master Champalal,¹⁵ who played various leading female roles

in travelling Parsi theatre companies in the early decades of the 20th-century. His account bears testimony to a very important, if often overlooked aspect – the bounds and restrictions set upon the person of the female impersonator ‘off-stage’ or in ‘real’ life, so as to not conflict with the pristine quality affected by his stage persona. Another reason Champalal provides for the life of discipline and near-austerity he and others of his ilk were required to live was the intense *sadhana* or devotion to their art – long recognised as a formative identity marker of the self-sacrificing and long-suffering Indian woman – required of anyone, in order to play ‘the perfect woman on stage,’ one whose ‘chal-dhal (gait and graces) even women from very good families emulated.’¹⁶ He lists the following as non-negotiable criteria for any female impersonator attempting ‘authenticity’ of portrayal:

- You must never, ever cut your hair short. Long silky tresses are a must for being a woman.
- As long as you play at being a female, proximity to males must be a big no! If you must meet boy friends or male members of the family, take care the theatre-goers never see you – meet other men, and you risk getting a “reputation”.
- While travelling, you must sit in separate compartments from male actors and stay in your tents upon arrival. You must never invite men into your tents, whether from the troupe or from the audience.
- The dance and music teachers would teach you how to modulate your voice and carry yourself. Their word is your command.
- You should neither drink, nor eat spicy food. They spoil the complexion and your voice, and make you manly and “hot-tempered.”¹⁷

As is obvious, these injunctions laid out by Champalal are ones which would be readily recognisable for Indian women from most communities during the time period in question, for the ‘distancing’ from the male sphere of action they advocate. The cultivation of aloofness here becomes loaded however, given that the parole is addressed to the maintenance of relations *between men*; people of the same sex, albeit, as is here alluded to, not ones subscribing to the same set of gender codes. What comes through strongly – in Champalal’s account, as much as Sundari’s – is just how invested these female impersonators appear to be in the construction and replication of an ‘authentic’ performed femininity, which stayed with these performers and impacted their lives as much off-stage as it did on it.

3. Female Impersonators and the ‘Modern’ Indian Woman

The scope of this chapter is limited, but within that scope, as has been established, it seeks to underscore the primacy of female impersonators in the shaping of the identity of the ‘modern’ Indian woman, and the fact that the women who were to soon become a part of the Parsi stage carried with them more stigma – that of the ‘working’ woman – than they did the ability to significantly influence the shaping of the categorical mould that was being created for their sex almost despite themselves. In the words of Kathryn Hansen, ‘Female impersonators structured the space into which female performers were to insert themselves, effecting the transition from stigmatised older practices to the newly consolidated Indian woman (*bharatiya nari*) of the nationalists.’¹⁸ In fact, by the apparent anomaly of Indian males passing as females and foreigners passing as Indian – Hindu and Parsi – women for the most part, the Parsi stage ‘established a paradigm for female performance even before Indian women themselves had become visible’¹⁹ in the public sphere.

The world of these cross-dressing female impersonators can be traversed only through fragmented documentation such as the material cited above, and is available exclusively in the form of journals, newspaper reviews, memoirs, and biographies (albeit few and far between, and mainly in Gujarati²⁰). This is also the site where female impersonation is ‘most overtly linked to the fashioning of a widely circulated standard for female appearance and a modified code of feminine conduct,’²¹ this last coming from a palpable creation/opening up of the public sphere for women in society, owing to several reasons, not the least of which is the social reform movements across Western India towards the end of the 19th century, which promoted female education, and brought to the forefront issues such as child marriage and widow remarriage.

However, as Hansen states, ‘to engage more fully with public life, women as social actors required a shield of feminine virtue that would guarantee their safety as they moved out into the world,’ and the appearance of a solid, non-negotiable ‘propriety conveyed through specific gestures and features of dress became (their) passport to mobility.’²² Ironically – or obviously, depending on one’s entry-point into this discourse – this attitude of ‘vulnerability-as-shield’ was most convincingly played out by female impersonators on the Parsi stage, as is evidenced by commentaries such as Champalal’s, analysed above, evoking as it does the terror of the impersonator gaining a bad reputation, if seen socialising with, or so much as being in conversation with, other men – even those belonging to the performer’s own family. The idea that these impersonators might ever pose a threat to the reputation of the women they interacted with, it would appear, was not one which caused undue concern.

What also becomes important to this analysis is the nature of the roles available to women/female impersonators on the Parsi stage. The most common of these was the role of the ‘romantic heroine, beloved of the hero and the embodiment of

feminine perfection and modesty,²³ effacing her selfhood almost completely, and important mostly for what s/he 'evokes,' in Mulvey's theoretical framework on the deterministic nature of the 'male gaze,' in her opposite, her binary: the hero.²⁴ Another category or genre of role widely used was that of the 'female magician,' like the *Jogin* in *Harishchandra* or in *Gopichand*.²⁵

The role of the spectator in this construction of femininity cannot be underestimated, if life was to indeed model reality and not merely imitate it. The male gaze, with its attendant – if latent – potentially homo-erotic undercurrents needs to be dealt with separately, given that this was an audience with prior orientation to the spectacle and reception of female impersonators on the urban stage, but the very composition and identification of certain classes/sections of men and women as comprising a theatre-going audience is an important facet as well, because with the advent of a non-aristocratic (and therefore non-patron driven, in a sense) middle-class theatre-going public, with women in their midst, 'impersonation and other aspects of theatrical practice began to address the spectator as a gendered subject.' Women were now, for the first time perhaps, the section whose 'enjoyment influenced the enactment of gender difference.'²⁶ The Parsi stage therefore became a site where gender played itself out and was debated as well as contested, if not overtly constructed, in myriad ways.

4. Conclusion

Even as it is obvious that there is a distinct disjunction between the fact that Indian women were performed or depicted first by Indian men and then foreign women on the national stage and early cinema screen, both of which, at the level of image seem to have provided greater spectatorial pleasure than the categories 'Indian' and 'woman,' together, could have afforded at the time, these practices did eventually serve one important purpose, which was that they made the idea of womanhood (and women themselves) visible; and on a mass level, at that. They represented women in the flesh, with an attendant 'cluster' of visual correlatives and signifiers to denote what thence became identifiable as the sphere of femininity. As historian Nida Sajid outlines, an examination of sites such as these becomes vital because 'theatre provides useful insights into the multiple constructions of women in accordance with the imperatives of nationalist politics,'²⁷ and can be read as spaces of contestation and subversion, but also equally need to be decoded in the light of the double hermeneutic which holds that the relationship between the spectacle and the society it stems from is located in a two-way system of signification, with either affecting and impacting continually the shape of the other.

Notes

¹ Kathryn Hansen, 'Making Women Visible: Gender and Race Cross-Dressing in the Parsi Theatre', *Theatre Journal* 51, No. 2 (1999): 127-147.

² Somnath Gupt, *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development*, trans. Kathryn Hansen (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2005), 51.

³ Mary Fenton was the daughter of an Irish soldier who, after retirement, presented 'Magic Lantern' shows around Delhi for a living. She met well-known actor and writer for the Parsi stage, Kavas Khatau, while he was rehearsing for a performance with Jahangir Khambata's troupe. They fell in love, married, and she moved to Bombay with him and began to perform alongside Khatau. She took on the Parsi stage name 'Mehr bai,' and owing to her fluent Gujarati, Hindi and Urdu, and adoption of Parsi dress, soon became immensely popular. She was 'undoubtedly the most successful, attractive and popular actress of her time'. *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴ Mrinal Pande, "'Moving beyond Themselves": Women in Hindustani Parsi Theatre and Early Hindi Films', *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, No. 17 (2006): 1646.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Gupt, *The Parsi Theatre*, 109-110.

⁷ Pande, 'Moving beyond Themselves', 1646.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Hansen, 'Making Women Visible', 128.

¹⁰ Jayashankar Sundari, *Thoda Ansu, Thoda Ful*, trans. Sunil Sharma (Ahmedabad: Gandhi Sombarsa, 1976), 72-73.

¹¹ A term made popular in Victorian England by a Coventry Patmore poem from a collection also titled 'The Angel in the House' (1854). This phrase came to become short-hand for the popular Victorian ideal of the self-sacrificing quintessential English mother-wife-woman.

¹² Mohan Nadkarni, *Bal Gandharva: The Nonpareil Thespian* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1988), 67-68.

¹³ Hansen, 'Making Women Visible', 137.

¹⁴ Kathryn Hansen, 'Stri Bhumika: Female Impersonators and Actresses on the Parsi Stage', *Economic and Political Weekly* 33 (1998): 2296.

¹⁵ As narrated to Mrinal Pande, 'Moving beyond Themselves', 1647.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Hansen, 'Making Women Visible', 128.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁰ One of the few examples of this genre is the autobiography of famous actor Jahangir Khambata who wrote a memoir entitled '*Maro Nataki Anubhav*', which was published in 1914 (but is currently out of print).

²¹ Hansen, 'Making Women Visible', 128.

²² *Ibid.*, 129.

²³ Hansen, 'Making Women Visible', 133.

²⁴ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16, No. 3 (1975): 6-18.

²⁵ Gupt, *The Parsi Theatre*, 111 and 166.

²⁶ Hansen, 'Making Women Visible', 131.

²⁷ Nida Sajid, 'Revisiting the Woman's Question on the Nation's Stages: New Directions in Research on Indian Theatre', *Feminist Review* 84 (2006): 124-129, 125.

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Subversive Bodies: Anti-Aesthetic Gender Images in Contemporary Flamenco

Idit Suslik

Abstract

From its inception as a type of folk art, flamenco has evolved as a gender-coded dance, displaying masculine and feminine bodies that reflected traditional gender roles and hierarchy in gypsy-Spanish society. The evolution of flamenco into a theatre art towards the beginning of the 20th century enhanced the importance attributed to the aesthetic features of the body and its movements. Female dancers represented an ideal of feminine glamour, and male performers succeeded in adjusting the concept of beauty to their own bodies, thus becoming the epitome of masculine strength. Commenting on the central role that beauty still plays with respect to gender representations in contemporary flamenco, dancer and choreographer, Belén Maya, says that ‘We have to renounce beauty. You don’t have to be beautiful all the time.’¹ Maya’s approach reflects a withdrawal from existing images of masculinity and femininity, which is evident in the work of additional avant-garde artists, such as Israel Galván, Andrés Marín, Juan Carlos Lériada and Rocío Molina. This group of artists undermines the notion of aestheticism as a defining feature of the male/female body in flamenco by constructing a different type of flamenco body. In this chapter I will examine how these artists challenge traditional gender imagery by incorporating artistic strategies from contemporary European dance, namely the appropriation of an ‘anti-aesthetic’ aestheticism and the implementation of Brechtian techniques, directed at theatricalising traditional gender images in flamenco and framing them as social performances. I will show that although the dancing bodies of these artists are technically proficient, they are perceived as strange, provocative, and from a traditional point of view – even ugly at times. These subversive bodies will be discussed as part of a cultural-artistic discourse aimed at exposing – and resisting – the aesthetic and social inscriptions of traditional flamenco on the masculine/feminine dancing body.

Key Words: Flamenco, tradition, innovation, masculinity, femininity, gender, flamenco body, anti-aesthetic.

1. Introduction

In this chapter² I examine how avant-garde flamenco artists construct a new type of ‘flamenco body’³ that challenges the gender images identified with this dance style, and undermines the notion of external aestheticism as the defining feature of the masculine/feminine dancing bodies. To fully understand the

significance of this deconstruction process with respect to the defining visual canon and aesthetic values of flamenco, I will first present a brief overview of its gender imagery within key stages of its development as an art. For this purpose, I have identified three distinct bodily models: the ‘sacred body’ of traditional flamenco, the ‘extravagant body’ of the first form of theatrical flamenco and the commercialised form associated with the Franco regime, and the ‘balletic body’ of the post-dictatorship years and the decade of the 1980s. I argue here that although representations of masculinity and femininity in flamenco have changed over time, they have always remained aesthetically beautiful. As a result, the bodies displayed by contemporary avant-garde artists are perceived from a traditional point of view as essentially anti-aesthetic, and therefore function as subversive flamenco bodies.

2. Dignified Men, Chaste Women: Sacred Bodies in Traditional Flamenco

In its traditional form, flamenco has evolved as an artistic practice which included song (*cante*), dance (*baile*) and guitar (*toque*), and functioned as a means of preserving and representing the authentic heritage of the gypsies, rooted in their history in Andalusia (southern Spain) since their arrival in the 15th century.⁴ It was practiced at family gatherings (*juergas*), and was perceived as a form of communication or dialogue between music and dance. In this context, the quality of the dancer was not evaluated according to stylistic formalism or virtuosic skills, but in the ability to present his/her individual expression within the existing musical rules. Moreover, performers were acknowledged as beautiful, not because their physical features were pretty, but because their movements were an honest reflection of their emotions and soul.

Because every dance functions as ‘a performance of cultural identity,’⁵ and is perceived as a stylisation of the bodily repertoire and *habitus*⁶ of a specific society,⁷ the aesthetic features described above are understood as the product of the cultural values that define gypsy (and Spanish) society. As such, they also affect the manner in which masculinity and femininity is displayed through the dance, while acknowledging the different styles associated with male and female dancers as representations of traditional gender roles and social hierarchy. The man’s style reflects the ideal of Spanish masculinity (*machismo*): the postures are angular, almost geometrical, and the movement is restrained, but sharp. The footwork (*zapateado*) is a dominant element in the dance, emphasising the man’s authority and control of his space.⁸ This image of the male dancer, upright and firm, constructs a dignified masculine body that symbolises the proud gypsy, who endures his fate with courage.

In contrast, the woman’s style is based on curved and fluid movements of the arms, hands and waist that form picturesque bodily postures. Although her bodily expression is extremely sensual, it is not perceived as vulgar or erotic, but as a celebration of her femininity in relation to her social role as wife and mother. Moreover, because the women’s arms and legs are completely covered by the

dress, her physicality constructs an image of a chaste body that abides to the strict code of modesty in gypsy society.⁹

Despite the accentuated physicality and expressiveness of male/female flamenco dancers, I argue that they represent sacred bodies that reflect ‘the controlled, somewhat taboo relationship between the sexes.’¹⁰ This is especially evident in the interaction between men and women within the dance, which maintains the values of dignity and chastity: although their physical proximity creates a sense of emotional intimacy that is charged with sexual tension, they will usually refrain from actually touching each other.

3. Desired Women: Feminine Extravaganza in Theatrical Flamenco

A different type of flamenco body was constructed within public venues towards the end of the 19th century and throughout the first decades of the 20th century.¹¹ This was the result of a fundamental transition in the social function of flamenco, which changed from a type of folk art, practiced by and for the people of its community, to a theatre art, performed by professional artists in a theatrical setting. The performances in public venues were aimed at conforming to public taste, and therefore placed the dance at the forefront, emphasising the aesthetic features of the body, along with the technical virtuosity of the dancers.¹² Consequently, traditional gender images were transformed into extroverted versions of masculinity and femininity. This was especially evident with regard to the female dancer, whose external beauty and glamour became a fundamental feature of the performances, and was accentuated through distinctive props and accessories – the fan, shawl, combs, flowers and earrings. As a result, she was no longer chaste or modest, but the embodiment of a seductive ‘Carmen,’¹³ the exotic image that characterised all Spanish women at the time.

This extravagant feminine image was furthermore exaggerated in flamenco nightclubs named *tablaos*, which were established during the years of the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975), and assisted in promoting Spain’s image as an exotic country, in response to the tourist boom of the 1960s. The *tablaos* led the art of flamenco to its lowest point in history,¹⁴ as performances exemplified features of burlesque shows: the dance emphasised acrobatic displays of footwork and castanet playing, and the sexuality of the female dancers was provocatively accentuated, including among other things, the exposure of the legs and chest area and excessive hip movements.¹⁵ Moreover, as Hayes clearly states, in these clubs, ‘flamenco and prostitution became synonymous,’¹⁶ as female dancers were expected to entertain the male clients offstage as well.

4. Dignity Reclaimed: The ‘Balletic’ Flamenco Bodies in Post-Dictatorship Spain

The dignified flamenco body was once again reclaimed following the end of the Franco dictatorship and throughout the 1980s, as leading artists attempted to

restore the true artistic essence of flamenco, and suppress its' commercialised forms, which were still being practiced in *tablaos* throughout Spain. This was obtained through the incorporation of aesthetic features from classical and neo-classical ballet into flamenco.¹⁷ As a result, the dancers displayed a unique integration between the controlled bodies of ballet and the highly passionate expressiveness of flamenco. The feminine dancing body achieved an eloquence that did not exist in traditional flamenco, but was highly inscribed with representations of female modesty. Similarly, male performers created a new masculine elegance that was still deeply rooted in the image of the proud gypsy.

Consequently, the beauty and sexuality of the dancers ceased to function as the objective of the artistic practice as a whole, but external aestheticism continued to be a dominant element in the works of the artists identified with this period. As such, the male/female bodies of this generation represented a stylised version of the traditional flamenco body, reflecting its cultural values and gender images through a refined bodily expression. Moreover, because these decades are considered a defining phase in the evolution of flamenco,¹⁸ I believe that the dancing bodies associated with this period are still considered today as the epitome of masculinity and femininity in flamenco, and therefore serve as an ideal model for its gender images.

5. Strange Men and 'Anti-Guapas': Introducing Anti-Aestheticism to the Flamenco Body

The beginning of the 1990s marked a new era for Spain, characterised by cultural pluralism, the globalisation of the media, the blurring of fixed gender roles and the recognition of diverse sexual identities.¹⁹ It is my assertion, that these changes manifested themselves in flamenco dancing from the mid-1990s onwards, within a new stylistic tendency that utilises an artistic strategy, defined here as 'fusion.'²⁰ This tendency is characterized by various manifestations of stylistic hybridity and intercultural thematic concerns. It is realised in the works of many contemporary choreographers, who attempt to expand the musical composition and movement syntax of flamenco as a means of constructing a relevant paradigm for this art in contemporary Spain.

The integration of different dance traditions into the language of flamenco has resulted in what I term 'bodily bilingualism,' meaning that the dancing body expresses physical characteristics and cultural values that are different from the ones identified with its traditional form. However, I would like to stress that despite these changes, the majority of contemporary flamenco artists still display the type of technically trained, physically refined and highly stylised 'balletic' flamenco bodies. This is extremely significant with respect to gender representations, because it preserves the notion that ugliness does not exist in flamenco. In fact, one of the most popular cheers that is still cried out to a female dancer during a performance is 'guapa,' meaning – beautiful. This shows that

regardless of her technical abilities, her quality as a performer is considerably validated by her physical appearance.

It is my assertion that the stylistic innovations described above paved the way for a different type of artistic practice in contemporary flamenco, which focuses on a deeper inquiry into the codes of the dance as a visual and theatrical language, and aims at exploring, and resisting, its defining aesthetic concepts. This approach is identified with the work of several avant-garde artists, such as Israel Galván, Andrés Marín, Belén Maya, Juan Carlos Lériða and Rocío Molina. Despite their highly personal and distinct dance styles, I argue that all of them intentionally display dancing bodies which are considered subversive, and experienced by the spectator as relatively strange, very provocative and even ugly at times.

Commenting on the role that beauty still plays in contemporary flamenco, Belén Maya states: ‘We have to renounce beauty. You don’t have to be beautiful or marvelous all the time. There are many other things to think, feel and create. We are the anti-guapas.’²¹ Like her experimental colleagues, Maya is completely proficient in traditional flamenco, but is ambivalent towards it, as evident in the following statement: ‘At times, “I put on the flower” and dance in a very classical way. But it’s like a costume I put on. I can do it, or not.’²² In my opinion, Maya’s concept of the ‘anti-guapa’ (i.e., the anti-beautiful) expresses the essence of the artistic practice realised by avant-garde flamenco artists, and their attempt to undermine traditional gender images and their still-undisputed connection with beauty. In the following sections, I will analyse the characteristics of these anti-aesthetic bodies in two representative works.

6. Athleticism and the Exposed Body: Exceeding the Image of the *Flamenca*

In the opening scene of *Cuando las Piedras Vuelen (When Stones Will Fly, 2009)*,²³ Rocío Molina enters the stage wearing black sporty undergarments, and does not display any of the distinguishing attributes associated with the female costume, apart from red flamenco shoes. This image of Molina, maintained more or less throughout the entire piece, is immediately marked by the spectator as a sign of difference, because it challenges the feminine image traditionally presented in a flamenco show. This is furthermore enhanced when Molina starts to dance, as her erratic arm movements alternately change from stiff and sharp to broken down and weak.

From a traditional point of view, Molina’s physical features are aesthetically incompatible with the iconic image of the *flamenca*, i.e., the traditional (if not ideal) female dancer. Her body is almost completely exposed, and therefore defies the value of feminine chastity in traditional flamenco, but also the refined female body of ‘balletic’ flamenco. Moreover, although Molina performs recognisable elements from the language of flamenco, her movements do not exemplify the elegance which characterises the feminine style, but express the intensity and accentuated physicality usually displayed in contemporary dance. Because this

type of athleticism is not part of the defining features of masculinity or femininity in flamenco, Molina is therefore appreciated as a proficient dancer, but her body is decoded as anti-aesthetic.

Interestingly, in several parts of the piece Molina does display highly stylized flamenco movements, but they are detached from their traditional context. In one such scene, she performs a sequence of graceful arm movements and a footwork combination, but does so sitting on a chair, wearing simple daily clothes and no shoes at all. Moreover, the stamping sound of her feat is produced from an external source: two singers continuously tap a musical rhythm on a pile of stones, using little stone-made flamenco shoes. As a result, although Molina's movements in this scene are aesthetically beautiful, she does not seem to transform into a traditional *flamenca*, but remains a contemporary flamenco dancer.

7. De-Familiarising Traditional Masculinity: The Uncanny Male Body

In his piece, *Al Toque (Towards the Guitar, 2010)*,²⁴ Juan Carlos Lériða chooses the guitar as a starting point for his exploration of flamenco as a visual language, breaking it down into fragmented movements, gestures and postures. The most intriguing aspect of this conceptual work is, without a doubt, Lériða's personal dance style, which pushes the body to a physical and aesthetic extreme. His movements are strange, if not disturbing: 'broken' and edgy postures, haunting moments of stillness and seemingly manic twists and turns. Very similar to contemporary dance, there is a deep sense of honesty in this highly exposed and unrestrained bodily expression, as it clearly evokes images of human solitude and the search for companionship. However, within the context of flamenco, Lériða's uncanny style completely defies the elegance and refinement identified with the dignified male body.

This bodily language functions as part of a wider artistic strategy, which utilises Brechtian techniques,²⁵ in order to de-familiarise the visual canon of flamenco. Brecht's concept of *gestus* creates a split between the actor and his role by 'producing a set of contradictory attitudes, gestures, and modes of speech which reveal the difference *within* the subject.'²⁶ In many scenes, Lériða performs recognisable flamenco movements, some of which are typical gestures and postures associated with the male dancer. However, he does not display them in their traditional form, but distorts them through exaggerated theatricality, repetition or slow motion.

Lériða's anti-aestheticism goes even further and challenges one of the most fundamental features of the traditional sacred body, which is still maintained in flamenco today. In one scene, he extracts the guitar from its familiar function as the defining musical instrument of flamenco and places it between his legs. As the scene progresses, Lériða performs continuous movements with his pelvis and seems to become aroused from his physical interaction with the guitar. This provocative display of sexual impulses is highly unusual in flamenco, and is

therefore considered extremely subversive. It is especially significant because although male/female flamenco bodies are sensually extroverted and very expressive, sexual tension and bodily desires will never be physically realised in flamenco.

8. Conclusion

The bodily images displayed in the works of Rocío Molina and Juan Carlos Lériða exemplify, in my opinion, a conceptual rejection of aesthetic beauty as the defining feature of gender representations in flamenco. Moreover, the manner in which traditional flamenco is presented in their works attests to a conflict between past representations and contemporary body. Molina does, in fact, present visual glimpses of traditional femininity throughout her piece, and in the context of her avant-garde approach to flamenco, these images function as an artistic (and even historic) point of reference. However, although she clearly acknowledges tradition, Molina chooses to explore beyond its limitations, presenting tradition as only one facet out of the many femininities she displays. In this respect, Molina rejects the one-dimensional femininity that exists in traditional flamenco, and thus realizes a fundamental feature of both postmodern and contemporary dance, which challenge the notion of masculinity/femininity as fixed and unified categories.

Quite similarly, Lériða uses traditional movements as a form of Brechtian *gestus*, simultaneously pointing to the original bodily gesture, while highlighting its incompatibility with his body. His approach to the body is closely linked with the works of contemporary dance theatre companies, such as Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater* or DV8 Physical Theatre, who present masculinity/femininity through physical or gestural performances, in order to estrange them from the body and frame them as socially rehearsed behaviours. Through these processes of deconstruction, Molina and Lériða succeed in exposing the artistic and historic inscriptions on the male/female flamenco body, but also demonstrate the contemporary body's 're-inscriptive potential.'²⁷ I therefore believe that the subversive bodies constructed by avant-garde artists function as part of an artistic-cultural discourse that questions the validity of traditional gender images as the unifying aesthetic model for representations of masculinity and femininity in flamenco today.

Notes

¹ Michelle Hefner Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009), 171.

² The following chapter is based on a PhD research in process, entitled: *Flamenco and Fusion: Strategies of 'Reaction' and 'Resistance' to Traditional Movement Syntax*.

³ I apply this term from Washabaugh, who discusses the central role of the body in flamenco song (*cante*). See William Washabaugh, 'The Flamenco Body', *Popular Music* 13, No. 1 (January, 1994): 75-90.

⁴ Claus Schreiner, ed., 'Andalusia: *Pena* and *Alegria*', in *Flamenco: Gypsy Dance and Music from Andalusia* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1990), 24-25.

⁵ Jane C. Desmond, ed. 'Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies', in *Meaning in Motion* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 31.

⁶ According to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, bodily patterns stem from a person's social and cultural environment, and in turn reflect their position or status in the social *field*. See: Pierre Bourdieu, 'Structures, *Habitus*, Practices', in *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53-54.

⁷ Ted Polhemus, 'Dance, Gender and Culture', in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter (London: Routledge, 1998), 174.

⁸ Marion Papenbrok, 'The Spiritual World of Flamenco', in *Flamenco: Gypsy Dance and Music from Andalusia*, ed. Claus Schreiner (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1990), 55.

⁹ Madeleine Claus, '*Baile Flamenco*', in *Flamenco: Gypsy Dance and Music from Andalusia*, ed. Claus Schreiner (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1990), 94.

¹⁰ Papenbrok, 'The Spiritual World of Flamenco', 54-55.

¹¹ This form of theatrical flamenco was established in two subsequent stages: the first occurred between the years 1860-1910 and is associated with the formation of public cafés, named *cafés cantantes*; the second took place between the years 1920-1950 within large-scale theatre performances named *ópera flamenca*. See Christof Jung, '*Cante Flamenco*', in *Flamenco: Gypsy Dance and Music from Andalusia*, ed. Claus Schreiner (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1990), 61.

¹² José Blas Vega, 'Hacia la Historia del baile Flamenco', *La Caña* 12 (Otoño, 1995), 20.

¹³ Michelle Hefner Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009), 167.

¹⁴ The *tablaos* still function in various parts of Spain (especially in Madrid, Barcelona and Seville), and although some remain tourist-oriented, others display performances and performers of high quality.

¹⁵ Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance*, 154.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ The central artistic format of this period was characterised as 'ballet-flamenco,' and consisted of narrative-based dance works that combined flamenco with western dance traditions. See Vega, 'Hacia la Historia del Baile Flamenco', 21.

¹⁸ Laura Kumin, 'To Live Is to Dance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture*, ed. David T. Gies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 300-301.

¹⁹ Jo Labanyi, 'Postmodernism and the Problem of Cultural Identity', in *Spanish Cultural Studies*, eds. Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 397.

²⁰ I apply this term from the phrase *flamenco fusión*, which refers to a specific style that had evolved in Spain from the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, and combined flamenco music with cultural and stylistic influences from western, Latin-American and/or Arab music. See: Julia Lynn Banzi, *Flamenco Guitar Innovation and the Circumscription of Tradition* (Santa Barbara, CA: University of California, 2007), ix.

²¹ Hayes, *Flamenco: Conflicting Histories of the Dance*, 171.

²² *Ibid.*, 170.

²³ See promo-clip, accessed 27 June 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfdU_qYYAAE.

²⁴ See promo-clip, accessed 27 June 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQRgfCMBepc>.

²⁵ Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁷ Michael Bowman and Della Pollock, "'This Spectacular Visible Body": Politics and Postmodernism in Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater*', *Text and Performance 2* (1989): 113.

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Cruising for a Bruising: Heterosexual Male-Artists Creating Queer Art

Ladislav Zikmund-Lender

Abstract

The chapter shows that a significant part of the visual material that we are used to calling queer art has been created by heterosexual men under several different circumstances – by accident, with later queering, on demand, or as a statement. The chapter explores these processes with special interest in representation of masculinities and how the reception of the images, which turned out to be queer, influenced the construction of their gender identity and sexuality. The chapter is open for collation of queer images created by queers, queer images created by heterosexual men and heterosexual and queer visual representation of masculinities.

Key Words: Queer, art, gender performativity, art history, heterosexuality.

1. Performativity of What?

As Czech philosopher Miroslav Petříček, who deals with visual arts, stated, the best way to get to know terms is when we examine their margins and limits.¹

In 2011, I have presented a paper called *Queer Junk* at the conference Queer Sexualities, about what can be found beyond the term ‘queer art’ and what is commonly presented as queer art but has nothing to do with the real art world, which uses institutional definitions to define the category of art.² Since the conference, I have examined other limits of the term ‘queer art’ or, to be specific, what makes a visual object queer. I opened other possibilities of what has to be reflected about such objects and what light should be cast on them in order to call them this way. I was not happy about a mere code of an author/artist and I was not satisfied with a receptive explanation, i.e. repeated queer reading only.

I was engaged with queer art collections and the fact how objects, which are not interrelated, acquire a queer code using their context and constellation; I dealt with queer codes in historical writings about art trying to find a historical dimension in queer receptivity. Exploring the meaning of queer art, all these efforts were related to the term ‘art’ and its margins and limits because I automatically assumed that queer was self-evident – just containing some performativity of non-heterosexual experience. In this chapter, I would like to explore the other part of the label ‘queer art’ – margins and limits of the queerness itself.

When Judith Butler sees the construct of gender identity as performance which is repeated,³ an image in its broadest meaning can be understood as such an act. ‘The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes,’ Butler continues, ‘as if it

were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. Actors are already always on the stage, within the terms of the performance.’⁴ We can think about images using the same terms because they present some experience which is reproduced and experienced all over again. Active performance of non-heterosexual experience using visual codes does not have to be directly connected with author’s experience when the author is the inventor of the image, as Michel Foucault criticised the concept of authorship.⁵ The following contribution deals with creation of queer codes in visual art by artists who did not have or do not have their own direct queer experience, and they are identified as heterosexual ones within their historical situation.

2. Bond: Homosocial Bond: Stirred, Not Shaken

Young painter Miloš Jiránek exhibited the painting he was working on for three years, *Sprchy v Pražském Sokole / Showers in the Sokol, Prague* at the 3rd exhibition of the Mánes Union of Fine Arts in 1903. The picture portrays gymnasts of the Sokol sport organisation, who are having a shower after their sport performance. Sokol played an essential role in a cultural construct of homosocial desire at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick understands this as a continuum between homosociality and homosexuality having in mind the specific historical context.⁶

It is evident that decadent poets Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic (who was openly gay) and Karel Hlaváček (who was heterosexual as far as we know) pinned the very same passion in male bonding in Sokol. However, Hlaváček’s verses about male bonding in Sokol appear to be more homoerotic than homosocial, i.e. they rather express erotic desire than characterise men’s effort to push through interests of other men, as Kosofsky Sedgwick explains, compared with gay-oriented Karásek’s erotically neutral texts about Sokol.

Nonetheless, Jiránek’s painting *Sprchy v Pražském Sokole / Showers in the Sokol, Prague* were scandalous, perceived as homoerotic and they had to be removed from the exhibition. The divide between homosexuality and homosociality apparently existed – it was the act of public display. They were probably heterosexual men – women who expressed their fierce criticism of the subject and appreciated only formal qualities of the work as we can see in the review of a contemporary female painter Klára Heyrovská.⁷

Hence somebody else appeared in the complicated scandal – it was Jiránek’s friend William Ritter, the gay critic and writer, who was probably unrequitedly in love with Jiránek.⁸ Ritter decoded a purely homoerotic implicit meaning of the picture and he was the only one who wrote positive reviews of this.

However, the homoeroticism of the painting turns into a positive quality in contemporary theoretical reflection (Jiránek’s monograph published in 2009). Tomáš Winter, the author of the monograph, argues that according to Whitney Davis, it is possible to compare *Sprchy v Pražském Sokole / Showers in the Sokol*,

Prague with works by Thomas Eakins or Henry Scott Tuke, but he does not deal with differences or continuation of the concepts of homosociality and homosexuality, which are the central problem in the theoretical reflection of the painting.⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asks: ‘What difference does it make, when a social or political relationship is sexualized? If the relation of homosocial to homosexual bond is so shifty, then what theoretical framework do we have to drawing any links between sexual and power relationships?’¹⁰ The answer lies somewhere in the political and power meaning of an act. Miloš Jiránek incorporated a very different code into his image than the one read by homosexually-oriented reader William Ritter when it moves him erotically, and the homophobic one read by mostly heterosexual viewers during the public display – i.e. an event that acquired a political connotation. The very act of gymnasts taking showers could not be understood as homoerotic, it was a scene from everyday urban life. Yet it was the author’s performative act, active recording of this experience as strong enjoyment through creation and display of this image that was discussed and was read erotically in both positive and negative way.

A thin line between male homosociality and homosexuality in the public discourse can be confusing when examining identities as historical situations in the event of interwar press oriented at gay male audiences. In 1931-1933, the magazine called *Hlas Sexuální Menšiny / Voice of Sexual Minority*, later renamed to *Nový Hlas / New Voice*, was published in Prague and one issue of magazine *Kamarád / Friend* was published in Brno. Speaking about the *Kamarád / Friend* magazine, there is not a single line about erotic or sexualised relationships between men. Despite the fact they were apparently sexualised relationships, the public discourse allowed only references to homosocial bonding, i.e. friendship or ‘being buddies.’ Homosexuality had to be presented publically as homosociality, but homosociality could not be extended to homosexuality. Homosocial bonds were simply not supposed to be shaken.

When we discuss queer visual codes created by homosexual authors, we must not ignore advertisements and illustrations in magazine *Nový Hlas / New Voice* (there were no images in *Kamarád / Friend* magazine). For instance, the advertisement for a gay-friendly restaurant in Prague shows the difference between written and visual languages. Whereas a meeting of best friends, i.e. a notice about asexual relationships, is advertised in the text, the visual message shows us the real state of things.

Except for gay artist Ladislav Vlodek, all illustrations in *Nový Hlas / New Voice* magazine were created by heterosexually identified artists – Josef Krasický, František Kobliha, Jan Konůpek etc. Jan Konůpek’s reproduced painting from Georges Duhamel’s novel *Two Friends* can be read as homosocial bonding, as the contents of the novel indicates, or as representation of an archetypal sexualised relationship of two men suggested by Will Roscoe in his book *Queer Spirits*.¹¹ Using Jungian archetypes, Roscoe formulated three archetypes of same-sex desire

based on his extended research of mythologies and images of various cultures. One of the archetypes is called divine twins, two identical halves creating a whole.¹² Konůpek's illustration is a perfect representation of the divine twins archetype: Konůpek could portray one of the men with dark hair, the other one could be shorter, have different clothes, yet Konůpek saw them as identical. It was not a coincidence. *Spiritus agens* of the magazine was Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, a decadent writer and collector, who was the central character of the interwar gay community in Prague. He owned all books on queer history and we know that they were available to anybody who was interested. Karásek's cultural acquaintances, including contributors to *Nový Hlas / New Voice*, naturally knew about them as well. The basic work in his 'queer library' was Plato's *Symposium*, with the essential text for the divine twins archetype:

Now when this form had been cut in two, each half, yearning to brace its other, would throw its arms around the other and entwine together, wishing to grow together, refusing to eat until they began to die of hunger and laziness, but refusing to do anything apart.¹³

In *Nový Hlas / New Voice* magazine, Konůpek used the representation of a homosocial bond, which could be alternatively read as homosexual only by a circle of initiated viewers.

Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic ordered homoerotic images by Polish painter Wlastimil Hofman, an acquaintance of Jacek Malczewski. A vast correspondence proves Karásek's role as an inventor, who provided Hofman with accurate instructions on what the paintings should look like. Therefore, a collection of large canvases was made for Karásek – *Endymion, Ganymede, St. Sebastian* and a study of a nude as well as a number of drawings. All the pictures represent adolescent male nudes expressing a certain inner struggle, which can be interpreted in the field of mythology as well as performance of establishing and negotiating gender identity. At least this was the meaning Karásek's queer acquaintances probably understood.

Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, who left his vast collection and library to the Sokol sport organisation, obtained a flat and rooms where he could show his art collection and library to the public. However, Wlastimil Hofman's homoerotic pictures were always intended for private purposes of Karásek and his guests. It is evident that repetition of queer performance through an image is subordinated to the gap between a private queer gaze and a male heterosexual public gaze.

3. Who Is the Fag Now?

The queer life and social position are an expressive topic of heterosexual male authors in contemporary art, however, it acquires a distinct political content. As Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, women are occluded in homosocial and homorosexual

relationships and these relationships also influence heterosocial and heterosexual relationships.¹⁴ In Czech contemporary art, queer issues are very often used for criticism and discrediting of contemporary and past ultra-right attitudes, i.e. Nazi ideological residues of the Second World War and neo-Nazi groups of hooligans. In 2001, a male art group called Rafani (Beagle Boys) created an installation with eight posters called *Boj / Struggle*. Four posters represented demagogic slogans in a similar stylisation like Nazi and Communist propaganda posters, and the other four posters represented portraits of group members stylised as ultra-right skinheads with their bald skulls covered with sperm. They drew attention to violent definition of an ultra-right ideology against social reality of sexual minorities, although homosocial relations of fans of the ideology often serve as a cloak for homosexual practice. They have expressed a sexualisation of homosocial relationships of ultra-right skinheads in the name of homophobia in a very hypocritical manner and they refer to the pointlessness of homophobic fight from any ideological position.

Sexualisation of homosocial relationships is the topic of two contemporary works by self-identified heterosexual authors. Ondřej Brody, who has frequently cooperated with another male author, created an installation called *Degenerate Art* with artist Kristofer Paeteau. The installation referred to the previous criticism of their common works as degenerated ones. They selected 30 critical commentaries handwritten in Swabacher typography and they placed their portraits in Adolf Hitler stylization in the front of the venue. The notorious moustache was made of pubic hair of the other man. Their works are often on the verge of perversion, morality, pornography, yet they examine limits of the social constructs. The authors put it this way: “critique paintings” point out the degeneracy of our art. We also created a double (gay) Self-Portrait as Hitler in order to incorporate our degenerate image.¹⁵ It is up to the viewers to decide what is degenerative: stylisation into Adolf Hitler portrait or overstepping the tolerable boundary in representation of a relationship of two heterosexual men. The so-called degenerative embodiment of Adolf Hitler foreshadows the reasons behind the crossing of a thin line between homosociality, necessary to maintain the system of power, and homosexuality, interfering with a patriarchal system of power. The artists are not afraid to proclaim their professional relationship to be sexualised due to a political message.

Brody chose a different procedure in his performance with Evžen Šimera in 2003, called *Už Nejsme Buzíci / We Are Not Fags Any More*. Šimera says about the project:

We invited mostly couples to the opening, but single people as well. But only women were allowed to enter the room where the show was. The entry to this room was guarded by two guys and they did not allow any men to enter. Inside the showing room,

we tried to create a positively relaxing atmosphere. We installed a divan, candles, dim light, we offered chilled champagne and flowers. I and Brody tried to take the best possible care of the ladies. The men were gathered in other parts of the gallery and in the garden. Some of them were irritated, some were trying to interfere with our action, men wanted to have their girlfriends back. The output of this project was society divided into two parts, neither of which was able to have an objective point of view on our project.¹⁶

Brody and Šimera decided to demonstrate their heterosexuality and ideas about a professional and personal relationship of two male artists oscillating on the verge of homosociality and homosexuality, and to refute it by creating a fictitious confined system of power. They acquired the role of alpha-males and they excluded other men from the situation, therefore they eliminated any possible homosocial and homosexual relationships with them, all the while being no threat to each other. They disrupt the established patriarchal order using the structure of two equal men seducing a big group of women, because the exclusivity of men has always been a matter of one man only, and the leader of any system of power has always been one man – except for mutual homosexual relationships of two men. The situation when artists excluded all other heterosexual men in order to seduce a great number of women while respecting and performing the whole action together, was a retroactive and absurd confirmation of what they wanted to state. As Kosofsky Sedgwick writes in her brilliant book called *Tendencies*, ‘it is startling to realize that the aspect of “homosexuality” that now seems in many ways most immutably to fix it – its dependence on a defining sameness between partners – is so recent crystallization.’¹⁷ Violation of traditional patriarchal ideas about binarity of gender, sexuality and power (dominating / subordinating ones, male / female, homo/heterosexuality as well as a pederastic model within homosexual relationships) can be perceived as queer, i.e. as demonstration of difference and refusal. Kosofsky Sedgwick calls this subversion of binary codes within homosexual relationships a homosexual homo-genisation.

The situation in contemporary art shows that the sexualisation of homosocial relationships of two and more men is the political issue of a sexual dimension. As Kosofsky Sedgwick writes ‘homosexual activity can be either supportive of or oppositional to homosocial bonding.’¹⁸ The opposite can be valid as well, i.e. homosocial activity can be either supportive of or oppositional to homosexual bonding. Queering of a visual message appears to be a unique communication strategy to clarify political, social and sexual positions in both directions. Rafani’s work *Boj / Struggle* shows a political importance of a thin line between homosociality and homosexuality, and the ideological importance in the contemporary discourse. Ondřej Brody creates a system where he uses antithetic

strategies to disturb ideas about polarity of homo/heterosexuality. Brody and Rafani show that homosexuality is naturally anchored in social reality but it has always gone against performance of the structure of power. As Michel Foucault puts it: 'It is through the isolation, intensification and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct.'¹⁹ We can add that it penetrated modes of visual arts performativity as well.

4. Conclusion

The fact that images have a performative importance is demonstrated in medieval artworks that were supposed to evoke some (religious) deeds or experience,²⁰ and in images related to experience of negotiation of queer identity to hide codes of what could not be written or spoken about or to repress homosexual practice.

When I visited Musée du Louvre for the very first time at the age of 17, I intuitively spent hours in front of pictures which were (psychologically and erotically) connected with my otherness, queerness, and its internalisation. I later discovered their queer interpretations and I found out that experiences of images can be shared. I have recently learnt about an interesting concept of an American activist and spiritual leader Harry Hay. He thinks that the main contribution of queer people to heterosexual society is their point of view described as subject – SUBJECT consciousness. It is a point of view based on mutual respect, empathy and equality compared with heterosexual relationships based on subject-object dynamics, i.e. a heterosexual white man is superior to the others who are understood as subordinate objects in relationships of power.²¹

If we use this concept in the context of images and their continual and continuous experience, we can see that queer codes can be experienced and implemented in the images also by authors with no homosexual experience. In other words, many queer images were created by heterosexual male artists without any demonstration of queer desire.

Therefore, it is possible to share the performance of queer experience independently of sexual identity of the subject. Queer consciousness is transmittable.

The heterosexual concept of subject-object dynamics is applied in repetition of the performance when looking at the image. We are used to seeing a picture as a three-dimensional object with an aesthetically pleasing surface but we are not used to looking into the picture and equally decoding cultural traces of implemented deeds. Queer art is not the issue of implementation of queer representation or its queer reading but as Whitney Davis thoughtfully said, it is mostly about the degree of consensus among participating subjects²² – which leads us back to the concept of the subject-SUBJECT consciousness. However, we cannot participate in queer

performativity of the images only if we tolerate differences but we should be able to respect them and to experience them.

Notes

¹ Miroslav Petříček, 'Eventualita konce', in *Konec Světa?: Palác Kinských 26.5.-19.11.2000*, eds. Milan Knížák and Taťána Demčáková (Prague: National Gallery, 2000), 19-21.

² See Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, 'Visualizing the Community: Queer "Junk" as Representation, Self-Promotion and Stereo-Typology', in *Queer Sexualities: Staking Out the New Territories in Queer Studies*, ed. Anne Worthington (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2012), 49-69; Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, *What a Material: Queer Art from Central Europe* (Prague: Zikmund-Lender, 2012), 1-12; Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, "'Nakřivo Rostlý Výchonek". Obrazy Homosexuality v Umění České Dekadence', in *Homosexualita v Dějinách České Kultury*, ed. Martin C. Putna (Praha: Academia, 2011), 321-338; Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, 'Vlastní Pokoj, Kam se Nesmí. Gay a Lesbická Studia v Českých Dějinách Umění', in *Tvarujete si Sami? Sborník 3. Sjezdu Historiků Umění 25.-26. Zář 2008*, eds. Milena Bartlová and Hynek Látal (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 2010), 286-294.

³ Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal* 40, No. 4 (December 1988): 519-531.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 526.

⁵ See Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul J. Wood (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 949-953.

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 2-5.

⁷ Klára Hofbauerová-Heyrovská, *Mezi Umělci a Vědci* (Praha: Jos. R. Vilímeček, 1947), 160.

⁸ Milena Lenderová, "'Má se Svými Ženskými Peklo": Tak Trochu Jiná Láska v Secesní Praze', *Dějiny a Současnost* 12 (2007): 30-32; see also *idem*, last modified 2007, accessed 12 June 2013, <http://dejinyasoucasnost.cz/archiv/2007/12/-ma-se-svymi-zenskymi-peklo/>.

⁹ Tomáš Winter, *Miloš Jiránek: Zápas o Moderní Malbu* (Praha: Arbor Vitae, 2012), 55-56.

¹⁰ Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 5.

¹¹ Will Roscoe, *Queer Spirits: Gay Men's Myth Book* (San Francisco: Beacon Press, 1996).

¹² *Ibid.*, 150-151.

- ¹³ Ibid., 153; see also Plato: *Symposium*, ed. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- ¹⁴ Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 5.
- ¹⁵ 'Degenerate Art', last modified 2010, accessed 12 June 2013, <http://brodypaetau.com/recent-works/degenerate-art>.
- ¹⁶ Evžen Šimera, 'We Are Not Fags Any More', last modified 2013, accessed 23 January 2014, <http://evzensimera.name/2003-2/we-are-no-more-gays>.
- ¹⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 57.
- ¹⁸ Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 6.
- ¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Dějiny Sexuality I: Vůle k Vědění* (Prague: Herrmann & Synové, 1999), 59.
- ²⁰ Milena Bartlová, *Skutečná Přítomnost: Středověký Obraz Mezi Ikonou a Virtuální Realitou* (Prague: Argo, 2012), 25.
- ²¹ For further see Will Roscoe, *Queer Spirits: Gay Men's Myth Book* (San Francisco: Beacon Press, 1996).
- ²² Whitney Davis, 'Gender', in *Critical Terms in Art History*, ed. R. Nelson and R. Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 330.

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As a symbolic support, I would like to dedicate this contribution to Martin C. Putna, an inspiring Czech queer scholar I have the honour to be a friend of. On the 17th May 2013, which is celebrated as the International Day Against Homophobia, Czech President Miloš Zeman refused to appoint Putna a Professor due to Putna’s involvement in Prague Pride parade in 2011. There were protests against the unprecedented suppression of academic rights and homophobia during the conference week in Prague.

Part 3

The Personal Is the Political: Femininities and Masculinities in Socio-Political Contexts

Mrs. Private Property

Hande ayır

Abstract

How do human beings experience the surname change issue in terms of the protection of equal legal, social and economic rights, with particular reference to the documentary *Yok Anasının Soyadı / Mrs. His Name*? Indeed, my surname was also changed without my consent after my marriage. One day I realised I had two diplomas, each with a different name on it; however, both those people are me. Visually, my name has multiplied like an amoeba: Hande ayır, Hande Aydın, Hande ayır Aydın. From this visible sign, people around me – for example, the civil establishment – have gained the apparent right to talk about my personal life in the public sphere. Afterwards, I remembered the feminist quote ‘the personal is the political,’ started my own research, and found out that women in Turkey are required to change their surname when they marry and divorce. If they would like to continue using their ex-husband’s surname after a divorce, they need to get permission from both the ex-husband and the State. Because of this unfair policy, some women have appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), as the motion was opposed in Turkish courts, and subsequently the ECHR is requiring the Turkish Government to pay an indemnity. Thus, the link between surnames and identity is a crucial human rights debate. The media portrays this issue as one that is currently being solved. However, after my visit to the Turkish Grand National Assembly, I came to the conclusion that the process is not moving forward at all. As an emerging researcher and filmmaker, I have made the seventeen-minute documentary *Yok Anasının Soyadı / Mrs. His Name* (film: <http://vimeo.com/48432993>; password: handem82), which is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context.

Key Words: Autoethnography, documentary, surname, human rights, identity, representation of female subjectivity.

1. Individual Experience Juxtaposes Socio-Cultural Structures

The first time the surname change issue caught my attention was via e-mail. I had graduated from college and had started to work full-time in 2005. Around the same time, my manager sent a message with an unusual signature to our entire team. She used a double surname with one in brackets, in the form ‘Begum (Kent) Stone.’ I never forgot the image of that scene, as it meant a lot to me. It is a visual sign, a cultural code, with her feelings in between, a decision in the making. I asked her the meaning of the brackets and got the impression that our manager was, wholeheartedly, trying to become familiar with her new identity. I felt angry

and could not pin down the source of my anger. However, I suppose I knew what the brackets meant before asking. My aim was, intentionally, to make her think, but of course she had already been thinking about the issue. My question made her uncomfortable for a while. From this visible sign, the brackets, the double-surname usage, one person can develop an opinion of another's personal life. At that point, the private inevitably becomes public.

In her novel *Malina*, Austrian poet and author Ingeborg Bachmann emphasises the tension in heterosexual relationships as follows:

[Fascism] does not start with the first bombs that are dropped; it does not start with the terror you can write about, in every newspaper. It begins in relations between people. Fascism is the primary element in the relationship between a man and a woman.¹

This does not apply only to romantic couples. Years ago my manager and I also had a small war. Time passed, one day I married. Legally, women in Turkey have two options after marriage: they have to either abandon their maiden names and take their husbands' surnames, while also taking on a new visual identity, or alternatively, use both surnames. They do not have the option of keeping their own surnames, that is to say, their father's surname. In the end, for example, my surname became Aydın instead of Çayır, and the whole story began.

My writing and films have been published with the surname Çayır. Now, I am legally named Aydın. I did not know what to do. It was such a schizoid case. My identity multiplied, and I have stuck with Hande Çayır Aydın in case of emergency. Some people know my professional Çayır identity; legal partners have to meet with me as Aydın. This case triggered the example of '*Sybil: The Classic True Story of a Woman Possessed by 16 Separate Personalities*,' classified as non-fiction, and was a runaway bestseller.² Multiple personality disorder (MPD) was Sybil's illness. She had different names/selves, plus hysteric crises. The whole identity, visually in the case of my surname, mentally in Sybil's case, breaks into pieces, and as a result of that, fragmented structures come into the world. Lastly, Sybil's multiple personality is a sign of her illness. On the other hand, the changing of surnames when women marry and divorce carries a similar meaning. If a woman, for example, decides to marry sixteen times in her life, she will take on sixteen consecutive identities. Thus, it is a kind of closed system that serves the patriarchy and its private properties. With this labeling, sealing, changing surname system, the family union is protected. Women and children are labeled with different surnames if the couple gets divorced. Men have the right to take their surname back after a divorce, which is what happened to well-known Turkish TV personality Serap Ezgü in 2010. Did this affect her economically? Has the forced surname change been a barrier for her career? How can this happen to someone so

well-known? How do human beings experience the surname change issue in terms of the protection of equal legal, social and economic rights, and how does this reflect in contemporary media sources such as newspapers, advertising, television and cinema? These questions surfaced as readily as my anger. In personal terms, one day I realised I had two diplomas, each with a different name on it. However, both those people are me. My name has multiplied like an amoeba: Hande Çayır, Hande Aydın, Hande Çayır Aydın. From this visible sign, people around me – for example, the civil establishment – have gained the apparent right to talk about my personal life in the public sphere.

Afterwards, I remembered the feminist quote ‘the personal is the political,’³ started doing my own research, and found out that women in Turkey are required to change their surnames when they marry and divorce. If they would like to continue using their ex-husband’s surname after a divorce, they need to get permission from both the ex-husband and the State. Because of this unfair policy, some women have appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), as the motion was opposed in Turkish courts, and subsequently the ECHR requires the Turkish government to pay an indemnity.

Thus, the link between surname change and identity is a crucial human rights debate. The media portrays this issue as one that is currently being solved. However, after my visit to the Turkish Grand National Assembly, I came to the conclusion that the process is not moving forward at all. As an emerging researcher and filmmaker, I have made the seventeen-minute documentary *Yok Anasının Soyadı / Mrs. His Name*, which is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. To put it in a nutshell, I believe movies can bring us closer to the human experience and assist in the process of change.

2. Documenting the Dialogues of ‘Eye-Then-Tea-Tea’/ (Identity)

Yok Anasının Soyadı / Mrs. His Name is a documentary about women changing their surnames when they get married and divorced. Women face opposition in Turkey and appeal to the ECHR in order to protect their identities. The analysis is self-reflexive with the methodology of autoethnography, focusing on the feminist quotation ‘the personal is the political.’ The research and film follow the relationship between the analyst and the analysed, where the autoethnographer is the instrument of data collection. Narratives in film are constructed with regard for social memory and identity, treating self as other, while the researcher and researched, dominant and subordinate, and individual experience and socio-cultural structures can be examined, creating equality.

To be precise, I did not know the sexy word ‘autoethnography’ while I was making the film. In order to heal, I wanted to tell my story, which is referred to as ‘auto’ in literature. I was curious about other women’s choices, men’s thoughts on that, even children’s. That part is called the ‘ethnos,’ working through people/culture. Here is the ‘graph’: five years ago, my husband insisted that I

change my surname. I was legally Hande Aydın, Mrs. His Name, and Mrs. Private Property. Additionally, he wanted to see his surname in unofficial papers - on my business card and in my film credits. My reflex was to refuse. He pushed against my refusal by insisting. Initially, it was like a joke between us. Subsequently, Sigmund Freud's *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* barks up the wrong tree. It was not a joke. My family was calling out my name as 'Mrs. Aydın' with a smile. My second family, that is to say, my husband's family, was quite silent. In the mean time, some of my writing was published with an amoeba name: Hande Çayır Aydın. One fine day, Mrs. Private Property came across a quotation from Mahatma Gandhi: 'Be the change you wish to see in the world.'⁴ Until that time, I did not know what to do. I cared for my husband, and his friends were joking about our different surnames. We were not the symbol of a traditional family, or a representation of homogeneity in surname. The visual sign reflected our non-traditional relationship. He instantly gained a nickname, though, the 'henpecked husband,' just because of my decision regarding my surname. It is my name and my habituation of forming my 'self,' but remarkably, my husband's friends, my family, and other people had the right to talk about it. Moreover, they could exact emotional power over an individual. Those people transformed into toy police in my surreal world. I thought our personal world was haunted by those toys. The end result was a decision to divorce. The reason was not only the surname change issue; it was simply the first sign of differing opinions, bitter standpoints, and a rough existence.

In 2004, I made a short work of art called 'eye-then-tea-tea/identity,'⁵ questioning self and other. It was an abstract form of visuals and colour, dominated by sensation. My father watched it and enquired, 'We are all university graduates and none of us understands your work. What are you actually doing in university; is this really your only work?' This feedback made me feel pitiful and bewildered. Hence, in the documentary *Yok Anasının Soyadı / Mrs. His Name*, I tried to cut down my tendency for abstractions, in response to my father. My desire was to be understood. I sometimes use the classic 'talking heads' style, but frankly, it seems boring to me. My instructor advised, 'If it is boring to you, then, it will be boring for others, too.' The form in *Yok Anasının Soyadı / Mrs. His Name*, then, became a mixture of both the abstract and the concrete. Responses to those quite divergent scenes were totally different.

3. 'Being Oppressed Means the Absence of Choices'⁶

The documentary begins with a dialogue with my husband, discussing the meaning of the project:

Husband: Okay, what's the project? Let's hear you.

Mrs. Private Property: The project... it's called "Surname".

Husband: My love, are you shooting "Surname" now?

Mrs. Private Property: Of course!

Husband: It is an unnecessary project... It is meaningless.

Mrs. Private Property: Why?

Husband: There are a lot of subjects to film, couldn't you find anything else?

Mrs. Private Property: Hmm, are you making light of this problem?

Husband: Yes, I'm making light of it.⁷

While I was in primary school, we had a classmate whose parents got divorced. One day, we went to her house for a birthday party. On the doorbell, there was an unfamiliar surname. We knew our twelve-year-old friend did not have this surname, and we realised that her parents were divorced. The children started to joke about it, which really hurt me. Even at that age, making light of that situation was not acceptable to me.

Here is a continuing excerpt from the above conversation, including the topic of how 'women get out of control' if they decide to choose their own surname and identity:

- Women use two surnames one after the other; it was not like that before. Why do you think it's happening now?
- It's like women got out of control.
- What?
- "Out of control", what does that mean?
- You don't know what "out of control" means, my love?
- You mean that they're in charge of their own decisions?
- No.
- Does it mean they're taking charge of...?
- They go wild! They go wild!
- So we can say they're taking charge of things.
- A bridle is a tool for controlling a horse. You know a bridle?
- Yes.
- Who is the horse?
- So it means... you control the horse by its bridle. Like you know, when you pull it, the horse stops.
- Yes.
- If the horse gets mad and out of hand when she doesn't obey you, the bridle is between the horse's teeth, right? She bites down hard on the bridle.
- Hmm...

-
- And then whatever you do, the horse does not respond, she just gets frantic. So it means, in fact, you are no longer able to control the horse. It's all gotten out of hand...
 - So the horse is a metaphor for women, then.
 - Yes.
 - Do something worthwhile... Leave women's issues alone! Did you hear me?
 - Did you hear me? Am I talking to the wall?⁸

Also, some men in Turkey think it is 'normal' to expect a woman to take on her husband's surname:

- Are you married?
- Yes, I am.
- What about your wife?
- It was normal, it wasn't a big deal. She uses my surname. She didn't ask for anything else.
- Did she not?
- No, no.
- And if she had?
- My wife doesn't really do that sort of thing. How can I describe it? I guess she just doesn't find it important.
- I wonder why?
- I don't know, I mean, I think she doesn't think about this stuff.
- Hmm...
- She thinks about the kids and stuff like that now, she doesn't have energy to think about these kinds of things.⁹

This problem is not changing at all in Turkey, socially or legally. Indeed, this could be solved via identity numbers: women could give their surnames to men, or an entirely new family surname for both parties could be possible. However, at this juncture these choices are absent and oppression arises.

I was carrying a camera with me the entire time, nearly two years, during the shooting process. Experts, lawyers, people in the street, artists – they all have surnames, but some of their surnames have changed without their consent. Murathan Mungan, the famous Turkish author, says in his book *Yüksek Topuklar / High Heels* that women with two surnames are 'double-faced,'¹⁰ because on one hand they act like feminists by using two surnames, but on the other they reinforce

the patriarchy. In the end, it is your name, but almost everybody has a right to intervene except you.

Here is another example, a man whose wife is Canadian. The man is my boss. In my documentary, he is the only one who asks questions before I have a chance to.

- Do they talk about it openly before they get married?
- Everybody has a different story.
- All right, my opinion is that if they didn't bring it up before the marriage, then it is normal to act according to social norms. That is what I would expect. I mean, it is like saying that I don't want to do my military conscription, but I have to. It's not an option for me. Like circumcision – everybody expects me to do it, so it's not an option, either. So this is not my option. It's not about what I want, it's bigger than that. And if the person I propose to doesn't say from the beginning that she wants to do something exceptional, outside the norms, I would not accept her wishes.
(*Yok Anasının Soyadı / Mrs. His Name*, 2012)¹¹

The following is taken from a conversation with a taxi driver:

- Throughout time it has been a custom, a tradition, so it is not very logical. So to me, in the end, it is not important whether a wife uses her husband surname or not, if they are formally married on paper.
- So I don't know.
- Are you married?
- Yes, I am.
- Your wife's surname, is it yours?
- Yes, mine.
- What would you have said if she had said to you, "I am not going to use your surname, I will use mine"?
- Actually, my wife did say that to me...
- Really?
- My wife is a university graduate. She is a teacher. I did not allow it, I did not accept it.
(*Yok Anasının Soyadı/Mrs. His Name*, 2012)¹²

4. Women Made a Difference in The(ir) World

After listening to men, I focused on women, and specifically those who made a difference in their lives with the innovative choices in the face of this imposition. Here is Asuman Bayrak's path:

I was born in 1964. I got married in 1992. When I got married, I had to tick a box on the form in order to use my own surname with my husband's. I didn't do it. In any case, I never thought about changing my surname. However, I guess five or six years after my marriage, a thief entered our office and stole all my identity cards. Until that day I had never changed my surname. I didn't feel it was necessary. I thought, if I don't change it, it remains as it is. But when I went to apply for a new identity card, I could see that my surname was gone and had been replaced with my husband's surname. I called my lawyer about it; she said not to accept any documents. So I didn't, and I carry a paper that replaces my stolen ID for two years. I didn't know what to do. I got so angry. Later, with my husband's consent and his witness, and with my business partner, we appealed to the court. Asuman Bayrak is known as Asuman Bayrak in a business context, so her surname must not change. However, even though the judge was a woman, she decided against me. Then we appealed to a higher court. Again the decision was against me. In any event, this process took four or five years. During that period, I lived without any identification. I couldn't go abroad, I could not do anything. However, eventually I had to retire. Legally, we had to divorce. So we did, but we live together. In order not to change my name, we had to get divorced but we still live together. When we were opposed in Turkey, we appealed to the ECHR. That took four or five years; last year in October we finally got a decision in our favor. However, there are two cases before mine in Turkey, and at the moment the government does not recognize the decision of the ECHR. So if I get married again, the Turkish government will again change my surname. But I am determined to fight against it to the bitter end. Now, the ECHR is requiring the Turkish government to pay an indemnity. So we are waiting for the results of that process.¹³

And here is another woman, Ayşegül Yaraman:

However, I don't think it is a system we could not manage. As time passes in a marriage, a common surname or a selected one

could be used. But at least, I think that today's legal system leads women into a voluntary second class, even with the law that allows the use of two surnames.¹⁴

5. Outcome versus Process

This research will represent a significant output for academia, as Turkish resources are limited to the extent that only two books on the subject have been published in Turkey: *Kadının Soyadı* by Nazan Moroğlu and *Kadının Soyadı ve Buna Bağlı Olarak Çocuğun Soyadı* by Yıldız Abik. Both writers are lawyers; as a result of this, both books are written from a forensic point of view. That is to say, it is important to produce and share knowledge in this area using autoethnography.

The autobiographer writes about self without other. The ethnographer studies other with as little self as possible. The autoethnographer treats self as other. Furthermore, autoethnography calls attention to issues of power. It is about being aware of one's position in the context of research, rather than denying it. I, as the autoethnographer, was the instrument of data collection and I am proud of that. During the process of creating the documentary, I was incredibly vulnerable but healing, and discovering that I was not living in an isolated environment, *fanus*.¹⁵

Flashback...

When I presented my paper at my university, the committee asked, 'What is the difference between the writing of your research and a novel?' Unfortunately, at that time I was not familiar with the books *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* by Carolyn Ellis or Kim Etherington's *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research*. However, I think I defended the points in my own way, simply by expressing my true beliefs, and I know, feel and sense that this is only the beginning.

Notes

¹ Ingeborg Bachman, *Malina* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2013), 1-5.

² Flora Rheta Schreiber, *Sybil* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1989).

³ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴ Rita Verma, *Be The Change: Teacher, Activist, Global Citizen* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), 210-211.

⁵ Hande Çayır, *Eye-Then-Tea-Tea* (Sabancı University, 2004), accessed 23 November 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e22iS2YtaYI>.

⁶ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

⁷ Çayır, *Yok Anasının Soyadı* (2012).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Murathan Mungan, *Yüksek Topuklar* (İstanbul: Metis, 2007).

¹¹ Çayır, *Yok Anasının Soyadı*.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ P. Clough and L. Nutbrown, *A Student's Guide to Methodology: Justifying Enquiry* (London: Sage, 2002).

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Embodying Womanhood?: Doing Pregnancy, Doing Research

Gemma Anne Yarwood

Abstract

In 2010, whilst undertaking qualitative research into UK parenting, I became pregnant with my first child. In this chapter, I discuss my experiences of this with particular focus on my research relationship with one of the mothers I interviewed whilst pregnant. I describe how, as a white woman researcher in my mid thirties living in the UK, I was positioned by the research participant within and outside femininity discourses based on cultural norms on the feminine body. Drawing on my interview transcript and field notes, I highlight how I negotiated this complex research relationship. I felt problematised by the participant based on constructed notions of femininity. Namely, that within the UK feminine beauty constructs women's ideal body shape as a slender waist.¹ This contradicts feminine notions of woman's capacity to reproduce which entails changing body shape and gaining weight.² I found the research participant (often to my discomfort) openly discussed my embodied pregnancy. Here I argue that, unlike other circumstances, the physicality of pregnancy is considered normative practices of talk.³ I conclude this chapter, by arguing that there is a need for closer examination of the taken for granted assumptions associated with the researcher/researched relationship. In particular, I suggest that researchers should consider the significance of their personal biography on the research process and research relationships.⁴

Key Words: Womanhood, femininity, motherhood, qualitative research, research relationships.

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an insight into my personal experiences of being pregnant whilst undertaking qualitative research interviews into UK parenting. The complexity of my experiences, in part, lies in the challenges I faced in undertaking face-to-face interviews (with six working mothers in the UK). During these interviews, to my discomfort, the research participants openly discussed my pregnant physicality. Here I focus on data from one participant as space precludes in-depth analysis of my relationships with numerous participants. I consider my discomfort in being positioned within and outside normative discourses of femininity by one participant (Karen⁵). Whilst I give evidence of the ways the participant positioned me within cultural norms of femininity and motherhood, I acknowledge dilemmas I faced in challenging these norms. I conclude this chapter by suggesting the need for further research which examines research relationships during face to face interviews, paying particular attention to subjective experiences of femininity and womanhood.

This chapter is located amongst existing feminist informed literature on the social construction of femininity and motherhood as an institution. Firstly, I outline the background to this UK based study, attending to constructions of motherhood and womanhood to situate my own personal biography and signpost the UK based research context in which the chapter is situated. I wish to declare that, I do not assume the chapter's generalisability. Instead, I aim to stimulate debate about differences and similarities of cross-cultural norms of femininity and pregnancy within a forum of inter- and multi-disciplinary discussion. Secondly, I describe the study, before moving on to present interview data and field notes of my feelings about the interviews and the research relationships. My discussions focus on the negotiations with the research participant (Karen, white forty-year-old professional woman with two children) and myself (a white woman researcher in her mid thirties who became pregnant with her first child during the research process). I outline my feelings of discomfort in the interview when Karen deemed it acceptable to comment on my pregnant body and my personal biography. I argue that my findings demonstrate how she positioned me in relation to cultural norms of femininity and motherhood mobilised within the UK.. These norms construct womanhood and motherhood as mutually constitutive.⁶ I found I was problematised as a woman based on the associations of mothering and femininity.⁷

2. The Pregnant Body and Discourses of Femininity

Globally, pregnancy and motherhood have been dominant representations of femininity for decades. Feminist informed scholarship has worked tirelessly to question cultural norms embedded within notions of the femininity and motherhood. In this chapter, I focus on my experiences of being a pregnant researcher to consider the challenges posed by idealised constructions of feminine beauty. Situated amongst this feminist scholarship, here I discuss how pregnancy means weight gain and changing body shape, both of which are positioned outside notions of idealised feminine beauty.

The idealised woman is constructed on notions of biological capability to mother.⁸ Embedded in constructions of motherhood are notions of femininity. These constructions are presented as a natural outcome of biology and an innate female feminine maternal instinct.⁹ Motherhood and womanhood are conceptualised as mutually constitutive within a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality.¹⁰ Rooted within the social construction of the mother are contradictory notions of feminine beauty and innate capacity to reproduce. Dominant discourses of femininity in the global West centre on an idealised body shape, specifically representations of a slender waist.¹¹ This contradicts with the capacity to be 'feminine' by becoming a mother, represented in pregnancy by shape change and weight gain.¹² As pregnant women's bodies change (they become larger inevitably as the baby grows inside their body), in the UK these can

be positioned outside the discourse of feminine beauty as they are constructed as less attractive.¹³

In the past decade, a burgeoning area within feminist informed literature has focused on disrupting the traditional idealised feminine mother construct. One way this has been undertaken is by examining the embodiment of gender and femininity in pregnancy and motherhood.¹⁴ The pregnant body presents embodied examples of the complex everyday realities of doing mothering both in the public and private spaces.¹⁵ The physicality of embodied aspects of motherhood cannot be hidden from view. Weight gain and changing body shape are physiological ‘happenings’ in the process of becoming a mother. Thus it provides ‘physical examples’ to trouble the often inaccurate constructions of femininity and motherhood within the UK.¹⁶ For instance, whilst mainstream Anglo-American popular culture provides representations of the pregnant women as symbols of femininity, heterosexuality and motherhood, they do not focus on the physiological leakiness and messiness of pregnancy. (Within feminist scholarship, this located alongside feminist discussions of menstruation and other aspects of embodied womanhood.) Recent feminist scholarship provides much needed addition to the debates about womanhood and femininity.¹⁷ These messy physiological realities of the embodied experiences of pregnancy and womanhood function to disrupt the romanticised and sanitised ideal mother construct and its embedded notions of femininity.

Having briefly outlined cultural norms of femininity, motherhood and womanhood dominant within the UK, I present two excerpts from my interview with Karen to describe my interpretations of being positioned by her inside and outside the norms of motherhood and femininity. I discuss how, as a pregnant female researcher in my mid-thirties, I experienced feelings of discomfort when Karen talked openly about my pregnant body and how my body shape was constructed as unattractive within the dominant cultural norms of Anglo-American feminine beauty in early twenty-first century.

3. The Study

Although my research relationship with Karen is the focus of this chapter, I interviewed her as part of a larger parenting study involving semi-structured interviews with eleven working mothers and nine working fathers in the UK. The research aimed to examine their parenting experiences during a period of social, economic and political transformation within the UK, namely economic recession, shifting gendered working and parenting participation, and changes to policy and political leadership.¹⁸

The study chose working parents with children aged five years and under because these were implicated in most contemporary changes to UK work-family policy (between the data collection period 2008-2010). I used semi-structured interviews with the participants (all living and working in the UK at the time of data collection (2008-2010)). They varied in cohabiting arrangements, marital

status and ethnicity. All identified themselves as heterosexual, aged between 29 and 42 years old and in paid employment at the time of data collection. Their occupations varied in type and contractual arrangements including part-time, full-time, flexi-time, compressed hours, self-employed and temporary contracts.

Recruitment of my participants involved initial advertising using posters, websites and electronic communication tools such as emails and local Library / community group notice boards in two towns within a 15-mile radius of a North West City in England. Volunteers contacted me for preliminary discussions and I used a snowballing sampling technique asking them to recommend other potential participants. This enabled my sample group to expand through parents recommending others who fitted my criteria of being a working parent with a child under five years old. I do not claim that those recruited in my study are representative (see Millennium Cohort Study for evidence of this). Instead, my research aimed to gain a rich corpus of detailed accounts of their everyday working/parenting experiences.

Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately an hour with each parent. I gained signed ethical consent from each participant and the interviews took place in a negotiated location.¹⁹ I later transcribed the Dictaphone recorded interview using a simplified version of Jeffersonian notation.²⁰ Data analysis was framed by an interpretivist approach in which intersubjectivity between researcher and participant is recognised as generating key data.²¹ I read and reread the transcripts and my field notes, focusing on my interpretation of both the events and the intersubjective relationship between the participant (Karen) and myself. I used existing research²² on mothers-to-be and idealised female body discourse to inform my analysis. In this chapter, I examine interview data and field notes focused on one of the mothers in the study. I have chosen to focus on Karen because of the richness of the data and the intense feeling of discomfort I recorded in my field notes after my interview with her.

4. My Experiences of Interviewing Mothers Whilst Pregnant

Excerpt 1

Karen: 'Wow your belly looks big, I bet you feel embarrassed.'

GY: 'Oh do I look big?'

*Karen: 'Has your midwife said anything to you about your size? I was big like you when I had my second, I was big but I survived in the end.'*²³

By virtue of its visible embodiment, my pregnancy was integral to how my identity was co-constructed during the interviews. For example in this excerpt

Karen positions my pregnant size central in her construction of motherhood. In doing so, she pathologises my body size drawing on associations of acceptability.²⁴ As part of this, she asks me ‘*Has your midwife said anything to you about your size?*’ In doing so, she draws on notions of midwifery expertise in diagnosing ‘my big size’ within notions of normal size of a pregnant belly. Howson²⁵ suggests that in the beginning of the twenty-first century, Anglo-American societies have witnessed a transformation to a formalised knowledge of pregnancy and its redefinition as pathology. Within the context of Karen’s interview, she identifies her own experiences of pregnancy by drawing on the expertise and knowledge she gained from her midwife. She goes on to position me outside norms by noting that, ‘*your belly looks big.*’ She adds a disclaimer ‘*I was big like you when I had my second, I was big but I survived in the end,*’ using ‘*survive*’ to suggest that with expert midwifery knowledge, I may survive my pathologised pregnancy.

In the excerpt, Karen says ‘*I bet your feel embarrassed.*’ I reply ‘*Oh do I look big?*’ Until my experience of pregnancy, I was unaccustomed to people making explicit comments about my physical appearance. In the interview, I responded to Karen’s comment with a question because I felt a heightened sense of awareness about my pregnant physicality. I was also aware of the feminine ideal of the slender-waisted women which dominates representations in the UK’s mainstream popular culture. My response to Karen was partly for my own reassurance but also I felt shocked being described as ‘*big.*’ I was fully aware that my body shape had changed inevitably as my pregnancy progressed. I had not, until this point, considered this problematic. I felt this must be noticeable for Karen to comment on it. At this point in the interview, I became acutely aware of how my private gendered and sexualised body as a pregnant woman could not be clearly boundary from the public body of the researcher.²⁶ For feminist sociologist Caroline Gatrell,²⁷ the physical embodiment of pregnancy can signify societal assumptions that there are differential notions of acceptability when discussing physicality that in other circumstances would not be considered normative practices of talk. Like many other researchers, I felt uneasy about these empirical realities of my fleshy material body.²⁸

In my field notes, I documented how I felt discomfort in Karen’s comments about my pregnant size. Despite my academic background (in which I had reviewed existing feminist literature on the regulation of pregnancy and childbirth), I wrote in my field notes about how I needed to ask my midwife if I was big and if there was a problem with my size and my unborn child. Despite feeling Karen problematised my pregnant size, I did not challenge this assumption in the interview with her.

In another excerpt, detailed below, Karen referred to feeling like ‘*a big fat whale*’ whilst pregnant with her first baby. I felt particularly uncomfortable when she finishes her statement by asking me ‘*You know what I mean, right?*’ In doing so, I felt she was appealing to my shared understanding of the dominant cultural

norms. She asked me to agree with her that I know what she means and I too *'felt like a big fat whale.'*

Excerpt 2

*'I felt like a big fat whale when I was pregnant with my first baby, I couldn't dress in nice clothes or heels, I'd lost my waist, my womanly curves. You know what I mean right?'*²⁹

In my field notes I documented I had not, until the point of the interview *'felt like a big fat whale.'* I interpreted her comments as negative representations of the pregnant body and I had, up until the interview, felt positive about my pregnant body. She comments: *'I'd lost my waist, my womanly curves'* and, in doing so, draws on notions of the ideal feminine body as a slender waist and defined hips dominant in the UK. This contradicts the inevitability of weight gain and changing body shape associated with pregnancy. In my field notes I questioned, how could I be both feminine in sense of the slender waist and feminine in becoming a mother? These seemed contradictory notions of femininity to me and I asked myself: did I actually want or expect to be constructed in either of these ways? The existence of a slenderness norm within constructions of femininity in the UK is difficult to ignore, we are aware of it as a dominant cultural norm although we may avoid pursuing slenderness.³⁰

In terms of my intersubjective relationship with Karen, I also recorded feeling my relationship with Karen was in its early stages and I did not want to offend Karen by challenging her comments. I recorded that, on balance, I felt I did not want to challenge Karen's questioning my size and appearance or the fact I felt she judged me as being outside the assumed norms of femininity and motherhood. In my field notes I acknowledged that these and other excerpts were examples of the complex decision-making process as I negotiated my research relationship with Karen. Researchers must make difficult decisions during interviews particularly to ensure relationships remain established. However, I was fully aware that researchers should not put themselves at risk. I did not feel at risk, instead I felt discomfort as I have explored throughout this chapter. It is important, however, to signpost here that, if matters arise in which the researcher interprets the research relationship as compromising the safety of those involved, then the researcher has an ethical responsibility to revisit the purpose of the research and deal with ethical concerns by following appropriate procedures in place.

5. Summary and Final Comments

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's argument that each individual is in the world through their body and that each individual perceives that world within their body, I found my pregnant body provided a visible cue during the interviews. As a trained researcher, I was aware of the complex relationship between 'researcher' and 'researched.' In particular, the interpretive research framework I adopted here enabled me to focus on the intersubjectivity between Karen (the participant) and

myself (the researcher). According to feminist psychologists Lawthom and Tindall,³¹ interpretive qualitative research has the capacity to emphasise the rich interconnections of researcher and participant during interviews. By acknowledging this relationship between the researcher and research participant, the practice of research can be considered a significant shared meaning-making process, stimulated by intersubjective engagement of both parties. In this chapter I have provided two interview excerpts to present the rich and complex relationship between Karen and myself. In this specific interview with Karen I experienced mixed feelings about my relationship and interactions with her. On the one hand, I interpreted her comments and questions as her engagement in the interview. On the other hand, I felt uncomfortable when she commented critically both directly (excerpt 1) and indirectly (excerpt 2) on my physical size. My field notes evidence how, despite feeling reluctant to talk about my pregnancy, I was often drawn into comments about my appearance.

In this chapter, I have described how the unfolding of events in an interview situation provides rich data of interesting insights into how I ‘did research and pregnancy.’ In other words, this paper has drawn attention to intersectionality³² as a theoretical consideration to discuss one example of how femininity was performed and represented. I focused on my own positioning as a UK based white woman, pregnant researcher. I have argued that methodological insights, such as the ones given here, present a sense of the challenges for scholars of femininity wishing to consider how they position themselves within epistemologies and research practise.

Notes

¹ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (London: University of California Press, 1993), 50.

² Sally Johnson, Anne Burrows and Iain Williamson, “‘Does My Bump Look Big in This?’ The Meaning of Bodily Changes for First Time Mothers-to-Be’, *Journal of Health Psychology* 9, No. 3 (2004): 361-374.

³ Caroline Gatrell, *Hard Labour: The Sociology of Parenthood* (Berkshire: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56-57.

⁴ Gayle Letherby, *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 124.

⁵ Karen’s name has been changed to protect her identity following *British Psychological Association Ethics Procedure* (BPS, 2010).

⁶ Maaret Wager, ‘Childless by Choice? Ambivalence and the Female Identity’, *Feminism & Psychology* 10 (2000): 389-395.

⁷ Letherby, *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

- ⁹ Sandra Roper and Rose Capdevila, “‘We Are a Real Family’: A Q Methodological Study on the Experiences of Stepmothers”, *Radical Psychology* 9, No. 2 (2010), accessed 12th February 2013, <http://www.radicalpsychology.org/vol9-2/roper.html>.
- ¹⁰ Wager, ‘Childless by Choice?’, 390.
- ¹¹ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 50.
- ¹² Johnson, Burrows and Williamson, “‘Does My Bump Look Big in This?’”, 361.
- ¹³ Alexandra Howson, *The Body in Society*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Policy Press, 2013), 120.
- ¹⁴ Rachel Thomson et al., *Making Modern Mothers* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2011), 88-89.
- ¹⁵ Caroline Gatrell, ‘Secrets and Lies: Breastfeeding and Professional Paid Work’, *Social Science and Medicine* 65 (2007): 393-404.
- ¹⁶ Johnson, Burrows and Williamson, “‘Does my Bump Look Big in This?’”, 366.
- ¹⁷ Caroline Gatrell, *Embodying Women’s Work* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2008), 16.
- ¹⁸ Mary Daly, ‘Shifts in Family Policy in the UK under New Labour’, *Journal of European Social Policy* 20 (2010): 433-443.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Rachael O’Byrne, Mark Rapley and Susan Hansen, “‘You Couldn’t Say ‘No’, Could You?’: Young Men’s Understandings of Sexual Refusal”, *Feminism & Psychology* 16 (2006): 133-154.
- ²¹ Rebecca Lawthom and Carol Tindall, ‘Phenomenology’, *Qualitative Methods in Psychology: A Research Guide*, eds. Peter Banister et al. (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2011), 8.
- ²² Johnson, Burrows and Williamson “‘Does My Bump Look Big in This?’”, 363.
- ²³ Gemma Anne Yarwood, *A Discursive Examination of UK Based Working Parents Talk* (Unpublished interview data, 11 September 2010).
- ²⁴ Howson, *The Body in Society*, 140.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 141.
- ²⁶ Melanie Mauthner, Maxine Birch, Julie Jessop and Tina Miller, *Ethics in Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 2002), 2-3.
- ²⁷ Gatrell, *Hard Labour*, 34.
- ²⁸ Julia Twigg, *The Body in Health and Social Care* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 87.
- ²⁹ Yarwood, *A Discursive Examination*.
- ³⁰ Howson, *The Body in Society*, 13.
- ³¹ Lawthom and Tindall, ‘Phenomenology’, 11.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 10.

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Contemporary Maternity: Independent Reproduction with Assisted Technology

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Abstract

This study and chapter analyse the experiences of single women who look for treatments in order to have children (Assisted Reproduction) and their relationship with contemporary dynamics concerning reproductive projects. Essentially, it aims to investigate in which sense the desire of having children is dissociated from conjugality, mediated by reproductive technologies. In this case, it is possible that a repositioning of the father and male figure is taking place. Besides, the aim is to identify if those experiences mediate autonomy processes and women's decisions over the course of their lives. Research consisted of semi-structured interviews with fifteen single women from different regions of Brazil, mostly residents in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. It also collected testimonies of Spanish and Argentine women. The interviewed women's ages vary from 28 to 42 years. The group involves those who intend to submit themselves to reproductive assisted treatments, those who are involved with any kind of proceedings like egg freezing, artificial insemination and In Vitro Fertilisation, and those who have already had children or who are pregnant. We have interviewed specialised physicians who work for the main reproductive clinics in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, as well as psychologists working in Brazil, Spain and Argentina. Moreover, we interviewed the coordinator of the only sperm bank in Brazil. These testimonials have shown an ongoing 'maternity redesign,' which reveals dilemmas and a construction of new narratives about reproduction and attendant subjects. From the collected material, it becomes possible to broaden and improve the debates about the relations and impacts of reproductive technologies in women's lives, as well as deepening the study of family and gender, and their future horizons.¹

Key Words: Maternity, reproductive technologies, single mothers, family, gender.

1. Introduction

Single motherhood is not a novelty. Over time this experience has been part of human history in different contexts.² So what makes maternity without conjugality and mediated by technologies contemporary? Furthermore, could a disjunction between marriage and reproduction be underway?

This is especially important in a context where children are born from relationships; reproduction and sexuality are linked, and definitions of fatherhood/motherhood emerge from genetic and biological contributions. All these things have been called into question in the contemporary scenario.

By analysing the life-stories of fifteen single women who had or had not undergone some kind of assisted reproduction procedure³ we think about three issues: senses of motherhood in non-conjugality scenarios, the nexus between reproduction and women's life courses, and the implications of reproduction technologies on gender dynamics. In spite of different nuances of gender, age and other social markers among the interviewees, the research shows that there is a redesigning of motherhood in progress.

From the institutional point of view, single women's demand for assisted reproduction in Brazil remains mostly unexpressed. On the other hand, women consider that interest in this issue is increasing, although many keep it a secret. It is worth highlighting that the coordinator of the sperm Bank PROSEED registers an important increase in these numbers.

It should be noted that the women interviewed⁴ have sought assisted reproduction in private clinics. That is because public clinics are scarce and directed towards low-income couples. Assisted reproduction regulation in Brazil comes from the Federal Council of Medicine⁵ which states that single people can use AR according to doctor's agreements.

The clinics here analysed target couples with fertility problems. Many women say that they did not know if they would be included because they were single. From the interviews with physicians it was clear that the largest number of people attended to consisted of infertile heterosexual couples, followed by homosexual couples and single women. This demand is inclined to cryopreservation of oocytes.

2. Motherhood in a Non-Marital Scenario

For some women, the desire for motherhood is a feeling that can appear at a specific moment in their lives, stimulated by long-lasting relationships, relatives and friends having children, the purchase of property, getting a new job, or advancing age. In any case, it expresses an essential connection to one's person itself, mostly related to the female universe and the idea of maturity, so it means fulfilment and completeness.

Therefore, motherhood has a sense in a highly individual value context, turning itself into a personal project. There is also a belief in a link between generations in order to improve the ways of living together, education and care. Thus, motherhood would be a way to carry out these changes.

Just one of women interviewed flatly said that she would never make use of assisted reproduction in order to have a child alone. In other cases, eight women made use of some kind of procedure (artificial insemination, In Vitro Fertilisation, cryopreservation of oocytes); four intend to do it, and two of them are unsure.

The natural and ideal way of forming their families is by means of relationships. Nevertheless, two women claimed that they have always known they would be single mothers. To the remaining group, independent maternity by AR represents a second option, as a result of their love experiences. This decision is

experienced, in some situations, with a sense of frustration, but to others it is a way of fulfilling their dream to be a mother.

The absence of a father is a tension aspect related to this independent maternity option. 'A father is missed,' says one of the women. There is an expectation about the meaning of generating a child who will not have a father. That is because even when they recognise the *ficitious* presence of the father in some marital formats, a *front husband* as one of them said, they note a difference between having an absent father and not having one. In independent maternity by AR 'You kind of took away from him the right to know who his father is.'

The concerns involve the child's social life (Father's Day at school), how to tell the child about their origin, and the need to predict what can happen with a child conceived in this way. They elaborate these questions believing in the symbolic father figure that could be represented by other people around them, mostly relatives. The importance of male figures does not simply lie in the idea of doing certain tasks or playing specific roles, as can be observed in the responses of one of the women: 'I do everything: I replace bulbs, I paint the apartment, and I am a man in person (laughs). But it's not the same (...) A man gives you security.' But this is not about mere physical protection: the woman in question feels that maybe she would be more effective facing a thief, for example, than her friend's husband. This means that the male figure has a symbolic role with a ripple effect on women's anxiety about a child's upbringing.

In Roudinesco's opinion, the Freudian perspective was at the forefront of a new conception of the 'western' family and 'was in a certain way the paradigm of contemporary affective family (...)'⁶ This reading was supported by the matrimony and parenthood laws, and constituted a 'psychological model capable to restore a normalizing family order in which the father and mother figures would be determined by the primacy of sexual difference.'⁷

The view that it is possible to build new family references appears among the group. We find speeches that try to emphasise what will be offered to the child, even recognising the possible father's absence. In this sense, they consider the content more important than the form. We notice an emphasis that a family constituted by single women who used AR is a much desired family. This point also arises in specialist interviews, when doctors describe the determined way women came into their offices. Families constituted without a partner have this feeling as an important resource.

The women interviewed are worried about the amount of responsibilities they had to undertake alone by being independent mothers, so too the financial costs of supporting a family. However, it is worth noting they look for family support, and sometimes even get it, to face childcare demands as well as the symbolic function mentioned above. So, we can say that these women are not necessarily alone in their motherhood project.

The absence of a father figure is also the reason for criticisms they hear about their decisions. As one of them says, there is a tendency to imagine that single women who seek AR have some kind of health problem, that they are lesbians, or 'are not able to get a man to have a child with' them. However, even when single women could potentially get pregnant another way, independent motherhood using AR deliberately conveys an intention. Besides, they consider this a more responsible way to fulfil their dreams without a partner.

Independent maternity by AR also modifies views on partner-relationships, as it makes a distinction between reproductive projects and affective-loving perspectives. Being in a relationship is not out of the question, but is separated from the wish to be a mother. Women think about having relationships after AR and compare this situation to a divorce, with children involved. One of them evaluates that being a single mother is not the same as searching for an *excluding maternity*, which sets males aside. It is a process which is not free from doubts and questions, but they are increasingly aware of that.

Non-marital motherhood by the use of conception technology signals a gradual changing process in relation to the fusion of parent, father and partner figures which lie in a single person in our culture.⁸

3. Reproductive Projects and the Course of Life

Aging is an important marker that organises experiences and expectations related to reproduction. However, this is not a natural concept because it only becomes meaningful in social and cultural contexts.⁹

In the case of reproduction by means of technology, aging factors link some discourses. The assertion that technology guarantees an expansion on age limits for getting pregnant is the most common one. This idea is in accordance with late motherhood. In relation to this point some considerations should be made.

First of all, specialists point out the idealisation that women can have children at any time, emphasising that after the age of 40, their fertility reduces so much that it is necessary to use sophisticated technologies like egg donation. They also criticize celebrities who publish fantasies of having a baby by means of assisted reproduction; in most cases without mentioning treatment conditions like the number of attempts, techniques, costs involved, etc. This way, they contribute to generalising the excessive reliance on technology.

Among specialists, there are those who urgently demand a regulation¹⁰ in which the maximum age limit should be established for treatment, in order to have a better response from women over fifty making use of such procedures. Some are of the opinion that egg freezing is not recommended in order to postpone motherhood.

The question of age also links discourses about the minimum age limit appropriate to submit a woman to assisted reproduction. That is mostly important in the context of single women. In these cases, the conjugality modifies age

perceptions, considering that single women under thirty who seek AR are considered too young, but married women of the same age are not. This view reinforces the perspective linking reproduction with conjugality. However when women become older, around forty, without the prospect of having a relationship, this opinion becomes relative.

So, we conclude that the debate about age and reproduction points the social and cultural adequacy to events like childbirth, family constitution, gender dynamics, conjugality, etc. It is not only a matter of scientific and biological definitions. One of the specialists said a woman's body does not know about the set of social and cultural changes, because biologically speaking, the best age to become pregnant is still around 25 years.

In reference to late motherhood, discourses show that maybe the affective and loving contexts linked to age are more important than professional success. In the course of life, women make the first distinction between the affective and loving partner and the father of their children, even when their preference still remains in a person who possesses both qualities.

4. Promises of Technology: The Case of Reproduction

Childbirth links a set of relationships¹¹ and in marital contexts it is fundamental to transform a couple into a family.¹² Doing all that through technological procedures brings some questionings about kinship and family constitution, and the ethical aspects involved in the procedures.

Strathern points that interventions in the way kinship is constituted entail fantasies about the future, which are related to what we are bequeathing to the next generation.¹³ Futures which belong to the present, to those things we imagine to ourselves. Therefore, a reproduction model based on natural process gives a kind of theory about relations between humans and nature, the passage of time, intergeneration-relationships, etc. Any interference in this model brings about new terms in which we have to think about relationships between ourselves and the world.

Among the aspects involved in this debate, some stood out from the interviews. The search for single motherhood points to the necessity of getting male gamete – semen – and this requires an elaboration of the father figure, which is no longer restricted to the genetic donor. Although it also occurs among married women who use semen donors, in single women, childbirth does not produce a relationship with a father. So there is a conceptual change in how children are born out of relationships. These women have chosen to get semen from anonymous donors because this would prevent childbirth from requiring some kind of 'fatherhood link' with men they might consider unfit for this role. However, anonymous donation emphasises a father's absence, and that is a sensitive aspect of the option of single motherhood. Some single women even keep it a secret when they use assisted reproductive technology which, in our point of view, shows that they

prefer to deal with the father's absence than with the fact that he does not exist. Otherwise, the option of anonymous donors may indicate a willingness to build new family experiences.

Many aspects are involved in the process of choosing semen donors, such as physical, behavioural and taste characteristics, but some women also choose to take into consideration the men they feel attracted to. In this case, they transfer a romantic content to the relation they establish with the semen in order to elaborate childbirth in this context. These fantasies may constitute an important resource to assimilate the use of semen of an anonymous donor.

Choice experience can be traumatic, bringing about feelings of frustration, because it highlights the absence of a partner in the 'family' project. The women feel a rational and depersonalised experience translated into a worksheet, like in the description: 'For me it was traumatic. I became depressed because you feel like you are going to a supermarket, to choose a tomato sauce.'

The logic that organises donor choice is also related to a concern in preserving some morality in this process, because they do not want to acquire just anyone's semen; even if anonymously. So they make use of resources like careful choice, or the fact of using the same person's semen in different pregnancies. This procedure is similar to being selective when choosing a partner. Becoming a single mother by AR is just the opposite of finding anyone to get pregnant, and this is the basis for the narratives the women will use with their children.

Feminist literature points to a set of problems involved in getting assisted reproduction, highlighting the ways in which sophisticated technology submits female bodies to medical control, depriving women and society in general of the capacity for interfering and deciding on how to use AR.¹⁴

One of the women interviewed tells of a negative experience with the doctor who undertook the cryopreservation of oocytes. The language is the fragile point in this doctor-patient relationship, revealing different positions, conceptions and power. In the woman's view, she does not have frozen eggs, but children. She talks about them in a loving way: 'I have two little teams of six.' It is not simply genetic material; even the used medicine packaging is kept, because it is part of the history of a human being.

Getting information is an important aspect in establishing a power relationship in this scenario. However, it is very difficult for women to obtain knowledge and they do so in personal networks, taking part in virtual networks, and by using internet research.¹⁵

Considering the set of criticisms feminist thought addressed to reproductive technological promises, we could list mostly: biological kinship; motherhood wish update; female body under medical control; female representation as lack and imperfection, and so on. Nevertheless, the women interviewed demonstrate some resources utilised to acquire autonomy in order to make their decisions by means of technology; sometimes in spite of medical discourses.

The case of freezing eggs is emblematic. Originally a technique aimed to preserve fertility in illness treatment contexts, it started to be used in cases of couple infertility, and nowadays single women use it to postpone the decision of motherhood, even when some specialists disapprove of the practice.

The act of freezing in this sense means deceiving time, the aging process which interferes in the best conditions to procreate. Conception technologies are an instrument in this case, which give women some freedom in relation to their reproductive projects, including when they do not consider relationships good enough to build a family.

Single motherhood by AR presents tensions but also brings about new elements to think about subjects and relationship types involved in childbirth. It articulates and disarticulates representations of father-parent-partner, presenting new possible arrangements.

We believe that thinking about the process concerning reproduction by technologies is an opportunity to highlight symbolic contents about what we are, and how collectively design our relationships.

5. Conclusions

The advent of reproductive technologies puts in the spotlight conceptions about reproduction as a result of sexual activities. Besides, it discusses the version that fatherhood and motherhood identities come from biological ties established at childbirth, by pointing out the development of conception techniques like male and female gamete donors, embryos, surrogate uteri, etc. Non-marital contexts also make explicit the questioning that children come from relationships, which brings conditions to their subject constitution.

We observe that these experiences are contemporary because women feel they are facing something new; they are at the forefront. Perhaps for this reason, they express tensions in breaching current parameters such as the concern about a father's absence. They also create strategies like the presence of male figures using their network of relatives; children as family foundation; achieving critical thought about family models based on form instead of content and relation quality.

The case of choosing the semen donor is ideal to look at the dilemmas and responses created in order to produce legitimate experiences. It shows different senses linked to the use of technologies. A distinction of single motherhood by AR and single motherhood by other means proves the reproductive project's intensity and seriousness, considering the care, planning and high degree of reflexivity involved.

The use of technology to achieve motherhood is not neutral because it leads to a high medicalisation process of the female body, enhances power relationships between women and specialists, and also adds new possibilities to the ways of reproduction that emphasise motherhood as an individual project. So gender

dynamics can be evaluated in the sense of reproduction achievement linked to age and conjugality markers.

Notes

¹ The presentation of this chapter at the 3rd Global Conference on Femininities and Masculinities in Prague was supported by CAPES/Brazil.

² Angus Maclaren, *História da Anticoncepção: Da Antiguidade à Atualidade* (Lisboa: Terramar, 1997). In relation to the Brazilian context, see: Tania Dauster, 'A Experiência Obrigatória: Uma Interpretação sobre a Maternidade Fora do Casamento em Camadas Médias Urbanas', *Boletim do Museu Nacional* 59 (1988): 1-34.

³ Research also included ten interviews with specialists/physicians, and psychologists. However, these narratives were not presented in this chapter.

⁴ The women's group is between 28 and 48 years of age, mostly concentrated in the 33-35 age range. In relation to the professional aspect, all of them went to college, and many of them are postgraduates. Most of the women are not engaged in 'typical' women's occupations, and the older women are financially independent, and are active in their careers.

⁵ Resolution 2.013/13.

⁶ Elizabeth Roudinesco, *A Família em Desordem* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2003), 88.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸ For further discussion about this issue: Marilyn Strathern, 'Necessidade de Pais, Necessidade de Mães', *Revista Estudos Feministas* 2 (1995): 303-329.

⁹ Guíta Grin Debert, 'Pressupostos da Reflexão Antropológica sobre a Velhice', *Textos Didáticos Antropologia e Velhice* 13 (1998): 7-27.

¹⁰ This point was included in the recent resolution revision of Federal Medicine Council, which establishes 50 years of age as the limit to use AR.

¹¹ This is the main idea presented in Strathern, *Necessidade de Pais, Necessidade de Mães*.

¹² Helena Ragoné, 'Surrogate Motherhood and American Kinship', in *Kinship and Family: An Anthropological Reader*, eds. Robert Parkin and Linda Stone (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 342-361.

¹³ Marilyn Strathern, *Reproducing The Future: Essays on Anthropology, Kinship and The New Reproductive Technologies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

¹⁴ Some feminist points of view about NTR presented in Brazil can be examined in: Françoise Laborie, 'Novas Tecnologias da Reprodução: Risco ou Liberdade para as Mulheres?', *Revista Estudos Feministas* 1, No. 2 (1993): 435-447; Naara Luna, 'Natureza Humana Criada em Laboratório: Biologização e Genetização do Parentesco nas Novas Tecnologias Reprodutivas', *História e Ciências da Saúde*

12, No. 2 (2005): 395-417; Verônica Ferreira, Maria Bethânia Ávila and Ana Paula Portella, *Feminismo e Novas Tecnologias Reprodutivas* (Recife, PE: SOS CORPO, 2007); Cláudia Fonseca, 'A Participação Leiga nos Rumos da Ciência: de Embriões à Maternidade Assistida', *Saúde e Direitos Humanos* 5, No. 5 (2008): 127-142; Martha Ramírez-Gálvez, 'Corpos Fragmentados e Domesticados na Reprodução Assistida', *Cadernos Pagu* 33 (2009): 83-115; Miriam Grossi, Rozeli Porto and Marlene Tamanini, *Novas Tecnologias Reprodutivas Conceptivas: Questões e Desafios* (Brasília: Letras Livres, 2003).

¹⁵ Of our group, two women have created blogs in order to exchange experiences.

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The Representation of Ideal Femininities and Masculinities in Kabyle Folklore

Sabrina Zerar

Abstract

This chapter explores the monstrous representation of ideal femininities and masculinities in traditional Kabyle-Algerian society with specific reference to its folklore (folktales, proverbs, love poetry and bawdy language). It seeks to demonstrate that monstrosity, a hallmark of this folklore, is deployed in the manner of what Northrop Frye calls militant irony. This results in the construction of ideal forms of gender power relationships which, in Bourdieu's words, strikingly resemble the ones that obtain between serfs (females) and nobility (males). The chapter closes with the contention that the crisis of hegemonic masculinity claimed recently in the academia and in the world of the media was there at the very beginnings of gender power relationships as reflected in the Kabyle myth of origins. Apart from suggesting a revisionist history of men-women relationships, the contemporary invocation of this masculine crisis seems to be arising from the insecurity that males feel when confronted with self-imposed high standards of virility.

Key Words: Representation, deformity, Kabyle folklore, ideal femininities, masculinities, class, gender, domination

1. Introduction

Gender power relationships in Kabyle community have already been explored by a huge number of researchers, among whom we count Pierre Bourdieu, Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, Malek Chebel, and Tassadit Yassine.¹ Regardless of the divergence in the terms in which they draw the balance sheet of these gender power relationships, with Bourdieu's debits contrasting sharply with Lacoste-Dujardin's credits, researchers have to date overlooked the crucial role that the aesthetics of deformity play in the definition of Kabyle ideal forms of femininity and masculinity. Leo Frobenius's statement about the prevalence of this aesthetics in Kabyle popular culture made nearly a century ago seems to have fallen on barren ground, since so far researchers in the field of Algerian studies have emphasised more on the normative side of this culture than on its deforming aspects.² In so doing they have missed to shed light on how the Kabyles look at and see themselves in the distorting glass of their folklore, and how the aesthetics of monstrosity is deployed, somewhat in the manner of what Northrop Frye calls 'militant irony,' to en/gender ideal female and male identities.³

2. The Female Monstrous and the Idealised Forms of Kabyle Femininity

Popular Kabyle culture provides a large number of examples illustrating the way the monstrous is deliberately foregrounded to affirm ideal femininities and masculinities, standing in the background as implicit moral standards. Teryel is just one among many of those female monstrous mythical figures against whom ideal femininities are defined. Her appearance is particularly prominent in the Mquidech folktales employed here to argue my point.⁴ In these folktales Mquidech (half-man) represents a trickster hero involved in a war of wit against Teryel. However, behind this war of wit, there is another war waged for the abrogation of negative femininities threatening the Kabyle social fabric. Perhaps, the most striking motif in the many versions of these folktales is that of Mquidech encroaching on Teryel's fig orchard, and his climbing upon the fig trees to pick up their fruits. For readers not familiar with Kabyle symbolic system, this might pass as a mere decorative detail. But for the Kabyles, the motif of picking up forbidden figs involves a whole system of values based on honour. As a single woman, Teryel works hard to make her fig orchard prosper, but the story questions the validity of her economic endeavour if she cannot protect that symbolic capital of honour, which in the Kabyle value system ranks higher than the economic capital.⁵

The implication is that a woman who lives alone is liable to forfeit her honour. Her femininity is a negative femininity. The summoning of evidence from another source of popular culture, traditional love poetry, illustrates further the point I wish to make here. Here is a love poem that comes very close to the motif of Teryel's fig trees climbed upon by male trespassers: 'Fig tree / That I have girded with a fence of asphodels / Upon you has a young man climbed / He has tasted your tender fruits / Eaten and drunk / Under the eyes of your master.'⁶ The implication of these highly sexual verses is that it is difficult for males to safeguard their capital of honour. No matter the precautionary measures males can take, women will always remain their Achilles' heel. So in deciding to live alone and having her unfenced fig trees mounted upon and their fruits picked up easily by male trespassers, Teryel exposes herself to derision in her vain attempt to protect her honour herself. As females, women are supposed to be 'weak vessels' of honour which only males (symbolically referred to as rifles in Kabyle) can effectively deter other males to 'eat and drink from.' By trying to assume this exclusively masculine duty of managing the symbolic and social capital of honour, Teryel breaches the code of gender roles, thereby exposing her negative femininity.

There are other aspects to Teryel's negative femininity, which put into relief 'true' Kabyle womanhood. Indeed, in all the versions of the Mquidech folktale, one can note that Teryel does not only fail to dissuade Mquidech from encroaching upon her private property, but finds herself in the dishonourable condition of being taunted by Mquidech calling other males to come and share in the feast of green figs. In so doing, he lets everyone know that her fig trees belong to *Beladjut*, in other words to no particular person. There is no need to invoke Friedrich Hegel

hereto understand that as a female Teryel is accorded no recognition as possessor of material and sexual property.⁷ The derision goes so far that when the half-blind Teryel fumbles among the leaves of the fig tree to capture Mquidech, the latter presents his testicles that she mistakes for ripe figs. Once this picture of Teryel as a woman of ill-repute is established, our trickster-cum-culprit deliberately lets himself be captured and carried as prisoner to Teryel's home with another trick up his sleeve. He outwits her again by telling her to fatten him beforehand in her provision jars of dried figs before feasting on him, since as he stands he is just skin and bones.

What comes next is another denunciation of her negative femininity through her incapacity to fulfil the ideal feminine role of preserving her bountiful harvest of dried figs, honey, and butter for which she has laboured hard. As Lacoste-Dujardin tells us, the sexual division of labour in traditional Kabyle society is seen in operation in the sharp distinction between the outside-home productive activities assigned to males and the inside-home transformation and preservation chores allocated to females.⁸ Teryel has monstrously and scandalously transgressed this sexual division of labour. By poaching on the male territory of productive activities, Teryel fails to accomplish the vital female task of preserving the produce of her own labour from defilement: to fatten Mquidech she knows nothing better than putting him in an earthen granary (*ikufen*) that Kabyle women use for storing the harvest of male labour. As Mquidech eats the dried figs in the *ikufen*, he relieves himself, mixing in that very process his excreta with the dried figs. Every time Teryel checks on him, Mquidech mockingly pushes out a thin stick (a sexual metaphor) for her to touch telling her all the while that he has not yet fattened up. Clearly, Teryel's abusive assumption of male productive roles and the consequences of that transgression of gender roles for the survival of the community build into a militant irony, thrusting at her negative femininity the better to affirm the idealised form of femininity at the core of the sexual division of labour.

Teryel's monstrous failure to meet the ideal of Kabyle womanhood also shows in her incapacity to transform the produce of male labour into cooked food. In the various folktales, Teryel is represented as a big-bellied woman feeding on raw food (frogs, insects, donkeys, etc) outside home, which during her sleep wake up to make a pandemonium inside her belly. When we meet her at home with her captured victims, she has no cooked food to offer but a 'dish of ashes.' Always out hunting or working in the fields, Teryel infringes the customary law which assigns the Sybil-like Kabyle women the duty of maintaining fire in the hearth. Not only does she cut a poor figure as a homemaker incapable of providing nourishing sustenance by transforming raw into cooked food, but she turns her home into a cannibal home wherein she devours her young captives. In the Mquidech stories, Teryel goes to the extent of committing the sacrilege of throwing out of the window that mythical stone-mill bequeathed as a legacy to Kabyle females by that

cultural heroine in Kabyle mythology, the ant, at the beginning of the world. At the level of symbol, Teryel's monstrous act of throwing out that instrument of food transformation, obviously because of lack of skill, speaks of a disparaged model of femininity in the Kabyle value system.

Apart from getting rid of the stone-mill, Teryel renounces to other no less important Kabyle idealized feminine activities. We often meet her, for example, weaving and spinning during the night, an activity supposed to be performed during the day by women who abide by the rule of domesticity. More seriously, she takes it to her head to dispose of her bedding just because during her absence Mquidech has mischievously implanted needles in it. The sexual connotation of this motif cannot be lost to a Kabyle reader/listener. Exhausted by her roaming during the day, Teryel has no patience to be pricked by the needles, i.e., to make love, and by extrapolation to make children during the night. Thus, it is hardly surprising that we often encounter Teryel alone, or just with one daughter, which comes to the same in a culture that measures the worth of a woman by the number of male children to whom she can give birth. In this respect, Teryel strikingly fails to measure up to the idealised Kabyle woman as mother of seven male children celebrated in popular Kabyle culture.

To close this discussion of Teryel's monstrosity I shall point to two other cases exemplifying Teryel's crossing of the chalk line separating male from female economic activities. In the Kabyle economic system, as scholars like Bourdieu have already shown, females by contrast with males are supposed to devote themselves to a small economy like gardening and keeping small fowls like hens. The interdiction to practise the big economy is mythically imposed by divine decree because of a woman's mismanagement of God's gifts at the beginning of the world. In some versions of the Mquidech folktale, Teryel is brought to task for crossing this economic red line between the sexes by portraying her as a half-blind woman confusing the bums of Mquidech for melons while she is gropingly weeding out her field of melons. The other case held against her as a negative femininity model is the easy disposition of her single hen, the cackling of which disturbs the quietness of her sleep.

In sum, the monstrous discourse developed around Teryel is a cautionary moral discourse against the perversion of prescribed economic, political, and social gender roles. The derision of Teryel covers even the aesthetic domain since she is often described as a big-bellied woman with dishevelled hair. Nicked-named the 'mother of dirt,' she is often portrayed as being incapable of attending appropriately to her body care. On trying to brush her hair, she mistakes the distaff for a comb and fatally hurts herself, and on attempt to apply make-up and to clean her ears, she employs a burning twig instead of an eye-liner and cotton-tips, stupidly burning out her eyes and setting her hair on fire.

3. The Monstrous and the Idealised Forms of Kabyle Masculinity

Monstrous discourse is also deployed against implicit Kabyle ideal masculinities, but it is not as predominant as in the illustration of ideal femininities. This differentiation can be explained by the fact that while males have a wide spectrum of concrete social ideals on which to pattern the various stages of their existence females have not that privilege because of the restriction of their social roles to that of motherhood and homemaker. The Kabyle folktale entitled 'The Lover of White Things' dramatises this spectrum of social male ideals by portraying the growth of the hero from shepherd, to farmer, to a warrior-hunter, and finally to head of a family with the prospects of becoming the elder of the village. Females have no such social ideals set as milestones on the road of their existence. They are mostly valued for their fertility in male children. Failure in this regard no matter the reason can have tragic consequences. Kabyle myth, for example, shows that once the Mother of the World has ceased being fertile at advanced age she became a witch, whose marginal status contrasts sharply with that of elderly males sitting proudly in the village council.

However, the existence of concrete social ideals of masculinity does not totally preclude the appeal to the monstrous to foreground them. The portrayal of *Waghzen* (ogre) in the folktales is a case in point. He stands as a foil to what the Kabyle male is supposed to be. When this monstrous figure is imagined as head of a household with Teryel as his wife, he is often depicted as a slow-witted, hen-pecked husband, either childless or father to a single daughter. His lack of virility is reflected in his avoidance of meeting people face to face as an ideal Kabyle male would do, preferring abduction of unprotected females to honourable marriage, a wild sexuality to a sexuality geared to the making of children, greed to self-control, cunning to truthful dealing, and solitary life to social life. In short, *Waghzen* in the Kabyle folktales appears as a grotesque monstrous figure meant to distinguish between socially acceptable and rejected forms of masculinities. According to Bourdieu, gender and class representations overlap in the Kabyle conception of the world in such a way that females are to males what the serfs are to nobility. In making *Waghzen* wear intestines around his head in the guise of a crown while mistreating his abducted wife, the folktales demonstrate how far the Kabyle ogre is removed from this idea of male nobility.⁹

Though the crossing of gender lines and the infringement of the societal value peculiar to men and women are presented as fraught with danger and pollution, the examination of Kabyle folklore shows that males very often stretch out the rules by sanctioning these monstrosities whenever they expediently prop up the patriarchal order. For example, we often meet proverbs celebrating the very 'deviant' female masculinity derided in the folktales. One of these proverbs goes as follows: 'A household without an old woman is like a fig orchard without male figs.' It has to be observed that one of the techniques used by Kabyle farmers to fertilise figs is to suspend on the branches of the female fig trees male green figs in pairs

symbolising testicles. The analogy between the proverb and this agricultural practice is quite obvious. At old age, old women with the loss of their own fertility are allowed to assume a masculine identity, and to oversee the biological reproduction of the family and the preservation of its capital of honour by choosing honourable brides for their sons and making sure that they do not fail on these two vital counts. With these remarks about the recruitment of elderly women in defence of patriarchal ideology, I come close to Mineke Schipper's claim in this collection of essays that proverbs 'present an intriguing mirror of traditional wisdom, interests and fears and inherited ideas about 'ideal' and 'deviant' womanhood, and in doing so also reveals inherited views of 'ideal' and 'deviant norms of manhood.'¹⁰ Now, if there is something to be intrigued about in the proverbial message discussed above, it is in the manner 'ideal' and 'monstrous' forms of femininity are traversed and reshuffled by the male guardians of wisdom in such a way as to transform elderly women into some sort of eunuchs/slave-drivers in charge of the Kabyle harem.¹¹

Just as is the case with 'deviant' womanhood, the male-gendered noble order does not assess all 'monstrous' forms of masculinities with the same moral yardstick. Here too the rules are stretched out to accommodate some sexual monstrosities and disqualify others. This distinction between male sexual monstrosities are present in folktales where the celebration of male heroes with monstrous sex organs capable of subduing sex-hungry females occurs as a motif, but it is in the bawdy language that hierarchal differentiation between males is strongly established. In this language, the *afhli*, the *argaz* or *argaz d-nfes*, is a man in real command of his sexual instruments regardless of the type of the sexual relationships (heterosexual or homosexual) in which he is involved. The 'real' man is sharply distinguished from the passive homosexual the *attai*, the man who has nothing to show but an *asaalak*, an *asherbub* (a flabby sex organ) and prominent round buttocks (*trum*), and the *akawad* the false heterosexual who in the manner of a pimp hires his own womenfolk to satisfy by default his disavowed passive homosexual drives. It is obvious from these few examples of bawdy language that while monstrosity is attached to homosexuality as a whole in this highly homosexual society, it is only the passive type that is really negatively connoted. Kabyle women as their love poetry and proverbs show play on the contradictions of this ideological construction of masculinities reflected in male bawdy language to deflate the rhetoric of male superiority peculiar to this culturally en/gendered Kabyle nobility. The following proverb is quite illustrative of this appropriation of the obscene by females to deride their male counterparts: 'Your sexual instrument is flabbily hanging while mine is like a soldered iron slab.'

4. Conclusion

It follows from the above that female and male identities in Kabyle folklore are negatively constructed or performed through an excessive resort to a monstrous

discourse marked by a high degree of ‘militant irony.’ This cultural politics of militant irony is basically feminicidal in the sense that women emerge as its major victims even when negative monstrous forms of masculinities are invoked and dismissed. Men and women studies such as the one carried out by Barbara Braid in this e-book are too ready to underline the crisis in which modern hegemonic forms of masculinity have found themselves as a result of the recent reshuffling of gender power relationships. This study of Kabyle folklore, a folklore rightly considered by Bourdieu as archetypal, belies such a diagnosis. It shows that this crisis is not a recent phenomenon at all. It was there at the very beginnings of gender power relationships. Traces of it can be located in the Kabyle myth of origins, wherein we find the same males invoking the same shame to reverse the sexual practice of monstrous females (Amazons) making love to males in the top position.

Notes

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination Masculine* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2002); Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, *La Vaillance des Femmes: Les Relations entre Femmes et Hommes Berbères de Kabylie* (Alger: Editions Barzakh, 2010); Malek Chebel, *L’esprit du Sérail: Mythes et Pratiques Sexuelles au Maghreb* (Paris: Payot, 1995); Tassadit Yassine, ‘Anthropologie de la Peur: L’exemple des Rapports hommes-Femmes, Algérie’, in *Amour, Phantasmes et Sociétés en Afrique du Nord*, ed. Tassadit Yassine (Paris: Payot, 1995).

² Leo Frobenius, *Contes Kabyles, Tome II: Le Monstrueux*, trans. Fetta Mokran (Aix-en-Provence, 1996), 5.

³ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 224.

⁴ The discussion of the representation of Teryel (She-ogre) and Waghzen (ogre) in this chapter refers to several collections of Kabyle folktales including folktales that my grandmother used to tell me. Among the versions of the folktales of ogres that I have used here figure the following: Jean Rivière, *Recueil des contes Populaires du Djurdjura* (Paris: Leroux, 1882); Auguste Moulieras, *Légendes et Contes Merveilleux de la Grande Kabylie* (Paris: Leroux, 1893-1898); Malek Ouary, ‘Bel Ajoudh et L’ogress’, in *Ici* 55 (May-June 1957); Youcef Alliouï, *Contes du Cycle de L’ogre, Timucuha* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002).

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Polity Press, 2010).

⁶ Tassadit Yacine, *L’izli ou L’amour Chanté en Kabyle* (Alger: Bouchène-Awal, 1990), 217.

⁷ Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. A. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

⁸ Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, *Le Conte Kabyle: Etude Ethnologique* (Alger: Bouchène, 1991).

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Pratique Précédé de Trois Études D'éthnologie Kabyle* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000), 20-215.

¹⁰ Schipper Mineke, 'Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet: World-Wide Wisdom about Women', in the *Abstracts Booklet of the 3rd Global Inter-Disciplinary Conference on 'Femininities and Masculinities'* (Prague: Inter-Disciplinary.Net 2013), 1. For the development of the same idea, see also Schipper Mineke, *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet: Women in Proverbs from around the World* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Germaine Tillion, *Le Harem et les Cousins* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973).

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Gender and Family Relations: The Question of Social Security in Kosovo

Tahir Latifi

Abstract

Based on fieldwork¹ conducted in the village of Isniq (Deçan, West Kosovo) in summer 2011 and 2012, the chapter focuses on the relations between family members in the post-war period and explores changes in family and gender relations. More specifically, it asks in which way the lack of public social security is experienced by both sexes, especially by women. In this regard, it will also try to answer in which realms the customary law still plays a crucial role and the public laws are not practiced, and what kind of effects this might have on gender relations. The traditional Kosovo Albanian family is characterised by a multiply structured household and patrilinearity. Only men were considered full household members and had the right to inherit property. In addition, family and kinship functioned as an exclusive social security unit. While socialism brought changes in family relations, the crisis years of the 1990s 'repatriarchalised' these relations. In the period after the war of 1999, family and gender relations have changed significantly, as Kosovo's legislation guarantees equality between sexes. In reality, however, the Kosovar society is far from being equal with respect to gender relations. The Kosovar state is weak and has very limited capacities for providing social security for its citizens, and the customary law is still prevalent for many Kosovo Albanians. However, there are indications of a weakening of patriarchal relations, especially if we compare the contemporary situation with the situation during the pre-war period. Recently an increasing number of women who contribute to the household budget has emerged. Moreover, since the war some families consist only of women and their children and therefore women take care of their families exclusively. Today there seems to be a growing trend of women who are not only the contributors to family budgets but also administer their incomes themselves and have benefited, in part, from the new inheritance laws.

Key Words: Gender relations, kinship relations, remittances, social security, customary law, public law.

1. Introduction

As a new country, five years after its independence and nearly 14 years after liberation, Kosovo is still facing difficulties and challenges to heal its wounds caused by war crimes (1998-99) such as rape and other kinds of atrocities committed by the Serbian (Milosevic) regime. For Kosovars, 1999 was the end of a decade-long exclusion from every kind of institutional and public life. Being a

patriarchal society, the exclusion from the formal institutions and the public sphere in some way has also affected the strengthening of the patriarchal family. Patriarchy 'was not necessarily the father who ruled, but the eldest man of a household and in many cases it was the uncle or the father's elder brother,'² as the Balkan patriarchy consists of a complex set of hierarchal values connected to social structure defined by both gender and age. This patriarchy succeeds its historical form in its complexity related to patrilinearity, patrilocality and a patriarchally oriented common law.³The Kosovo Albanian social order, like many 'traditionally' patriarchal societies, supported the construction of identities of the patriotic man and it exalted childbearing women as icons of national survival.⁴ In a similar way, the Norwegian anthropologist Backer emphasised that in Albanian families, women were responsible for the household, for 'secondary' works such as bearing and rearing children and for keeping their own nuclear unit clothed.⁵Backer conducted her research in Isniq (Deçan) village of the Plane of Dukagjini in 1970s (which is the village of my research). Mulholland states that 'the role played by women is ignored, and the wives of business leaders and family women generally are stereotyped as male trophies and consumers of such wealth.'⁶

It is evident that the post-war period has been characterised by major positive changes with regard to gender relations and transformations in family and Kosovo society at large. From the end of the war in 1999 until the declaration of Independence on 17th of February 2008, Kosovo was administrated by the United Nation Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). The international administration, jointly with Kosovo representatives and civil society, established public institutions, including departments and special offices, which deal with gender issues.

Thus, the following chapter highlights gender and family relations in the post-war period of 1999 in Kosovo in the context of both social and political changes. In the first section, I will address the issues of male domination and the persistence of customary law. I will try to explain the persistence of customary law and how it interferes with public/state laws, and what kind of effects it has on gender relations. The second section focuses on the subject of gender roles and social security issues. Moreover, it deals with women's position in relation to the public and private sphere. In the third section, I will move on to the problem of changing family and women's empowerment.

2. Male Domination and the Persistence of Customary Law

After the collapse of Socialism in East and Southeast Europe, a new era of transition of the political and economic system began for all the post-socialist states. However, this was not the case for Kosovo – on the contrary. In March 1989, Kosovo's autonomous status was abolished by the Serbian regime of Milosevic, which was followed by Serbian domination and conquest, and finally by the armed conflict of 1998-99. Kosovo, neither in the form of an autonomous province nor as a relatively independent state has had the capacity to offer

substantial support to its citizens. Because of the inability of the state to offer social welfare mechanisms to its citizens, it is primarily the family and kin relations who still provide care and security for one another, especially for elderly people, people who are unable to work, as well as for the unemployed ones. In this respect, Bott states: 'Ties among kin are likely to be stronger if the kin are able to help one another occupationally.'⁷ Thus in the case of the state of Kosovo, on the one hand, the lack of efficient economic policies of the government to create opportunities for sustainable stability and, on the other hand, the weakness of the state to offer its citizens care and appropriate social security, have affected, and somehow predisposed, the maintenance of strong kinship relationships and the relevance of reciprocal help within and across the generations. Reciprocity means that parents take care of and support their adult children in education, marriage and finding a job. Later, once the parents have retired, their children feel obliged to take care of them.

Albanian family is characterised by a household cycle consisting of multiple and nuclear family relations where sons remain in the household whereas daughters are married out. The household structure and kinship relations are identified by members who originate from the same patriline, as Kaser defined the complex family, which was once spread all over the Balkans. Such family type is usually related to pastoral labour organisation and an extended lineage structure.⁸ This family form consists of a father and his sons with their married-in wives, who constitute a multiple household of two or more married couples. The property and land is shared equally among the male offspring, while women (a fact which still continues in most cases) are excluded. A household was a corporate unit and only men were considered full members.⁹

According to Albanian Customary Law – *Kanun* (Canon), estate, land, buildings are considered the common property of the family. As only men were considered full household members, they held exclusive inheritance rights, while women were excluded from the same right. This exclusion and related social issues are prescribed by customary law and traditional norms which exceed the norms and rules defined by the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*.¹⁰ Nowadays, despite the existence of modern state laws, the customary law is still a fundamental social fact which interferes with state laws. For instance, the inheritance right, undoubtedly everywhere in Kosovo, continues to be mainly a man's right and 'privilege.' At the same time, this praxis is contrary to the state laws, which clearly defines that all children have equal rights to inheritance.¹¹

In the village where I conducted research I 'discovered' two cases where women actually got their legal inheritance rights. In one case, while the father was alive, he decided to give a part of the property to his daughters. However, his daughters inherited only a part of the yard where they live, but not an equal share compared with her brothers. The daughters do not have equal rights to the land like their brothers. While in the second case the father (also while he was still alive)

decided to equally distribute all property and land among his children, including his daughters. These cases serve as a motivation to further explore this matter by raising questions such as: are these isolated cases or maybe an indication of change of the traditional inheritance's rule?

In the first case mentioned above, the main reason for the father to transfer a part of his property to his daughters were: being owner of property opens chances to create an independent life; in case one of his daughters should have any conflict or problem in her married life, such property would release her from any kind of pressure, for example to surrender to domestic violence by her husband or in-laws.¹² Moreover, because of some new social conditions and changing family structure in Kosovo it has become more difficult for a divorced woman to return and to live in the family of one of her brothers. Thus equal inheritance rights enable women who are victims of domestic violence to make choices that previously were not possible.

3. Gender Roles and Social Security Issues

The Kosovar women's contribution and activities in the political and national movement of the past are not sufficiently valued and recognised, in other words, they are subordinated to male-dominated narratives. Muun indicates that women may be subordinated in political and nationalist movement as well as in politics, but they occupy an important symbolic place as the mothers of nations. While men in traditional perspective may be presented as the defenders of the family on the one side, women are presented as the embodiment of family honour; in this case a woman's shame is the family's and nation's shame.¹³ Likewise, Krasniqi states that the public sphere has been, and still is, dominated by men; and in this line it is also associated with the ways in which history was written and concentrated on male actors in the public sphere. For example, in print publications and documentary films concerning the Albanian underground movement in Kosovo, women are 'portrayed mainly as the mother, the sister or the daughter of the male heroes of the movement, and rarely as activists in their own rights.'¹⁴ The post-war master narratives still employ a hegemonic discourse that makes it more difficult for women to challenge their subordination status in the patriarchal order as they are continuously assigned to the husband's family.¹⁵

However, in the last war (1998-1999) Kosovo women were actively organised in the process of political movements and war. At the same time, they were subject to sexual violation/rape by Serbian military and paramilitary forces. Regarding the place of sexual violations in public discussions in post-war Kosovo, the anthropologist Nita Luci suggests:

a discussion of sexual violence occurred in Kosovo would in no way be complete without a discussion of nationalism, whereas only a gendered perspective (one which links sexuality to

national identity) can adequately ascertain for women as agents in shaping and defining the condition of post-war Kosovo and not just bystanders, or symbols of traditional life whose roles are created by masculine state/power politics.¹⁶

Kosovo's public laws foresee participation of women in local and central assemblies. The legislation defines that 30% of elective representatives have to be women. Political participation affects and raises women's empowerment and their role in peace-building, and it can help to reform the traditional security sector. In regard to reconciling work and family, little has been done in Kosovo. There are insufficient childcare options, a general lack of preschools and kindergartens, as well as insufficient locations available for breast-feeding, all of which create difficulties for women, in particular, to reconcile work and family responsibilities.¹⁷ Childcare is seen as a woman's (mother's) duty and if she works, mostly grandparents are the children's custodians.

In reality, the Kosovar society is far from being equal with respect to gender relations. However, there are indications that suggest a weakening of patriarchal relations, especially if we compare the contemporary situation with the situation in the pre-war period. There has been an increasing number of women who contribute to the household budget. Additional factors should not be overlooked. Since the war some families in Isniq as well as everywhere in Kosovo consist of women and their children only. In such cases, it is exclusively women who take care of their families. In the past and at the present, the household economy has depended on remittances which have helped alleviating poverty, providing for economic balance and social security at a low level, since the state is not able to take care of its citizens.

Women are in an unfavourable position when it comes to real estate. Especially in rural areas they are often pressured to renounce, or 'voluntarily' resign, claims to ownership or rights of inheritance in favour of male family members (brothers). In 2009, according to the statistics, only 8% of households consisted of women as owners.¹⁸ Likewise, in terms of household's head, there occurs a large difference between women and men as well as with their civil status (married/unmarried/widowed). On the one hand, 92.4% of the male household heads are married, while, on the other, married women account only 17.8 % of all female household heads. Out of this percentage of women's household heads, 70% are widows, while out the percentage of male household heads, only 4% are widowed.¹⁹

4. Changing Family and Women's Empowerment

In terms of the trend of family change in the Balkans, Kaser emphasised rejection of progress in gender relations. In post-socialist societies the tendencies to re-establish conservative family and gender roles has emerged. Traditional

elements of gender relations are permanently confronted with modern ones or vice versa and in most of the Balkans, tradition and modernity exist simultaneously.²⁰ The head of the Gender Equality Office of Deçan Municipality explained in regard to gender equality that local authorities pay special attention to employment policies. She gave me some data which provide significant insights regarding gender differences at the workplace and in professional employment. Accordingly, there are 134 employees in local public administration. Out of these, 107 are male, whilst 27 are female. In the education sector there work 578 teachers, and 394 of them are men, while 184 are women, which means that 69% are male. In the medical sector, the opposite emerged. Out of 120 employees, 84 (70%) are women, whilst 36 are men.²¹ One of the reasons behind the difference in gender balance between the health and the education sector might be the smaller number of women with higher education; hence in the health sector many nurses have secondary education only. The statistical evidence of the last census (2011) provides a more complete review of employment rates in Deçan municipality. Of 4396 employees in total, 978 (22%) are women, while 3418 (78%) are men.²² The total number of employments in Kosovo is 280,454, of which 23% are women; whereas men hold 77% of employment places.²³ Thus, despite a significant increase of women in salaried work, there appears to be a large way to go yet before obtaining equality with men.

In regard to family planning, the available data suggest a decline in the average Total Fertility Rate (TFR) from 2.9 births per woman in 2002 to 2.03 in 2009. This is a decline of nearly one child per woman.²⁴ Family planning in Kosovar society is still shaped by the patriarchal environment and mentality. Traditional Kosovar society 'imposes' that a couple necessarily has to have at least one son. It seems that in the post-war period the willingness of couples to have any more children but this one son may have translated into selective abortion practices, as the current sex ratio at birth is 110.7 boys to 100.0 girls.²⁵

Below I address a significant question of what relations among couples are, in which both partners work. I will present the example of two families in the village of my research. My intention was to observe the position of an employed woman, her relations with her husband as well as their discussions with other family members on these issues. In both cases both of the spouses worked; and as a coincidence, in both cases the spouses had the same professions. In the first family, both the woman and her husband were teachers, whilst the wife was a member of Deçan Assembly at the same time. She said: 'now we have good economic conditions and very good relations to each other and today we make almost everything together.' She said that she does not keep her money (therefore she also explained that in her father's family also all of the members work but the father controls the money), but they spend the money together. Therefore, she declared 'I am like an assistant.'

In the second case, husband and wife were medical doctors and they worked at the Public Hospital as well as at their private surgery at home. He declared that his wife, working in the private surgery, has more clients and works more than he does. In addition, his wife takes care of their children more than him. Even at the time of the interview she attended to her 'obligations,' helping her daughter who is a student at the Medical Faculty. He claimed that they always had an understanding attitude toward each other, even when his parents wanted that she should also attend to milking the cow, but they had now adapted to these new conditions. As a couple, they would jointly decide about work allocations and expenditures, but he was in charge of safe-keeping the family income. This was common practice in most of the cases observed. The husbands effectively control the family budget, even the woman's income. This shows that, in regard to the female contributions to the family budget, husbands or fathers usually continue to enjoy the role of the *paterfamilias*.

5. Conclusion

Regardless of all changes, a typical Kosovar family continues to be a patriarchal one in practice, and the Kosovar society is far from being equal with respect to gender relations. Participation of women in the public sphere is still lower than men's and this impacts directly on their subordination in status. However, wives and daughters constitute dynamic factors, both in urban and rural areas. Today an increasing number of women have entered the previously exclusively male labour market and they contribute to the household income. Therefore, now they are not only expected to perform a reproductive role but also a productive role. This does not mean to suggest that previously women did not engage in productive work, but their work was more undervalued in conditions of an even stronger patriarchal environment than today. The question remains, whether such new constellations will increase family cohesion or whether they will contribute to its decline. Whereas considerable dynamics emanate from the women's side, men constitute a more conservative element. It seems a growing trend that women act not only as contributors to family budgets but increasingly they also administrate their own incomes as well as, infrequently, enjoy inheritance rights. The increased involvement of women in the public sphere and slow advances of property rights in practice will increase their empowerment and self-confidence.

The head of a household formally used to be the father or husband, but his power has declined, typically being no longer as authoritative as in previous times. This means a 'strong patriarchal rule' and the hierarchical order between generations does not quite exist anymore like in former time. Similarly, the positions and functions of family members are no longer as strictly ordered as they once were.

Notes

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² Karl Kaser, *Patriarchy after Patriarchy: Gender relations in Turkey and in the Balkans, 1500-2000* (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2008), 33; See also Göran Therbon, *Between Sex and Power: Family in the world 1900-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 13.

³ Joel M. Halpern, Karl Kaser and Richard A. Wagner, ‘Patriarchy in the Balkans: Temporal and Cross-Cultural Approaches’, in *Household and Family in the Balkans. Two Decades of Historical Family Research at University of Graz*, ed. Karl Kaser (Vienna: LIT, 2012), 49.

⁴ Jamie Munn, ‘The Hegemonic Male and Kosovar Nationalism, 2000-2005’, in *Men and Masculinities 10* (Sage Publications, 2008), 440.

⁵ Berit Backer, *Behind Stone Walls: Changing Household Organization among the Albanians of Kosova*, 2nd Edition (Pejë, Dukagjini 2003), 118.

⁶ Kate Mulholland, *Class, Gender, and the Family Business* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1.

⁷ Elizabeth Bott, *Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms, and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families*, 2nd Edition (New York: Free Press, 1971), 124.

⁸ Karl Kaser, ‘The Balkan Joint Family Household: Seeking its Origins’, in *Household and Family in the Balkans. Two Decades of Historical Family Research at University of Graz*, ed. Karl Kaser (Vienna: LIT, 2012), 109-128.

⁹ Backer, *Behind Stone Walls*, 52.

¹⁰ Lekë Dukagjini Kanun is a corpus of laws, regulations and norms of Albanians collected on a book by Stjefën Gjeçovi in years 1910-1925. These rules and norms were used in the course of several centuries, before and after the life of Lekë Dukagjini, who lived in the 15th century.

¹¹ Assembly of Kosovo, *The Law on Gender Equality in Kosovo* (Law No. 2004/2): 8, accessed 4 March 2013,

http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/ligjet/2004_2_en.pdf.

¹² Informed by a woman who is school’s teacher and deputy at Deçan Municipality.

¹³ Munn, ‘The Hegemonic Male’, 448.

¹⁴ Elife Krasniqi, ‘Ilegalja: Women in the Albanian Underground Resistance Movement in Kosovo’, *ProFemina* Special issue (Summer/Autumn, 2011): 100-102, accessed 23 November 2014,

http://www.rpp-westernbalkans.net/en/library/Research-Results/Regional/Towards-Transformative-Politics--Intersecting-Knowledge-Production-and-Social-Activism/mainColumnParagraphs/0/text_files/file0/ProfFemina_specijalni_broj_letojesen_2011.pdf.

¹⁵ Anna di Lellio and Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, 'The Legendary Commander: The Construction of an Albanian Master-Narrative in Post-War Kosovo', *Nations and Nationalism* 12 (July 2006): 522.

¹⁶ Luci Nita, 'Endangering Masculinity in Kosovo: Can Albanian Women Say No?', *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 20 (2002): 72.

¹⁷ Ulf Färnsveden and Nicole Farnsworth, *Gender Study in Kosovo. Review of the Implementation of the Law and Program on Gender Equality in Kosovo* (Stockholm: ORGUT Consulting AB, 2012), 8.

¹⁸ Statistical Office of Kosovo, *Women and Men in Kosovo* (Prishtinë, 2011): 7, accessed 28 February 2013, http://esk.rks-gov.net/ENG/publikimet/doc_view/979-women-and-men-in-kosovo-2010?tmpl=component&format=raw.

¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

²⁰ Kaser, *Patriarchy After Patriarchy*, 237-238.

²¹ Informed by the head of Gender Equality Office – Municipality of Deçan.

²² Kosovo Agency of Statistics, accessed 5 March 2013, <http://census.rks-gov.net/istarMDEE/MD/dawinciMD.jsp?a1=yC&a2=mF0&n=1UR50600011&o=0Q&p=0&sp=null&l=0&exp=0>.

²³ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, accessed 6 March 2013, <http://census.rks-gov.net/istarMDEE/MD/dawinciMD.jsp?a1=yC&a2=mF0&n=1UR90600V70&o=0Q&v=1UR060IP00V70000000&p=0&sp=null&l=0&exp=0>.

²⁴ Statistical Office of Kosovo, *Women and Men in Kosovo*, 10-11.

²⁵ Agjencia e Statistikave të Kosovës, *Statistikat e Lindjeve 2011* [Statistics of Births 2011] (Prishtinë, 2012): 12, accessed 4 March 2013, http://esk.rks-gov.net/publikimet/doc_view/901-statistikat-e-lindjeve-2011?tmpl=component&format=raw.

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Women in Search of Social Security: Hostage of Family, Tradition and State

Elife (Elie) Krasniqi

Abstract

The post-war period in Kosovo was a period marked by big transformations in many spheres of society. Kosovo society underwent turbulent political times and has had a long period without any experience of a functioning social security service run by the government. For Albanians in Kosovo, it was their families who provided economic solidarity, social security as well as social cohesion. Yet the changes that are happening in the post-war transitional period in Kosovo point to the fact that the family and household as stable institutions are becoming increasingly questioned. The grand narratives of the ‘nation’ ubiquitous in the public sphere, when talking about the family, recognise women’s role in regard to reproduction and in maintaining social cohesion, yet core dimensions such as state-building are only superficially mentioned. Several laws and regulations today, in line with European standards, are in place to guarantee equal opportunities and gender equality. However, in reality, social problems such as the lack of trust in the rule of law, and the fact that the implementation of the law is transformed by remnant traditions of customary law, remain. The inability of proper law implementation leaves families, yet again, to function as the main providers of social security. In this regard, marginalised groups like women, given their economic dependency on their respective families, remain hostages of tradition and are conditioned to ‘obey.’ This chapter explores the issue of women’s social security, and simultaneously shows the dynamics of power and relation between private and public domains, concretely between ‘family’ as a social institution which perpetuates (what is assumed to be) ‘femininity’- expressed biologically (the reproduction role) and socially (dedication and sacrifice for the family); and the state in the post-war transitional period, which *prima facie* secures gender equality in order to adhere to European standards, but in reality fails to break the dominant patriarchal practices and further reproduces ‘masculinity/ies’ within the frame of patriarchal domination. The findings presented in this paper are part of my PhD research, conducted in Opoja region, south of Kosovo, and in the capital, Prishtina, from 2010-2012.

Key Words: Gender, women, family, tradition, customary law, state, social security, law implementation, power, femininity, masculinity.

1. Introduction

In February 2007 Kosovo declared its independence, so far recognised by 93 UN member states.¹ As has happened throughout history, especially in post-liberation periods, the grand narratives of nation have dominated the public sphere in Kosovo since the end of the war in 1999. They celebrate predominantly male heroes in their struggle of nation and state building. Women's merits on the other hand are only partly recognised, by emphasising their reproductive biological role, praising their dedication and sacrifice for bringing up healthy families and as such maintaining national cohesion. After the war in Kosovo, although there has been significant change and progress in the advancement of women's position, especially if we look at it from the legal aspect (*de jure*), women's lives have remained socially insecure, holding them hostage to their families, traditions,² the nation, and the state.

The region of Opoja, Dragash municipality (south of Kosovo) where I conducted my research, is a rural area in Kosovo, and the physical distance from the capital Prishtina practically equals the distance that people have from the state, especially with regard to ideas of improving women's lives. It is generally stated that the bad state of affairs of Kosovo's economy is reflected in the fact that the largest source of survival is the government, namely government jobs. But inhabitants of Opoja can't even say that for themselves, since there are few government jobs here: the largest source of survival in Opoja is migrant remittances. At municipal level, the general employment rate of women is quite low: of a total of 4,461 employees, only 302 are women.³ Also the level of higher education of women leaves much to be desired. In the mid-level, for instance, out of 1,554 students with secondary level education, 809 are women,⁴ but as soon as the level of education goes higher, the number of women drops drastically.⁵ The reasons for lower education among women are poor economic conditions, the lack of employment perspectives, and the area's moral conservatism.⁶ Under these conditions, it is boys who get to attend higher levels of education and not girls. Circles of socialisation, especially within families, prepare women for being housewives and mothers, whereas men are expected to become household heads and professionals in different fields. For women, it is socially expected to circulate between what writer Shukrie Gashi calls 'the Three K magic triangle 'kuzhinë-kalama-kozmetikë' (kitchen – children – cosmetics).⁷ The triangle also illustrates quite well the position in which I see women's social security today, as a hostage of family, traditional practices and the state.

In order to demonstrate the interconnection of these three facets, I will try to give a short overview of family structures and traditions and at the same time try to shed some light on the security of women and improve their lives. I argue that the blurry picture of the social security system in Kosovo today is, to a great extent, a consequence of the 1990s. This period would have to be taken into account when aiming to better understand the present reluctance of Albanian women to be more

actively persistent in realising the rights which they are entitled to, and for the reasons why femininity designed under patriarchal domination continues to be reproduced in contemporary Kosovo society.

2. The Concept of Family in Kosovo

Post-war transformations have impacted family life and family size and structure in Kosovo. In rural areas, the degree of these changes is less. Families in rural areas in Kosovo would be defined, in the main, as Balkan joint families,⁸ which, according to the Balkan historian who coined the term, Karl Kaser, are characterised especially by patrilineality, patrilocality and patriarchy. However, the ways in which the changes after the war have affected family structures in Kosovo has yet to be researched and defined.⁹ Being patrilineal and patrilocal, in traditional Albanian understanding the line of the father is seen as the transmitter of the name, blood and property of a family.¹⁰ With only 8.2% of women having inherited property,¹¹ this issue remains one of the burning problems relating to questions of women's dependence on family and traditional values. According to customary law¹² women are not entitled to inheritance, whereas according to applicable government laws, women are fully entitled to own and inherit property. Considering Islam on this matter, women would have the right to inherit half the amount that their brothers would take. Although Islam seem to be more prevalent in Opoja than in other regions, women still do not inherit property. Bearing in mind the generally fragile state of the country and region's economy, and the specifically low levels of higher education and employment among women and the customary taboo against women's inheritance, the general picture seems to indicate that women in this region live in a total state of dependence on their families. When talking about this with the villagers, they turned out to be aware of the rights that women are entitled to inheritances, according to both applicable law and Islam. However, they reasoned that women, once they marry, enjoy the property of their husbands. In cases where marriages fail and they return to parental families, as commonly expressed, a woman's 'brother's door remains open to her' (*gjithmonë e kanë derënçelëtevlau*). This also refers to the traditional custom according to which married women (sisters) are entitled to pay regular visits to their parental families. Traditionally, this visit was two weeks, twice a year, and would continue even after the death of the parents, in the brother's family (which would have remained in the parental home). Another reason for the reluctance of fathers and brothers to share the family's inheritance with women is the conviction that it would be the brother-in-law who would gain a stake in the family's property.

It is not only the material aspect that hinders women from realising their right to inheritance, but also the dimension of loyalty internalised by women as a moral family value. If women would claim their right to inherit, they would be considered disloyal to their families.¹³ Furthermore they would pay a social price, which means that their family network and environment would prejudice them and

in some cases even isolate them. These so-called 'family values' make women dependent first on their parental families and then, after marriage, on their husbands and their families. In Opoja, women are socialised to be mothers, caregivers in the husband's family, and to be loyal to their 'feminine fate.' Needless to say, there are also exceptions to this practice. Generally, when women marry, they are expected to live with their husband's family and take care of his parents in old age. In Dragash municipality, there are no resident-care-homes for elders and no kindergartens. Even in cases where women are employed, the role of the primary caregivers at home falls to them. In one of the villages where I conducted research, when talking about the help that should come from the government, either in creating care-giving infrastructure or increasing pensions, an interviewee said '*The pension of an old man is the bride.*' What this means is that the well-being of old people is in the hands of their son's bride's service and propriety, and they do not count in the service that should come from the state. Young married women who seek a separate life in a nuclear family are seen to be selfish and not perpetuating traditional and moral values. These typical gender roles are assigned by tradition and are defined both biologically (reproduction role) and socially (the expected readiness to be in service of family). They are able to constantly reproduce themselves because of the inability of the state to properly implement laws, create family policies and provide social security, through which women would be able to shift from a family dependent position to a lifestyle more pursuant of their individual rights. Apart from the aspect of property, there are other aspects of family and tradition, which could highlight the state of limbo in which women find themselves. However, I have chosen to restrain myself to property issues mainly, in order to leave space for discussion regarding political aspects, concretely the role of the government. The next section will discuss the involvement of the government and its inability to fully implement laws, thus slowing down the process towards a firm social security framework for both women and men.

3. The Post-War Period: From Failing State to Transitional Society

The challenges of the post-war situation are not solely a post-war phenomenon, but should also be understood as a legacy of the period under Yugoslavia and, later, Serbia. The period of the 1990s with the expulsion of Albanian employers from public institutions marked the failure of the state to be in the service of all its citizens, and the creation of the informal so-called parallel society.¹⁴ The loss of jobs in the 1990s meant automatically the loss of the right to public health care services.¹⁵ On a socio-cultural level, the Serbian state constructed *the other* by attacking first the Albanian family as an institution: portraying associated gender behaviours as backward and primitive and also as a threat to the Serbian nation. In reaction, Albanians perceived the state as being the source of oppression, whereas the institutions of family and kinship networks became something to defend, since

they provided safety and security.¹⁶ The ‘socialist progress,’ achieved to a certain degree or perhaps only superficially in Kosovo,¹⁷ stagnated. In this anomic state, traditional practices returned and society re-patriarchalised.¹⁸ Nevertheless, urban women organised themselves, both politically and socially. During the 1990s, distinguishing women’s needs parallel to or over the needs of the nation for liberation was not considered a priority by the majority. It was thought that women’s rights would naturally follow in the aftermath of liberation.¹⁹ Family matters were pushed deeper into the private domain and were silenced further. Being the source of social security, family was considered crucial to social cohesion, and women were expected to contribute in this domain. As in the earlier periods of 1960s / 1980s, also during the 1990s, women made their political contribution to nation and state building. However, after the turmoil, women’s merits were only partly recognised by emphasising their reproductive role rather than their political and civic engagement.²⁰ The narratives of the nation romanticised also the discourse on family, which reduced women to their biological role of reproduction; and an even further reduced social discourse narrowed this to the motif of sacrifice for the family.

Currently, as far as the government politics regarding gender are concerned, there are several laws that have been passed so far, in line with European standards, such as the Gender Equality Law, the Law against Discrimination, and the Law against Domestic Violence. Other laws that fall into the family domain are the Law on Family, and the Law on Family and Social Security. From this point, *prima facie* the state has an intention to improve, as is commonly said, ‘gender equality,’ although most of the laws were passed in a hurry without proper strategies and policies for implementation beforehand.²¹ However, as many reports have stated so far, significant problems remain regarding the implementation of these laws in social reality.²² There are several problems with regard to this: the legacy of the 1990s which makes people solve their problems within their own families to avoid government authorities; the problems relating to the inefficiency of the Rule of Law sector; the general public mistrust in the courts;²³ the practice of what I call *appropriation* of law implementation by customary law practices; and the lack of strong social security provided by the government. The issue becomes especially severe in the case of domestic violence. In Opoja, according to the Centre for Social Welfare in Dragash, from 2004-2009, 20 cases of domestic violence were registered. Indicatively enough, in this region I have not been able to follow any procedural and/or documentation traces that would show how these cases were handled. However, from talking to local women’s organisations, to the survivors of domestic violence in shelters in Prishtina and Prizren, and also according to a women’s NGO report,²⁴ there are indications that apart from a reluctance to report violence, there is also a consistent lack of proper case conduct for which the officials in the courts of law and in the social welfare centres are responsible. Furthermore, women who report violence are often bad-mouthed in

their social surroundings, so that social shame does not fall on perpetrators but upon victims. When violence becomes severe and is reported to the police, a couple of social workers from the local Centre for Social Welfare take over. They come together with ‘victim defenders,’ i.e. lawyers mandated to help the survivor of violence through the legal procedures of the court system. On the basis of the cases that I observed, I consider that one of the reasons why, regardless of the efforts from these three parties/agents (Police, Centre for Social Welfare, and Victim Defenders) the problems of women are often not resolved, is that the implementation of the law gets to be *appropriated* by customary law and tradition, which seeks to keep the family together at all cost. This prioritisation of family cohesion is primarily conditioned by the lack of social security. The law that settled the social security framework was passed in 2012, and it was supposed to be implemented in 2013. However, from what I have observed in the field so far, social security means insufficiently low pensions (60-80 Euro) and insufficiently low amounts of social aid for defined social categories. These insufficient amounts must be understood in the context of the generally poor state of the economy in Kosovo.²⁵

However, in cases where family matters are not addressed through recourse to the available legal and government mechanisms, and are left to be solved within the family and kinship network, the customary law practices leave essentially no choice for the affected women. In cases of domestic violence, women can go to a shelter for six months but then have to return back to the violent environment of their husband’s families, as the government rarely finds an alternative housing solution for them.²⁶ The type of traditional family more prevalent in rural areas considers children always to belong to their father’s line. Consequently, in cases of divorce, the husband and his family often do not allow women to take their children to their parental homes, as they are considered ‘of the husband’s blood.’ Even in cases where women do take their children to their parental family, the situation worsens when the parental family cannot provide for her due to poverty. In this climate of a severely underperforming economy, a fragile government, and the associated perseverance of traditional family values, improving lives of women and their well-being remains a stark challenge, regardless of the existence of laws in accordance with European standards.

4. Conclusion

As this research is still in progress, I conclude by giving a short summary of the points discussed. Kosovo is a country that has gone through political turbulence and is yet undergoing a process of transition, seeking social stability and security. The legacy of the political tensions of the 1990s and the fall of communism has led people to rely on their families as providers of social security. By this token, women’s role is considered crucial to maintain family cohesion. Regardless of their history of civic and political engagement, women are mainly recognised for their

reproductive role only. The changes after the 1999 war suggested that the firm, traditional family type of the rural areas would also begin to change. For the time being, qualitative indicators show that these changes are conditioned both economically and politically. Because of the poor economic state of the country, specifically in the region researched, and because of a generally prevailing moral conservatism, priority for education is given to boys and not girls. As far as conservatism is concerned, this is expressed by the application of customary law to issues such as property and inheritance. On the one hand, through different practices and discourses, women are reduced to their reproductive role and their social sphere is narrowed to the family and private domain alone. On the other hand, the inability of the state to properly implement the existing laws discourages even further any attempts by women to take action for changing their position. The lack of a sufficient and strong social security provision by the government leaves women shackled in a situation of no choice and situated in a limbo between traditional family values that can be oppressive, and the absence of government protection.

Notes

¹ Kosovo Thanks You, accessed 8 March 2012, <http://www.kosovothanksyou.com/>.

² I am aware that the term 'tradition' is a complex one, but in this text I am referring to practices that are legacy of customary law and Islam.

³ Kosovo Statistics Agency, accessed March 2013, <http://census.rks-gov.net/istarMDEE/MD/dawinciMD.jsp?a1=yC&a2=mF0&n=1UR90600051&o=0Q&v=1UR060IP00051000000&p=0&sp=null&l=0&exp=0>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ It must be emphasised that the Agency of Statistics of Kosovo has the data per municipal level. Therefore, the data presented are for Dragash municipality, which covers both Opoja and Gora regions and are not divided per region.

⁶ Janet Reineck, *The Past as Refuge: Gender, Migration and Ideology among the Kosovo Albanians* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 169-181.

⁷ Shukrije Gashi, 'Gruaja Shqip tar enë Lëviz jen kom bë Tare Përçlirim komb Tard he Barazi Gjini Ore', in *Veprimtaria e Gruas në lëvizjen kombëtare për çlirim*. Prishtinë (Instituti Albanologjik Prishtinë: Shoqata e Tëburgosurvepolitikë Kosovës, 2010).

⁸ Karl Kaser, *Porodica i Srodsva na Balkan, Analizajedne Kulturekojanestaje* (Beograd: Association for Social History Beograd), 1994.

⁹ From 2010-present, Centre for Southeast European History and Anthropology has conducted a research project on the Family in Kosovo in two regions: Opoja and

Isnqi. Under the supervision of Prof. Karl Kaser, the team consists of Dr. Carolin Leutloff – Grandits, Tahir Latifi, and myself.

¹⁰ See Reineck, *The Past as Refuge*, 169-181; Karl Kaser, *Porodici Srodsvana Balkan, Analizajedne Kulturekojanestaje* (Beograd: Association for Social History, Belgrad, 1994); Karl Kaser, 'The Balkan Joint Family Household: Seeking Its Origins', in *Household and Family in the Balkans: Two Decades of Historical Family Research at University of Graz*, ed. Karl Kaser (Vienna: LIT, 2012), 109-128; Valbona Begolli, *Pozita e Gruas në Kosovë Me një Vështrim të Posaqëm në të Drejtën Zakonore* (Prishtine: Rilindja, 1987); Berit Backer, *Behind Stone Walls: Changing Household Organization among the Albanians in Yugoslavia* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 1979), Second Edition (Pejë, Dukagjini 2003); Gjergj Rrapi, *Savrement Zadružne Porodice na Kosovu* (Beograd: Institut za Sociološka Istraživanja Filozofskog Fakulteta u Beogradu, 1995).

¹¹ Kosovo Statistical Agency, the conference for the presentation of preliminary census results, 21st September 2012, Emerald Hotel, Prishtina.

¹² The customary law or the Code of Lekë Dukagjini, commonly referred to it as Kanun, is a set of customary laws that were codified by the Princ of Lekë Dukagjini around 15th century, and written only in the 19th century by an Albanian priest Shtjefën Gjeçovi.

¹³ In 2002, I conducted a research project on the issue of Women and Property, as an assignment for the course on Research Methods at the University of Prishtina, taught by Prof. Lynne Alice. Insights of it are to be found in the article of Lynne Alice, *After Communism: Critical Perspectives on Society and Sociology* by Carol Harrington, Ayman Salem and Tamara Zurabishvili (Bern, 2004). See also *Women's Property Inheritance Rights*, Kosovo Gender Study Center, 2011, accessed 27 February 2013, <http://kgscenter.net/images/stories/pdf/trashegimia-ang-web.pdf>.

¹⁴ Until 1989, Kosovo was an autonomous province of Yugoslavia until it was abolished by Serbia in 1989. The coming years resulted in heavy tensions in Kosovo (police curfews, violence) and the expulsion of Albanians from public institutions, schools, and University. Albanians created the so-called parallel system, in which the healthcare and education system was established in private houses and funded by 3% tax from each Albanian household income, and the Albanian diaspora.

¹⁵ Nicole Farnsworth, *History Is Herstory Too: The History of Women in Civil Society in Kosovo 1980-2004* (Prishtine: Kosovo Gender Study, 2008).

¹⁶ Anton Berishaj, 'Violence Following Violence', in *Archives of Memory: Supporting Traumatized Communities through Narration and Remembrances* (Psychological Notebook, Vol. 2. Oct. 2001), accessed March 2012, <http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/PsychosocialNotebook2.pdf>.

- ¹⁷ Drita Gunga, *Gratënënperiudhën e Ndërtimit socialist* (Prishtinë: Rilindja, 1986)
- ¹⁸ Karl Kaser, *Patriarchy After Patriarchy: Gender Relations in Turkey and in the Balkans, 1500-2000* (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2008).
- ¹⁹ Julie Mertus, *Gender in Service of Nation: Female Citizenship in Kosovar Society*, in *Social Politics* (Oxford, Summer Fall 1996).
- ²⁰ Elife Krasniqi, 'Ilegalja: Women in the Albanian Underground Resistance Movement in Kosovo', *ProFemina* (2011).
- ²¹ KIPRED, *Laws without Policy, Waste Dead Letter and Futility* (Nov, 2006).
- ²² Ulf Färnsveden and Nicole Farnsworth, *Gender Study in Kosovo: Review of the Implementation of the Law and Program on Gender Equality in Kosovo* (Stockholm: ORGUT Consulting AB, 2012), accessed February 2013, http://www.swedenabroad.com/ImageVaultFiles/id_8560/cf_52/Sida_Gender_Study_in_Kosovo2012-12-20_ORGUT_Final.PDF.
- ²³ Kosovo 2012 Progress Report, accessed February 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/ks_rapport_2010_en.pdf.
- ²⁴ Kosovo Women's Network, *More than Words in Paper? Response of Justice Providers to Domestic Violence in Kosovo*, 2009, accessed January 2013, http://www.womensnetwork.org/images/pdf/Women's_Network_eng.pdf.
- ²⁵ Kosovo's unemployment rate is 47% (World Bank, Country Brief 2010), and the general economic growth is very low. According to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) estimation, the level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is 1,731 € in 2009, whereas the Gross National Disposable Income (GNDI) per capita is 2,007 € (UNDP 2010).
- ²⁶ Naime Sherifi Beqiri, director of Centre for Protection of Women and Children in Prishtina, told me that her Centre, together with the local municipality and Habitat, managed to secure housing for a woman with her children who repeatedly came to seek shelter in Prishtina. Interview conducted in April 2012. Prishtine.

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Civil Society Discourses of the Kemalist Women's Organisations in Turkey: Engendering Civil Society?

Asuman Özgür Keysan

Abstract

Civil society is a very contested and gendered concept and takes various meanings in different contexts and over time. In the Turkish context, civil society has been instrumentalised dominantly as a prominent and leading area for democracy promotion and the term 'civil' has been employed as the opposite of 'military' since after the 1980s. Although this kind of liberal approach has been challenged by some critical perspectives, the majority of critical approaches have also failed to ask in what ways women's and gender issues are included and/or marginalised/silenced in the civil society discussions and practices. Therefore, this chapter will turn to the civil society discourses of two Kemalist women's organisations, called the Turkish Women's Association and the Turkish Association of University Women. These groups have a secular/Kemalist political standpoint, and struggle for gender equality in all areas of society. The goal of this paper is to investigate whether or not a link between gender and civil society has been constructed, and whether there is a counter-discourse which offers an alternative to the gendered hierarchies in civil society. To do this, it will focus on whether and in what ways civil society and gender relationships are represented in the women's interview texts, and analyse whether and how they (re)produce and/or challenge male-dominance in civil society.

Key Words: Civil society, gender, women's organisations, Turkey, autonomy, volunteerism, responsibility, discourse.

1. Introduction

Civil society is a very contested and gendered term. There is a lot of extant literature on civil society theories and their empirical applications in different contexts and over time – most recently in Central and Eastern Europe, South Africa and Latin America. The general tendency is to interpret civil society as a direct and linear way of enhancing democracy. It can be argued that the revival of the usage of the concept of civil society and the proliferation of civil society organisations under the influence of neoliberal policies since the late 80s, and its particular implications on historical and contemporary contexts, has led feminist scholars to re-conceptualise civil society from a gender perspective. In the scope of these debates, feminist scholars have suggested alternative models and understandings to link civil society with gender approaches. However, some of these studies have not paid enough attention to the context in the light of women's activism. To this end,

an analysis of the Turkish case may fill this gap by calling attention to women's civil society and whether and in what ways gender dynamics have been internalised in the civil society discourses of the women's organisations.

This chapter focuses on the civil society discourses of the Kemalist women's organisations.¹ The data for this research was collected through semi-structured interviews with two Kemalist² women's organisations, namely the Turkish Women's Association – Headquarters (the TKB)³ and the Turkish Association of University Women – Ankara branch (the TUKD)⁴ over May and June, 2012. Both women's associations take a secular/Kemalist political standpoint and basically strive for gender equality in all areas of society.

This chapter consists of two main parts. Firstly, it briefly touches upon how the concepts of volunteerism and autonomy have been mobilised in civil society literature. Secondly, it discusses in what ways the volunteerism discourse is produced and articulated in other discourses such as autonomy and responsibility in the women's interview texts; and what the origins of those discourses are. While doing this, it analyses whether and in what ways civil society and gender relationships are represented in women's interview texts, discussing whether they (re)produce and/or challenge male-dominance and gender-blindness in civil society.

2. Volunteerism and Autonomy: Concepts of Civil Society

Civil society is a contested term, taking on various meanings in different contexts over time. Volunteerism and autonomy are widely used concepts within the liberal approaches to civil society. Specifically, volunteerism and voluntarist action reverberate in Tocquevillian civil society conceptualisation. Tocqueville was very interested in the growth of autonomous voluntary associations outside of the state, established by people who shared common goals. He saw this as a warrant against the tyranny of the majority.⁵ In this context, civil society is construed as a space for a network of voluntary associations constituted against the tyranny of the majority.⁶ Putnam is a follower of Tocqueville who complains about the loss of spirit of association and defines the term of social capital as 'features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.'⁷ As a solution to the decline of social capital, he recommends a notion of civil society which pays attention to 'community spirit, volunteerism and association.'⁸ Another scholar that highlights the volunteerism and autonomy aspects of the civil society is Diamond. He underscores the significance of associational life which is independent/autonomous from the state. Diamond conceives civil society as an area 'of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, and autonomous from the state... and is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state.'⁹ This type of conception attributes positive features to a civil society which is distinct from the state and private realm.

It is crucial to underscore here that this kind of so-called liberal approach is one of the main perspectives of civil society and the debate on it is much wider than this brief discussion. More importantly, there is not one singular conceptual framework for civil society within the liberal perspective. It has instead taken various critiques from mainly Marxist, Gramscian and Habermasian approaches to civil society, and feminist scholars criticise those mainstream approaches due to their blindness to the gendered features of these concepts: they elevate masculine traits and roles, and subordinate the feminine.¹⁰ However, insufficient work has thus far been done on what a more gender equal conception of civil society would look like. Herein, I find it very crucial to focus on women's civil society and to dwell upon the discourses of the women who define themselves as volunteer women in these women's organisations. In this sense, I consider that in the Turkish case,¹¹ particular focus on the women's organisations may enable me to reassess the mainstream approaches to civil society which could build towards engendering the concept.

3. Unpacking the Kemalist Women's Civil Society Discourses

Volunteerism, autonomy, and responsible/committed-women, are the three main discourses produced by the Kemalist women's organisations regarding their perceptions of the civil society concept, and the aims and functions of civil society organisations (CSOs). The volunteerism discourse is prevalent among them but it is not produced on its own. It is articulated within other discourses such as those pertaining to autonomous associational life and responsible women in civil society. Thus, I organise this part of the chapter on the basis of the intersection of the volunteerism discourse with the autonomy and responsibility discourses. I argue that each type of intersection can produce different types of representations of the notion of civil society. This analysis will be done through a gender lens in order to explore whether and how the gendered characteristics of civil society are (re)produced and/or challenged by women's discourses. The implications of these discourses for the site of civil society will be discussed throughout the subsections.

A. Volunteerism Discourse

According to the volunteerism discourse, civil society is produced as a voluntary-based space for volunteer women. Volunteerism is interpreted as an indispensable principle of civil society and identified with 'no personal gain/benefit.'¹² As a corollary of the reference to voluntary-based space, the boundaries and the scope of civil society are questioned in the texts of women's interviews. It is in this way that the voluntary organisations are constructed as proper and real civil society organisations. This creates binary categorisations within civil society such as real versus alleged, and us versus the other, which may imply a hierarchically formed and fragmented site. Whereas real civil society is

defined as voluntary based and distant from any political authority, the alleged one is identified as male-dominant, professional, and interest-oriented. In this sense, the lack of civil society consciousness in the latter is accounted for by the non-existence of volunteerism.

The male-dominant aspect of the non-voluntary CSOs is highlighted as one of the reasons for low civil society consciousness, and this prevents those CSOs from becoming proper voluntary organisations. Interestingly, this reference to genuineness is also reflected in the classification of the women's organisations. The ones which can work on women's issues in real terms are considered to be real/genuine women's civil society organisations, and differ from those women's organisations founded as a social activity by a small group of women.¹³ Additionally, the women make a few general references to ideas such as 'male-dominant civil society,' 'democracy without women,'¹⁴ and 'masculine society,'¹⁵ so as to call attention to civil society as a masculine space.

The critique of the professional civil society organisations is another way of promoting the volunteerism discourse through drawing the boundaries of a real CSO, with professionalism voiced as the diametric opposite of volunteerism. The extract shows that the TOBB (The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey) is a standard civil society organisation. But, is it ever similar to us? All of the structures within the TOBB are professional.¹⁶ However, this kind of approach within the volunteerism discourse is challenged by a woman from the same organisation, the TKB, who complements professionalism with volunteerism in stating that 'civil society should be something professional. As well as the volunteers, there should also be a professional team.'¹⁷ One of the key points is the variety and dilemmas/conflicts found in the women's discourses, even when coming from within the same organisation.

B. Autonomy Discourse

The links between the 'volunteerism' and 'autonomy' discourses are discursively formed on the basis of the idea that the autonomous associational life and freedom of civil society organisations will be ensured and maintained as an outcome of volunteerism. There are two main ways of being autonomous in the Kemalist women's civil society discourses, each of which has its own problems: a) autonomy from the political parties/doctrine and, b) autonomy from the state/government.

The first form of this autonomy discourse is produced by referring to civil society organisations as above political parties, political organisations and doctrines – although an overwhelming majority of the women from both organisations show sympathy with the main opposition party, named the Republican People's Party (the RPP) and take part in its activities.¹⁸ One of the significant conditions for being an 'autonomous' and 'free' organisation is to stay away from any political/ideological stances.

By isolating the CSOs from any political thinking/ideological engagement, womanhood (*kadınlıklar*) is construed as a common ground for women's associations as part of the CSOs, and thereby the women's issues are taken as a priority without engaging in any differences among the women as indicated in the excerpt below. This may infer that it is not right to attach priority to the different identities in civil society, rather, womanhood as a primary identity should always be defended.

Organisations share a common ground in that they are sensitive to women's issues and they detach themselves from any political thinking such as head-scarved or not, believing Islam or not. At that point, civil society being organised comes up. In civil society it is enough to prioritise women and to aim towards doing something both in law and practice in support of women.¹⁹

Even though this may be read as avoiding the reproduction of any distinctions such as secular/laicist vs religious/Islamist, it can be argued that this may not be the case, given the excerpt below:

It is very difficult to join with the Islamist women's groups. We have done some activities with the BKP (The Capital City Women's Platform Association) before, but I think they are not the same. There are not many Islamist groups that I know closely. I don't want to know more about them either.²⁰

In line with the ideals of secularism and modernism, the argument that circulated among the Kemalist women is that wearing a headscarf is an obstacle for women to be liberated, and thus this may lead them into the trap of contesting secular vs Islamist binaries. In general terms, this kind of understanding constructs woman as a universal and monolithic category by ignoring religious, ethnic, sexual, class-based and other differences between women. Thus, the term woman is constructed as a homogeneous category. In accordance with this point, the demands and the purpose of all women and women's organisations in the civil society arena are discursively assumed to be the same. Furthermore, the absence of terms regarding ethnic, sexual, and class-based differences in the language of the women's texts relating to women's problems and gender equality issues in Turkey may be a good indication of how the discourse of sameness among women plays itself out. In relation to the homogeneous woman category, woman as a sexed category is identified through various roles such as being a 'conscious' mother, wife, daughter, and professional in her work.²¹ This conforms to the ideal Republican woman model, where women 'get an education and pursue a career and were expected simultaneously to be attentive and well-trained mothers.'²²

Second, the notion of civil society as somehow above governments is employed as a trope by another component in the autonomy discourse. In this sense, the autonomous/independent –and-thereby-free, character of civil society sets it apart from the state/government. In this way, the autonomy discourse has the capacity to reproduce the state-civil society dichotomy discourse which has been prevalent in the Turkish context since the late 1980s. One of the discursive strategies used in the women's texts to produce the discourse of civil society as autonomous from the state is to repudiate any financial state support to civil society due to its potential damage to the autonomy of the CSOs. A woman activist from the TUKD said that 'expecting any financial aid from the state is inconsistent with my mentality towards and understanding of civil society.'²³ However, an opposite approach, which does not interpret the financial state support as an obstacle for autonomy, is also articulated by a woman from the TKB stating that 'if these associations are for the public benefit, not for any personal gains, women, environment, health organisations etc. should be financially supported by the state.'²⁴ Moreover, the approach against financial support from the state does not imply that state's support/help in terms of enabling some facilities/projects and consultation²⁵ is not required. Consequently, it is argued that the state should not only support the CSOs but also consult them.²⁶ Thus, the autonomous/independent relationship does not refer to civil society and state as two mutually exclusive and distinct arenas. On the contrary, the women's texts from both organisations contain phrases regarding the inevitability of a close relationship, dialogue and discussion between the two, regardless of any specific political power/government.

C. Responsibility Discourse

The representation of being a volunteer woman in the language structures of these women's words is linked to the concepts of responsibility, duty and commitment. The intersection of the volunteerism discourse with the responsibility discourse produces an image of volunteer women who do not anticipate any benefit for carrying out civil duties and responsibilities. This account surpasses the minimal sense of civil society and charges women's activists with the mission of civil society development and the promotion of women's rights. In this context, the identification of volunteerism with duties and responsibilities excludes the understanding of volunteerism as a type of leisure time or social activity. To this end, all the women from both organisations, namely the TKB and the TUKD, consider themselves responsible for altering this misconception.

In relation to the discourse of responsibility-based volunteerism, volunteer women are referred to as being far from individualistic, and seen to be taking on responsibilities for society – in many cases, collectively, since 'civil society is where you can do actions which cannot be done individually.'²⁷ In other words, social benefits for the entire society are targeted through this discourse. I suggest that the women perceive themselves as more altruistic than mainstream, self-

interested actors, and want to emphasise their egalitarian spirit. However, the egalitarian discourse may be undermined by the very fact that it overlooks multiple identity categories and their implications, pinpointed in the autonomy discourse. This type of discourse is in line with the Kemalist secular ideology of the state within which groups/individuals deviating from the ideal of the secular state run the risk of becoming marginalised. Furthermore, terms such as responsibility-based and volunteer, idealistic women and so on, can be linked to the approach taken by the Turkish Republic to women and gender, and its Kemalist secular reforms which established and enhanced women's rights. As Tekeli²⁸ highlights, women's rights function as a way of denying the Ottoman past and forming a 'democratised' Republic in line with Western ideas and practices. I should underline that the Kemalist reforms had a significant impact on women's rights in Turkey. However, they were also powerful in determining and setting the boundaries of women's conduct, assigning them certain tasks in the public sphere, and drawing clear distinctions between the private and public arenas. Emancipation was confined solely to middle/upper-class elite women; that is, 'women of the urban bourgeoisie.'²⁹ The reforms³⁰ did not bear on gender issues 'such as a double standard of sexuality and a primarily domestic definition of the female role.'³¹ Those women who are formally emancipated by the reform process are the urban bourgeoisie who were educated, highly skilled and professional.

This kind of feminine profile suits the category of volunteer and responsible woman produced with the responsibility discourse. I argue that for a women's organisation, demanding commitment and duty-based volunteerism rather than social activity-based participation from its members, and additionally describing civil society participation as every individual's responsibility, may have an inclination to restrict civil society to the parameters defined by the nationalist/secularist Turkish Republican ideology. This was also highlighted by Ipek,³² that to be a volunteer in a civil society organisation is every citizen's duty and these people devotedly perform their citizenship responsibilities. I also consider that this may create a specific identity for women, within which one may achieve the ability to be part of civil society only if she accomplishes certain commitments. Moreover, as I highlight above, it may run the risk of marginalising certain women and groups for the sake of the perceived overall benefit to society, and crave a clean civil society space for us in which there is no room for the other.

In the scope of the responsibility discourse, educating/enlightening and consciousness-raising are the lexicons used by the women to describe responsibility of the civil society and CSOs. Thereby, the civil society/CSOs gain a specific mission to organise the masses and render them conscious. However, one of the problems with this discourse is that it may reinforce a 'from above' positioning and engender other binary categorizations such as conscious civil society organisation members versus ordinary people. Interestingly, a particular and special mission is attributed to the women's organisations within civil society

in terms of their consciousness regarding being organised and knowledgeable. It is presented that the target of women's organisations is to teach women how to obtain a 'civil society consciousness'³³ and 'to become an actor in the real civil society'³⁴ given the fact that women constitute half of the society/population. Thus, only women's organisations achieve becoming the most proper bearers of civil society, as voiced by one of the woman participants from the TKB. Thereby the integration of women's point of view to civil society is accentuated.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed three key civil society discourses from two Kemalist women's organisations, namely the TKB and the TUKD, and their (re)production and limited criticism of the masculine characteristics of civil society. I showed that regarding the women's interpretation of the civil society arena and the goals/functions of civil society organisations, the volunteerism discourse is the dominant one among these associations, and its intersection with the autonomy and responsibility discourses creates diverse and conflicting civil society discourses both between and within these organisations. More importantly, in spite of the few references to the significance of women's, or women's organisation's voices in civil society and a critique of the masculine elements of civil society, the general tendency is not to articulate/speak of/mention the gendered characteristics of civil society. In this way, the feminine and masculine roles in the civil society arena, not only drawn by the nationalist/secularist Turkish Republican ideology but also by the contestations and resistance of women, do not pay enough attention to the Kemalist women's views. Although the Kemalist women's groups have fought for gender equality in all aspects of society for many years, I argue that their support of the category 'woman,' meaning a volunteer woman in civil society with a professional role in the labour market who is also a good wife and mother, may uphold gender divisions in civil society, and ultimately fail to challenge women's subordination.

Notes

¹ The most common way of categorising women's organisations is ideology-based, distinguishing secularist/Kemalist, Islamist/religious, feminist, socialist and Kurdish women's groups. For an example of these categorisations, see Dilek Cindoğlu and Simel Esim, 'Women's Organizations in 1990s Turkey: Predicaments and Prospects', *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, No. 1 (1999): 178-188; Çağla Diner and Sule Toktaş, 'Waves of Feminism in Turkey: Kemalist, Islamist and Kurdish Women's Movements in an era of Globalization', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, No. 1 (2010): 41-57; Serpil Sancar and Ayca Bulut, 'Turkey: Country Gender Profile', Final Report, (2006), accessed 5 May 2011,

http://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/thematic_issues/gender/background/pdf/e06tur.pdf. In this chapter, I follow an ideology-based categorisation.

² Kemalism is both an ideology and a 'praxis of Westernization reforms' articulated by the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his followers. Burçak Keskin, 'Confronting Double Patriarchy: Islamist Women in Turkey', in *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists around the World*, eds. Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power (London: Routledge, 2002), 255.

³ The Turkish Women's Association (the TKB) was founded in 1924 and gained the status of 'an organisation functioning for the public good' in 1954 (TKB, 'Tarihçe (History)', (n.d), accessed 21 September 2012, http://www.turkkadinlartirligi.org/index.php=genel_icerik&content=tarihce_tuzu_k). After 2002, state support given under the aim of public weal was terminated. Membership fees and kermess, etc are its funding sources. The headquarters of the TKB has not received any funding from international donors so far. It aims to fight for legal gender equality because it regards legal protection as a first step towards equality in practice. It has 61 branches in Turkey and 7 sister branches in Northern Cyprus. It has 4047 members across Turkey, and 134 members at its headquarters in Ankara alone. The activities of the association are developing policies to promote equality and educate people on women's human rights and associative legal rights.

⁴ The Turkish Association of University Women (TUKD) was established in 1949 as a non-profit voluntary organisation of university women graduates. It has ten branches in Turkey in the big cities of Istanbul (headquarter), Adana, Ankara, Antalya, Bursa, Eskisehir, Gaziantep, İzmir, Kastamonu, Konya, and Samsun (TUKD, 'Turkish Association of University Women', 1998, accessed 19 September 2012, <http://www.ifuw.org/turkey/english.htm>). It has more than 1000 members. The main aims of the association are to 'protect the hard-won women's rights and other Atatürk reforms such as secularism, and improve the educational, economic and social status of women throughout Turkey' and to promote the participation of women in decision-making processes (ibid).

⁵ Robert Cox, 'Civil Society at the Turn of the Millenium: Prospects for an Alternative World Order', *Review of International Studies* 25 (1999): 6.

⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 126-133.

⁷ Robert D. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy* 6, No. 1 (1995): 67.

⁸ Alison Van Rooy, 'Civil Society as Idea: An Analytic Hatstand?', in *Civil Society and the Aid Industry: The Politics and Promise*, ed. Alison Van Rooy (UK: Earthscan, 1998), 13.

⁹ Larry Diamond, 'Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation', *Journal of Democracy* 5, No. 3 (1994): 5.

¹⁰ For more discussion, see Carole Pateman, *Sexual Contract* (UK: Polity Press, 1988); Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, (UK: Polity Press, 1989); Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1992); Jude Howell, 'Gender and Civil Society', in *Global Civil Society Yearbook 2005/6*, eds. Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor and Helmut K. Anheir (London: Sage, 2006); Jude Howell, 'Gender and Civil Society: Time for Cross-Border Dialogue', *Social Politics* 14, No. 4 (2007): 415-436; Jude Howell, 'Introduction', in *Gender and Civil Society: Transcending Boundaries*, eds. Jude Howell and Diane Mulligan (London: Routledge, 2005); Karen Hagemann, Sonya Michel and Gunilla Budde, *Civil Society and Gender Justice: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008); Anne Phillips, 'Introduction', in *Feminism and Equality*, ed. Anne Phillips (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Anne Phillips, 'Who Needs Civil Society? A Feminist Perspective', *Dissent* 46, No. 1 (1999): 56-61; Mikiko Eto, 'Reframing Civil Society from Gender Perspectives: A Model of a Multi-layered Seamless World', *Journal of Civil Society* (2012): 1-21.

¹¹ Turkey is where the major aspirations to be modern through Westernisation/Europenisation were beholden since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The notion of civil society in the Turkish context has been mostly identified with promoting democracy by contrasting the 'civil' against the 'military.' The dominance of military interventions, which happened in 1960, 1971 and 1980, and 1997 (postmodern coup) in the history of Turkish politics has been highlighted by scholars and commentators as one of the main reasons that Turkey could not enhance democracy through creating a free and associative space for 'civils.' The concept of civil society was mostly employed together with the notions of democracy and democratization without any further analysis. Levent Köker, 'How Civil, How Democratic?', *Today's Zaman*, 12 June 2007, accessed 20 January 2013, http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=113727; Sefa Şimsek, 'The Transformation of Civil Society in Turkey: From Quantity to Quality', *Turkish Studies* 5, No. 3 (2004): 46. In this way, civil society actors such as trade unions, associations (*dernek*) and foundations (*vakıf*), are viewed as spaces where a fight against authoritative military rule is achieved, and democracy promoted. Hakan Seckinelgin, 'Contradictions of a Sociocultural Reflex: Civil Society in Turkey', in *Exploring Civil Society: Political and Cultural Contexts*, eds. Marlies Glasius and David Lewis (London: Routledge, 2004, 173). In this context, CSOs are considered as a control mechanism on the state; and thereby positions CSOs against the state.

¹² Interview with Pinar, TUKD, 2012, Ankara (All names of the participant women are pseudonyms).

¹³ Interview with Lale, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

¹⁴ Interview with Sevda, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

¹⁵ Interview with Tansu, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

¹⁶ Interview with Sevda, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

¹⁷ Interview with Lale, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

¹⁸ Even though I did not ask which party the women voted for, the women participant showed their sympathy with the main opposition party in Turkey, called the Republican People's Party (the RPP). The RPP is a centre-left wing Kemalist secular party. Majority of the women highlighted their membership and also the administrative position they hold in that party organisation. Additionally, one of the women participants from the TUKD reported that 'we have some members who are members of the National Movement Party (the MHP)' (Interview with Sevim, TUKD, 2012, Ankara), an ultra-nationalist party.

¹⁹ Interview with Lale, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

²⁰ Interview with Tansu, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

²¹ Interview with Sevim, TUKD, 2012, Ankara; Tansu, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

²² Jenny B. White, 'State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman', *NWSA Journal* 15, No. 3 (2003): 146.

²³ Interview with Nurdan, TUKD, 2012, Ankara.

²⁴ Interview with Lale, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

²⁵ Interview with Nurdan, TUKD, 2012, Ankara.

²⁶ Interview with Sevim, TUKD, 2012, Ankara.

²⁷ Interview with Tansu, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

²⁸ Şirin Tekeli, 'Women in Turkish Politics', in *Women in Turkish Society*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1981).

²⁹ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Emancipated But Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case', *Feminist Studies* 13, No. 2 (1987): 322.

³⁰ Since there was not any significant political reaction of women against the Kemalist state mind-set, Kandiyoti defines Turkish women 'as emancipated but unliberated'. Kandiyoti, 'Emancipated but Unliberated?', 323. However, this does not mean that, as Tekeli argues, women's rights are given to women from 'above.' The struggle of the first wave in the women's movement for the Civil Code (1926) should not be forgotten. Sirin Tekeli, 'Birinci ve İkinci Dalga Feminist Hareketlerin Karşılaştırmalı İncelemesi Üzerine Bir Deneme (A Comparative Study on the First and Second Waves of the Feminist Movements)', in *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler (Women and Men in the 75th Year)*, ed. Ayşe Berktaş Hacımırzaoğlu (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 345.

³¹ Kandiyoti, 'Emancipated but Unliberated?', 324.

³² Yasemin Ipek, “‘Gorevimiz Gonulluluk’”: 1990'lar, Gonullu Kuruluslar, Gonullu Vatandaslar (Our Responsibility Is Voluntariness: 1990s, Voluntary Organisations, Voluntary Citizens)’, *Amargi* 3 (2006): 18.

³³ Interview with Pinar, TUKD, 2012, Ankara.

³⁴ Interview with Sevda, TKB, 2012, Ankara.

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Women's Conscientious Objection: Is It Enough to Be Side Simply (Not to Battle) on the Side of Peace?

Cemile Gizem Dincer

Abstract

Women's involvement in militaristic 'projects' is not new: from the time of nation-building processes which were highly militarised, women have always been regarded as reproducers and transmitters of race, culture and ideology. Women have never been independent from the discourses on militarism and nation itself and the national identities carry militaristic connotations (people born on in any land are 'genetically' warriors of that land/nation). Women have thus played interrelated roles such as mother, wife, and warriors that support and/or sustain militarism. Women's refusal of militarism in terms of conscientious objection thus deserves special attention. In Turkey, the number of women who are conscientious objectors is visibly increasing day by day. What is the significance of such an objector under conditions where no compulsory military service is the case for women? Developing critical feminist questions and perspectives on conscientious objection is necessary, since militarism utilises women as a tool to construct itself, and the state uses military service in the construction of citizenship as a way of subordination of women and sustaining the sexism of war. How is militarism fictionalised over women? To be on the side of peace, is it sufficient not to battle? How are women integrated internally to the conscientious objection movement? What are their reasons for being conscientious objectors? This chapter aims to reflect on these questions.

Key Words: Militarism, women, conscientious objection, feminism, nationalism, Turkish nation-state.

1. Introduction

As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country.
As a woman, my country is the whole world.¹

In 2011, a TV channel planned to organise a new competitive programme called 'Şafak 105' where 40 women would take military training for 105 days in barracks. It would be built around Lake Eğdir close to actual military barracks. The aim of the programme was to show that women can also be as successful as men in military training. According to the producer, the primary aim was to prove that 'girls can also do military service.'² The sexist language of the programme and the 24 hour-surveillance of women in it are some debatable issues which we need to

comprehensively analyse. However, what I would like to explore in this paper is the reproduction of militarism in everyday practices, and regarding to this, I will try to examine the women's conscientious objection movement which challenges this militarised nature.

Fortunately, the programme was not televised, but the idea of making a television programme with this concept was crucial to understand the militarised character of the Turkish nation-state. From the foundation of the nation-state of Turkey, nationalism and militarism have been deeply interlocked concepts here. Compulsory military service is one of the key concepts which reinforces this interrelationship between nationalism and militarism. In the context of Turkey, the military has significant political power. Article 72 of the 1982 Constitution of Turkey which calls compulsory national service for only men openly indicates that 'National service is the right and duty of every Turk....' Furthermore, the Military law number 1111 frames this duty clearly: 'Every male Turkish citizen is obliged to perform his military service in accordance with this law'. Currently the period of service is 15 months in general, but for university graduates it is 12 months as an officer, and 6 months as a soldier. Conscientious objection is not recognised as a right in the Turkish legal system.³

Compulsory military service does not only militarise the nation, but also creates differences and different status for women and men in the eyes of the state. In Turkey, during the construction of the militarised nation-state, women were located as producers/reproducers of the nation in cultural and ideological terms. Thus, the new 'Turkish' state has created its own femininities and masculinities which are nourished by nationalism, militarism, and sexism. While collaboration between nation-state and militarism unifies men with army, and locates them as the guards of a 'warrior state,' women became sacrificing mothers (Little Ayşe), obedient wives (Kezban), proud warriors (Sabiha Gökçen) and facilitate and maintain the production and reproduction of the system through these given gender roles.⁴ Since 2004, women who define themselves as 'conscientious objectors' have started to question these positions.⁵

The legal definition and the history of conscientious objection have varied from nation to nation and it is thus really hard to talk about one shared and common history. In this chapter, I will try to compare conscientious objection in the West and in Turkey.⁶ The history of resistance against war is as old as war itself. There are several reasons and motivations for conscientious objectors to refuse battle in resisting military service. Historically, the first known reason for conscientious objection in the West is based on religious beliefs, but its contemporary reasons are not similar to this. Starting from the 19th century onwards, the motivations to become conscientious objectors started to change; socialist and anarchist reasons started to come to the fore.⁷ Different from the European history of conscientious objection, in Turkey the main motivation is not based on religious reasons, but rather on political reasons such as anti-militarism. Moreover, most conscientious

objectors are total objectors, and do not accept any alternative civil service instead of military service.⁸ Furthermore, defining conscientious objection as ‘refusing military training and service, carrying/using guns due to a person’s religious belief, moral preferences, and political reasons’ is not new in the context of Turkey.⁹ The first conscientious objector’s main motivation was to declare his objection based on anarchist reasons: this was Tayfun Gönül, interviewed in Sokak Journal in 1990. Even until 2000, there had been only 10 conscientious objectors. In the 2000s, the number of conscientious objectors in Turkey visibly increased, and reached 210, with 64 of these objectors being women.¹⁰

Enloe mentions that the peace movement is male-dominated and that women challenge these ‘patriarchal tendencies inside their movements: against the presumption that men are best equipped to lead a peace movement.’¹¹ Women members of this movement have challenged the similar problem of male-domination. Women thus participated in the movement not only as ‘supporters,’ but also as active agents, bringing new perspectives through showing that this objection is not only limited to the refusal of military service but also challenges all features of militarism.¹² However, there are still questions which need to be answered such as: What is the significance of women’s conscientious objection where compulsory military service is not the case for women? What are the reasons for women to declare their conscientious objection? What do women object? Does conscientious objection of women need to be considered as a symbolic movement? In order to answer these questions and to understand women’s conscientious objection, the conscientious objection movement in general needs to be examined. Undoubtedly, there are as many definitions of conscientious objection as the number of conscientious objectors, and all declarations bring new voices to movement.¹³ Herein, I try to categorize them in three groups according to the declarations of women conscientious objectors in Turkey. These reasons take the form of the following: firstly, against compulsory military service and all features of militarism; secondly, against sexism and nationalism; and thirdly, against violence in general.

2. Against Compulsory Military Service and All Features of Militarism

... As a woman, my conscientious refusal is to resist reproducing militarism, although military service now is not compulsory for me.¹⁴

It is clear that militarism can not be defined only through the military. As Parla mentions:

Militarism is the acceptance and prevalence of a military presence, and its concepts and values in other social, political

and economic areas beyond the functions of making war and guarding borders. The level of this influence is the scale of militarism in a given country: in politics, law, economy, culture, education and areas and institutions of socialization.¹⁵

In countries such as Turkey which has been exposed to this 'militarised' influence in high levels, defining militarism only through military institutions will not be sufficient, and it will ignore its effects ranging from constitution of identities to shaping of everyday practices. In the declarations of women conscientious objectors, one of the main motivations should be constituted as not only being against compulsory military service, but must contend with all aspects of militarism. Women are affected by militarism in all spheres of their lives. Through conscientious objection, they reveal the gendered nature of militarism, and remaining outside of compulsory military service does not keep them out of militarism and its effects. Being women conscientious objectors makes visible the militaristic character of all institutions, and everyday practices. Women conscientious objectors thus change the nature of the movement, and locate it in a feminist and political background rather than a simply symbolic frame. In Turkey, male conscientious objectors are exposed to long periods of detention because it is thought that they are 'alienating the people from military service' (Article 318 of Turkish Penal Code)¹⁶ and are indulging in 'insubordination.' They are tried by court martial. Today, no women conscientious objectors are punished with similar charges.¹⁷ This is because if the State punished women conscientious objectors, it could be interpreted as its tacit acceptance of militarism, and might provide a base for the movement.

On the other hand, compulsory military service strengthens the relationship between militarism and sexism. Through the establishment of the nation-state, compulsory military service came to the fore as public policy, and aimed not only to create 'national consciousness' and 'homeland protection' but also to create hierarchal citizenship in which women and men have differentiated statuses.¹⁸ While men become first-class citizens because they perform compulsory military service, women are considered to be second-class citizens whose mission is to give birth to a 'soldier baby.'¹⁹ In this framework, women conscientious objection could mean taking a stand against hierarchal structures of citizenship. Within the women's conscientious objection movement, according to women, keeping silence would mean supporting militarism. As they do not want to kill or be killed, they resist all kinds of hierarchic, nationalist, and sexist structures.

3. Against Sexism and Nationalism

A patriarchal ideology, militarism determines our entire lives and leads to the perception of women in society as property, as

servants, slaves, and objects that can be silenced and harassed/raped ... The emancipation of women passes through the struggle against militarism.²⁰

In the second category, women's conscientious objection is a resistance against all given gender roles which are constituted via sexism and nationalism. As one of the women conscientious objectors mentioned in her declaration, women do not 'want to be dominated, manipulated by men and society who assume women are their property under labels such as "mother", "wife", and "daughter" just because we are women.'²¹ Through conscientious objection, women challenge such imputed gender roles, and make their statements in a world influenced by such gendered roles.

As is mentioned before, women conscientious objectors are against hierarchal structures of citizenship, and argue that these structures affect men as much as women. Performing compulsory military service provides men with the means to become first-class citizens, but this structure creates a further hierarchy within itself, and reveals the clearly heteronormative character of military institutions: through conscription, disabled men, gay and transgender individuals are excluded and constituted as 'others,' since they are 'feminised' and do not seem masculine enough to be thought of as men. In Turkey, compulsory military service constitutes one of the crucial factors 'to become a real man,' and an important stage that all 'healthy' men need to pass to be located at the top of gendered hierarchal relations.²² In this framework, considering the context of Turkey, it can be argued that compulsory military service is one of the striking ways in which hegemonic masculinity is produced/reproduced. Thus, women's conscientious objection displays resistance against not only all femininities, but also all masculinities. As one woman conscientious objector explains in her statement, they 'reject a life where sexism, nationalism, patriarchy and heterosexism will be deconstructed.'²³

4. Against Violence

The final reason provided by women conscientious objectors is their disclaiming of violence. Especially during wars, the collaboration of militarism and male violence become apparent. 'Looking through the lens of war has made us acutely conscious of the way women are oppressed and exploited through their bodies, their sexualities, and reproductive capacities. It is clear that war legitimises male violence.'²⁴ For instance, systematic rapes during wars are striking examples of this framework. These systematic rapes not only include sexual violence, but are indicators of the interrelation between women and nationalism. As many feminist scholars indicate, the honour of the nation is equated with the protection of women.²⁵ Since nationalism locates women as the honour of the homeland, systematic wartime violence and rape becomes a war strategy. In their declarations, women express that they resist all kinds of violence, its normalisation, and

glorification.²⁶ They reject violence and war, even those happening far away from them. According to women conscientious objectors, not battling and not serving the military establishment alone does not mean being far away from violence. To be on the side of peace, it is not sufficient not to battle, thus they scream for peace through their declarations.

Considering the declarations of these women, it is argued that violence does not only refer to physical violence. These women object to all forms of violence that produce/reproduce inequalities. In this sense, women's objection strikingly reveals gendered and other forms of violence. They are against all kinds of discrimination which can produce racism, sexism and so on. For instance, most women point out the State's systematic violence and assimilation policies pertaining to the ethnic minorities in Turkey.

Women who declare their objection do not constitute a homogeneous group. In the context of Turkey, systematic violence and discrimination of the Turkish state against ethnic minority groups, particularly the Kurdish population, paved the way for PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) to launch armed warfare. Civil war in Turkey has been on-going for the past 30 years. In addition to the above mentioned reasons, the declarations of women conscientious objectors in Turkey also demand an end to civil war here. Women who reject all types of violence and militarism express their conscientious objection against ongoing war conditions, and demand peace. Different from (not all, of course) Kurdish men conscientious objectors, Kurdish women conscientious objectors do not only reject state militarism, but alternative militarism too.²⁷ As one woman conscientious objector expressed in her declaration, women define their conscientious objection as a way of not being tools in the ongoing civil war, and believe that peace can only come through the removal of militaristic cultures and conflict. Women conscientious objectors thus push the limits of Kurdish and Turkish nationalism and 'challenge gendered militarism in all its facets.'²⁸

5. Conclusion

In Turkey, conscientious objection has not been recognised by the state yet. Long detentions still exist, and many courts create unnecessary problems for conscientious objectors. Nevertheless, the number of conscientious objectors is visibly increasing day by day. Defining conscientious objection as a rejection and a demand for change is considered to be a political responsibility,²⁹ and women in the conscientious objection movement continue to increase their voices in their resistance against militarism, war, sexism, and nationalism through their declarations. According to them, to be silent only means to be complicit. "You cannot be a conscientious objector since military service is not compulsory for you" is only an expression of the masculine structure of the movement.³⁰ Women's conscientious objection is more than a symbolic movement; it is a form of resistance against imposed militaristic structures, and a call for peace.

As a final note, I would like to state the words of İnci Ağlagül:

As long as I remain silent I shall see myself as an accomplice. However, I do not want to be an accomplice to war and militarism in any way, and become a spectator while our lives, our minds and our dreams are imprisoned.³¹

Notes

¹ Virginia Woolf, BrainyQuote.com, Xplore Inc, 2014, accessed 23 November 2014, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/v/virginiawo141918.html>.

² Emel Gülcan, 'BBG, Kadınlar, Militarizm ve Masum Olmayan Eğlence Anlayışı', accessed 7 March 2013, <http://obxyjda.bianet.org/bianet/kultur/133019-bbg-kadinlar-militarizm-ve-masum-olmayan-eglenme-anlayisi>.

³ In the case of Bayatyan (2011) European Court of Human Rights recognised conscientious objection as a right protected under the article related to 'freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.' According to European Court of Human Convention, engager countries are guaranteed to not violate rights which are protected by convention. But Turkey has not made any legal reform, and still does not recognise conscientious objection as a right.

⁴ Ayşe Gül Altınay, 'Refusing to Identify as Obedient Wives, Sacrificing Mothers and Proud Warriors', in *Conscientious Objection Resisting Militarized Society*, eds. Özgür Heval Çınar and Coşkun Üsterci (London and New York: Zed Book, 2009), 88-104.

⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁶ For more detailed analyses see: Eda Acara, 'A Case Study on the Discourse of Women's Conscientious Objection in Turkey' (Master's thesis, Saint Mary's University), 1-8.

⁷ Ibid., as cited in Alec Epstein, 'The Freedom of Conscience and Sociological Perspectives on Dilemmas of Collective Secular Disobedience: The Case of Israel', *Journal of Human Rights* 1, No. 3 (2002): 314.

⁸ In the case of Kurdish conscientious objection and some of the conscientious objectors whose declarations are based on religious reasons, the movement is more about non-combatant nature than total objection, and they only reject serving in the Turkish army.

⁹ Can Başkent, 'Bir Öz-İfade Olarak Vicdani Ret', 2008, accessed 2 February 2013, <http://www.canbaskent.net/politika/39.html>.

¹⁰ Hilal Demir, 'Kadınların Vicdani Ret İlanı Entelektüel Faaliyet Mi?', 2010, accessed 29 February 2013, <http://www.savaskarsitlari.org/arsiv.asp?ArsivTipID=1&ArsivAnaID=60387>.

¹¹ Cythia Enloe, 'Where Are the Women in Military Conscientious Objection? Some Feminist Clues', in *Conscientious Objection Resisting Militarized Society*, eds. Özgür Heval Çınar and Coşkun Üsterci (London and New York: Zed Books, 2009), 86.

¹² For more detail: Ayşe G. Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation* (United States of America: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

¹³ Other reasons might include being against hegemonic masculinity (Eylem Barış), being supporters of peace (Elif Akgül, Zeynep Varol), religious reasons (Gizem Altınordu), being against national borders (Özlem Mollamehmetoğlu) etc.

¹⁴ Ayşe Batumlu, as cited in Alec Epstein, 'The Freedom of Conscience and Sociological Perspectives on Dilemmas of Collective Secular Disobedience: The Case of Israel', *Journal of Human Rights* 1, No. 3 (2002): 312.

¹⁵ Taha Parla, 'The Philosophical Grounds of Conscientious Objection', in *Conscientious Objection Resisting Militarized Society*, eds. Özgür Heval Çınar and Coşkun Üsterci (London and New York: Zed Books, 2009), 74.

¹⁶ Against this article, there has been an ongoing petition and civil disobedience action such as when on May 13, 2013, 30 people went to Caglayan Court House and gave voice to their reasons to 'not join the army because...'

¹⁷ There are some examples where women have been sued for alienating people from military service. But these women are not necessarily conscientious objectors.

¹⁸ Ayşegül Altınay and Tanıl Bora, 'Ordu, Militarizm ve Milliyetçilik', in *Milliyetçilik: Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Cilt 4*, ed. Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim Press, 2002), 140-154.

¹⁹ 'Every Turk is born as a soldier' is one of the common arguments which reinforces the militarised nature of the Turkish nation-state. Moreover, arguing that 'Everybody is born a baby, not a soldier' is considered as 'alienating the people from military service' and can invite suing. For more details, see: <http://www.askeregitmeyin.com/haberler/civic-disobedience-demonstration-in-turkey/>.

²⁰ Figen Yüksekdağ, cited in C. K. Ogden and Mary Sargant Florence, *Militarism versus Feminism: An Enquiry and a Policy* (London: Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1915), Digital Library, accessed 23 November 2014, np, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/florence/feminism/feminism.html>.

²¹ Can Başkent, ed., *Vicdani Ret Açıklamaları Almanacağı*, 1989-2010 (İstanbul: Propaganda Press, 2011), 30.

²² Pınar Selek, *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak* (İstanbul: İletişim Press, 2011).

²³ Başkent, *Vicdani Ret Açıklamaları Almanacağı*, 48.

²⁴ Cynthia Cockburn, *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2007), 228.

²⁵ See Cockburn, *From Where We Stand*, Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation*, and Cynthia Enloe, 'Feminizm, Milliyetçilik ve Militarizm', in *Vatan Millet Kadınlar*, ed. Altınay Ayşe Gül (İstanbul: İletişim Press, 2000) for more on this theme.

²⁶ Women conscientious objectors support non-violence, but in a different framework. This chapter explicates the case of Turkey, in some detail.

²⁷ While women accept the militarised and hierarchal nature of the Kurdish movement, some women conscientious objectors consider the Kurdish movement as a freedom movement. Thus, they do not analyse policies of state, and PKK from the same perspective, and they mention unequal power relations between these two sides. In some ways, some women conscientious objectors consider the Kurdish movement as self defense, and argue that it needs to be problematised after establishment of peace.

²⁸ Altınay, 'Refusing to Identify as Obedient Wives, Sacrificing Mothers and Proud Warriors', 130.

²⁹ Nilgün Toker, 'Anti-Militarizm Sorumluluktur...', *Journal of Birikim* 207 (İstanbul: Mattek, Temmuz, 2006).

³⁰ Cockburn, *From Where We Stand*.

³¹ Başkent, *Vicdani Ret Açıklamaları Almanacağı*.

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Being Muslims, Diasporic and Male: The Emergence of the 'Perfect Muslim' in the European Context

Valentina Fedele

Abstract

In the last four decades, studies on gender and Islam have been focused on women, investigating the construction of gender-differences under the religious, the political, and the sociological point of view. Masculinity, on the other hand, has been rarely analysed as a subject till recently, and is lagging behind studies on masculinity in the West. Most of the studies which do exist tend to analyse Muslim masculinity in relation to homosexuality or to deviance – terrorism, fundamentalism, physical violence in private and public sphere – supporting the social constructionist perspective, assuming men are not born, but made within cultural, political, economic contexts – aims to address those factors influencing the emergence of model of the perfect Muslim male, in the framework of the building of European Islam. The focus of the chapter is on religious factors, whose relevance is usually underexplored in studies on contemporary masculinity.

Key Words: Muslim masculinities, European Islam, diasporic Muslims.

1. Introduction

Analyses of masculinity are relatively new in sociology and gender studies and have been approached following two main lines: differentialist ones¹ highlighting the importance of biology in the definition of masculinity and femininity; and constructivist ones,² which conceive gender as a social practice and masculinity as fluid and linked to economic, social, political and everyday life issues. Men, from this point of view, are not born 'they are made, they construct their masculinities within particular social and historical contexts.'³

If western masculinities have recently been defined as an object of study, especially within gender studies, analyses of Muslim masculinities are rarer yet. Over the years a tradition of academic and scientific analysis of Muslim femininity has been established, often placing the Qur'an at its core, both to denounce its extent of discrimination against women, and, as is claimed by Islamic feminism, to underline its emancipatory potential. Muslim masculinity instead is rarely an object of research, if not linked to phenomena of social exclusion, racism, violence, or terrorism.⁴

This generates a paradoxical distortion in gender studies: Muslim women, considered excluded from the public sphere, are the center of political, religious and social discourses,⁵ while hegemonic masculinity, considered to be the subject

of political and social dynamics is not discussed, perpetuating, as underlined by some observers, its same dominance.⁶

From the point of view of the sociology of Islam, the lack of attention to the social construction of Muslim masculinity determines the inability to fully read forms and directions emerging from the identity crisis that is crossing the contemporary Muslim world.⁷

This chapter intends to contribute to studies on Muslim masculinities, analyzing some key elements in the building of Muslim male identities in contemporary diasporas – in particular in communities of Maghreb origins in France and Italy – focusing specifically on the religious, an issue often excluded in constructivist analysis.

In this sense, Islamic masculinities are considered as *emergent* masculinities, defined by ‘men’s positioning within a variety of religious and social structures.’⁸

Taking this approach, I will consider some of the factors influencing the emergence of models of masculinity in Muslim diaspora – sacred texts and their interpretations, everyday religious, sociological consequences of the diasporic condition – in order to detect, through semi-structured interviews and analysis of online fatwa, the main characteristics of the emerging pattern of a perfect Muslim male, with particular attention to the aesthetic and behavioral dimension, the latter assuming a peculiar relevance in the broader context of contemporary religious practice.⁹

Moreover, following Connell,¹⁰ masculinities are considered as arising from social and cultural dynamics, so the characteristics underlined in this chapter should not be read as fixed, but as relevant features, themselves changing and challenged, in the identification of a Weberian ideal-type, a comprehensive model useful to understand contemporary Islamic masculinities, but not necessarily explanatory of the single experience of each Muslim believer.

2. Islamic Sources and Their Interpretations

Two main elements linked with each other should be taken into account when considering masculinity in Islam’s sacred text: the concept of *fitra* and the *sunan al-fitra*.

Fitra literally means nature, instinct, and is defined in the Qur’an (30:30)¹¹ as the nature of God upon which people are created, the original nature in which each person is born, beyond education.

Fitra contains theological issues – as the natural disposition to monotheism, to the oneness of God, *tawhid*, and to the submission to God¹² – but also physical, aesthetic and behavioural ones: *fitra* is the beauty and perfection of each human being as created by God,¹³ to the point that not appreciating it is a sign of weakness in faith. Islam, indeed, emphasises not only faith (*iman*), acts of worship (*ibadat*) and social acts (*mu’amalat*), but also the aesthetic creation of God and its preservation as a part of a self-discipline that embraces all areas of human life.

Classical commentaries and law schools, starting with the Qur'an and *hadith* – the accounts of the Prophet's life – have therefore focused also on those lawful measures that deal with the care and improvement of aesthetics, without altering the *fitra*, giving rise to *sunan al-fitra*, a set of hygienic and cosmetic practices recommended, but not mandatory (including dental care, cutting beard and nails, personal hygiene, hair removal) based on the example of the Prophet Muhammad. *Fitra* is, in fact, perfectly embodied in Abraham and Muhammad, the latter being considered *al-insan al-kamil* (the perfect human) and *uswahasana* (an excellent model of conduct), a model whose morality is sublime.¹⁴ This model religiously, morally and ethically is an example for each believer, male or female, but aesthetically and behaviourally, it is a special reference in the construction of masculinity, placing it in continuity with Muhammad himself, in the same way models of femininity follow the example of Muhammad's wives and daughters.¹⁵

Even if it has to be stressed that God in Islamic theology is beyond gender, as a unity (*tawhid*) that transcends the polarities masculine/feminine and their interactions,¹⁶ the normative prescriptions of the Qur'an and *hadith* institutionalise gender differences, tracing precise limits between males and females, in public and private spaces, also concerning behaviour and appearance.¹⁷

Models of gender relations, family, femininity and masculinity, based on the elements described above, have been enriched, from the early centuries of Islam, with cultural traits that have also become part of the *sha'ria* during its definition, between the 8th and the 10th-centuries, absorbing a number of practices into the discourse of faith.

An example of this process is the value of circumcision, a practice not mentioned in the Qur'an, little discussed in the *hadith*, considered mandatory only by *Shafi'is*, that has been constructed explicitly and publicly as the base of masculinity, the line of continuity between fathers and sons; the rite of differentiation and establishment of masculinity, regardless of its religious value.¹⁸

This is to say that the relevance of *sunan al-fitra* and of the prophetic model in general in the construction of Islamic masculinity has been challenged by historical, political, and social elements over the centuries, having less to do with Islamic theology and more with patriarchal structures and the cultural interests of the dominant elites, imbibed thence in the name of Islam.

In the Maghreb, one of these elements has been colonialism and the fight for independence.¹⁹ As Dialmy emphasises,²⁰ colonisation undermined classical North-African socialisation based on the establishment of two distinct sexual identities, normative and hierarchically sanctioned by the rites of birth, marriage and childhood games. The hegemonic Muslim male occupied the main space and acquired powers and privileges, because of being male and because of being Muslim, articulating in a particular way Connell's patriarchal dividend, in terms of honour, prestige and right to command.

Colonialism has been, in this sense, a turning point, questioning the honour of North-African society, urging men to prevent, unsuccessfully, what was narrated by the colonised as the rape of the motherland, undermining the same self-definition of masculinity and identity, as highlighted by Franz Fanon.²¹ At the same time, during colonialism and then during the building of nation-states, new models of masculinity arose, based on urban nationalism, as Gamal Abdel Nasser identifies in Egypt, or on the scripturalism of new religious reformist movements, like Hasan al-Banna in Egypt and Ali Belhaj in Algeria outline. These are still dominant models, despite the extreme variety of the axes of rebuilding of masculine identity. *Sunan al-fitra*, in particular provisions concerning the cutting of the beard covered an identifying demand, and were the sign of Islamic resistance to cultural domination (though often the beard was replaced by the more secular and nationalist mustaches).

3. The Definition of Masculinity Models among Young Diasporic Muslims

Like with colonialism, the fact of diaspora is a break in the definition of a model of Muslim masculinity, within a broader process of reformulation of Islam in the context of deculturation, deterritorialisation and de-ethnicisation,²² where Islam is a cognitive minority, not organised by the central government and not supported by a homogeneous culture, facing the dual processes of pluralism (outside) and pluralisation (inside).²³

This process is emphasised in the case of so-called second generations who often inherit, at a familiar level, cultural patriarchal dividend and that found in the Qur'an the base for building new models of gender relations and of masculinity, in the light of new cultural, social, and economic landscapes.

The relationship between young diasporic Muslims and Islam is often analysed from the point of view of integration and identity that, while important in the formulation of Muslim masculinity, obscures the religious, emphasising conflicts of belonging, especially related to social and economic exclusion. To the purposes of this chapter, however, the most interesting elements emerge using two prisms of interpretation: generation and gender.²⁴

Generation allows understanding a fundamental difference between first and second generations that emerges from a different relationship with the external society: Allievi summarizes it, saying that while parents are Muslims because they are Egyptian, Moroccan etc., sons and daughters are Muslims, because they are not: they are *born again Muslims*.²⁵ As such, they choose to be Muslims, expressing their choice in everyday life, they are committed to the reformulation of Islam, trying to build a community of faith, beyond ethnic, cultural, national, and linguistic differences, adapted to a non-Muslim environment. At the heart of this project is the re-reading of the sacred text, seen as a mean of bargaining with the family and of mediation towards the society. The cultural patriarchal dividend is

progressively left behind in the reconstruction of new dynamics and models based on the sacred text and on God's word.

Gender adds to this analysis some sociological elements: the combination of religious and gender stigma in the society often leads to a more positive attitude towards women than towards men, generating negative consequences on masculine identity.²⁶ Although some studies show how Muslim diasporic women may suffer multiple discriminations, because they are women and because they are Muslim, especially if they wear *hijab*, other authors show that, in general, they are socially better perceived than men. Muslims men tend to be described as violent, sexist and dangerous, while women are victims, vulnerable, and oppressed, needing protection, therefore, integration, in continuity with the colonial mindset.

In this double bargaining, sacred texts and the definition of religious belonging plays a central role and is translated into two main religious attitudes: the individualisation of belief, and the changing of the meaning of rituals. The latter is important to demonstrate how the aesthetic and behavioural assumes relevance in defining a new model of Muslim masculinity.

In a diasporic context, Islam cannot be reformulated in a legal sense, but only in an ethical, aesthetic, and behavioural one, thereby changing the meaning of orthopraxis and ritual which becomes an expression of the person in the public space as Muslim, vindication of the choice of belonging. Dassetto notes that this is a self-defined belonging linked to subjectivity, and is therefore extremely fragile. It needs to be continuously reaffirmed, especially since inserted in a context of minority.²⁷

The interviews I have conducted between 2009 and 2012 involving second generation Muslims of Maghreb origins in Italy and France confirm these reflections: being Muslim means having faith and adopting a Muslim way of life, the latter expressed not only with respect to religious practices, but also in moral and behavioural spheres, with a strong ethic of political and social commitment towards the surrounding society. Religion seems to recover the value of an ordering principle of life, a point of view on reality, with its own language through which is expressed the whole of life.

Practices, though subordinated to faith, are very important; evidence not only of the believer's intimate and personal relationship with God, but also of belonging to an imaginary community of faith, the *umma*, articulated at the local level. Following the analysis of Hervieu Léger and Willaime in a minority context, religious practices perpetuate the sense of connection with a common Muslim memory.²⁸ The emphasis on religious practices is functional to the same concept of modern religious belief: following Berger, Dassetto argues that the uncertainty inherent to modernity requires the organisation of daily time, the structuring of time and space, to which, in religious terms, repetitive practices and rituals respond. Islamic orthopraxy, which occupies specific space and time in everyday life, acquires a peculiar significance in pluralist and pluralized modernity.²⁹

The importance of informing *islamically* each act and the insistence on the behavioural dimension fills the spaces left empty by rites, giving a constant sense to ‘Musulmanity,’ expressed not only in every action performed, but also in exterior symbols.

The Muslim ethic is, in this sense, part of the *modern sense of self-care*.³⁰ Salvation is to be sought in the afterlife and in everyday life expressed on earth by morality, ethics, and the Muslim way of life. Being Muslim and living Islam as a principle informing daily lives, determines the behaviour of interest in the world around one, interest perceived and informed by religion, a sign of a reinterpretation of Islam in the world, determining behaviour and precise choices in private life: in the interviews emerges a widespread preference for religiously endogamous marriage (better with diasporic Muslims), lived as a religious duty.

The aesthetic and behavioural dimension is particularly evident when analysing questions posted by believers on online-fatwa websites. Sisler defines cyber-fatwas as the extreme evolution of fatwas intended as legal advice, losing in the contemporary world its juridical element, emphasising its character as a non-binding opinion; simple advice for the believer.³¹ The virtual space challenges contemporary fatwas, expanding their field of intervention and enhancing their voluntary features: the advice of the *mufti* may not only be ignored, but may also be replaced by another cyber-fatwa issued by other subjects, best interpreting the believer’s necessities. Electronic fatwas, in fact, derive their legitimacy from the ability to interpret the believer’s needs, and not from the Islamic education of the *mufti*: believers, underlines Roy, freely choose the answers that suit them best. As cyber-fatwas are some of the most diffused means of spreading the Muslim way of life, they represent a way to evaluate directions of contemporary Islam and, in this specific case, of diasporic Islam and the reformulation of Muslim masculinity.³² An analysis of cyber-fatwas shows the prevalence of questions related to practices, moral-ethical issues, and behavioural issues.

Ethical requirements identify a precise model of being Muslim, and respond to the need of living Islam as a way of life. Many fatwas are concerning the duties of Muslims, emphasising not only theological and orthopractical issues, but also providing an orientation for social action: to be a good Muslim is to believe in God, to respect one’s parents, to deal fairly with one’s own wife and children, to be good with neighbours, society’s poorest and travellers, to be socially responsible, to not waste money, have a balanced lifestyle, to not commit adultery or fornicate outside marriage, which also implies an appropriate attitude for men and women, especially in mixed environments, and the control of social relations and entertainment, to respect every human life, to solve conflicts through dialogue and negotiation, to care for orphans, vulnerable people, and animals, to keep promises and obligations, to tell the truth, and always be honest. The aesthetic space, in this context, takes on an unprecedented importance, and if the general warning is for moderation, there is a high demand for knowing *sunan al-fitra*. Muslim men try to

find an aesthetic object that has the same symbolic and religious significance of the *hijab*, with a particular immediate interest in beards.

4. Some Concluding Remarks

This chapter has tried to show how analysis of contemporary Muslim masculinity, both in diasporic and traditionally Muslim majority countries cannot ignore the constructivist approach, taking into account the different discourses that contribute to building Muslim men, including the religious one. In the analysis is underlined among young European diasporic Muslims of Maghreb origins, the rise of a typical religious discourse that determines ethical, aesthetic, and behavioural models, not homogeneous but linked to a reading that could be identified as neo-reformist, replacing in a de-territorialised and de-cultured context, the patriarchal dividend of the societies of origin, with a new dividend.

This, even if from several points of view it seems to draw a model of Muslim masculinity and Muslim family open to a higher sharing and confrontation between genders, has its limits in its very origins. It is, indeed, based on the word of God, on the Qur'an, the sacred text, therefore, on an immutable base that is beyond differing interpretations – a firm base – and this is the reason that is the main challenge to the emerging model of the perfect Muslim male in Europe; those masculinities do not fit the same model's requirements, especially when they arise within the European Muslim community.

Notes

¹ David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1990).

² Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender and Society* 19 (2005).

³ Lahoucine Ouzgane, 'Islamic Masculinities: An Introduction', in *Islamic Masculinities*, ed. Lahoucine Ouzgane (London: Zed Books, 2006), 2.

⁴ Paul Amar, 'Middle East Masculinity Studies Discourse of "Men in Crisis" Industries of Gender in Revolution', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 7 (2010). Exceptions are the studies on homosexuality and Islam (see Scott Kugle and Stephen Hunt, 'Masculinity, Homosexuality and the Defence of Islam: A Case Study of Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Media Fatwa', *Religion and Gender* 2, No. 2 (2012); Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, eds., *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997) and the works on Muslim masculinity in pietistic movements: Samuel Geoffrey, 'Islamic Piety and Masculinity', *Cont Islam* 5 (2011); Barbara D. Metcalf, 'Remaking Ourselves: Islamic Self-Fashioning in a Global Movement of Spiritual Renewal',

in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*, eds. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); As far as I know two books have been published on the specific topic of Islamic contemporary masculinity: Ouzgane, ed., *Islamic Masculinities*, and Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds., *Imagined Masculinities. Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2000).

⁵ Rubah Salih, *Musulmane Rivelate, Donne Islam e Modernità* (Rome: Carocci, 2008).

⁶ Ouzgane, *Islamic Masculinities*; Abdessamad Dialmy, 'Vers une Nouvelle Masculinité au Maroc' (Conseil pour le Développement de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales en Afrique, 2009).

⁷ Alberto Ventura, 'Il Mondo Islamico Contemporaneo e la Costruzione di una Nuova Identità', in *Le Religioni e il Mondo Moderno*, eds. Giovanni Filoramo and Roberto Tottoli (Torino: Einaudi, 2009).

⁸ Ouzgane, *Islamic Masculinities*, 2.

⁹ Olivier Roy, *La Santa Ignoranza: Religioni Senza Cultura* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2009).

¹⁰ Connell and Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity'.

¹¹ 'Set your face to the *din* in sincerity (*hanifan*) which is Allah's *fitrah* (the nature made by Allah) upon which He created mankind (*fatara'n-nas*). There is no changing the creation of Allah'; other references also in Qur'an 35:1.

¹² Kugle and Hunt, 'Masculinity, Homosexuality and Islam'.

¹³ Qur'an 40:64; 64:3; 95:4.

¹⁴ Qur'an 68:4; 33:21.

¹⁵ Salih, *Musulmane Rivelate*.

¹⁶ See Durre S. Ahmed, 'Gender and Islamic Spirituality: a Psychological View of 'Low Fundamentalism'', in *Islamic Masculinities*, ed. Lahoucine Ouzgane (London: Zed Books, 2006).

¹⁷ Qur'an 49:13; 4:1.

¹⁸ Vincent Carpanzano, 'Rite of Return: Circumcision in Morocco', in *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society*, eds. Werner Muensterberger and L. Bryce Boyer (New York: International Universities Press, 1981).

¹⁹ Hussein Adibi, 'Sociology of Masculinity in the Middle East' (Proceedings Social Change in the 21st Century Conference, Carseldine Campus, Queensland University of Technology, 2006).

²⁰ Abdessamad Dialmy, 'Masculinity in Morocco', in *What about Masculinity* (Al-Raida: Lebanese American University, 2004), 21.

²¹ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

²² Stefano Allievi, *Musulmani d'Occidente* (Rome: Carrocci, 2002); Khaled Fouad Allam, *l'Islam Globale* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2002).

- ²³ Peter L. Berger, *Una Gloria Remota. Avere Fede nell'Epoca del Pluralismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994).
- ²⁴ Annalisa Frisina, *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia* (Rome: Carocci, 2007).
- ²⁵ Allievi, *Musulmani d'Occidente*; Olivier Roy, *Global Muslim: Le Radici Occidentali del Nuovo Islam* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2003).
- ²⁶ Frisina, *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia*.
- ²⁷ Felice Dassetto, *L'Islam in Europa* (Torino: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1994).
- ²⁸ Danièle Hervieu Léger and Jean-Paul Willaime, *Sociologies et Religion Approches Classiques* (Paris, PUF, 2001).
- ²⁹ Dassetto, *Islam in Europa*.
- ³⁰ Roy, *Global Muslim*, 87.
- ³¹ Vit Sisler, 'European Courts' Authority Contested? The Case of Marriage and Divorce Fatwas On-Line', *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology* 3 (2009): 1; Roy, *Global Muslim*.
- ³² Roy, *Global Muslim*.

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Femininity under Globalisation: Doing Gender in Transnational Space

Bih-Er Chou

Abstract

Globalisation of production with fast flow of capital and international division of labour has produced various different effects on gender which have resulted in hegemonic masculinity and excessive femininity. For example, in an effort to attract foreign investment, many developing countries have employed the image of local women as docile with dexterous fingers suitable for tedious and repetitive work at the assembly lines. Similarly, women as care or domestic workers have composed the main force of international migration from poor to rich countries. Furthermore, in many emerging global cities, there exists a thriving economy of intimacy based on the sexual entertainment provided by young female rural-urban migrants and consumed by male international tourists and entrepreneurs. These studies, focusing on rural and working women, have pointed out how globalisation reinforces the hierarchical relations between 'local' women / femininity and 'global' men / masculinity. However, how the femininity of urban and professional women may be affected by processes of globalisation has received scant attention. An increase in the rates of labour participation of these women in professional and career jobs seems to be a common observation. The proposed chapter therefore intends to fill this gap by examining how the femininity of women of upper occupational echelons is affected by the process of globalisation. Data has been collected from a group of women who were the wives of Taiwanese family business bosses relocated in China, a result of the economic restructuring in late 1980s. Information about their involvement in the business (public) and family experiences (private) before and after the transnational relocation will be analysed to illuminate how globalisation of production affects the representations of femininities for entrepreneurial women. These findings will shed light on how the women negotiated with global masculinity, and redefined the multi-dimensionality of the concept of femininity.

Key Words: Femininities, doing gender, gender and globalisation, entrepreneur women, gender and transnationality.

1. Feminist Challenges to Global Theorisation

Globalisation, facilitated by powerful and instantaneous worldwide communication and transportation, has produced rapid flow of capital, goods, services, and people across borders and national boundaries. This process of globalisation has led to a new and violent phase of 'time-space compression.'¹ It has also resulted in the reconfiguration of international division of economic order

among states and the reconstitution of global and local.² Feminist efforts on the gender effect of globalisation emphasised the distortion of excluding women as recipients and actors of the economic restructuring process and the specification of the diversity of women participation in globalisation beyond economic and production spheres.³

Feminist analyses also specified how gender systems were reconstituted in particular locales as results of the interaction between global forces with local contexts. Feminist examinations of migration, internal and international, stimulated by global movement of labour further pointed out the links leading to the commercialisation of female sexuality and emotion in production of male capitalism and maintenance of masculinity around global cities and the acquisition of modernity of rural young women.⁴ Implicit in the feminist efforts were the notions that globalisation may re-articulate gender hierarchies and redefine the meaning of femininities and masculinities. However, the specific re-gendering process and effect of globalisation varies in particular places, for particular groups of people and to particular ends.

Most feminist analyses tend to focus on the experience of working class and rural women: how the femininity of urban and professional women may be affected by the processes of globalisation has received little attention. As globalisation processes accelerate, there has been an increasing participation of women in transnational professional and career jobs. This chapter therefore examines how the femininity of entrepreneurial women was affected by the process of globalisation. Specifically, the following questions were addressed: How do these women do their gender, perform or interpret their femininity, in a presumably masculine domain? How these women negotiate with patriarchy to account for their global or transnational femininity not only challenges the masculine script of globalisation, but also reconfigures the constitution of femininities.

2. Femininity and Globalisation

Literature on economic development and its impact on gender equality and international division of labour among women has been a major feminist concern in the social sciences since the 1980s.⁵ Recent feminist works on the gendering effect of globalisation also focus on how masculinity and femininity were reconstituted by the economic restructuring process and global migration. There seems to be a consensus that the capitalist mode of global restructuring tended to encourage the emergence of hegemonic masculinity and promotion of traditional femininity. (Hyper) masculinity is considered to be the new gatekeeper of the new global economic order;⁶ and, thus, the global is masculine, while the feminine is local.⁷

A. Globalising Female Bodies and Sexuality

In addition to the social dimension of gendered divisions of labour between public and private spheres, the concept of femininity also encompasses a biological dimension regarding a set of cultural disciplines and regulations of female bodies and sexuality. As such, femininity denotes a set of rules and expectations defining the proper behaviour and attitudes of women in their presentation of self, body and sexuality in relation to men. It denotes a sense of decorum in accord with the meanings of 'propriety' interpreted by gendered society. Although different societies at different historical periods have different interpretations and require different sets of decorum to express propriety, the essence of 'propriety' and the core of 'being feminine' have remained relatively unchanged. To be feminine is to be passive, gentle, considerate, affectionate, obedient, and emotional, both bodily and sexually. In practice, ideal women would appear to be docile and dependent, gentle and affectionate as mates, but strong and affective as mothers. Moreover, they would be sexually passive and obedient to the desires of men.

Women of less developed societies move across national borders through marriage as brides of white men in the developed world. Cross-border marriage between white men and non-white women in many Asian societies has its origin in western colonisation and American military involvement in the region since WW II. These transnational, inter-racial marriages are based on economic inequality due to international division of production, and the colonial discourse on the hierarchical ordering of white masculinity and 'oriental' femininity. The 'imaged' woman thus becomes the object of marriage for the white man resisting or threatened by the advent of women's liberation movement. This re-emerged cross-border marriage market in turn provides opportunity for women of economically disadvantaged areas to escape poverty and be exposed to 'modern' ways of life. This western/colonial perception of non-western femininity also provides other sources of cash income for female rural-urban migrants to global cities.

B. Transnational Economy of intimacy

Globalisation of capital may recreate and reinforce gender hierarchy both within and without marriage in the private sphere. Globalisation affects power relationships between men too. Since capitalism is gendered as male-dominant, globalisation of fast flow of capital transnationally has created a new class of businessmen with a new set of masculinities within the male hierarchy. This is hegemonic masculinity⁸ and refers to men's ability to embody the aggressiveness, competitiveness, toughness, and accomplishment in both economic games and sexual play. It may be observed in the patterns of sexual consumption among the Japanese '*Sarariima* (salary men),'⁹ the Taiwanese businessmen in China (Taishang),¹⁰ and Chinese private entrepreneurs after 'marketization.'¹¹ This new wave of masculinity characterised by male consumption of female sexuality viewed as a means of business alliance by the young Chinese

entrepreneurs was dubbed as 'corporate' masculinity,¹² 'cool' masculinity¹³ or entrepreneurial masculinity.¹⁴ Globalisation has accorded those men with hyper-masculinity a higher status and more privileges than men of 'lesser' masculinity, and leads the elevation of male power over women to new heights. This new mode of masculinity stimulates a new demand for exaggerated female sexuality and excessive submissiveness to sustain the (re-)discovered masculinity.¹⁵

In many emerging global cities, there exists a thriving economy of intimacy based on the sexual entertainment provided by young female rural-urban migrants and consumed by international tourists and entrepreneurs. Economy of intimacy refers to the emergence of exchange systems of demand for the purchase of intimacy and supply of sexual entertainment catering to the needs of international businessmen and male tourists in many globalising cities in developing countries. This economy is able to absorb the oversupply of labour from the large influx of female rural migrants; it creates an image of prosperity and equilibrium in many global cities such as Bangkok¹⁶ and coastal cities in China such as Shenzhen and Dongguan. While the affordability and accessibility of female sexual service and emotional intimacy encourages the macho extra-marital relationships and casual sexual liaisons among the businessmen, it creates challenges for the femininity of women. In fact, the phenomenon of 'bao-er-nai' (contracting second wife) among Taiwanese businessmen in China has caused threats and induced anxiety among the wives and introduced competition among different femininities.¹⁷

3. Methodology

The subjects of this study are mainly the 'boss wives' of Taiwanese businessmen (Taishans) in two coastal cities, Dongguan and Shenzhen, in China, the first two free economic zones since the opening-up of 1978. These two cities had the highest concentration of relocated 'traditional' Taiwanese industries in the 90s. These traditional Taiwanese businesses were characterised as labour-intensive, low-technological and low-capital requirements. Most of them were small-to-medium size family businesses or firms in Taiwan forced to relocate to China during the restructuring process of the 80s.

Data for this analysis came from in-depth interviews with a selected sample of 24 'boss wives' currently residing in China (22) and Taiwan (2) conducted from January to April of 2006 and 2007. It contained detailed information on the decision-making process, the experiences, and subjective assessment of their relocation, and their involvement in business and family arrangements at different stages. Questions about the alleged prevalence of extra-marital sexual liaisons of Taiwanese businessmen and how they coped with the same were also included in the interview. Most of the interviewed boss wives had assumed administrative functions within the women's committees of Taiwanese business organisations in China at various local chapters. Many of them were earlier migrants to the areas and may be seen as senior members of the community of boss wives. They were

also knowledgeable about different patterns of relocation experiences and have heard and witnessed the coming and going of marriages. They served as informants of the community of boss wives.

4. Analyses and Discussions

To ascertain how transnational relocation of family business production affected the sexual politics between husbands and wives, two questions were asked. One is about the wife's views on the prevalence of business men's involvement in sexual entertainment and sexual liaisons with local women; the other question is how she negotiated a new sexual subjectivity when encountering this situation.

A. Sexual Playground for Men vs. Battle-Ground for Women

In general, there were two different types of male sexual aggressiveness among the Taiwanese businessmen: commercial sexual entertainment, and semi-permanent extra-marital sexual liaisons. According to the interviewed wives, most, if not all, Taiwanese businessmen would eventually have experiences in going to sexual entertainment establishments such as Karaoke pubs where female bodies and sexuality were purchased for men's entertainment to enhance masculine superiority for personal satisfaction, male-bonding, and business advancement. Of these men, between one-quarter and half of them had developed long-term sexual liaisons with young Chinese women, making them 'girlfriends' or 'concubines.' This phenomenon of 'bao-er-nai' was more prevalent among the older businessmen. These men would have two families and fulfill their cultural fantasy of playing the traditional Chinese patriarch. While men enjoyed this sexual freedom and reinforced their masculinity in this new context of transnational space, the women encountered severe challenges to their femininity. Facing the frequent visits to Karaoke bars by men where young females play the role of subordinates with adoration and tenderness, wives often felt 'threatened' and were forced to play defensive roles. Various defense mechanisms were developed for self-protection and to maintain their definition of femininity.

The typical discourse strategies for combating the *occasional play of husbands* developed by wives included:

My husband becomes younger all the time while I become older every day! I would pretend not seeing it to have peace of mind. But I would occasionally go to those places (Karaoke) with my husband. Then he will not overdo it. (S01)¹⁸

"We, Taiwanese wives are different from the young Chinese girls here. We are traditional. They are very manipulating and opportunistic."(S16)

“They are very open, bold (liberated) in attitude and sticky (persistent) in approaches. They have different moral standards.”(S19)

“They are poor and need money; getting hold of Taiwanese businessmen means having sources of money. (S10)¹⁹

Men are men. Some do it, some don't, depending on their nature. They will do it (consume sexuality) if they have the chance, no matter where. Being Taishang means being bosses and having money. It is much easier to do it in China, because it is much cheaper, more affordable compared with Taiwan. Being wives, we just have to trust our husbands and adjust ourselves, fulfill ourselves, and expand our own life space. (S03; S04)²⁰

“Facing the competition of the exaggerated femininity of young Chinese women, I would dress up more fashionably, wear make-up and do up my face, etc. I would try to look younger and appear more feminine.” (S02; S21)

“I would try to act gentle, considerate, and talk sweetly and praise him.” (S19)²¹

B. Negotiating Femininity

B.1 Resilient Womanhood and Motherhood as Core of Femininity

For the more *serious extra-marital affairs* of men, ‘bao-er-nai’ (contracting second wife), these were modal advices of ‘Taishang’ wives.

We Taiwanese wives are very resilient; really, really resilient! When facing husband's extra marital affairs, you have to be very tolerating and patient. We have to think about business, family and children. We would take up these responsibilities, when our husbands were already lost at sea! If we do these well, we will touch his heart and change his mind. He will eventually turn around and come back home. It is no use to quarrel with them. (S17; S18)²²

We will not suggest divorce as a resolution. We will advise wives to stay in marriage. Divorce is not good for older women; they will not have a good second marriage. Therefore, it is important to get through and persevere through the whole mess (of

husband's affairs) after you have overcome all the difficulty of moving to China. What is important is to be economically independent and to have financial control (of business). We ourselves are not important, children are the most important! (S17, S16, S29)²³

“To maintain good conjugal relations here, Taiwanese wives had better open (only) one eye and close the other eye; or, even pretend to be blind!”(S19)

Or, “as long as we do not see it (husband's affairs) with our own eyes, it is alright. It means that he still cares for my feelings!”(S16)

“As long as he still cares for and puts the Taiwanese family in the first place as the most important one in his mind, that would be my bottom line.” (S13)²⁴

B.2 Prudent ‘Modern’ Femininity

While the older Taiwanese wives adopted resilient womanhood and motherhood as strategies in negotiating their feminine subjectivity, their younger counterparts had to deal with different problems in performing their gendered roles. For the younger wives (those under 40 years of age) in their prime, their modern femininity, embodied as modern, fashionable outlooks and worldly sophistication, or superior ‘cultural quality,’ represents an advantage in their competition with the femininity of Chinese women. In response to the question: ‘Did Chinese men ever court them, such as asking for dinner engagements, sending flower or giving gifts? How do they handle these situations?’ these were their answers.

Yes, many Chinese men working in government admire (young) Taiwanese women, because (they think) we are more elegant and classy; we have higher cultural quality (su-zhi).”(S21)

“But Taiwanese women could not accept Chinese men because (we think) they are different; there were vast cultural differences between ‘us’ and ‘them.’” (S28)²⁵

Chinese men are very direct. When they like you, they will say or express it to you directly. They will look at you directly, non-stop, and tell you that you look very pretty or pay you some other compliment. (S019, S020, S021)²⁶

If they give me gifts, I would definitely accept them. You have to accept instead of rejecting or refusing them. Chinese men like to give gifts to women they like. It gives them a sense of accomplishment. It indicates their ability to be in those positions having access to extra funds for luxury gifts. Besides, you need their favours and help sometime. But, I would never actually “use” those gifts, except the flowers. I would put them in vases in offices or stores. Other gifts, such as gold cards or gift coupons, I would just put them away. (S019, S020, S021)²⁷

“As for dining invitations, I would stall it by postponing it to some other time and invite other Taiwanese wives whom they might also know and would like to meet.”(S19)

“The other tactic would be to ask the Chinese man to join the social gatherings of our women’s group, etc. The point is to avoid dining with him alone.” (S20)²⁸

When I encounter these situations, I would “insist” on my status of being wife and mother. I would, of course, tell my husband about it. But I would mention casually or selectively; only some parts, glossing over the details. (S19, S20)²⁹

5. Conclusion

This chapter focuses on how the femininity of entrepreneurial women was affected by the processes of globalisation by examining the experiences of Taiwanese business wives after their relocation to China. How did the Taiwanese business wives do their gender in this transnational space? First of all, as shown elsewhere,³⁰ most of the business wives embodied their transnational migration passively: many did so only as the last resort to save their marriage and family from dissolution due to the competition of the exaggerated femininity of the young Chinese women. Moreover, the new gender order between ‘executive masculinity’ and ‘excessive femininity’ prevailing in global circuits was not in their favour. In the new economy of intimacy, the femininities of Taiwanese women was contested. Confronted by the challenges from the ‘excessive femininity’ of young, local women, Taiwanese business wives adopted various strategies. The older cohorts tended to emphasise the virtue of ‘resilience,’ ‘forgiveness,’ and ‘motherhood,’ of the traditional femininity of Taiwanese wives as a way out of the temporary setback, and hoped they would eventually be victorious in winning back their husbands in the end. Divorce or dissolution of marriage was not considered as a viable option. Expediency in interpreting the meaning of wife and husband and family seems necessary, if not sufficient, in this new transnational gender order.

However, for the younger cohorts, when they were envisioned as embodying the 'modern,' their femininity appeared to be more desirable to young, local upper-class men than the local women. There seems a reversed gender order and a hierarchy of 'modern femininity' and 'traditional masculinity' may emerge in this transnational space.

In short, several points may be concluded from the findings of this chapter. Not only masculinity, but more importantly, femininity may also be affected by the transnational space created by globalisation and processes of production with their concomitant mobility of people across national boundaries. This would be an expansion of earlier research which tends to focus more on masculinity of men, businessmen in particular. Moreover, the effect on femininity appeared to be complex and multifaceted, rather than simple and monolithic: women employed various discourses and strategies to reinterpret what they understood by femininity, to maintain their subjectivity, and remain agents in the process of globalisation, despite being passive at the start.

Notes

¹ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 20.

² David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (London: Blackwell, 1989); Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Culture Economy', *Theory, Culture, and Society* 7 (1990): 295-310.

³ Joan Acker, 'Gender, Capitalism and Globalization', *Critical Sociology* 30, No. 1 (2004): 17-41; Carla Freeman, 'Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26, No. 4 (2001): 1007-1037.

⁴ Kimberly Chang and L. H. M. Ling, 'Globalization and Its Intimate Other: Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong', in *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites and Resistances*, eds. Marianne H. Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan (London: Routledge, 2000), 27-43; Carla Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work, and Pink Collar Identities in the Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Mary Beth Mills, *Thai Women in the Global Labor Force: Consuming Desires, Contested Selves* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

⁵ Maria Mies, 'Colonization and Housewifization', in *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986), 74-110; Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990).

⁶ R. W. Connell, 'Change among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, No. 3 (2005): 1801-1825.

⁷ Freeman, 'Is Local'.

⁸ Connell, 'Change among the Gatekeepers'.

⁹ Ann Allison, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure and Corporate Masculinity in Tokyo Hostess Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁰ B. E. Chou, 'Sexual Politics and Globalization: Triangulation of Relationships among Taishang Bosses, Bosses' Wives and Chinese Women', in *Sexuality, Gender and Power*, eds. Anna G. Jónasdóttir, Valerie Bryson and Kathleen B. Jones (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹¹ E. Y. Zhang, 'Goudui and the State: Constructing Entrepreneurial Masculinity in Two Cosmopolitan Areas of Post-Socialist China', in *Gendered Modernities: Ethnographic Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy L. Hodgson (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 235-265; Tiantain Zheng, 'Cool Masculinity: Male Clients' Sex Consumption and Business Alliance in Urban China's Sex Industry', *Journal of Contemporary China* 15, No. 46 (2006): 161-182.

¹² Allison, *Nightwork*.

¹³ Zheng, 'Cool Masculinity'.

¹⁴ Zhang, 'Goudui and the State'.

¹⁵ Chou, 'Sexual Politics and Globalization'.

¹⁶ Ara Wilson, *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons, and Avon Ladies in the World City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Chou, 'Sexual Politics and Globalization'.

¹⁸ Interview data from S01.

¹⁹ Interview data from S16, S19 and S10.

²⁰ Interview data from S03 and S04.

²¹ Interview data from S02, S21 and S019.

²² Interview data from S17 and S18.

²³ Interview data from S17, S16 and S29.

²⁴ Interview data from S19, S16 and S13.

²⁵ Interview data from S21 and S28.

²⁶ Interview data from S019, S020 and S021.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Interview data from S019 and S020.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ B. E. Chou, 'Moving the Family or Family on the Move? Gender and Transnationalism in Asian Context', paper presented at 4th International Conference on Women's Studies: Gender Equality and Law, Famagusta, North Cyprus, October 3-5, 2012.

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Displacement and Subalternity: Masculinities, Racialisation and the Feminisation of the Other

Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos

Abstract

In different historical and cultural contexts it is important to examine the ways in which diasporic and transnational relations are a key process of societal change, which may involve complex forms of dislocation and integration. Drawing on a qualitative research project on immigrant men in Portugal, we aim at disentangling the ways in which community identities are constructed in a gendered manner, with differences pertaining to the constitution of specific diasporic communities (Brazilians, Cape Verdeans and Mozambicans), hailing from diverse Portuguese colonial and post-colonial histories. We contend that for a deeper understanding of the overall consequences of migration and transnationalism, a gender perspective, which is often neglected when tackling cultural encounters and multiple modernities, is mandatory. For immigrant men, the experience of otherness, even if permeated by cultural entanglements, hybridity and social inclusion, is marked, in most cases, by subalternity. This subordinate condition, of being a discriminated stranger, a categorised other, often experiencing feelings of frustration and disenchantment with the 'European dream,' is reinforced by racialised/ethnic otherness vis-à-vis the dominance of whiteness. The ways of dealing with discrimination lead to the construction of identities along national lines of origin, in a highly gendered form, in terms of masculinities. As a consequence, Portuguese and European men are strongly devaluated and viewed as feminine and emasculated. Simultaneously, Portuguese women tend to be perceived as strongly masculinised. Conversely, immigrant men tend to stress self-definitions of identity that give priority to a virile sexuality and bodily performances as a way to compensate for the lack of other capitals of masculinity (e.g. financial and public power). However, these strategies can be quite paradoxical. On the one hand, there is a reinforcement of a defensive communitarian sense of belonging that ultimately leads to ghettoisation. On the other hand, there are also aspirational processes operating through the mimicry of the dominant other, even if these are often conflicting and contradictory. In sum, at the same time, immigrant men aspire to power in many-sided ways (namely by reinventing multiple forms of male bodily performativity), and tend to shut themselves to inclusion in the dominant Portuguese gender order, frequently being complicit with their own fetishisation as Other.

Key Words: Masculinity, hegemony, subordination, otherness, migrant men, post-colonialism, modernity, power.

1. Men at the Margins: Subalternity and Hegemony

The expansion of transnationalisation processes (from capitalism to culture) has paved the way for new forms of building up masculinity to emerge in contemporary societies. Migration movements from the global South to the global North posed new challenges to men in their individual lives, and to the gender order as an institutional whole. Indeed, the rapid flow of bodies, information and imageries of manhood, which are rapidly dislocated from one social setting to another, have set difficult challenges to the research of men and masculinities. These challenges must necessarily lead us to reconsider the notion of hegemonic masculinity as well as the dynamics of power that still sustain the gendered hierarchy of some over others, as Hearn has pointed out with the concept of transpatriarchies.¹ For this reason, further advancing our reflection on how men in subordinate positions (re)construct their identities and practices by reference to the norms of masculine power, success, virility and whiteness (the key principles upholding hegemonic masculinity) is of paramount importance. By focusing on different groups of immigrant men living in contemporary Portugal, we aim to contribute to the empirical knowledge of the 'subordinate' vis-à-vis the hegemonic, and explore the ways in which ethnic community identities are constructed in a gendered manner by men who have lived through processes of displacement. Additionally, we expect to examine the boundaries between subordinate and dominant and discuss the concept of hegemonic masculinity and the problems it has raised. From our perspective, the differentiation between subordination and domination is not as clear as it may seem and cannot be conceptualised outside a perspective that perceives the complexity of making the one into the other: the processes of otherness. On the other hand, the emphasis on otherness implies that we envisage masculinity as a complex structure of capitals mobilised in the permanent struggle for identity and some kind of supremacy, even one that works by reinventing the power of the subordinate. This power, though problematic and potentially ghettoising, can also contribute to change what hegemonic masculinity represents and, most importantly, it might lead us to question what the concept means. In sum, by looking at the margins, it is perhaps easier to disentangle the imageries, and even symbolic contradictions, of the centre.

From the 1980s onwards, transnational masculinities have been widely debated and new concerns raised². One important subject has been the transnational flows of men who migrate from one place to another, normally from poor southern countries to the comparatively richer northern societies in search of a better life, many times to face hardship and even the shattering of the once cherished 'western dream.' Research focusing on migrant men has expanded and provided us with information on how marginalised and subordinated masculinities are compelled to change, at least to a certain degree, when men have to adjust to a different gender order and quite often to a different conceptualisation of what hegemonic masculinity is.³

A valued masculinity can be many things and enacted in different ways. This array of different symbols associated with masculinity and with male power allows men to reconstruct their position as dominant subjects in very different ways, at least discursively. But power is also discourse, even if we must not forget the material basis of inequality. Poor immigrant men are not powerful if we define power in materialistic terms, but their global subordination does not inhibit them from aspiring to power, which they try to demonstrate and enact, particularly in relation to women but also to other men, through complex strategies (violence, for instance) and discourses.

The contemporary remaking of masculinities as a transnational process generates a perhaps more complex hegemony of men.⁴ In a world shaken by massive changes in gender relations, men's lives and identities are shifting, thereby revealing, at the micro-level, the multiplicity and the entanglements of modernities.⁵ From the point of view of male power, in postcolonial Portugal immigrant men find themselves caught up between different 'worlds' of meaning. Gender relations are not immune to global change, but are evolving into hybrid forms of masculinities, rather than simply adapting to western ways, though the influence of the West is paramount.

In this sense, men and masculinities constitute an object and a perspective of research which implicates multiple levels of analysis and complex connections between them. As a result, it is worth developing the dialogue between material and discursive approaches to power, simultaneously avoiding either the reification of masculinity or its dissolution into a plethora of discourses. Although masculinities are multiple, and it is therefore reductionist to speak of men or masculinity as uniform categories, it would be an error to forget that men's power is structural and thus forms a consistent set of societal patterns, at the same time as it is culturally shifting and individually embodied in flexible ways.⁶ Advocating such a theoretical and methodological strategy implies keeping abreast of concepts such as patriarchy or hegemonic masculinity, without losing sight of domination as a process operating fluidly at multiple levels and as ultimately constitutive of the subject.⁷ A discussion of Connell's definition of masculinities as hierarchically organised multiple configurations of practice forming a hegemony is paramount. However, if we place the processes of masculine domination at the centre of gender relations we still have to find theoretical tools to grasp domination as structure, discourse, and agency-related. In this respect, Marx's notion of 'appropriation' may be of help, if we are able to go beyond a materially driven definition and extend the concept of appropriation to culture and symbolic goods as well as agency and embodiment. The process of incorporation implies appropriation, and this appropriation is always a power-based process.⁸ Drawing upon Bhabha's work on appropriation and mimicry, Demetriou, among others, has argued for masculinities – particularly hegemonic masculinity – to be conceived as appropriating traces of non-hegemonic masculinities.⁹ In this regard, masculinities

are socially constituted through complex struggles for the acquisition and reallocation of certain symbols and material positions. The embodying and performing of gender, while linked to power differentials, implies processes of appropriation that must be viewed as dynamic and flexible. As a consequence, a reflection on power and hegemony must consider the hybrid character of masculinity. In their practices, men permanently use various references, but not exactly through the most peaceful negotiations. Hegemonic masculinity is not just a symbol of domination over women and other forms of masculinity; rather, it is particularly dependent on tension within it. An additional difficulty emerges when we aim to trace its main traits. In other words, the main problem is perhaps to find a heuristic way of distinguishing between what is hegemonic and what is not.

2. Immigrant Men in a Postcolonial Society

This chapter focuses on the diasporic masculinities of immigrant men living in Portugal's capital city, Lisbon. It was part of a wider research project on non-dominant men and their identity strategies in dealing with subalternity and domination.¹⁰ The selection of immigrant men, in a total of 45 in-depth interviews, sought to attain a wide diversity of colonial and postcolonial histories vis-à-vis the colonial centre.

The bulk of interviewees were Brazilians (20) who are, today, the larger migrant group in Portuguese society. Brazilian relations to the former colonial power are ambiguous, even if Brazil can be characterised as a European settler society (although with highly marked Black African and Native American demographic and cultural strands). Brazil's independence was attained quite early (in 1822) in the context of the South American liberations of the early 1800s. From the onset of independence, Brazil became a recipient society of Portuguese migrants. As a result, Portuguese migrants, and by contagion Portugal, were seen depreciatively. The downgrading of the Portuguese thus developed within the complex racial classifications of Brazilian society. Even if the official rhetoric depicts it as a racial democracy, Brazil still presents a system of hierarchical categories of race and colour, whose apex remains whiteness to the detriment of Black or Native American admixtures. On the other hand, in the last few decades, Portugal has increasingly been seen as a rich Western European country, whose culture was perceived by Brazilians as similar to their own – not only linguistically, but also regarding sociability.

The two other groups represent a very different colonial background – the late Portuguese colonialism in Africa – and exemplify, at each pole of the spectrum, opposite colonisation strategies. Both Mozambique and Cape Verde only attained independence in 1975, after a long war. However, Mozambique was a strongly racial colonisation: not only was the legal difference between 'Blacks' and 'Whites' paramount, native populations were also constrained to forced labour. From 1961 onwards, European settling increased highly. The preponderant

colonial system was basically akin to *apartheid*, enhanced by the proximity of South Africa and the importance of British economic interests in Mozambique. Quite differently, in Cape Verde, the colonial strategy followed by the Portuguese state produced a mixed society, resulting from the mingling of Portuguese settlers and dislocated Black Africans (the islands of Cape Verde were uninhabited before Portuguese discovery). This process of Creolisation impacted racial identities and categories as, over all, Cape Verdeans did not perceive themselves as 'Black' but as mixed (*Mestiços*). Both Mozambicans (15 interviews) and Cape Verdeans (10 interviews) started migrating to Portugal from 1975 onwards.

The receiver society for these different immigrants, Portugal could be characterised as a backward society until the changes brought forth by the revolution in 1974, which put an end to five decades of an authoritarian, conservative, and colonialist dictatorship. Although Portuguese colonial practices were highly racist, official discourse denied this, praising the supposed Portuguese lack of racial discrimination, and soft, integrative colonialism. Notwithstanding, Portuguese culture and society are pervaded by racial categorisations. At present, a systematic 'subtle racism' prevails, even if official discourse and legal frameworks are straightforwardly anti-racist. Likewise, until the mid-70s, official and legal discourses in Portugal enforced a strongly asymmetrical gender order of masculine domination. This has now profoundly changed. Not only has Portuguese democracy enacted absolute formal equality between men and women, and developed anti-conservative gender equality policy measures in a wide number of fields, but it has also, siding with the sharp decrease of Catholicism, enabled profound changes, ranging from female paid labour (one of the highest in the world, full-time) to the dissemination of individualised life-styles or LGBT rights, paving the way to a more symmetrical gender order.

When dealing with these groups of immigrant men, we were concerned with a number of analytical problems, such as how to apply conceptual categories such as hegemonic and subordinate to the analysis of non-hegemonic or discriminated men and masculinities, and how to combine material and discursive approaches to power without neglecting the agency of the subordinate. As a tactic, we focused on the aspirations of these immigrant men to be/become/have the absent 'capitals' of manhood, analysing different strategies and discourses for self-empowerment when dealing with otherness, scrutinising rebellion and protest as a way to escape subjection, but also looking at complicit and contradictory modalities of masculinity and community identities.

3. Diasporic Masculinities and the Dialectics of Otherness

Our main findings reveal that these three groups of immigrant men have quite different forms of dealing with displacement, though a number of commonalities could be identified. All of them are engaged in what can be defined as the dialectics of otherness. In brief, they are the Other, but that fetishised otherness

becomes a complex process in which immigrant men also transform Portuguese and European men (as well as women) into 'others.'¹¹ Otherness is predicated as a form of mutual recognition, which permits the subordinate a gain in terms of identity, using a number of strategies for disempowering the dominant. Even if immigrant men mimic western ways (Portuguese but mainly the westernized imageries of masculinity) they all feel the need to empower themselves by recreating difference. This difference is mainly constructed through the body and sexuality as a sort of weapon of true manhood, denied to Portuguese and Europeans, in general. The latter are generally emasculated and their constant feminisation (as weak and dominated by more powerful and undesirable women) clearly shows the extent to which the feminine is still a strong weapon of devaluation. For Mozambicans, Portuguese men are '*men in a bottle*' (subordinated to women), for Cape Verdeans they are weak, for Brazilians they are sexually powerless and unfit to conquer women. At the same time, also as a commonality, the Portuguese weak or even 'gay-ish' men are the dominated partners of masculinised women who behave like men, are sexually unattractive, have too much body hair, and are to be avoided, in stereotypical terms.

In spite of these common strategies, the difficulties in dealing with *racialised* discrimination are dealt with in different ways, which are clearly underpinned by the history of colonial inheritances and ambivalent views of Portugal as a European nation which was a former colonizer. In other words, the forms of dealing with the supremacy of whiteness are different for historical reasons. Brazilians strive to hide their racial features (when they are obviously not in conformity with the body of a white man). Cape Verdeans, who often consider themselves as 'the whites of Africa' tend to demonstrate ambiguous feelings when ambiguously discovering blackness in the Portuguese context. Mozambicans, who were already aware of their blackness, feel, in spite of this, the reiteration of blackness beyond their expectations. In a way, the old fallacy of luso-tropicalism whereby the Portuguese would be softer, less racist, and more open to stereotypical tropicalist bodily performativities is shattered and substituted by the cold reality of facts. Then, as the Portuguese become colder and whiter, immigrant men, discovering a stronger otherness than ever imagined, end up by falling into this dialectics of otherness, and resort to difference to regain some power. Even if there are a number of ways of reconstructing masculinity and many-sided othernesses, subordination has to be dealt with.

4. The Commodification of Masculinity in the Post-Colonial Context

Our empirical work led us to reflect upon what some authors have labelled the commodification of masculinity, paying special attention to the ways in which men's discourses point to the struggles between domination and subjection. One striking fact is that by referring to commodification, we are reproducing the ways in which men organise their discourses and practices, always awarding a certain

value to a certain good (material or symbolic) which mimics, to some extent, the capitalist dynamics of economic exchange. A number of symbols are appropriated by men and used performatively to enact masculinity and avoid a feeling of complete exclusion. In a way, following Baudrillard's reasoning on the 'object value system,' signs and symbols can be exchanged as commodities insofar as meaning (which can equal value in a Marxian sense) is created through difference.¹²

Men empower themselves in multiple ways and using a wide number of categories that range from those embedded in custom to those linked to the western imagery of masculinity. By using their bodies as if these were 'capitals' of manhood, men reflexively trade their bodily abilities (from violence to sexuality) in a sort of market of goods, in which the body and sexuality are seen as opposed to money or other forms of institutional power. This allows marginalised men to achieve a feeling that they can be valued men without having money or any other form of materially-based power. As a result, white men are emasculated insofar as they are considered less virile and 'softened.' They become others in a complex game of otherness, in which there seems to be, at a first glance, little coherence in discourses about masculinity.

These processes can be reconstructed through the categories men use to describe themselves and others. However, all of these 'labels' represent the entanglement of different symbolic categories – those of the countries of origin, those of colonial discourses, those of contemporary Portugal – with global imageries, and many examples could be given. Most of these labels represent a kind of rebellion against the power held by others, but simultaneously they also reveal a will of not being left out of what is hegemonic in terms of masculinity. Therefore alternative and even marketised forms of building up masculinity are only partially rebellious insofar as they do not really contribute to the emancipation of women and comply with patriarchy, at least in the majority of cases.

However, more important than presenting a list of local and global imageries, which could result in the description of a number of types of masculinity, is to grasp the processes that underlie the use of such discursive categories, which ultimately contribute to maintain masculine hegemony.¹³ In this train of thought, there are three key processes which must be taken into account when analysing diasporic masculinities: aspiration, mimicry, and disenchantment. Men aspire to emancipation and to their share of hegemony, which they so often see as unattainable.¹⁴ In an attempt to escape subordination, mimicry plays a key role in as much as strong entanglements between different symbols are constructed in a way that they generate new categories and forms of enacting masculinity. But there is also a degree of disenchantment produced by frustration and a feeling of unattainability. This is quite obvious when we analyse the ways in which men play with the categories of otherness. Also, this is blatant when we take into account the feeling of exclusion that affects a great percentage of male immigrants, who see

themselves deprived of the material and symbolic ‘goods’ that would grant them a powerful masculinity. In a way, disenchantment is deeply tied with the awareness of being alienated and deprived of recognition and redistribution.¹⁵

Finally, a central conclusion is related to the importance of transnational capitalism in reproducing power and inequality. But, more than just a material mode of production – and the marketised discursivity it upholds – capitalism appears almost as an ‘ontological’ reality that, in a strong way, implies tying together the symbolic and the discursive with the material groundings which still support a patriarchal gender order, or in other words, the continuity of patriarchy. The idea of masculinity as capital can only be understood in this way, which is, of course, highly indebted to Marx’s theorisation of value. For now, the important aspect to retain is that the notion of capital can both include and weave together the discursive and the material. The marketised semantics of masculinities at the margins is, in this sense, closely linked to the hegemony of men, which implies different but effective strategies of appropriation, through sophisticated forms of competition, of socially produced value, whether material or symbolic.

Notes

¹ Jeff Hearn, ‘Patriarchies, Transpatriarchies and aintersectionalities’, in *Intimate Citizenships: Gender, Sexualities, Politics*, ed. E. Oleksy (London: Routledge, 2009), 177-192.

² Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005).

³ Mike Donaldson et al., ed., *Migrant Men: Critical Studies of Masculinities and the Migration Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴ Dorothy L. Hodgson, *Gendered Modernities: Ethnographic Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell, *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne, ed., *Dislocating Masculine: Comparative Ethnographies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Richard Howson, ‘Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity’, *Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies* 4 (2009): 7-21; Aiwaha Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵ Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ‘Multiple Modernities’, *Daedalus* 129 (2000): 1-29; Göran Therborn, ‘Entangled Modernities’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 6 (2003): 293-305.

⁶ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender and Society* 19 (2005): 829-959; Jeff Hearn, ‘From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men’, *Feminist Theory* 5 (2004): 97-120.

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- ⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977).
- ⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- ⁹ Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Demetrakis D. Demetriou, 'Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique', *Theory and Society* 30 (2001): 337-361.
- ¹⁰ The project Men at the Margins (2010-2013) is funded by the Portuguese Science Foundation.
- ¹¹ Sarah Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000).
- ¹² Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 1996 [1968]).
- ¹³ Hearn, 'From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men'.
- ¹⁴ Howson, 'Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity'.
- ¹⁵ Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003).

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The Construction of Sexuality Knowledge in Human Sexuality Textbooks

Monika Stelzl and Brittany Stairs

Abstract

In this chapter, we discuss our research regarding the construction of sexuality knowledge in North American human sexuality textbooks. Feminist and social constructionist scholars argue that knowledge is negotiated in society and reflects power interests rather than being objective and universal.¹ Informed by these feminist and constructionist approaches, we focus specifically on sexuality knowledge and conceptualise it as being socially constructed and as fashioning subjective experiences. We used discourse analysis to examine the dominant discursive themes around the organisation of textbooks' topics as well as the content of chapters on sexual distress of twelve current North American human sexuality textbooks (introductory/survey level). In particular, we explored what discourses were present and dominant, and which ones were represented to a lesser degree or missing. Biological essentialism emerged as the principal discourse with respect to chapter organisation. Biological essentialism also dominated explanations of sexual distress and was connected to biomedical discourse around the alleviation of sexual distress. We argue that the extensive presence of biological essentialism in the construction of sexuality knowledge not only precludes alternative discourses around cultural and sexual diversities, but it also justifies existing power structures. In line with feminist approaches such as the New View Campaign, we call for expanded representations of human sexualities in current North American survey-level sexuality textbooks.

Key Words: Sexuality knowledge, discourse, feminist psychology, social constructionism, human sexuality textbooks, biological essentialism, biomedical discourse, New View of Women's Sexual Problems.

1. Introduction

A belief that knowledge reflects facts which are assumed to be objectively true is an approach that is often reflected in mainstream psychological literature.² In contrast, feminist and social constructionist scholars, among others, have argued that knowledge does not exist independently of the knower but rather it is negotiated in society and, as such, it affects and is affected by history, culture, power relations, and language.³ In our chapter, we contend that human sexuality textbooks are actively involved in a particular construction of sexuality knowledge.

2. Construction of Sexuality Knowledge

We adopt the view that sexualities are socially constructed by way of their positions in particular historical and cultural contexts as well as through language and power.⁴ Power and language have implications for how sexualities are defined, characterised, expressed, experienced, and negotiated.⁵ For example, Brickell posits that productive power produces a particular constellation of definitions, knowledges, and meanings regarding sexuality, such as presenting heterosexuality as the normative and stable sexual orientation.⁶ Hence, in our chapter, we use the term ‘sexuality knowledge’ to reflect our contention that, in relation to sexuality, what we know and how we know is socially constructed, is intertwined with power and language, and fashions subjective experiences. In relation to productive power, the availability of specific dominant as well as dissident discourses contributes to a particular construction of sexuality knowledge which, in turn, informs a particular construction of sexuality. Discourses can be defined as meanings around a particular topic created through shared use and understanding of language.⁷ Reproductive sexuality constitutes one example of dominant discourses around sexuality.⁸ Within the discourse of reproductive sexuality, a strong emphasis is placed on family and heteronormativity. As a result, the biological and reproductive aspects of sexuality are positioned as natural and normative.⁹ Heteronormativity refers to the prevalent assumption that heterosexuality represents the natural norm of romantic and sexual attraction.¹⁰ In the context of the reproductive discourse, woman’s possible yet inevitable role as a mother is constructed as one of the centre-pieces of female sexuality. Gynaecology textbooks have perpetuated this discourse by frequently representing female sexuality as existing solely for reproductive purposes rather than for woman’s pleasure.¹¹

3. The Construction of Sexuality Knowledge in Human Sexuality Textbooks

Gynaecology texts are one of many ‘knowledge’ sources incorporating dominant and power-infused discourses into the construction of sexuality. The internet, television, documentaries, and books have all been acknowledged by various scholars as potent transmitters of sexuality knowledge.¹² This sexuality knowledge is often presented and understood as objective, universal, and existing as an essential entity outside of those who experience it.¹³ In the context of sexuality education, textbooks about sexuality provide a comprehensive set of connections, themes, and discourses around sexuality, gender, love, and other topics.¹⁴ For example, Goettsch attempted to determine whether human sexuality textbooks sufficiently portrayed the various ways in which sexuality and society inter-connect. Goettsch argued that human sexuality textbooks emphasised themes around science via their focus on compilation of scientific data but historical and cross-cultural connections in the relation to sexuality were absent or only marginally present.¹⁵ This suggests that human sexuality textbooks do not account for many alternative discourses around sexuality, but rather tend to privilege and

perpetuate the current dominant discourses. Furthermore, we argue that textbooks are not neutral reflections of a particular topic yet, similarly to the conventional understanding of knowledge itself, they might be perceived as objective and representative summaries of the pertinent subject such as sexuality.¹⁶ Many feminist and critical scholars expressed concerns regarding the unquestionable assumption of empirical objectivity as then the various influences of power on knowledge construction go relatively unchecked.¹⁷

4. Current Research

Our research has been informed by feminist and social constructionist approaches in the area of construction and production of sexuality and sexuality knowledge. Specifically, we aimed to identify and explore the predominant discourses in North American human sexuality textbooks as well as to note which discourses and themes were marginalized or absent. In this chapter, we focus on the organisation of textbook chapters and the content of chapters on sexual distress.

5. Method

To identify dominant discourses in current North American human sexuality textbooks, twelve of the most recent human sexuality textbooks from major North American publishers were examined. The textbooks were predominantly introductory/survey human sexuality texts in the area of psychology and had publishing dates between 2009 and 2013. The most recent publications were used in order to detect current discourses of sexuality. To differentiate between the textbook sample and the referenced literature, textbooks are referred to by a letter. The list of corresponding textbooks is provided in Appendix A. Our examination was guided by discourse analysis, which requires a critical reading of texts to uncover prevalent themes.¹⁸

6. Analysis and Discussion

In our analysis, biological essentialism emerged as an especially salient discourse. Essentialism reflects the notion that ‘things’ have essences and these essences or forms are universal, temporally constant, and independent of the observer.¹⁹ The particular type of essentialism involved in the structuring of sexuality knowledge is that of biological essentialism or biological determinism.²⁰ In biological essentialism, biology and its relevant aspects such as hormones, genes, and drives are perceived and presented as natural, unavoidable, and determinant of genders, orientations, and sexual functioning. In the following sections, we explain how biological essentialism contributes to the general construction of sexuality knowledge by way of topic organisation. We then discuss the prominence of biological discourse in explanations of sexual distress and its dissemination into biomedical discourses around distress alleviation. Drawing on our analysis, we argue that the dominance of biological essentialism in the

construction of sexuality knowledge precludes alternative discourses around cultural and sexual diversities, and justifies existing power structures.

7. Biological Essentialism in Chapter Organisation

We argue that the organisation of chapters implies a particular hierarchy of importance so that topics presented earlier on can be understood as foundational to the overall construct of sexuality. Furthermore, we contend that topics presented early on might be understood as important, and possibly even necessary, for one's comprehension of topics presented in the latter portions of a textbook. In most of the examined textbooks such priority was conferred to biology. At least one chapter on human anatomy and physiology was included in all of the textbooks and it was consistently positioned as one of the first chapters. In addition to sexual anatomy, several textbooks had entire chapters on hormones (Textbooks C, F, and I) and genetics and/or evolution (Textbooks A and I). In contrast, topics around multiplicity and diversity of sexuality were either embedded within more broadly labelled topics or were presented as a distinct topic in the latter portions of the textbooks. For example, none of the textbooks had a separate chapter on sexuality and culture. Instead, culture was predominantly included in the introductory chapter with a hodgepodge of 'diversity' sub-topics such as ethics, spirituality, research, and education (e.g., Textbooks B, C, F, and K). Similarly, media, which is seen as a major contributor to the construction of sexuality, tended to be presented as a minor sub-topic or positioned under differently named topic such as sex for sale (Textbooks B, E, I, and J). Topics dealing with a diverse continuum of sexual expression such as sexual variations and behaviours were relegated to the latter parts of the texts, invariably following chapters on anatomy, hormones, and genetics.

The unified emphasis on biology as both preceding other topics and as underlying a cluster of chapter titles (re)produces the idea that genetics, anatomy, hormones, and instincts do not interact with, but rather define sexual expressions, orientations, and practices. The combination of biological essentialism with the prevailing assumption that knowledge, in general, is essential, universal, and neutral makes alternative organisations of sexuality topics neither possible nor necessary.

8. Biological Essentialism in Causal Explanations of Sexual Distress

Nine of the twelve textbooks had a separate chapter on sexual distress, providing indication of the importance of the topic of sexual distress today. In contrast, only two textbooks contained 'sexual health' as a part of a chapter title. One of these distinct chapters was, however, in the form of an epilogue. We want to note that although the textbooks most often used the terms dysfunction and disorder, we use the term distress throughout this paper. We feel that the term distress better acknowledges the variety of subjective experiences whereas

dysfunction and disorder are terms that others may label onto one's experiences. We do use the term dysfunction or disorder in instances where we want to highlight the problematic use of this terminology in the textbooks. Finally, we purposefully did not replace the term dysfunction or disorder with the term distress when we felt that the word distress would also imply external imposition of distress even if the person did not experience distress.

All chapters contained information on the causes or origins of sexual distress. This information was either presented within sections on specific disorders or/and in separate chapter portions dedicated to origins of distress. We focus on the sections that specifically dealt with the causes of sexual distress.

First, the organisation of sections was driven by biological essentialism. All textbooks, with the exception of Textbooks F and J, covered physiological or medical causes before describing psychological and other causes. Similarly to the overall organisation of chapters, we argue that this systematic tendency of giving precedence to biological explanations of origins of distress produces the notion that biological causes are central and ubiquitous. Other causes, such as psychological and relational ones, are presented as being contingent on organic factors or being secondary, i.e., less central, to explanations of what determines sexual distress.

Second, causes were typically conceptualised as residing within the individual. Most chapters included distinct sections on physiological or psychological origins of sexual distress. In comparison, fewer chapters went beyond the individual and included sections on interpersonal causes, such as problems in one's relationship. Even fewer chapters acknowledged cultural or social context, such as gender inequality, as discrete causes of sexual distress. Paradoxically, the emphasis on individual factors failed to incorporate subjective perceptions of experiencing and interpreting distress. As Textbook I stated, 'at what point these concerns rise to the level of 'disorders' is a subjective question, and largely an irrelevant one.'²¹

It is, then, the discourse of biology that takes precedence over subjective, psychological, relational, or socio-cultural discourses in the construction of knowledge regarding sexual distress. As a consequence, causal explanations of distress are mainly presented as a biological phenomenon and hence positioned outside of the complexity of human interaction.

9. The Privileging of Biomedical Discourse in Distress Alleviation

All chapters on sexual distress contained sections on treatments and strategies for alleviating sexual difficulties. As was the case with chapter organisation and explanations of distress, biological essentialism dominated the descriptions of distress alleviation. We identified a number of places where biological essentialism dispersed into related discourses around alleviation of sexual distress: the discourse of hegemonic masculinity in many therapies and treatments covered in the textbooks, the embedding of power imbalances in the description of sensate focus exercises, and the incorporation of biological essentialism into biomedical

discourses. In this chapter, we focus specifically on the pervasion of biomedical discourse in the description of treatments of erectile disorder.

The role of pharmaceutical companies in the framing of specific sexual experiences as sexual dysfunctions or disorders and the associated propagation of biomedical treatments has been comprehensively documented and critiqued.²² This biomedical discourse appeared to be privileged in most of the textbooks' sections on treatments for 'erectile disorder' or 'erectile dysfunction.' For example, Textbook I contained four treatment subsections regarding erectile dysfunction. The first sub-section was short and was titled 'Simple measures may alleviate the problem.'²³ However, the main emphasis was on the next two sub-sections titled: 'Viagra and similar drugs have become the leading treatments' and 'Erectile dysfunction can be treated with devices and implants.'²⁴ The last sub-section was labelled 'Psychological treatments may be useful.'²⁵ The middle two sub-sections were the longest. In addition, the last sub-section began by stating that 'If a man's erectile dysfunction does not respond to medical treatments, or if there are factors suggesting his problems result from psychological or relationship issues, he may be referred to a sex therapist.'²⁶ In addition to the privileged emphasis extended to biomedical treatments, the wording of the four sub-sections in Textbook I also demonstrates the insidious incorporation of biological essentialism into the justification for biomedical treatments as the most appropriate ones. It is stated that drugs have become 'leading' and devices and implants 'can' treat erectile dysfunction, but psychological treatments only 'may' be useful. Textbook I was not exceptional in its approach to explaining treatments of erectile dysfunction. Across many textbooks, described treatments for erectile disorder were heavily saturated in the biomedical discourse with Viagra and other drug treatments being often presented as a leading option to overcoming erectile disorder. What is problematic to us is that this material is not presented in pharmaceutical pamphlets marketing a medical solution but in psychology textbooks framed as neutral and independent of corporate (i.e., pharmaceutical) agenda. Yet, it is precisely the pharmaceutical companies that benefit from essentialising sexual distress as biologically based and conceptualizing it as a disorder. As a consequence, biomedical treatments appear as logically connected to the physiological causes, and more specifically, to the physiology itself.²⁷ So while we do not suggest that authors of the textbooks intentionally represent pharmaceutical interests per se, it became apparent to us that by privileging biomedical discourses around treatments of erectile dysfunction and connecting them to the inescapable notion of biological essentialism, human sexuality textbooks legitimise these discourses and hence justify the existing dominant power structures as prevailing and necessary. Other approaches that would reposition alleviation from the focus on the treatment of the body were notably absent in the majority of textbooks. One example of such approach is the New View framework, in which Kaschak and Tiefer argue that sexual difficulties should be categorised by social and cultural differences,

relationship issues, psychological and personal history, and last, medical and physical problems rather than primarily concentrating on sexual difficulties as situated physiologically and psychologically within the individual.²⁸

10. Disprivileged Frameworks of Understanding

In our analysis, we found that aside of biological essentialism well-developed alternative discourses were largely missing. As already noted, none of the textbooks had a separate chapter on sexuality and culture. With respect to the chapters on sexual distress, many texts did pay some attention to cultural influences but attention was primarily directed at Western societies. For instance, Textbooks B's and K's coverage of cultural causes of sexual distress was situated within Western cultures with sub-sections on growing up in sexually repressed families and performance anxiety that men may face given the dominance of hegemonic masculinity in Western society. We suggest that the prevalence of biological essentialism precludes the need to substantively incorporate Non-Western cultures' conceptualisations as important aspects of sexuality. In other words, the privileging of biological essentialism together with systematic underrepresentation of cultural diversity cements the biological discourse as central and makes significant discussion of cultural diversity irrelevant.

We also found that alternative frameworks regarding the conceptualizations of sexual distress and critiques of existing therapy were largely overlooked in the chapters on sexual distress. Textbook C was the only textbook that contained a section on critiques of sex therapy. Five of the nine textbooks included alternative frameworks of sexual distress however these explanations were typically not given a substantial amount of space and tended to be placed at the end of the chapter or presented as a 'special interest' topic. The New View of Women's Sexual Problems was the most frequently described non-medical conceptualisation of sexual distress.²⁹ Briefly, the New View questions the conceptualisation of women's sexual distress as comparable to men's, especially alongside the biological dimension. For example, it is argued that women's economic, social, and political circumstances are, in general, substantially different from those of men. Women are often responsible for child- and elder-care and may not readily have the physical, mental, and emotional resources for their sexual lives.³⁰ While we agree that women's experiences of distress have to be understood in their own right, we also suggest that the established understanding of men's sexual difficulties is problematic as it often ignores non-biological factors. Given the systematic marginalisation of non-medical conceptualisations of distress in the textbooks we analysed, we argue that alternative frameworks and understandings of sexual distress such as the above mentioned New View approach need to be given comparable scope and degree of explanation to the current dominant conceptualisations.³¹

11. Conclusion

The aim of our research is to uncover the dominant as well as the relatively under-represented themes in North American human sexuality textbooks. So far, we found that the organisation of chapters and the content of chapters on sexual distress are largely driven by biological essentialism discourse. While additional and alternative discourses are not always ignored, they are often treated as less significant than biology or as being preceded by, and thus affected by, biological essentialism. With respect to sexual distress, this concentration on individual biology privileges and legitimises biomedical discourses as prominent options for treatment of sexual distress.

It is our sense that human sexuality textbooks do not sufficiently acknowledge the role of cultural, social, and political factors in the construction of sexuality knowledge. Rather, the textbooks perpetuate current deterministic constructions and thus reinforce existing hegemonic and biological discourses around sexuality knowledge. As such, students of human sexuality who learn from the textbooks that we examined might not be exposed to the multiplicities and complexities of sexualities. This can be especially problematic if students are led to believe that sexuality knowledge presented in human sexuality textbooks is objective rather than shaped by culture, power, and language. As a troubling consequence, students might incorporate the particular construction of sexuality knowledge into understanding and interpretation of their experiences, and even into something as central as their identities. Furthermore, if sexuality textbooks and those who learn from them fairly unquestioningly adopt and perpetuate a particular construction of sexuality knowledge, the existing power structures are, at least implicitly, authorised to dominate the construction of sexuality knowledge itself. Hence, we close this paper with a call for challenge of dominant discourses around sexuality knowledge as well as for expanded representations of human sexualities in current North American survey-level sexuality textbooks.

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²⁰ DeLamater and Hyde, 'Essentialism', 10-18; Tiefer, *Natural Act*.

²¹ Simon Levay and Janice Baldwin, *Human Sexuality, Fourth Edition* (Sunderland: Sinauer Associates Inc., 2012), 517.

²² E.g., Elizabeth Canner, 'Sex, Lies, and Pharmaceuticals', *Feminism & Psychology* 18 (2008): 488-494; Ray Moynihan, Iona Heath and David Henry, 'Selling Sickness: The Pharmaceutical Industry and Disease Mongering', *British Medical Journal* 324 (2002): 886-890; Leonore Tiefer, 'A New View of Women's Sexual Problems: Why New? Why Now?', *Journal of Sex Research* 38 (2001): 89-96.

²³ Levay and Baldwin, *Human Sexuality*, 526.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 526-527.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 528.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Barbara L. Marshall, 'Sexual Medicine, Sexual Bodies and the "Pharmaceutical Imagination"', *Science and Culture* 18 (2009): 133-149; Moynihan, Heath and Henry, 'Disease Mongering', 886-890.

²⁸ Ellyn Kaschak and Leonore Tiefer, eds., *A New View of Women's Sexual Problems* (New York: The Haworth Press, Inc., 2001); Tiefer, 'New View', 89-96.

²⁹ Kaschak and Tiefer, *A New View*; Tiefer, 'New View', 89-96.

³⁰ Tiefer, 'New View', 89-96.

³¹ Kaschak and Tiefer, *A New View*.

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Appendix A

List of human sexuality textbooks included in the analysis:

- A. Golanty, Eric, and Gordon Edlin. *Human Sexuality: The Basics*. Mississauga: Jones & Bartlett Learning, LLC, 2012.
- B. Greenberg, Jerrold S., Clint E. Bruess, and Sarah C. Conklin. *Exploring the Dimensions of Human Sexuality*, 4th Edition. Mississauga: Jones & Bartlett Publishers, LLC, 2011.
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- L. Rosenthal, Martha S. *Human Sexuality: From Cells to Society*. Belmont: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2013.

ALL EQUALLY REAL

FEMININITIES AND MASCULINITIES TODAY

Gender identities are dynamic, multiple categories, refusing resolutely to reduce their complexity to fit neat extant binaries. This volume grapples with the dialectic which emerges from the fact that while there is a certain resistance to being labelled in contemporary discourses on sexuality, gender identities actively influence how we interpret the world and how we function within it: we exist amongst patterns, models and behaviours, as well as among people who virtually demand to be labelled, because to them, this forms the basis of a stable identity. Various cultural perspectives and realities are given voice, bringing to bear the need to identify privileges they might take for granted, but which are unobtainable elsewhere. As the curtain of one's own cultural context is lifted, this volume hopes that these privileges are -- even if for a moment -- no longer invisible.

Anna Pilińska is a researcher at the University of Wrocław. Her current research focuses on the postmodern construction of sexuality in the prose of Vladimir Nabokov, Edmund White, Bobbie Ann Mason and Achy Obejas. Her interests include postmodern prose, film adaptations, poetry and translation.

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