

# **GENDER STUDIES**

**Vol. 1 No. 5/2006**



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**Thanks are due to Professor Isabel Marcus from the University of New  
York at Buffalo, for her valuable suggestions**

**Gender Studies**

**Revista de Studii de Gen a Centrului Interdisciplinar de Studii de Gen al  
Universității de Vest Timișoara**

**ISSN 1583-980X**

# **GENDER STUDIES**

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**Through the Lens of Gender. Sites of Gendered  
Representation and Discourse**

## **POWER IN CONVERSATION**

**MÁRIA BAJNER**

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Recent works on gender and the English language show that the male-female hierarchy is inherent in the words we use to perceive and name our world. These studies of grammatical forms and vocabulary intend to document a male dominated reality expressed through language. Much less attention has been directed toward how gender hierarchy is expressed in conversation. By turning to conversation, we move to an analysis of the interactional production of male-female power relations traced in people's talk.

The paper - while highlighting gender-related aspects of conversation - argues three points. First, that men and women use different interaction strategies in conversations. Second, that these strategies are culturally acquired temperament traits. Third, inexpressiveness is seen as a product of male subculture.

### **Gendered representation of talk**

Interaction requires at least two people. Conversations are produced not simply by their presence but also by the display of continuing agreement to pay attention to one another. That is, all interactions are potentially problematic and occur through the continual, turn-by turn efforts of the participants. In a sense, every remark or turn at speaking should be seen as an attempt to interact. For an attempt to succeed, the other party must be willing to do further interactional work, that is, the other respondent has the power to turn an attempt into a conversation or to stop it immediately. According to Deborah Tannen women are trained to look for connection in their interactions; they make efforts to raise topics and to get others to take them up in order to equalize speaker's turns; men, who are being trained to look for power in their interactions, try to control the topic even when their own subject knowledge is poor. At the same time, they appear to interrupt women more than the other way round (Tannen 1992:39,42). On the other hand, men and women respond differently in conversations when a problem is presented. Because men are trained to be active and find solutions to problems, it is argued, they adopt a problem-solution approach when someone articulates personal difficulties; in contrast, women are encouraged to think of themselves as listeners.

When these different discourse rules operate together, women's contributions are likely to be heard less than men's because men will be trying to take the floor and women will be encouraging them to do it. Neither side is dominating or giving way. Each is simply doing what it has been trained to do within its own gender group.

Textual analysis reveals how interactants do the work of conversation. There is an overwhelming difference between female and male use of questions as a resource of interaction. Research (Lakoff 1990:320) notes that women ask more questions than men. Lakoff has interpreted this "question asking" as an indication of women's insecurity, a linguistic signal of an internal psychological state resulting from the oppression of women. But a psychological explanation is unnecessary to reveal why women ask more questions than men. Since questions are produced in conversations, we should look first how questions function there.

Questions are interactionally powerful utterances. People respond to questions as "deserving" answers. The absence of an answer is noticeable and may be complained about. A question works in conversation by opening a two-part sequence. It is a way to insure a minimal interaction - at least one utterance by each of two participants. Harvey Sacks (1998) describes a type of question used extensively by children as a conversational opening: "D'ya know what?" As with other questions, it provides for a next utterance. The next utterance it engenders is itself a question, which provides for yet another utterance. The archetype is, "D'ya know what?" "What?" 'Blahblah...(answer). Sometimes, of course, the adult answers with a statement like "Tell me what". Whatever the exact form of that first response, the idea is that the first question sets off a three-part sequence. Q-Q-A, rather than a simple Q-A.

Sacks points out that children's use of this device is a clever solution to their problem of insuring the right to speak (at the same time, their use of this strategy acknowledges that restricted right). In response to the "What?" children may say what they wanted to say in the first place.

In her analysis of conversations between couples in their own homes, Pamela M. Fishman (1999) discovers that the work of establishing and maintaining conversations is women's work. Fishman's findings of the transcribed material show that men produced over twice as many statements as women, and they almost always got a response, which was not true for women. The transcript demonstrates how some conversational strategies work between men and women. It documents the woman as working at interaction and the

man as exercising his power by refusing to become a full-fledged participant. As the interaction develops and she becomes surer of her difficulties, she brings more pressure to bear by an increased use of strategies. The failure of women's attempts at an interaction is not due to anything inherent in their talk, but to the failure of men to respond, to do interactional work.

Another interactional strategy is the use of the minimal response, when the speaker takes a turn by saying, "yeah", "umm", "huh", and only that. Men and women both do this, but they tend to use the minimal response in quite different ways. Fishman's research suggests that women use such reinforcers to maintain others' contributions while the male usage of the minimal response displays a lack of interest. The monosyllabic response merely filled a turn at a point when it needed to be filled. For example, a woman would make a lengthy remark, after which the man responded with "yeah", doing nothing to encourage her or to elaborate. Such minimal responses are attempts to discourage interactions together with the phenomenon called "male comprehensiveness." The phrase "This is interesting" or its variation occurs throughout Fishman's tapes. When conversation is problematic, the work of establishing that a remark is interesting ideally is done by both interactants, not one. The first person makes a remark; the second person responds to the remark, thus establishing its status as something worthy of joint interest or importance. All this occurs without the question of interest ever becoming explicit. The use of "This is really interesting" as an introduction shows that the user cannot assume the remark itself will be seen as worthy of attention. At the same time, the user tries single-handedly to establish the remark. The user is saying "Pay attention to what I have to say; I cannot assume that you will." In five hours of Fishman's transcribed material, the women used this device ten times, the men seven (170). There are also many instances of "y'know" interspersed throughout the transcripts. While this phrase does not compel the attention of one's partner as forcefully as "This is interesting" does, it is an attempt to command the other person's attention. The phrase was used thirty-four times by the women and three times by the men in the transcribed conversations (172-175).

### **Inexpressiveness and Male (Sub)Culture**

Through this analysis of the detailed activity in everyday conversation, other dimensions of power and work in interaction are suggested. Two interrelated aspects concern women's availability and the maintenance of gender. Besides the problems women

have generating interactions, they are almost always available to do the conversational work required by men and necessary for interactions. Sometimes she is required to sit and “be a good listener”, other times, she is expected to fill silences and keep conversation moving, to talk a lot.

Since interactional work is related to what constitutes being a woman, with what a woman *is*, the idea that it *is* work is obscured. The work is not seen as what women do, but as part of what they are. Because this work is obscured, because it is too often perceived as an aspect of gender identity rather than of gender activity, the maintenance and expression of male-female power relations in our everyday conversations are hidden as well together with the phenomenon of “male inexpressiveness” as it first has been conceptualized by Balswick and Peek (1971). In their conceptualization, male inexpressiveness is seen as a culturally produced temperament trait which is learned by boys as the major characteristic of their forthcoming adult masculinity. Inexpressiveness is evidenced as adult male behaviour which does not indicate either emotion or support of the conversational partner. Inexpressiveness in a culture where little boys are expected to grow up to be inexpressive is seen as an “internalized norm” of the super-ego (48). As they articulate this: “While the girl is taught to act ‘feminine’, [...] the boy is taught to be a man. In learning to be a man, the boy in American society comes to value expressions of masculinity [such as] physical courage, toughness, competitiveness, and aggressiveness (1971:363,364). It is a mistake to ignore the peculiar asymmetrical patterns of socialization in a society which makes it much more dangerous for a boy to be incompletely socialized than a girl. Much of the literature suggests that parents and other adults exert greater social control to insure that boys “grow up male” than the girls “grow up female” (Parsons 2000) - as can be seen in that fact that greater stigma is attached to the boy who is labelled a sissy than to a girl who is known as a tomboy.

On the other hand, if we consider inexpressiveness to be a character trait, as do Balswick and Peek, we should also be aware that the normative control of that trait is never complete - being threatened constantly by both the presumably more expressive demands of the id and the excessive demands of the “internalized norms” of the super-ego. While the norms of society may well call for all little boys to grow up to be inexpressive, the inexpressiveness of the adult male should never be regarded as complete or total, as Balswick and Peek would have it.

In our culture we have ideas about the sexes that are constructed around stereotypes showing men as strong, silent, long-suffering, while women are trivial, chattering and nagging. There are also studies which show that, in a variety of contexts, it is men who carry out much of the talking (Sadker and Sadker 1991). Obviously, age, status and context will affect both the amount of talk a person delivers, and the degree of dominance s/he has. Tannen (1992) contributed to the debate of male/female stereotyping by claiming that “men are trained to become familiar with talking in public situations, learning how to hold centre stage through verbal performance such as storytelling, joking and imparting information.” (quoted in Carter, Goddard, Reah, Sanger, Bowring 2001:295). Women, on the other hand, are more comfortable with private speaking: for them, “the language of conversation is more about establishing connections and negotiating relationships” (295). Males, therefore, might think females talk a lot because they hear them talking in situations where men would not, for example on the telephone or in social situations with friends.

Sidestepping questions of the ultimate origin of male and female cultural differences, emphasis should rather be put on sub-cultural differences as first discussed by Chodorow (1971). Her distinction between “being” and “doing” makes it clear that what men “do” defines both male and female activity. Benston’s discussion of male production of exchange-value in the public sphere and female creation of use-value in the private sphere captures the same fundamental differential of power underlying what appears to be merely cultural. The origin and the persistence of male and female sub-cultural differences goes back to male bonding developed by Lionel Tiger (1998). He points out that the ritual and magic of the males is a secret to be guarded against the women’s eyes. Such magic is only privy to the men, and access to it in rites of passages finally determines who is a man and who is only *other*. Similar processes are at work in our own society, where boisterous games and audacious deeds are the measurement of the “manly men”, who, while sharing the “male-inclusive” experience develop the male-only language, not to be used in the presence of women.

Studies on language and gender have sought to cast light on people’s real experiences on how men and women converse, both in single-sex and mixed-sex groups. Deborah Cameron and Jennifer Coates (Cameron,1985,1990; Coates,1986; Coates and Cameron,1988) the two major figures in British sociolinguistics make an assumption that there are features in language which can be explained only by reference to gender. Coates’s work has analyzed discourse differences in women’s and men’s conversation

styles, identifying features of all-female group discussions which differ from those found in mixed or male-only discussion groups. There has also been considerable work done on differences in pronunciation, syntax and lexis between men and women with particular relevance to stereotypes and beliefs regarding what is “typical” male or female usage, and the interactive norms found in all-female and all-male groups. (See R. Lakoff,1975; Edelsky,1977; Spender,1980; Cameron,1990). Edelsky’s (1977) research shows that at an early age children have internalized ideas of what is a “typical” word for a man to use rather than a woman (e.g. strong swear words), or for a woman to use rather than a man (e.g. milder expletives such as “oh, dear”), showing how ingrained are stereotypes of gendered language.

Carter in *Working with Texts* (2001:295- 296) refers to Tannen, who sees male and female groups as different cultures which, when they are brought together in mixed-sex situations, can clash and cause misunderstandings because the participants are operating different rules. As Tannen suggests, many male-female conversations result in difficulty because men think they are simply exchanging information, while women think they are negotiating. Such misunderstandings - according to Tannen - often arise in mixed-sex conversations as a result of men and women following different rules. To support her argument, she quotes a couple who - while driving home - have the following conversation:

Sue: Would you like to stop for a drink?

John: No.

As a result, they do not stop, but start to have an argument when they get home. Sue says that John never consults her feelings, while John says he never knows what Sue really wants because she will not tell him - rather, she expects him to guess. While the man thought he was just being asked information about his needs, she thought her question would be the opening move in a conversational sequence of negotiation.

Although it is argued that men are socialized into inexpressiveness, it is also argued that they may learn to be situationally rather than totally inexpressive. To the extent that an ability to be expressive *in situ* with a woman leads to satisfactory and gratifying consequences in one case, it probably does not take long for the male to learn to be expressive with *any* woman - not just his spouse - as a mode of approaching that woman. This is a way of “coming on” with a woman - a relaxation of the usual standards of inexpressiveness as a calculated move to establish a sexual relationship. Skills at

dissembling in this situation may have less to do with handing a woman a “line” than with showing one’s weakness and frailties as clues intended to be read by her as signs of authentic male interest. In many Latin cultures, which might be considered to epitomize traditional male supremacist modes, the style of *machismo*, in fact calls for the male to be dependent, nominally open, and very expressive to whichever woman he is currently trying to “make.”

The process of unlearning the internalized conversational norms is not as simple as it is suggested by Balswick and Peek. Their suggestion that men simply “unlearn” their inexpressiveness through contact with a woman is unsatisfactory. First, it suggests, that men can rescue themselves with the help of “male solidarity”, through contact with other men, or, even worse, it would seem to make the task of rescuing men just one more task of women. That is, the woman is expected to restore to the man that which was initially taken from him in socialization.

### **Inexpressiveness and Power**

In light of this generalization, it should be remembered that inexpressiveness is not just learned as an end in itself. Rather, it is learned as a means to be implemented later in men assuming and maintaining positions of power. Inexpressiveness validates the rightness of one’s decision. In fact, the social position of highest power - not incidentally always occupied by men - demand veneers of both universalism and inexpressiveness of their incumbents, suggesting that at these levels both characteristics merge into a style of control (consider G.W. Bush on the Iraqi war). What I am suggesting is that inexpressiveness in a society where social relationships are so much permeated with notions of power, even what may appear on the surface to be authentic can be an extension rather than a negation of (sexual) politics.

Inexpressiveness in a sexist culture empirically emerges as an effort on the part of the male to control a situation (once again, on his terms) and to maintain his position. This is even truer of male inexpressive behaviour in intimate relationships. The following dialogue drawn from Erica Jong’s novel of upper-middle-class sexual etiquette, *Fear of Flying* (1977) is a clear example of male inexpressiveness and its political use:

She: ‘Why do you always have to do this to me? You make me feel so lonely.’

He: ‘That comes from you.’



She: 'What do you mean it comes from me? Tonight I wanted to be happy. It's Christmas Eve. Why do you turn on me? What did I do?'

Silence

'What did I do?'

He looks at her as if her not knowing were another injury. 'Look, let's just go to sleep now. Let's just forget it.'

'Forget what?'

He says nothing.

'Forget the fact that you turned on me? Forget the fact that you're punishing me for nothing? Forget the fact that I'm lonely and cold, that it's Christmas Eve and again you've ruined it for me? Is that what you want me to forget?'

'I won't discuss it.'

'Discuss what?' 'What won't you discuss?'

'Shut up! I won't have you screaming in the hotel.'

'I don't give a fuck what you won't have me do. I'd like to be treated civilly. I'd like you to at least do me the courtesy of telling me why you're in such a funk. And don't you look at me that way...'

'What way?'

'As if my not being able to read your mind were my greatest sin. I can't read your mind. I don't know why you're so mad. I can't intuit your wish. If that's what you want in a wife you don't have it in me.'

'I certainly don't.'

'Then what is it? Please, tell me.'

'I shouldn't have to.'

'Good God! Do you mean to tell me I'm expected to be a mind reader? Is that the kind of mothering you want?'

'If you had any empathy for me...'

'But I do. My God, you just don't give me a chance.'

'You tune out. You don't listen.'

'It was something in the movie wasn't it?'

'What in the movie?'

'The quiz again. Do you have to quiz me like some kind of criminal? Do you have to cross-examine me? ... It was the funeral scene...the little boy looking at his dead mother.'

'Something got you there. That was when you got depressed.'

Silence

'Oh, come on, Bennett, you're making me furious. Please, tell me. Please.'

(He gives the words singly like little gifts. Like hard little turds.) 'What was it about the

scene that got me?’

‘Don’t quiz me. Tell me!’ (She puts her arms around him. He pulls away. She falls to the floor holding onto his pyjama leg. It looks less like an embrace than a rescue scene, she sinking, he reluctantly allowing her to cling to his leg for support.)

‘Get up!’

(Crying) ‘Only if you tell me.’

(He jerks his leg away.) ‘I’m going to bed.’

(Jong, 1977:108-9)

This is clearly an example which indicates that inexpression on the part of the male is not just a matter of inarticulateness or even a deeply socialized inability to respond to the needs of others. The male here is using inexpression to guard his own position. To not say anything in this situation is to say something very important indeed: that the battle we are engaged in is to be fought by my rules and when I choose to fight.

### **Conclusion**

Contemporary research on language and gender does not suggest that male talk is “normal” while female talk is “deviant”, nor does it indicate that there is anything significantly powerful or powerless about male and female talk, respectively. It does suggest that men and women adopt different conversational styles because they are trained to understand and operate spoken discourse differently as a part of being socialized for different roles in society. It demonstrates that verbal interaction in daily experience helps to construct and maintain the routinely established hierarchical relations between men and women. Inexpressiveness, one of the gender-related discourse markers, is seen as a particular male character trait. In addition, it is an instrumental requisite for assuming adult male roles of power, the consequence of the political power position of males in society. I would argue that a little boy must become inexpressive not simply because our culture expects boys to become inexpressive but because our culture expects little boys to become decision makers and wielders of power. For if my argument, that male inexpressiveness is instrumental in maintaining positions of power and privilege for men, is correct, then male and female sociologists and linguists might come up with introducing models of unlearned inexpressiveness which might indicate how men might relinquish the power which has historically been theirs.

Significant change in the male gender role will only be made if the problem is conceptualized as one that involves individual males gradually unlearning their inexpressiveness. There are articles published in fashionable women's magazines suggesting some techniques women might develop for drawing their male partner out of their inexpressive shell. I think that kind of advice is not only facile and wrongheaded but also burdens the female with additional "emotional work" while simultaneously creating a new arena in which she can - and most likely will - fail.

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## **MEDIA'S PLAY OF GENDER**

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### **Introduction**

Media discourse is patriarchal and it consequently abels gender roles. Women are taught how to behave as women and men are taught how to be “real men”! The popular concept of the sexes originating from different planets (men from Mars and women from Venus) emphasizes differentiations and distinctions between men and women. It also emphasizes misogynistic attitudes towards women (Bordo,1999). They are subordinated, soft and obedient, as opposed to the dominant, active man.

Men are stimulated to adopt a violent mask, the “tough guise” as a tool for survival and to gain respect in socializing. This mask gradually becomes their identity. This attitude is supported by the numerous Hollywood movies, broadcast each night during peak-time. During the week: 13<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> of May 2005, for example, on popular Romanian TV stations such as ProTV and Antena1 the movies starred: Steven Seagal, Jean Claude van Damme, Chuck Norris Dolph Lundgren, Kris Kristofferson, Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone, Sean Connery, Jackie Chan, Pierce Brosnan, Lorenzo Lamas, Don “The Dragon” Wilson, David Morse, Michael Dudnikoff, Richard Dreyfuss, Thomas Howell, Marcus Chong, Roy Scheider, Hulk Hogan and Jason Statham. Romanians also have their own male TV stars playing violent characters: Ciupanezu’, Boboc, Bălan in *Băieți Buni* (ProTV) and Terente, Zeamă, Țeapă, Ciupitu’, Sică Ciomag, Marco, Ricky in *Numai Iubirea* (AcasaTV). The same attitude is also supported by numerous popular video and PC games (*Quake, Ghost Recon, Doom, Hitman, Special Operations, Last Bronx, America’s Army, Counter-Strike, Unreal Tournament, Return to Castle Wolfenstein, Medal of Honor*) as well as wrestling and other popular sports.

### **The Male Discourse**

Let us start by presenting the harmful effects of violence in games. The “fashion” of the new millennium is virtual reality computer and video games, Nintendos and playstations. They have by the highest interaction with the audience-player. Consequently, the experiences are perceived as more “real”, the play is perceived as pure personal choice.

Furthermore, this realism is increased by the First Person Shooter as the performer enters entirely “under the skin” of the character; he sees on the screen exactly what his character sees. This media is highly manipulative because the player is permanently convinced the choices he makes are actually his. Accordingly, the consequences and the effects of the media are left underconsidered.

The rules of these games are simple: you have a mission and in order to fulfil it you need to solve a lot of problems. How? Through violence. One frequently plays a brave solitary muscular powerful soldier – a prototype of American Marines!

He will fight and kill mainly everyone he encounters. Violence is not only presented but encouraged and rewarded. Yet, this is not all! There are no emotion, no grieving and no regrets. Thus, aggressive and violent masculinity becomes a way of solving everyday problems, a style of living (Jenkins, 1999).

A simple calculation illustrates how many murders are necessary for the fulfilment of one mission (the games consist of several missions for their completion): “only” 15-30 in *Ghost Recon*, but even more than 100 in most others.

Professional American armies use these games as training for their soldiers (video documentary: *Gender, Race and Violence in Video Games*). *America’s Army* is, actually, a game of training to become a US soldier: your character is instructed physically and theoretically for war. But most games are useful in the “emotional training” of a “recruit”: they work on the desensitisation of players and on making them violent and subsequently dispassionate to take someone’s life.

It sends a message to us as a species to murder our own kind for material or ideological control. Eysenk (2000) in his article published in *Media Studies: A Reader* notices that “humans are almost unique in having ritualized murder by inventing ‘war’; but, even so, humans tend on the whole to have some seemingly aversion to taking human life” (Eysenk, 2000:425).

Now, with the “help” of these video games, the “problem” is solved. There is no aversion; violence has become everyday-life. We can “appreciate” and “admire” its consequences: extremely high crime rates, numerous wars, violent kids, domestic violence, street fights, gun fights, school fights and school shootings.

We can even observe a trend of aestheticisation of crime (in box-office movies such as *Natural Born Killers*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Seven*, *The Gam* and *Fight Club*. These are movies highly praised by critics and highly popular in Romania. They present a world of extreme

violence: brains scattered on the car's windshield, blood, dead bodies, violent deaths, traumas, demons, fights and violent murders. The heroes are couples: of hitmen, of drug-dealers, of robbers, of murderers, who live in a depraved and immoral society. All of them are presented in a TV show inside another TV show: *America's Most Wanted* in *Natural Born Killers*! This subtle idea calls for a serious insight into the effects of the relationship and co-dependence between media and reality.

Besides desensitisation to violence, video games offer several other messages. Two of the most important are misogyny and the sexual objectification of women on the one hand (the female characters are usually highly sexualized objects and are available mostly for rescue). Another message is racial stereotyping. The main protagonist is generally a white Caucasian male and his opponents are ethnic brutes, beasts created through the exaggeration of the characteristics of supposedly "barbaric races".

The negative heroes are sometimes nonhuman (zombies and monsters in: *Quake*, *Ghost Recon*, *Doom*, *Counter-Strike*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*). Often, however, evil identities are representatives of the designated opponents of Western, capitalist "Americanism": they are the German Nazis (*Medal of Honor* and *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*) or they are Russian or African terrorists (*Special Operations*) or members of Yakuza (*Hitman*). In a mission of *Hitman* the player is ordered to free a US prisoner kept solely in his underwear which has the USA flag on it!

In their quest to destroy the western values and lifestyles, these negative heroes seem to call upon and unleash the forces of the evil. Consequently, the player as American Marine feels threatened and considers himself obliged to fight back, almost in defence! The explanation behind these stories and attitudes is mainly financial; these games are designed for and sold to American males, who will definitely not spend money on a FPS based on reality in which an Arabian army is fighting against US invasion!

These games stereotype all men as violent beasts. They also label women as impotent creatures, as objects to be saved and used by potent males. This duality is represented as the nature of modern human beings. Mass media present it as a biological predisposition. So violence becomes a norm. While it is normal for a man to be violent, it is unfamiliar and strange for women to act in that manner.

The articulation of masculinity as violent has reached a sexual level as well. Bullying women is perceived as normal, fun, even romantic. In numerous articles, TV or radio shows and movies, the theme of rape has become very popular.

However, regardless of the number, message and attitude of numerous debates in the media, the myth of romantic rape survives and continues to be staged in several movies. The seduction in many scenes consists of an “erotic” molestation and harassment of a woman by a man: often she is immobilized as she is apparently embraced by the man or she is being kissed insolently despite her obvious discontent and disagreement. These actions are not condemned; on the contrary, they are praised, they are perceived as the standard seduction procedure. Thus, the passionate lady-killer succeeds in charming a hard-to-get woman. Obvious examples are staged in most “romantic movies”.

Occasionally, it is the woman (the victim of the rape) who is also accused of provoking it. As Sarah Tobias in *The Accused* (1988) is being gang-raped inside a pub, there are cheers and expressions of admiration from the other clients. During the trial, she is accused of having a “sexy attitude”, which is supposedly the cause of the rape... This prize-winning movie was based on actual events! It calls for serious consideration of the effects of the relationship and co-dependence between media and reality.

The articulation of muscularity is, also, overemphasized. Contemporary toys and virtual characters of video/ computer games have muscles three times bigger than an average person’s muscles! As most men don’t quite fit the pattern, they find other ways to expose their “tough guise” through weapons (as explained in the video documentary: *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity*).

The effect of this trend is obvious: domestic violence, rape, serial killing and street gun shootings. It can also be observed in the increased number of wars, of ethnic hatred, of terrorist attacks, even in the whole “fashion of war”!

Numerous shows broadcast in Romania (*Stele Verzi* on ProTV, *Un Bărbat Adevărat* on AcasăTV) also adopt the above-mentioned attitudes. In *Stele Verzi*, famous fashion models, “Miss-es”, music and TV stars wrestle in front of a live audience; in *Un Bărbat Adevărat*, famous male Romanian stars “fight” for the title “Man of the Year” through various competitions such as riding a bull, boxing and skandenberg.

War movies are one of the most powerful tools for promoting all of the above. They display an aggressive male fighting for survival, justice or peace in a decaying and hostile world. He is desperately using instinctual, raw forces that are seemingly his only options in this social “jungle”! Masculinity simply becomes aggression and violence! Military movies are free from all “soft femininity”. They represent raw masculinity and pure violence. They express the story and the fashion of war:



The war film is perhaps the richest of all texts of masculinity. Escape from the feminine, bloody initiation into manhood, male bonding: these are all themes which the traditional war film employs. In a sense, the war/ military film is hardly ever about anything other than what it means to be a man and how to become one. (Simpson, 1994:212)

These attitudes are generally encouraged by the white masculine heterosexual media discourse in advertising, news, most TV shows, most movies and series. Male social identity is at the top of the actual social patriarchal scale. Most male characters are granted the dominant position; they are the ones who take the initiative and are the major decision-makers. They are active violent cops (Bălan and Boboc), bloody leaders of the illegal underworld affairs (Ciupanezu'), owners of important companies (Dan Bratu), successful businessmen (Tudor Lupescu, Muri), brave pilots (George, Delia's husband) and heads of families (Nechifor).

### **The Female Discourse**

Paralleled to this social construction of masculinity, femininity is its alternative or more accurately opposition. Girls are represented as soft, warm, loyal and cooperating with the raw side of masculinity by taming it. They enjoy being bullied by men; they appreciate "the alpha man" with his double-side personality: soft sometimes, raw and violent most of the time. Women have also learned to perceive bullying as romantic behaviour, thus encouraging it. They have been taught to be submissive to the dominant patriarchal system, to be a tool for solving men's problems, to be obedient, silent, inactive and, also, to use their sexuality for anything they need (Bordo, 1999).

Women in international and Romanian programmes interpret the roles of obedient house-wives (Ana, Delia, Marga), illiterate maids (Ildiko), limited mothers uniquely devoted to their children (Marga) or shrewd luxury prostitutes (Casandra, Dea, Guvida). All independent, self-assured and self-controlled female characters successful in their careers are severely punished with misfortune, hardships and an unhappy intimate life (Laura), with a cunning, heartless and dishonest soul (Claudia, Bianca's adulterous grandmother who cheats on her husband after 40 years of marriage) or with mental and emotional instability (Maria, Bianca's other grandmother, Dan's mother who has a young lover and frequent nervous breakdowns after being abandoned by Dan's father). Success in

their careers obviously makes them incapable of building a family and a positive intimate life.

As one can easily observe, there are no positive models of successful, active, independent women. In fact, all positive female characters depend on the strong, wise, loyal, smart, brave, intelligent, successful male “masters” (fathers, lovers, husbands, bosses); these female characters obey males in return for status, comfort, housing, food, money, and well-being. They might be adornments for their males, or they can take care of the houses of males, or they might sometimes act as tools to support and solve minor problems of their “masters”.

This is exactly the sexual-economic arrangement that Charlotte Perkins Gilman described more than 100 years ago. It is obviously more emphasized nowadays.

In her studies, Gilman noticed there were (and still are) significant gender inequalities; she noticed that the women were and are enslaved, disempowered, alienated, a class of subordinated social beings dependent on the “master class”, on powerful, independent men!

The only powerful instrument that women still have is their sex which they have to employ as a tool for survival. In fact, humans are unique in creating this economic dependence of one sex upon the other. Consequently, for women, a sex-relation is transformed into an economic relation, while for men, a sex-relation is dependent upon an economic relationship:

In view of these facts, attention is now called to certain marked and peculiar economic conditions affecting the human race, and unparalleled in organic life. We are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation. With us an entire sex lives in a relation of economic dependence upon the other sex, and the economic relation is combined with the sex-relation. (Gilman [1898], *Women and Economics* quoted in Ritzer, 1996:302)

But patriarchy cannot be reduced to economics! Beyond the material domination of women, nowadays, men have brought “authority” to this great inequality: the media everywhere encourages and legitimizes this patriarchy because it brings about ideological domination! Thus, this culturally and ideologically formative system has finally and irrevocably entrapped women in patriarchal society!

The so-called feminine shows, soap operas and “telenovelas” have nothing in common with women except for a few characters played by them. What these productions actually do is support and protect the central patriarchal system. These TV shows reduce and disparage feminine roles; they lock women into kitsch and superficiality (Rogers, 1991).

The so-called “feminine shows” do not represent a complex feminine culture. They are written, directed, sponsored and encouraged by men. They depict patriarchal dogma with a highly misogynistic attitude. They represent women as childish, inactive, subordinated creatures, similar to house-pets! Women’s only fulfilment and reason in life is to be good-looking, good wives and mothers.

These shows also pretend to be psychologists by analyzing tense situations and trying to solve psychological and sociological problems through communication (Rogers, 1991). This is the main topic of Romanian TV shows such as “*De 3X Femeie*”, “*Babilonia*”, “*Teo*”, “*Monica*”, “*Kensky Show*”, “*9595*”. It is noteworthy that the two latter shows are presented by men!

These shows seem to address “feminine” issues and problems such as gender relations, social class, parenting, poverty, discrimination, marital relations and many others, mainly sociological and psychological. The show’s guests and invited “experts” – rarely exclusively women, but most frequently both men and women – seem to help women solve these problems through communication. In fact, this “communication” is artificial and formal “gossiping”, “chatting” or cheap melodrama pretending to be genuine analysis and communication. The issues discussed are not convincingly “feminine” either; rather they represent problems of the whole society involving both women and men!

In fact, these shows maintain the same patriarchal discursive formation. Women are entrapped again in kitsch and superficiality since their catharsis is through melodrama and comedy!

All TV channels have been invaded by soap operas and telenovelas. Except for TVR Cultural, OTV and RealitateaTV, all Romanian TV channels broadcast at least one of the so-called “women series”. AcasaTV airs no less than 12 telenovelas each day. One of the most representative is “*The Young and the Restless*”, transmitted Monday to Friday by ProTV at 4 pm.

Like all the others, this soap-opera takes place inside a secure house, obviously the most important place in a woman's life. It is situated in opposition to the constantly dynamic exotic jungle of the men full of dangers and adventures.

The characters are presented in a symbolic order: one woman followed by the man she obeys who is her husband or lover. It is important that all women smile, while the men assume a serious, macho guise. The look of the males is cold, bossy and superior, as opposed to that of the females, who are in a permanent state of a "Bambi look". The large wide-opened deer eyes, denote innocence, candour, awe and also silliness. They emphasize this attitude by their permanent state of smiling that implies discomfort with oneself and subordination.

The language used is also symbolic. Women use a lot of tentative language: "perhaps", "maybe", "would", "could", "either...or..." ("Perhaps you have time today?"). They also never insist if they are refused, rather they back off. Women often suggest or propose, while men order. Whereas it is considered improper or shocking for women to use aggressive, vulgar language, men are allowed to do so.

The same attitude is reflected through body language. While men sit comfortably, and occupy a lot of space, women tend to sit shyly, in corners and occupy as little space as possible - their legs crossed and their eyes looking down.

The entire behaviour of women suggests lack of confidence, lack of power, uncertainty, hesitation, timidity and tentativeness. The model of an attractive woman in telenovelas is a gentle, warm, maternal beauty with deer-eyes. She has no opinion and no initiative. Those who do not fit the pattern are the career women. They are considered cold, aggressive and "masculine". They are unattractive, with no sex-appeal and they cannot find the peace of home and family.

In fact, women are encouraged not to work for their success, but rather to marry effortlessly into it! They are upstarts who know how to choose and attract the desired and proper man and how to conform to their social role. Few women actually work. Accepted job positions for women are secretaries, fashion models and sometimes teachers.

Housewives are satisfied with the position they have and will have their entire lives in the hands of their husbands. They even consider themselves lucky to do so, not having any control over their lives. They have no difficulties and no responsibilities. The only thing they do is to take care of the house and to give birth and raise the children. Nikki, Victor Newman's wife, actually states it clearly: "I am so lucky. I have everything a

woman could want; I have a beautiful daughter, a loving husband and a wonderful marriage.”

Housewives know their roles inside the house and the family. They also know they will be judged only by the successful performance of these roles. Women who see these “women series”, soap-operas and telenovelas are also encouraged to submit to a patriarchal system.

A more powerful stigmatization is attached to women by the “women commercials”. They have two major negative effects on women. First, they turn women into objects. Thus, they dehumanize women by promoting the idea that women are not different, but made up of slight variations of the same, easily replaceable body parts - long legs in high heels, big breasts, red lips and round butts. These women do not have any uniqueness; they are just objects, sexy and sex objects (video documentary: *Still Killing Us Softly3: Advertising's Image of Women*). All women are turned into sex-sexy objects, even those who don't use their bodies for their success such as sober news or TV presenters, singers, actresses, even athletes!

These commercials also convince women that their appearance is the most important thing they have and that is how it should be! This second major influence of the commercials on women is that the ads create discomfort among women with themselves, and their appearance (video documentary: *Still Killing Us Softly3: Advertising's Image of Women*). The ads' directors present doll-women, who spend their day in beauty salons and fitness rooms. They undergo extreme dieting and exercise all day long; they also have chemical treatments and undergo surgery. These women sacrifice all their time, resources, and lives for the continuous effort of maintaining a false image of an adolescent, extremely thin girl with highly-developed sexual feminine body parts, all fresh, all for immediate consumption! The directors correct the so-called “flaws” of the physical person with an electronic image of the person.

More recently, this technique has become inadequate even when women reached this ideal of beauty by extreme efforts. Now directors create women electronically; they are symbols of feminine beauty – imposed on women – that do not and cannot exist. Since it is impossible to reach this ideal of beauty, women are forever frustrated with their appearance, forever entrapped in the quest of buying and consuming advertised beauty products!

It is obvious that a woman cannot reach this ideal of beauty. However, she will be and is blamed and feels guilty if she doesn't continuously try, by the means of buying and consuming beauty products, promising "perfection". Thus, marketing campaigns ensure the life of the capitalist system and of the market, by endlessly frustrating women. This is the normalcy, lifestyle and values that the women's advertisements create.

### **Conclusion**

I have studied in this paper the representations and the discourse formation concerning the gender roles used by media. Wherever and whenever there is information, there are signs, symbols, images, meanings, codes and representations. They all tell a story. What this story is, how it is perceived, how it is told and why are some of the questions addressed and answered in this paper.

I have studied the signs, symbols and images that are used to establish these harmful norms, prejudices and stereotypes by which gender roles in the media and, consequently, in the society are ordered and governed. My conclusion is that they are so powerful because the audience is not consciously perceiving and internalizing them. Therefore, we should make an effort to be aware and critical all the time, in spite of the media's conscious effort to hypnotize and seduce us.

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# THE ROLE OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPE IN JANE SMILEY'S NOVEL *A THOUSAND ACRES*

INGRIDA ZINDZIUVIENE

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## Introduction

Jane Smiley (b. 1949) is a famous American novelist, essayist and short story writer. According to Cathy Davidson and Linda Martin, her writings explore a variety of themes: *The Greenlanders* (1988), a historical saga set in fourteenth century Scandinavia; *Barn Blind* (1980), a pastoral novel set during summer in Midwest; *Duplicate Keys* (1984), a mystery (Davidson, Martin, 1995:819). Such variation is, as Michael Chabon observes, a very challenging or even a risky step of a writer because he or she may “get punished for it by critics and even by readers who like to read the same thing over and over again” (in Wroe, 2004:1). However, Jane Smiley manages to escape the risks and stays a productive and popular author, able to engage the reader in all of her diverse themes and genres. Nicholas Wroe rightly states that Smiley is a professional in creative writing, the discipline she had taught at Iowa State University from 1981 to 1996 (Wroe, 2004:1).

The writer is particularly noted for her novel *A Thousand Acres* (1991), which won an honourable award of the Pulitzer Prize in 1992. The novel discusses a wide range of themes and contexts. One can find obvious character resemblance or plot and theme connections to William Shakespeare's *King Lear* as well as the discussion of traditional American family values, father-daughter relationship issues and rural life descriptions within the setting of American landscape. Many critics, including James Schiff and Neil Nakadate, also acknowledge *A Thousand Acres* as a feminist novel, which gives the speaking voice to a woman who reveals a female perspective in a male-dominated society.

As Scott C. Holstad observes, one of the most noticeable and widely analyzed plot lines of *A Thousand Acres* is the reinterpretation of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

Roots of *A Thousand Acres* can be seen in numerous novels and plays, the most obvious of which is *King Lear* [...] the parallels are too great to ignore. Smiley is successful because



she fills in so many of the gaps left open in the play. She gives us new and different perspectives. (Holstad, 1996:5)

Smiley's novel, in parallel to Shakespeare's play, tells the story of a father, Larry Cook, who decides to divide his prosperous one thousand-acre farm among his daughters: Ginny, Rose, and Caroline. Ginny and Rose accept the offer, while Caroline, the youngest and most beloved daughter, is not very enthusiastic about it and therefore is rejected by her father. What forced Smiley to expose the new perspective on *King Lear*, is, as James A. Schiff suggests, a gap, some equivocality or a mystery in the story which can be interpreted in many different ways:

Lear contains such a mystery, the one that Smiley latches onto - what could have caused such hatred and brutality from Goneril and Regan.[...] The daughters become angry, but their anger is attributed to the abusive actions of their father, not evil natures. (Schiff, 2004:1)

Thus, to explain the malevolent daughters' behaviour, the rewritten version of *King Lear* deals with sexual abuse or, rather, cases of incest. Sexual abuse is presented on two layers: one corresponds to human relationship, while the other deals with the abuse of the land.

Smiley's new perspective on a well-known drama already presents many issues for discussion, such as the rural background of the novel or the structure of a traditional family in the rural setting from mid-twentieth century until nowadays, and the woman's life in these specific surroundings.

The story of *A Thousand Acres* is set in the Midwestern state of Iowa and describes the upcountry life traditions, at the same time portraying the vivid landscape of Zebulon County. In such background Smiley reveals the drama of the Cook family. The descriptions of land in the novel are closely intertwined with the emotions and experiences of the main character.

As *A Thousand Acres* has obvious features of feminist writing, one can distinguish a clear line of ecological feminism in the novel: as Mary Paniccia Carden states, in *A Thousand Acres*, Jane Smiley "invokes the central concerns of ecological feminism" (Carden, 1997:1). The *ecofeminist* point of view focuses on the portrait of the two oppressed groups, women and landscape or nature (Carden, 1997:3). Thus, the theory of

*ecofeminism* has been applied in the analysis of the parallels between the exploitation of nature and abuse of women in the text.

### **Ecofeminist Interpretation of the Landscape**

*Ecofeminism* is one of the contemporary feminist movements, which declares immense attention to ecological issues. The term originally descended from the words “ecology” and “feminism” and it was coined by the French feminist Françoise D’Eaubonne in 1974 (McGuire, 2003:1). As Cathleen and Colleen McGuire state, D’Eaubonne mostly concentrated on displaying violent actions against women and nature, invoked by the hierarchical supremacy of men (McGuire, 2003:1). D’Eaubonne’s ideas are used as the basis of the theory; however, today, *ecofeminism* involves more diverse issues. According to Charlene Spretnak, one of the famous contemporary theorists of *ecofeminism*, the emphasis is put on the “cultural responses to the physical connections between nature and the female range from respect and honour to fear, resentment, and denigration” (Spretnak, 1993:181). The critic also presents some significant aspects of the development of *ecofeminist* theory: historical background, political activism, and spirituality and environmentalism (Spretnak, 1993:181-189). Analyzing the historical and archaeological background of *ecofeminism*, Spretnak explains that in the early European cultures, starting from the Neolithic period, women were highly respected or even worshipped because of their close ties to nature. In the Bronze Age, Indo-Europeans started migrating west, the warrior cult appeared and the patriarchal social system evolved. At that time the attitude towards the female changed radically (Spretnak, 1993:182). Spretnak analyses the Eurocentric worldview of dualistic thought, which underpins the marginalization of women: “the masculine” being associated with rationality, spirit, culture, autonomy, assertiveness whereas “the feminine” is associated with emotion, body and nature (Spretnak, 1993:183). Patriarchal thinking, influenced by the ideas of dualism, presented the masculine characteristics as superior to the feminine ones. Therefore, *ecofeminists* consider Eurocentric ideas to mark the initial phase of the oppression against nature and women.

By exploring the historical roots of patriarchy, *ecofeminists* seek to find solutions in order to change the marginalizing attitude towards women. According to Cathleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire, “in an effort to be ‘equal’ many mainstream feminists downplay biological female capabilities such as birthing, lactation, and menstruation. Ecofeminists are proud of women’s unique physiology” (McGuire, 2003:1). For these reasons,

the critique of the Eurocentric worldview, its analysis and the struggle for creating a socially equal, non-hierarchical community are the main concerns of political activists of today (McGuire, 2003:1).

Spirituality, or nature-based beliefs, is also grounded on the historical and archaeological data, concerning ancient religions that honoured both nature and femininity. As Spretnak states, “the *ecofeminist* alternative to the Western patriarchal worldview (...) is a radical reconceptualization that honours holistic integration: interrelatedness, transformation, embodiment, caring, and love” (Spretnak, 1993:187). *Ecofeminists* see close ties between the domination of women and domination of nature. They accept the non-dualistic religions that worship female goddesses or nature itself and consider the whole universe as a sacred entity that should be loved and cared for. *Ecofeminists* claim that people should reconsider their environmental conditions, such as pollution of soil, air and water, destruction of ecological systems and species extinction. Following D’Eaubonne’s ideas, eco-feminists oppose the old-fashioned values of male dominance, aggression and competitiveness (D’Eaubonne, 1990:2). According to Spretnak, environmentalists and ecofeminists believe that one should identify with the natural environment, and discover the “ecological self” (Spretnak, 1993: 185). They study the relationships between nature and people, especially concentrating on the human influence on the environment of the planet.

The *ecofeminist* movement conceptualizes the connections between the continuous exploitation of land and exploitation of women, determining close ties between the world of nature and female body. These issues are the focus of the analysis of the male-dominated family structure and social relationship within the boundaries of American landscape in Jane Smiley’s novel *A Thousand Acres*.

### **Development of a Woman’s Self-esteem in the Male-dominated Environment**

Most characters of *A Thousand Acres* live in a rural surrounding where patriarchal traditions are considered a norm that should not be transgressed. Smiley presents the range of different issues she aimed to emphasize in the novel, stating that she wanted to write

about specificity as opposed to universality, of Western European ideas of family order, of ownership and exploitation of land, resources, and the services of other human beings, of

conflict, literary form, ego, power, gender and the finality of death. (in Nakadate, 1999: 158-159)

Jane Smiley has succeeded to fulfil her aims: the novel raises many questions concerning patriarchal traditions. The exploitation of land and the repression of daughters are examples of using patriarchal power. The abused woman's feelings and her point of view are presented alongside the issues of the abuse of the land.

Ginny, the first-person narrator is a submissive daughter and wife, who, while describing her life, gets into details about her house chores, cooking and gardening, about the peculiarities of rural life and people that surround her. She is a model woman from the patriarchal perspective: a hard-working housewife, a good daughter, always compliant and silent. According to Davidson and Martin, Ginny's narration has a kind of a "transparent" style, which makes the narrator as neutral as possible (Davidson, Martin, 1995:237). Ginny is more of an observer than an active character. According to Nakadate, the absence of a tangible point of view in Ginny's discourse emerges from a woman's "confusing status in a family and community where women are given clearly defined, nominally valued [...] domestic roles that have no social or economic power" (Nakadate, 1999:173). The detailed descriptions of daily farm-life routine and historical accounts about her family do not reveal any inner feelings or desires of the narrator; she does not take any determined actions. The way the story is told shapes the discourse of a woman, who does not feel she has any power or any noteworthy opinions of her own. For a long time Ginny remains mute and insignificant.

The protagonist's narrative style and actions start changing only when she breaks the rules of the patriarchal system: she has a sexual affair with Jess Clark. Ginny becomes aware of her individual desires and her body. Soon after, her childhood memories come to the surface: she remembers that as a child she had experienced sexual abuse from her father. Her memories of this traumatic experience had been suppressed for a long time, but now, her past retrieved, she can move on to the future. Subsequently, fully aware of the corruption of the whole system of male-dominated values, Ginny liberates herself from it completely and starts a new and independent life.

### **Human Values in a Patriarchal Society**

At the beginning of the novel, Ginny describes her father as a respectful farmer, who operates one of the biggest and most successful farms in the county. According to Schiff, Larry Cook is “the quintessential American farmer and father, presenting a facade of strength, stoicism, and industriousness to the admiring community” (Schiff, 2004:1). Such a figure is clearly an image of a powerful patriarch, who rules his one thousand-acre farm, makes a big profit, and is the head of his family. Always in control, he is a representative of a true male-dominated value system.

Zebulon community regards Larry as a hard-working man who applies effective farming methods and has even developed a “catechism” (Smiley, 1992:45), a manual on good farming. According to this catechism, the farmer’s duties are “to grow more food” and “to buy more land” (Smiley, 1992:45). Displaying the concrete effects of good farming to the surrounding society is essential as well: “clean fields, neatly painted buildings, breakfast at six, no debts, no standing water” (Smiley, 1992:45). Appearances and opinions are of great importance, especially in a rural community where everybody seems to know one another, where “a poor looking farm diagrams the farmer’s personal failures” (Smiley, 1992:199) and where a good-looking farm represents the diligent and virtuous farmer himself. Therefore, Larry’s exterior appearances correspond to the general opinion of him as an honourable person.

When the Cook family experience inner troubles, they do not reveal them to other people in order to preserve the well-established opinion of the Zebulon County society:

My father truly was beside himself [...]. But we couldn’t give into that - we were well trained. We knew our roles and our strategies without hesitation and without consultation. The paramount value of looking right is not something you walk away from after a single night. (Smiley, 1992:199-200)

Eventually, the relationship between father and daughters becomes strained. However, the superficial impression had been formed over many years, and much effort is put into preserving it. Larry’s daughters are aware of the importance of keeping up appearances and thus they attempt to maintain the appearances for as long as possible.

The society of *A Thousand Acres* is constructed so that everyone has to pretend and play a certain part in it. When the novel starts, the superficial roles of an excellent farmer, a good father, loving daughters and housewives or friendly neighbours are exhibited to the outer world. Later in the novel, the underside of the characters is revealed. Larry is presented

as a hard drinking, violent-tempered father, whose farming technique has poisoned his land. His daughters hate him and the neighbours are rather more competitive and spiteful than friendly. Smiley describes and contrasts both types of social relationships: respectable surface, visible to the surrounding community and the rotten core that is kept screened from view.

### **Exploitation of Nature and Women**

In her novel, Smiley devotes much attention to the *ecofeminist* interpretation of the connection between land and human body. Following the *ecofeminist* interpretation of a female body, she starts her novel with an epigraph by Mendel Le Sueur:

The body repeats the landscape. They are the source of each other and create each other. We were marked by the seasonal body of earth, by the terrible migrations of people, by the swift turn of a century, verging on change never before experienced on this greening planet. (in Smiley, 1992:1)

Female body, as well as the land, is associated with fertility and nurture. Abuse of women and exploitation of land, fundamental features of patriarchy, are clearly indicated in the novel. Schiff rightly observes that “Smiley uses the land as a metaphor for the body. Like the female body, the land has existed as something for men to control, possess, violate, and exploit” (Schiff, 2004:1). Larry Cook, a patriarch, owns both land and the bodies of his daughters, and poisons this “property” by his farming methods: the tile drainage system hides chemical-poisoned water underneath the rich and fertile land.

Jess is the one who reveals the truth about nitrates and pesticides that caused Ginny’s inability to have children: “people have known for ten years or more that nitrates in well water cause miscarriages and death of infants. Don’t you know that the fertilizer runoff drains into the aquifer?” (Smiley, 1992:165). Consequently, Ginny and Rose discuss the effect of the polluted water on the local people. The sisters discover that women in Zebulon County do not live long. The examples are obvious: their grandmother, their mother and Jess’s mother died from cancer. Rose had had breast cancer too. As the nitrates mostly harm only the bodies of female family members, nobody cares much about the reasons. In this respect, Smiley expresses her views unequivocally: farmers sacrifice their wives and daughters in order to maintain the prosperity of their farms, gain

profit and keep up appearances of successful farming. Since the polluted water has not significantly affected men, nobody is concerned about its fatal impact.

It takes quite a long time to discover that the land had turned poisonous, although the frequency of cancer-caused deaths clearly indicates the cause of these tragic events. Similarly, it takes a long time to understand the causes of Rose's anger or Ginny's naivety before the terrible family secrets are finally revealed. Rose has never forgotten the rapes, thus anger has become the only way to deal with her pain: "don't make me feel sorry for myself. That's the hardest. The more pissed off I am, the better I feel" (Smiley, 1992:192). A recurrent symptom of sexual abuse is, as Davidson and Martin note, "denial and repression" (Davidson, Martin, 1995:420). This attitude explains Ginny's reserve and repression of her memories. Less resilient and strong in comparison with Rose, she is so deeply victimized that she chooses not to remember the dark sides of her adolescent years.

The poison is not visible externally. It is hidden in the same way as the hurtful memories are kept repressed. However, Ginny has always been conscious of something veneering inside her mind and underneath the soil. She describes the relationship with her father, before recalling her abused adolescence:

I feel like there's treacherous undercurrents all the time. I think I'm standing on solid ground, but then I discover that there's something moving underneath it, shifting from place to place. There's always some mystery. He doesn't say what he means. (Smiley, 1992:104)

The covert water imagery predicts the hidden secrets that keep Ginny from normal relationship with her father. He is the person who deleted the memories of her body. During church supper, after recalling the constant rapes and humiliation at her husband's (Harold) hands, Ginny wants to purify herself and seeks the relief in water: "now it seemed only water, only total, refreshing immersion, could clear my mind" (Smiley, 1992:246). She goes to an old quarry, which, as she remembers, used to have clear blue water in it. However, she finds out that the water has changed into "brown and murky" (Smiley, 1992:247). Water, a universal symbol of purity, life and vitality turns into a cover for poison and darkness in the novel. The subverted imagery reveals Ginny's "poisoned" and abused life experiences.

Larry's abusive actions affect not only his daughter but also his land. The writer conveys environmentalist ideas through Ginny's character and her perspective: her symbolic connection with water expresses the need to identify with nature. If people harm nature, sooner or later it turns against them. Therefore, by identifying the similarities between the poisoned land and an abused female body, Smiley expresses the *ecofeminist* concern about environmental pollution, which is caused by the oppressive patriarchal ideology of dominance over women and nature.

### **Conclusions**

*A Thousand Acres* documents rural life peculiarities and social conventions that are constructed according to the rules of patriarchy. Jane Smiley reveals the feelings of a woman, who is oppressed by the traditional male-dominated set of values. However, not only women are abused and controlled in the novel - the author draws our attention to man's influence on the deteriorating condition of the planetary environment.

*Ecofeminist* ideas in the novel highlight the parallels between the exploitation of nature and the abuse of women. Throughout human history, women have been closely associated with nature because of their capability to bear children and to nurture. Since the emergence of patriarchal society, natural resources have been controlled and exploited by men. Women, being associated with nature, have all along experienced their powerlessness and silence in this male-dominated society.

Smiley successfully describes the gradual awakening of a woman, who, at first, feels voiceless and insignificant. Her submission is caused by her constant abuse by her father, a patriarch, who perceives the land and the women in his family as chattel. However, after the main character succeeds in reevaluating herself and her life, she moves on to the future with renewed hope.

Smiley reveals both sides of patriarchal values, where neat farms and fertile fields disguise the silent and subdued women, exploited and polluted land. Ginny's character challenges the public perceptions of a wife and a daughter: by the end of the novel, she feels no longer the need to identify herself through her social relationship to any male figure. Ginny becomes an independent and autonomous person. Therefore, she succeeds in finding a more liberated existence, free from abuse and exploitation.

In her novel, Smiley attempts to portray the hierarchical divisions between male and female social roles. The divisions lead to unsatisfactory results: thinking that he has



control over everything, a man turns against his children and nature, whereas the exploited nature turns against him. Hungering for perfection and aggressive competitiveness, humans are programming their self-extinction. In *A Thousand Acres*, Smiley attempts to prove the fact that by acknowledging themselves as a part of nature and by repudiating the patriarchal relationship frames, people may avoid this fatal outcome. In this respect, the description of the American landscape has acquired new roles in American fiction.

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**FEMININE SOCIAL SPACE IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S *THEIR EYES  
WERE WATCHING GOD AND JONAH'S GOURD VINE***

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Social space is predominantly viewed by literature as masculine, i.e. it produces a framework of masculine hegemony regarding, in the first place, the distribution of work, time, and place (Bourdieu, 2000:17-18). The order constructed renders social space public, hegemonic, and heterosexual (*see* Hanson and Pratt). This *transparent space* (Rose, 1993:40), however, also entails a feminine social space, which, on the one hand, bears similar traits to masculine transparent space regarding its structure; and, on the other hand, is contested by the urge of subjective place-construction in an alternative social space.

This characterization also holds for Hurston's feminine social space. The reasons are twofold: a) feminine social space is structured on similar premises as its masculine counterpart, i.e. to maintain the female status quo via subversive power mechanisms; b) this female status quo exists much in relation to masculine transparent space, as a kind of subspace, which shows the naturalization of (white) masculine values in the female consciousness. In this way, Hurston's struggle to establish a genuine feminine space marks also the strife against a *feminine transparent space*. I have already discussed Hurston's individual response elsewhere. In this paper I claim that she also shapes an alternative social space for women, which is created in opposition to both transparent spaces.

In both *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine* the status of this feminine transparent subspace within the masculine social framework is well recognized. It derives from the traditional and gendered division of labour that ascribes spatially, in the first place, the domestic sphere to women, as well as from the gendered distribution of social roles. On the one hand, it is true that the status of women renders a high degree of social and spatial immobility; but, on the other hand, it also demarcates a limited space for

women, where, in accordance with the rules of masculine transparency, women can acquire a gendered position of power. This limited spatial framework equals with a social space with a clear hierarchy along lines of race, gender, and class. Thus, arguably, the female subspace is a *dispositif* (see Deleuze 1992) within the larger masculine function: it shapes a power centre for the socialization of women and for the interpolation of gendered identities.

Interestingly, this often suggests the juxtaposition of the two transparent spaces, or the apparent exclusion of males from female spaces. From time to time the relative autonomy of female social space surfaces in both novels. In *Jonah's*, for example, the female ritual space around birth and death rites grants marginal positions to males. Similarly, in *Their Eyes* Janie, Nanny, and Mrs. Washburn, the white landlady, shape a community in which men do not appear at all.

The relationship of the two transparent spaces to each other produces a dynamics that is, however, not based on mutuality or reciprocity. As a subspace, female transparency establishes rather a complement enabling the system to function smoothly by the indoctrination of both men and women via the production of knowledge, and, consequently, appropriate social behavior.

The inner structuring of female social space enhances this to a great degree. The interrelated constraints of race, gender, and class emerge powerfully in both Nanny's and Mrs. Turner's case in *Their Eyes*. For both of these characters the three constraints harmonize to embody the peak of social upheaval. Neither of these women can imagine an independent woman as a functioning unit of their community. In an argument with Janie over Logan Killicks, Nanny's preoccupation with capital shows how gender and class are interwoven for her:

Heah you is wid de onliest organ in town, amongst colored folks, in yo' parlor. Got a house bought and paid for and sixty acres uh land right on de big road and. . .Lawd have mussy! Dat's de very prong all us black women gits hung on. Dis love! Dat's just whut's got us uh pullin' and uh haulin' and sweatin' and doin' from can't see in de mornin' till can't see at night. (22)

In contrast to Nanny's ideology, in which the land and the house as well as their location symbolize situatedness in social space, Mrs. Turner exemplifies how race and class join to shape the peak of female upward mobility. She associates colour with

refinement: the lighter (i.e. closer to white people in complexion) a person is, the higher position s/he deserves in the community. Mrs. Turner's complexion, her pointed nose, her thin lips, her stature, and her brother's straight hair grant her the desired similarity with whites and urge her to "class off" (135). Her self-hatred becomes pronounced: "Ah don't blame de white folks from hatin' em 'cause Ah can't stand 'em mahself" (135). Her non-identification with and her distancing from the African American community is shown explicitly by her objectifying her people as "them." This extent of "deracination" (Russell 1992:72) reveals her serious alienation from blacks and her ideology positions her above her people on the basis of the constraint of race: "We oughta lighten up de race" (135). Obviously, her dilemma is not to enlighten the workers of the Everglades or to bring about reform, but it verifies her positioning in transparent space and in its female subspace. Not only does she define herself in connection with whites, more specifically, with the white middle class, but, in addition, she does so by defining herself in relation to men. When, for example, a brawl is initiated in her restaurant to reprimand her, she seeks to rely on her husband "to put a stop to things" (144). In a rather comical way, Hurston reveals that in Mrs. Turner's consciousness power is ultimately connected to masculinity despite what her elitist standoffishness and her ideology-induced speeches would suggest.

Of course, Mrs. Turner cannot be accepted in the Everglades, so she is driven away; but elsewhere, for example, in Georgia, as Emmeline's character proves in *Jonah's*, classism along lines of race and gender is practiced. Emmeline, like Mrs. Turner and Nanny, is preoccupied with class, i.e. capital and social standing in her case, which is why she disapproves of John despite his pale complexion. She cannot accept John, who is from over the creek, a spatial stigma of lower social position. In fact, Hurston's critique becomes palpable when Emmeline's upper-class consciousness and morality are debunked by her illiteracy. When she catches the slate on which John has written a message, she erases it "as well as the world's greatest professor" (72). Her constant policing and fake moralizing, however, are power tactics to enforce obedience and the acceptance of gendered identity.

These three constraints establish thus a simple binary between the ideal woman as a satellite on the side of a man, reflecting values of (white) male transparent space, and those women who lack any of the outstanding values of these constraints, be it capital, man, or light complexion.

The strong differentiation along race, gender, and class can be noticed as early as childhood. In fact, very similar structures can be detected in children's communities and, in the first place, in children's games in both novels. In *Their Eyes*, for example, Janie tells her friend, Pheoby Watson, how she was different early in her childhood, when she and Nanny were living on Washburn's property:

Mis' Washburn useter dress me up in all de clothes her gran'chillum didn't need no mo' which wuz better'n whut de rest uh de colored chillum had. And then she useter put hair ribbon on mah head fuh me tuh wear. Dat useter rile Mayrella uh lot. So she would pick at me all de time and put others up tuh do de same. They'd push me'way from de ring plays and make out they couldn't play wid nobody dat lived on premises. (9)

Not only does Hurston establish that Janie is an outsider from early on, she also states explicitly the background of her difference that will later lead to the realization and conscientization of her difference. Inversely, Janie is discriminated against on the bases that later serve as the grounds to be elevated in Eatonville: a) the place she lives at, which indicates a higher class position through the association with whites; b) her class position is backed up even among children by her light complexion and her clothes, i.e. her "spoiling" by a white woman. Furthermore, her complexion may also condemn the other girls with darker skin, debasing them in their femininity. As Russell et al. point out,

Many believe that light skin is feminine and dark skin is masculine, and very light skinned boys and very dark skinned girls often suffer from being at odds with this cultural stereotype [. . .] For black women, skin color is even more central to identity [than to black men] [. . .] negative attitudes about women with dark skin persist. (1992: 66-67)

In this way, the child Janie is stigmatized and exorcized from children's social space for the discontentment of the community with itself. The antagonism against Janie is fuelled by the grown female community ("they mama told 'em [. . .]" [9]), which also indicates the inert power mechanism and the power-related structuring within the female community: daughters are socialized into transparent space by their mothers.

Similarly to this scene, *Jonah's* also provides palpable examples of the presence of transparent female space in childhood. Exactly the same happens to Amy in Georgia as to Janie: for the girls, not only does her family represent class (as Phrony, a fourteen- year-

old girl, says during a game, “[Lucy] live over Pottstown. Her folks done bought de ole Cox place. She go to school. Dey’s big niggers” [23]); she also happens to attract John, the most popular boy, who has also light pigmentation. These scenes prove the socialization of girls into gendered space so much so that the structure of the female subspace becomes visible already in children’s lives. When, for example, Lucy feels exulted after John squeezes her arm while walking home, the reason of her exultation is partly due to the novelty of the feeling; a major reason is that John does this in opposition to her parents and after asking her parents’ permission to escort her home in front of the other girls. John takes stand openly for her, but, by doing so, he also elevates Lucy above others in the girls’ community.

On the basis of Mazumdar’s stratification of female roles in the case of the Hindu house (1999:161), I identify three important spatialities in the female social space of the grown female community: familial space, ritual space, and communal space. Here I want to concentrate on communal space, as I have already elaborated on domestic spaces elsewhere, and ritual space will be a part of a different treatise. Suffice it to say that female ritual space in Hurston’s works is largely embraced by birth rituals and death rituals. In the first place, *Jonah’s* offers excellent examples in this regard. Lucy’s childbirth is attended to by a friend, Pheemy, who aided by two assistants “performed the ancient rites” (92). Birth is purified through ritual, but also, in this way, Lucy is taken up by the community “so that no harm could come to [her]” (92). Ritual naturalizes her into the community and renders her intelligible for the system. Even more conspicuously, Lucy’s death agony shows how ritual seemingly sets her apart from males, yet her wish to be buried as she wants is denied by cultural ritual enacted by women. As immersion in a community is conditioned, departure from it is also systematized. The female leader of the ritual organizes the tasks and does not allow Lucy’s wishes to be granted. Thus, for example, despite Lucy’s explicit desire that “don’t let ‘em take de pillow from under mah head, and be covering up de clock and de lookin’ glass [. . .]” (130), the women enacting the ritual tasks take away the pillow. In her agony Lucy is silent, but her silence also signifies her lack of control over the events. Marginalized in the centre, only her eyes reveal her will and her dependence on Isis’s self-assertion, when “Isis saw her set eyes fasten on her” (132).

Conversely, the fact that Janie is excluded from Starks’s sick room and his death agony in the bedroom shows her marginalization, which she, in fact, breaks, by going into

the bedroom to reassert herself before Starks. She does this successfully, which is also ritually expressed as she manages to occupy the leading role in the ritual and thereby to reclaim her social role, despite previous neglect: “Come heah people! Jody is dead. Mah husband is gone from me” (83).

Female communal space is characterized rather by its lack. The scarcity of female social ties shows explicitly the subtlety of the working of male transparent space, which renders female social space also spatially fragmented. While familial or domestic spaces as well as ritual space are validated in masculine space, they remain limited, either defined by the location of the home or by the incidence of ritual events. Communal space, which can be regarded primarily as social space, appears in collaboration and under the control of men. In *Their Eyes*, for example, in a mock courtship in Eatonville young men address Bootsie, Teadi, and Big ‘oman and later Daisy, objectifying them as pets and denying them voice in the narrative game. Girls gain their public or social identities under the gaze of the male community. In this scene women are played off against each other, which becomes conspicuous, when it is stated that “The girls and everybody else help laugh” (63). Barbara Lazear Ascher reports of this kind of “identification with the aggressor” (1996:334):

[. . .] she was feted around town as “the first woman partner” and she proceeded to follow a pattern not unusual for women who achieve some semblance of power. She refused to reach behind to pull other women along. It was too risky. She might fall backwards. I blush to recall when, in the fourth grade I was the only girl on the boys’ baseball team, I joined in their systematic “girl trashing.” I enthusiastically participated in disparaging conversations about people who were “just girls.” [. . .] Then all I knew was that my power depended on keeping other girls out. (1996:334)

Ascher’s intriguing essay backs up the dynamism of female-female relationships in the communal space of female social space in Hurston’s works too. There is no collaboration between women, only functional junctures as when it is reported regarding a village social event: “The women got together the sweets and the men looked after the meats” (42). In another instance, which often characterizes female relationships in Hurston’s works, Janie chases another woman, Nunkie, away, who wanted to make advances to Tea Cake (131). The fact that this happens in the Everglades, the liberating haven for men and women alike, proves Hurston’s skepticism infiltrating the narrative. Nevertheless, this event is indicative of female communal space, which, in this way,



denounces female relations based on mutuality, but establishes a competitive framework in favour of men. As Pheoby admits on welcoming Janie in Eatonville again, “An envious heart makes a treacherous ear” (5). This sharp evaluation of the female community is backed up beforehand by the narrator: “The women took the faded shirt and muddy overalls [i.e. in which Janie returns to Eatonville] and laid them away for remembrance. It was a weapon against her strength [. . .]” (2).

Hurston deconstructs female transparent space individually and socially already before the Everglades. Hurston’s strategy is not to construct an entirely new, alternative universe, as she cannot, which is ultimately proved by the Hurricane scene, but to build in fissures in female transparent space also. In the focal point of these schisms one can detect the genuinely individual that is able to shape nurturing social relations as well. *Genuine feminine social space* is the result of, what Hobson and Lindholm call, “Composing of Constituencies,” which denotes “the process of creating shared meanings and consciousness among diverse individuals within a social category [. . .] and the framing of grievances and goals of a social movement” (1997:478). In Hurston’s works this social category of women does not cover a homogeneous group either; rather it cuts across several possible groupings; it thus enhances also cross-boundary alliances by, for instance, transcending class and age by representational or discursive practice, as well as an implicit political content (Hobson and Lindholm, 1997:478). Genuine feminine social space is revealed in the two novels between mothers and daughters, friends, as well as, interestingly, between black and white women.

Mother-daughter relations come into foreground in *Jonah’s*, when Lucy on her deathbed shares her wisdom with her daughter, Isis, and gives her instructions about what Isis is supposed to do when Lucy is dying. The importance of the scene is manifold. But most significantly, Lucy gives Isis her bed, which is her only property, an act that enhances a direct matrilineal linkage in the book. Similarly to Nanny in *Their Eyes*, Lucy admonishes her daughter by sharing her mother wit with her, creating *the* “cognitive framing” (Hobson and Lindholm 1997:483), which further contextualizes Isis in femininity through shared values. By giving provisions to Isis, Lucy establishes a communal space as she renders trust and mutuality in the pool of their relationship. She becomes dependent on Isis for voice.

In fact, genuine feminine social space is established with friends through the mediation of mother wit, too, i.e. through transmitting female wisdom and life story; and

through care realized as praxis. In *Jonah's* such a realization of feminine social space is practically absent for Lucy's hermeneutic isolation from the female community. However, in *Their Eyes* Hurston establishes a strong bond between Janie and Pheoby that sets them apart both from male and female transparent space. The intimacy of their friendship is realized on several levels. Mutual understanding is one important aspect that becomes conspicuous when both of them elaborate on the community in a similar fashion. Furthermore, the care with which Pheoby attends to Janie signifies the closeness of their relationship.

Most importantly, however, the transmission of the text, i.e. what Hobson and Lindholm coin as a "cultural narrative" or "master frame" (1997:489), creates a female genealogy. Similarly to Lucy's demand to Isis, Janie asks Pheoby to represent her in the community by telling Janie's life story: "You can tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf" (6). This metaphor denotes indeed unity through oneness and social imbeddedness in their own feminine social space. The place itself is indicative of this space. Janie tells her story on the back porch in her backyard, which Pheoby enters through "the intimate gate with her heaping plate of mulatto rice" (4). This passage emphasizes distance from the porch on the main road, where the Eatonville community usually gathers. As Robert E. Hemenway points out, the porch is "the centre of the community, the totem representing black cultural tradition; it is where the values of the group are manifested in verbal behavior" (1976:239). In fact, the two porches are contrasted heavily spatially, whereby the main porch is situated in the centre, denoting not only values of a cultural tradition, but also of public, masculine social space. On the porch "the act of sitting in judgment implies the power of definition" (Kornweibel, 2004:404), i.e. the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Conversely, the backyard is located behind Janie's house, signifying individualism, creativity, privacy, and mutuality, which are inclusive, in the first place, and are characteristic of genuine feminine space and feminine social space.

The shallowness of female communal space of Hurston's Southern black communities is further heightened by the fact that, in the first place, in *Their Eyes* the black female individual finds support under the protective wings of whites. On the one hand, this may signify white paternalism, which can be seen as a power mechanism to keep African Americans in an inferior position. This aspect can be detected in Tea Cake's consciousness explicitly when after the hurricane in Palm Beach he states, "So Ah means

tuh go where de white folks know me. Ah feel lak uh motherless chile round heah” (164). Regarding communal space, however, Hurston exercises a powerful critique when she shapes a protective white female circle around Janie. This may be regarded as a tribute to Hurston’s white female Maecenas, but it can be seen as a harsh criticism of the black community, which, in Hurston’s judgment and despite her devotedness to it, devises also a strong parochial and provincial aspect. This view of the black community returns also in *Jonah’s*: “You know our people is jus’ lak uh passle uh crabs in uh basket. De minute dey see one climbin’ up too high, de rest of ‘em reach up and grab ‘em and pull ‘im back. Dey ain’t gonna let nobody git nowhere if dey kin he’p it” (169).

In *Their Eyes* Janie experiences the protection of white females twice. First, at the beginning of Janie’s quest Mrs. Washburn’s care and the antagonism of black girls and women are contrasted: “Mis’ Washburn helped out uh whole heap wid things” (10), while black girls instigated by their mothers mock Janie. Then, at the end of the work, Janie finds refuge from her own in the understanding embrace of white women in the court room. There it is spatially neatly depicted that “The white women made a little applause [. . .]” (178) and “[they] cried and stood around her like a protecting wall [. . .]” (179), while the black mass appears marginalized as a depersonalized wall of animosity. In this sense, the courthouse becomes a metaphor of moral space, in which justice is administered in a mothering environment and recognition is realized, which is why Janie goes “to visit the kind white friends who had realized her feelings and thank them” (179). The two scenes show that the sequence of time and space come round as Janie ends up where she sets out from regarding spatial paradigms.

Both of Hurston’s novels prove the complexity of Hurston’s understanding of the African American community. Even regarding female social space, Hurston refuses to form a mythical feminine community, which would be homogenous, and employs a view that promotes diversity along lines of race, gender, and class within a transparent framework. Most significantly, Hurston shows that it is possible for the female subject to give individual response and to achieve relative autonomy socially by creating her own, even if limited, social space.

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## **Women Writers Subvert the Canon**

**VIRGINIA WOOLF--MRS DALLOWAY.**  
**A PSYCHOANALYTICAL REINTERPRETATION OF THE CANON**

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*"Always the same metaphor: we follow it,  
It carries us [...] wherever discourse is organized[...].  
Thought has always worked in dual oppositions[...].  
Through dual hierarchical oppositions.  
superior/inferior.[...] A universal battlefield."*

Helene Cixous-

*Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays*

“Thought has always worked in dual oppositions [...]. Through dual hierarchical oppositions...” argues Helene Cixous in her quoted masterpiece: the human mind cannot perceive the two genders *except* in terms of hierarchical oppositions: the male gender is the superior, the active, the empowered one, while the female gender represents exactly the opposite, the weak, the passive and the disempowered one. Why do we always have to think in hierarchical dichotomies, and why is the woman the constant ‘loser’ in this “universal battlefield” (Cixous, 1989:92).

Cixous is not the only feminist to have raised this question and to have searched for possible answers. Moira Gatens in her *A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction*, Christine Delphy in her essay *Rethinking Sex and Gender* as well as Juliet Mitchell in *Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis* - they all research this same topic of discriminatory hierarchical dichotomies.

Nevertheless, Cixous immediately announces a clear solution. “There are some exceptions” she argues, who do not allow themselves to be reduced to “dummies” (Cixous,

1989:92) and who accept the “other” (92) in themselves. What does this “other” mean to Cixous? It means the “homosexual element” (92) in each of us, that is the ““permission”” (92) we give to ourselves to acknowledge the “presence of both sexes” (92) within our individual personality, identity and sexuality. It is a certain “bisexuality” - “two within one” (92) in each of us. “That doesn’t mean you have to be homosexual to create, (...) but there is no invention possible (...) without an abundance of the other...” (Cixous, 1989:92). What Cixous means is, that in order to be a creator, in the broadest sense of the word, you cannot “repress your homosexual element” (Cixous, 1989:92), that is your “other” within yourself, within your identity, within your sexuality. Cixous’ message is clear: you cannot create anything (your piece of art, your identity, or even your own life), without accepting the “other” within you.

The thesis of the present paper is the following: does Clarissa succeed in recreating/rebuilding herself, her identity, her life and her happiness? In order to answer this question, I will employ certain feminist psychoanalytical theories of feminist literary criticism. Firstly, Clarissa seems to be extremely feminine and heterosexual at the beginning of the novel, completely lacking (repressing) her “other” within herself. Yet this proves to be only a mask. Secondly, she unconsciously realizes that her “other” is missing in her and thirdly she recuperates this “other” by using various weapons. Her strongest weapon is *writing*, which I will interpret in the sense of *écriture féminine*. Only at this moment, after having regained her “other” can she become an ‘artist’, a creator, of her own life and destiny.

At first, she is no ‘artist’, but an upper-class, unhappy, depressive wife, who suffers from neurosis. Nevertheless, after finding her “other” she begins creating. She re-creates, re-builds and re-shapes her own miserable, failure-life after recuperating her “other”. At that point she gains the power to defeat her existential failure, that is her obsessive fear of aging and of death and to arrive at a moment of utmost empowerment when she recreates, she rebuilds her life. In this way, Virginia Woolf deconstructs the hierarchical dichotomy, by shaping Clarissa as the bisexual, ‘both-and’, androgynous character. I will accentuate this more later, when I discuss Clarissa’s mermaid-like dress.

It is this point where I consider it proper to mention the fact that *Mrs. Dalloway* is not the only novel in which Virginia Woolf voices her idea of the androgynous creator. In *A Room of One’s Own*, we meet the same idea: she agrees with Coleridge that a great creative spirit cannot be but an androgynous spirit. A woman or a man cannot create (that

is write) thinking *only* as a woman or *only* as a man, respectively. The creator of either sexes should be an androgynous mind (Woolf, 1999[1929]:131).

Firstly, let us see in what way at the beginning of the novel, Woolf tries to trick the reader and present Clarissa as an utterly female, heterosexual woman, completely lacking her “other”, her ‘maleness’. Firstly, let us consider our maiden-encounter with Clarissa: when we open the novel, right from the very first sentence, “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (Woolf, 1968:5), we the readers, have a feeling of a very determined, empowered woman. This happens due to the reflexive pronoun “herself” and to the declarative verb “says”, which seems like an order to her servants not to dare buy the flowers for her own party. It will be herself, who will buy the decorative flowers.

Secondly, the flowers are extremely important to Clarissa, she spends almost an hour in the flower shop admiring them, smelling them, fingering and touching their petals and she steps out of the shop with a huge bunch of flowers in her arms (Woolf, 1968:18). This image cannot but remind the reader of a goddess of Nature or of Mother Nature herself. Clarissa identifies herself with the sea, swaying on her waves, with the clouds on the blue sky and with the air she breathes (Woolf, 1968:16). She associated herself with these clear symbols of femininity.

Thus we may conclude, that at the beginning the reader may fall into Woolf’s trap and may grow certain that indeed, Clarissa is the typical ‘female-only’, heterosexual woman, the perfect embodiment of femininity: flowers, foaming waves, air, clouds and different scents in the air. This is the ‘mask’ I announced in my thesis statement.

Next, we need to identify who is Clarissa’s “other”: it is no other than Sally, her great love during their youth: “Had not that after all been love?” wonders Clarissa (Woolf, 1968:37). It is this same-sex love that gave her the happiest time of her life, while she spent that dreamlike, passionate summer with Sally in Bourton. The climax of this “exuberance”, that according to Cixous (1989:92), reaches you only when you allow the “other” to come out, is the moment when Sally “kisses her on the lips” (Woolf, 1968:40). That was “the most exquisite moment of her whole life” (40).

Consequently, as long as Clarissa has her “other”, the quite masculine Sally (she smokes, voices political views, criticizes patriarchy (Woolf, 1968:33-40) within her heart and her identity, she is happy. When they part and she marries Richard Dalloway, their same-sex love is abruptly cut off, and Clarissa’s existential agony and failure begin.



Let us posit the following question: why is Clarissa unhappy in her heterosexual marriage with her husband? The answer is the following: Clarissa Dalloway is a bisexual, a 'both-and', an androgynous person. She is only forced to play the part of a heterosexual person/wife, due to her marriage to Richard. Nevertheless, as I mentioned in my thesis statement, this is only a part, a role she has to play. As soon as she married Richard, all possible perspectives for her same-sex love to Sally we cut off. Marriage really became for her a "catastrophe" (Woolf, 1968:39) as she and Sally had used to think about marriage in general, because she lost her "other" (Sally) within herself.

Further on, the dear memory of this "other", that is of the masculine Sally is suffocated, choked somewhere in her subconscious. She can just "dimly perceive" it as something dear, but very remote and misty (Woolf, 1968:36). Therefore her forced heterosexuality is one of the major causes of her neurosis. Julia Kristeva mentions in her masterpiece *Women's Time* that heteropatriarchy does not offer women any understanding for their gender-specific needs (Kristeva, 1981:203). Further on Kristeva argues in *A Question of Subjectivity*, that this total absence of understanding and support from the normative heteropatriarchy may be a major cause for women's neuroses (Kristeva, 1986:131).

As we can conclude, Clarissa is clearly a bisexual being, but she is not (fully) conscious of that, as I stated in my argument. She starts to realize this fact the moment she steps into her home with the arms full of flowers, as a Mother Nature, suggesting the symbols of her accentuated femininity and lack of the "other" in her. This is the crucial turning point in her life and in the novel.

When she enters the house she undergoes several steps of enlightenment (Woolf, 1968:33-52): firstly she is struck by the silence and the emptiness in her huge and posh house. This symbolizes the silence and the emptiness in her big heart, full of love; nevertheless there is no one to give this love to (Woolf, 1968:33).

Secondly, Richard's note on telephone desk, that only he was invited to Lady Bruton's lunch and Clarissa was not, triggers her sexuality and marriage crises to come to the surface of her conscious.

Thirdly, as a result of all these, her sexuality and marriage crises erupt. She starts to feel like "a nun who has left the world", their bedroom becomes an "attic" (that's where one usually never goes, or one stores futile objects), while the bed becomes too "narrow" for Clarissa. Further on, the bed is there only for "reading" cheap romantic novels and

Clarissa clearly feels a certain “virginity” on Richard’s side, in Richard’s bed, as Richard’s legitimate wife (Woolf, 1968:33-34).

We may conclude that at this dramatic moment of the morning, Clarissa realizes that she is smothered and utterly unhappy in her asexual (she feels like a “virgin”) hetero marriage with Richard Dalloway. As I argued in my second argument in my thesis statement, this is the moment when she starts feeling that something is missing, that her “other” is missing in her, that heterosexuality equals unhappiness in her case.

Her next step is to recuperate, to “regain” her “other”. The difficult question is how Clarissa recuperates this lost “other”. The answer is the following: following certain steps, she becomes a self-empowered, powerful woman, a social organizer, even a peace-mediator between two rival *male* academicians at her party. She takes up the leading role, which presupposes a masculine empowerment, freedom of action and of thinking. Most importantly, she *writes*.

I would like to announce it clearly from the start of my argumentation, that due to her hetero marriage, regaining her old “other” (Sally Seton), is out of question for Clarissa. That is why she has to find and construct her “other” *from* and *within* her own self. She has to resurrect from her own ashes, like a Phoenix bird. That is why, it is not Sally who is going to be her new “other”, but she herself, due to her self empowerment and agency, her power to decide and act—all these coming from *within* her.

Let us take her steps one by one and analyze them. Clarissa is going to have a party tonight. At eleven o’clock sharp (the Big Ben tolls) she decides she wants to wear a green, mermaid-like dress (which is torn), she decides to mend it and she also meets Peter. These are the first five crucial steps she takes to build up her “other” from within her.

Firstly, the temporal frame. In my opinion this point in time, that is eleven o’clock, was not randomly chosen by Virginia Woolf (Woolf, 1968:44). It suggests to me the expression ‘in the eleventh hour’, that is Clarissa starts empowering herself and regaining her “other” ‘in the eleventh hour’, when it is almost too late. Happily, it will prove not to be too late.

Secondly, I shall discuss her green, mermaid-like dress (Woolf, 1968:42). The mermaid is a symbol of ‘both-and’, of ‘both’-ness and of androgyny. The mermaid is both a woman (the upper part of her body) and a fish (the lower part), so she is a ‘both-and’. To my eye, Virginia Woolf, who herself was bisexual, is subtly suggesting to the reader that Clarissa is on her way to this ‘both-and’-ness, to fighting for and regaining her “other”.

Thirdly, green is a secondary colour, that is a colour obtained from mixing two primary colours: yellow (to which I will come back later) and blue. Again we meet this symbol of mixture, of 'both-and'-ness, of 'more-than-one-ness', of 'two-ness', of "variety" (Cixous, 1975:92). They all suggest that Clarissa is on her way to constructing her 'two-ness', her "abundance of the other" (Cixous, 1975:92).

Fourthly, her mermaid-dress is torn and she decides to mend it "in the eleventh hour". In my opinion this mermaid-dress symbolizes her attempt to regain her "other", as I mentioned above. Nevertheless, the dress is torn, so the 'mermaid' connotation that the mermaid-dress carries is still annulled, because the dress is torn. Clarissa's road towards rebuilding her "other" is momentarily blocked. And it is here that Clarissa rises from her own ashes. In the eleventh hour, she decides to mend the dress, she does not consider it too undignified for her upper class position to sit down and to mend her mermaid-dress (Woolf, 1968:42), that is her "other"-ness, and after all, her happiness.

*This* is the moment when she gains the power to decide, to use her agency, to take her destiny into her own hands and to drive it, to become a mermaid, to leave the miserable hetero 'to be'-ness, and reach out to her limits and turn to 'become'-ness. She dares reach out towards her limits, explore them, try them, fight them if necessary, as Cixous characterizes the woman (Cixous, 1975:96).

The natural question that we must ask is: does she succeed? The answer is yes, although Clarissa is not aware of this fact yet. In the eleventh hour, she does take her destiny into her hands and she does mend her dress, that signifies her rebuilding her "other"-ness'. In this way she becomes the artist, the *creator* of her own destiny, with that "certain homosexuality", 'other-ness', that Cixous mentions (Cixous, 1975:92).

Finally, Peter comes and pays her a visit, also at eleven o'clock, that is in the eleventh hour. The conversation with Peter is extremely important for Clarissa's 'mending' her life: firstly, during their conversation, she remembers all her happy moments with Sally, her "other" during her youth. Secondly, as a natural result of this, she also realizes that her hetero-marriage and consequently, her life, are both existential failures: "'This is what I made of it (of her life)!' And what had she made of it? What indeed? Sitting there sewing this morning..." (Woolf, 1968:48).

Another sign that Clarissa will succeed in becoming a mermaid, a 'both-and' is the fact that her dress is ready at twelve o'clock sharp, again the Big Ben signals it. Twelve o'clock is the zenith, the climax, the middle of the day, so Clarissa is ready to fight and win

the war for her “other”-ness, of her bisexuality at the middle of this big day, at the age of fifty-two, at the zenith of her life, as well. This day is the zenith of her life because this day is the most important day in her life, it is *this* day that she will rebuild/regain her “other” and her happiness.

Also, let us not forget that it is June, which is the sixth month of the year. Again, the same idea of the middle, of the climax, of the zenith is being underlined, in order to highlight the fact that Clarissa wins back her “other” and her happiness at the zenith of her life. Clarissa re-creates, re-builds her own life at the zenith/climax of her time/life. She becomes the creator, the artist of her own destiny, of her own “‘other”-ness’, by rejecting to be only the fragile sensual feminine Clarissa, that she has been so far and starts (unconsciously) protesting.

Clarissa takes up two arms to protest: her yellow curtains in her apartment where the party is taking place and writing. Let us analyze the yellow curtains first. At a first glance they seem to carry no importance. Nevertheless “it is important to realize that the colour yellow carried with it certain connotations” in the British society, from the turn of the century until the end of Modernism, that is the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Forward, 2000:300). British literature has an entire array of literary masterpieces in which yellow plays a major role, for example: *Mrs. Dalloway*, by Virginia Woolf (1925), *The Yellow Wallpaper*, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892) or *The Yellow Drawing-Room*, by Mona Caird (1891).

Stephanie Forward explains that yellow “is charged with a very special significance” in that period of time (Forward, 2000:299). Yellow signified: women’s rebellion against patriarchy, against hetero-patriarchy, against the inferiority of women to men developed by Darwin’s biological essentialism, against the traditional hallmarks of femininity (hysteria, physical weakness, mental instability). It is a colour of the “outrageously modern” woman, who refuses the Victorian gender-roles imposed upon her by the male society (300). “The colour yellow is the symbol of (women’s) assertiveness” (303), of rebellion and of starting to fight (hetero)patriarchy.

It is paramount to remember that the curtains in the room where Clarissa is hosting her guests are yellow (Woolf, 1968:194). In my opinion this signifies her own “assertiveness”, her “rebellion” and her fight against heteropatriarchy, that is her fight for regaining her empowerment, her agency, her “other” her, love towards her own self.

The other great weapon that she employs is writing. As I have mentioned, when Clarissa comes home, she undergoes certain steps of 'enlightenment'. I have explained her five crucial steps to regain her 'both-ness', her 'both-and-ness' and she succeeds because 'in the eleventh hour' she mends her dress, her mermaid-dress, signifying this 'both-ness', this 'both-and-ness', that she craves for.

After all these shocking and painful steps, Clarissa arrives at the final stage of her battle: she sits down and *writes* the invitations to her party. "...she sat, ever so annoyed, at her writing-table; worried; annoyed (...) But why should she invite all the dull women in London to her parties?(...) Anything more nauseating she could not conceive." (Woolf, 1968:130).

Writing is her strongest and most important weapon, which helps her win her "other", as women express themselves best in writing and not in speech. "Writing is woman's" says Helene Cixous (Cixous, 1975:92), while speech, especially public speech, belongs to the male sphere. In writing women can express their deepest, most gender-specific concerns, doubts and happiness. They have the freedom to dive into their subconscious, into their "cave" (as Woolf calls this in her dairy, quoted by Michael Cunningham in his novel *The Hours*). Returning to Cixous, she calls female writing a "frantic descent deeper and deeper to where a voice that doesn't know itself is lost in the sea's churning (...) women have almost everything to write about femininity: about their sexuality, that is to say about the infinite and mobile complexity of their becoming erotic" (Cixous, 1975:100).

As a conclusion, writing for a woman, and for Clarissa too, is the most direct and honest way of pouring out her problems, her happiness, and her rebellion, if necessary. And in Clarissa's case it is really necessary! That is exactly what she is doing: for the first time during this day (and probably during her entire life) she openly and bluntly cries out against the "dull" people she is surrounded by and she is "annoyed" with her invitees. For the first time she rebels against her dull and conservative society, and most importantly, against heteropatriarchy: the party is not for herself, but for her dear husband Richard, from whom she tries to elicit a bit of tenderness and love in this way. In return Richard cannot even utter the three words "I love you", when he comes home with a bunch of flowers for her.

Clarissa “frantically descends deeper and deeper” into her sea, into her subconscious, she realizes that she is not happy and for the first time, dares rebel against the heteropatriarchal cage that she lives in, lacking her “other”(Cixous, 1975:100).

Secondly, she indeed “writes about femininity: about her sexuality, that is to say about the infinite and mobile complexity of her becoming erotic” (Cixous, 1975:100). In my opinion, her being “worried” (Woolf, 1968:130) is a symbol of her unconscious fear/anxiety that if she fails to act, to fight now, ‘in the eleventh hour’, she will forever remain trapped in her heterosexuality, she will never become an empowered woman who loves and appreciates herself, she will miss her last chance to use “the infinite and mobile complexity of their becoming erotic” (Cixous, 1975:100).

In writing those invitations she expresses all her worries and her annoyance, her entire personality that rebels against what has normed her life so far. This rebellion, while writing her invitations, includes her entire personality that carries all her troubles, worries and anxieties. Unconsciously, this very moment, Clarissa empowers herself, by rebelling and winning her masculine, powerful assertive “other”. She leaves the ‘to be-ness’ and moves on to the ‘to become-ness’. She reaches out towards her limits in writing, she “bursts, (...) inundates, runs through, goes beyond the (heteropatriarchal) discourse” (Cixous, 1975:100).

As a conclusion, Clarissa, reaches out and becomes a mermaid, a ‘both-and’, an empowered, strong woman by the end of this important day--all this through writing. Through *écriture féminine* (female/feminine writing), through writing her invitations.

By the end of the day, one of her guests, Sir Harry, acknowledges her strength, her refinement, her presence which demands respect (Woolf, 1968:193). She even becomes the peaceful mediator between two snobbish gentlemen arguing about politics. She marches up to them smiling, but with a severe facial expression. Her presence is so dignified, so respect-demanding, that they immediately stop and cancel their quarrel (Woolf, 1968:194).

As a conclusion, and as an answer to my thesis statement, Clarissa Dalloway indeed regains/rebuilds the “other” within herself. In this way she gains the necessary “abundance of the other”, that “certain homosexuality” or “bisexuality” to become empowered, a strong woman, having the “other” in her (Cixous, 1975:92). At this moment, she does win her existential battle and she comes out victorious. She has regained her “other”.

As Cixous mentions, one can start creating only if one has incorporated and accepted the “other” within. Clarissa takes her life into her hands and starts creating her

own happiness by fighting off her existential fears (her fear of aging and of death) (Woolf, 1968:201-204). At the end of the day, and of the novel, she is triumphantly happy, smiling dearly in from of her eliminated existential fears. She empowers herself through *écriture féminine* and creates her own happiness, but only after having regained her “other”, in her case her self-esteem, her self-respect and her feminine empowerment.

We may then conclude that a feminist literary critique and feminist theories of psychoanalysis (such as those of Julia Kristeva, Juliet Mitchell and Helene Cixous) may aid us in reinterpreting the grand masterpieces of literature. In other words, employing these new literary devices, one may reinterpret the canon and shed a brand new light on it.

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**CANON SUBVERSION AND/OR REINFORCEMENT – *JANE EYRE*  
AND/OR *WIDE SARGASSO SEA***

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When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I should write the story as it might really have been. She seemed such a poor ghost. I thought I'd try to write her a life. Charlotte Bronte must have had strong feelings about the West Indies because she brings the West Indies into a lot of her books, like *Vilette*. Of course, once upon a time, the West Indies were very rich, and very much more talked about than they are now (Jean Rhys).

Using the above paragraph as the access key to the interpretation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one can only read it as a radical critique of *Jane Eyre*. In this sense it can be maintained that Jean Rhys' novel uses the plot, the characters and narrative techniques of Charlotte Bronte in order to criticise the themes of race and racism, gender and sexism, imperialism and colonialism, and sexuality, and to explore these themes in order to investigate the nature of sanity and madness. In my opinion, the author nevertheless, suffers from what Harold Bloom calls 'the anxiety of influence', as does everyone who willingly undertakes the task of reworking the canon and ends up by at least partly succumbing to it. Thorpe (1999:173) states that Rhys herself assumed that most average readers would approach her novel with some vague recollection of *Jane Eyre*, but hoped that it would be a dim and stereotype-based recollection; 'Rochester recalled as a passionate, Byronically moody man, his life blighted by the secret existence of the mad wife in the attic, she being little more than a figment of the 'gothic' imagination'. A



synopsis of Firdous Azim's highly influential post-colonialist study, *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, will, I hope, prove useful in arguing for this act of ever-continuous fascination with the canon and for the consequences of daring to meddle with its power. Aziz attempts to offer theoretical support to Jean Rhys, the author of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Drawing on Spivak's 1985 essay 'Three Women's Texts', in *Critical Inquiry* she deconstructs the manner in which a feminist text such as *Jane Eyre*, known for its anti-patriarchal stance, can, and does, function simultaneously as an intrinsic tool of other, larger, demands imposed by the discourses of imperialism and colonialism. Through a thematic analysis of Bronte's juvenilia, and primarily of its African element, Azim draws attention to *Jane Eyre's* association with English imperialism. In a rather reductionist manner, Azim states that 'the main theme running from Charlotte Bronte's juvenilia had been the establishment and consolidation of an English colony in West Africa' (1993:147). In her readings of Bronte's work, she goes on to argue quite convincingly, sometimes even passionately, for a reappraisal of the novels and of the juvenilia as an integral part of the project of imperialist displacement of colonised peoples and their cultures. Thus, she notes: 'Jane's protest at Rochester's comparison of herself with Turkish harem inmates, pointing to a hesitant and diffident recognition of the sexual oppression of all women and of the need for protest against such oppression, nonetheless places the educated Englishwoman in a position superior to her more unfortunate sisters, who are seen to need her guidance and to be infused with her recognition of their human status' (1993:182). Azim's contribution to the study of the so-called 'mistress texts' of Western feminism such as *Jane Eyre*, *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders* can hardly be diminished today, even in this canon-questioning era which we live in.

Nevertheless, the irony undermining Aziz's attempt disconcerts and poses even more questions than those that she sustains a focus on answering in her book. *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* opens by mentioning the dead-ends, the insurmountable difficulties, that can be encountered on attempting to change the 'English canon' within a Bangladeshi university (1993:1-5), but the book itself embraces precisely the sort of works that the 'canon sanctifies'. A strange exchange seems to have occurred at the level of colonial novels and their subsequent post-colonial study. For, if the colonial novel itself was bent on constructing the colonized Other into an object of both desire and loathing, now it appears that the colonial novel has become 'academic meat' or the desired quarry of postcolonial critical practices. From a postcolonial perspective this is a rather sad truth –

even the keenest anti-imperialists would have difficulties in building their own identity if they could not distance themselves from the well-hated but ever-present canonical texts, in a very interesting post-Orientalist manner. In returning time and again to those 'classics' of European literature which have been traditionally allied to the project of colonial expansion, postcolonialists merely continue to place the emphasis on the colonial rather than on the post-colonial. Jack Bristow, quoted on the back cover of *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* lavishly bestows his plaudits and declares Azim's book 'an exceptionally powerful contribution to post-colonial criticism ...a major intervention in debates about the epistemological underpinnings of the Western novel'. All this and even more may very well be true, but at the same time it is inescapable that *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* merely offers an-Other contribution to its object of critique, i.e. the Western novel. This is repeatedly put on a pedestal and depicted as worthier of academic consideration than the works of African, Caribbean or Asian authors. Definitely unwittingly but over-poweringly, books such as Azim's merely perpetuate the silencing and marginalization of more recent writing produced in the various territories 'visited' by the ever inquisitive European discoverers. For how effective is for us to know of Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Hanif Kureishi or Ngugi wa Thiong'o, if we are not encouraged to read their works? 'Young Indian girls' and 'African boys' too even today exclusively base their studies on a curriculum that - although apparently demolishing nineteenth century classics - in fact glorifies their influence. Many of today's postcolonialists, when given the opportunity to turn the tables and establish a whole new canon by promoting voices from the former colonies, prefer to engage in a rather mild, dialectical conversation with the English/Colonial novel. Aziz herself, towards the end of her book, exonerates colonial writers, making allowance for their 'race, gender, place' 'lapses': 'Literature, at one level, can be seen as history, as the fictions it erects reflect and express the stories and myths through which a nation and a culture choose to express themselves. The study of literature as history involves a study of the history of literature and as such is defined by the sites and modes of its dissemination'(1993:214). In other words, *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Shakespeare's *Tempest* and Aimee Cesaire's, *Robinson Crusoe* and Defoe are what their ages made them and it is only in this way that they should be looked at.

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* share the problematic connection between the canonical work and its modernist revision, calling forth a debate upon their either joined or separate influence in the literary landscape. This

present paper aims to ‘deconstruct’ this problematic connection by employing the analytic lenses of feminism, postcolonialism and modernism, so as to depict the viability of both novels and maybe of a different canon altogether.

The heroines of both novels share many traits of character and circumstance, such as childhood isolation, lack of orthodox parents, inexperience with the opposite gender, alienation from society, and, naturally, a marriage with Mr. Rochester. His power to elevate Jane’s status while degrading Antoinette’s is integral to Rhys’s implication that the latter’s madness has largely been the result of being locked up in the attic for ten years, and that it was entirely preventable. Apart from the similarities of traits and early life circumstances, Jean Rhys’s modernist revision operates with the notion of female-individuality and self-respect on a different basis from that of Charlotte Bronte, religion and colonialism being at the core of this distinction. Jane Eyre’s assertiveness stems from a deep nineteenth century faith in the Christian virtues of justice, fairness and duty whereas Antoinette’s gradual descent into madness and death are explained by the vision of the world as a rotting, pagan paradise, in conflict with everything Christianity imposes on women.

From the very beginning the ill-fated heroine of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is depicted as trapped between worlds of hating races, unable to survive in an immoral universe that wrongs her while righting the blacks of Jamaica, i.e. emancipating them. Antoinette attempts to endure what many other women do, such as an incompatible marriage, a family history tarred by mental insanity, but her struggle is doomed to failure as it is encompassed in a larger, unjust societal frame. Rhys portrays the Creole Antoinette in a complex relationship with the divided worlds of slaves and slave owners, blacks and whites, resulting in her experiencing conflicting feelings of hatred and pity, desires for acceptance and desires for separation. The account of physical and mental dislocation opens with Antoinette’s attempt to befriend Tia, a black girl of approximately the same age. Tia is Jane Eyre’s Helen Burns, with the most notable exception that it is not Christian resignation and endurance that she bestows on her friend, but violence and contempt. Tia literally shatters Antoinette’s dream of transplanting her own race into the black one, when she throws a rock that cuts the Creole girl’s face, causing her to bleed:

When I was close I saw the jugged stone in her hand but did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her

face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass (Rhys, 1999:45).

The act of violence is but a reflection of what the blacks had already done to Coulibri mansion - Antoinette's home, by setting it on fire. Strangely enough, Antoinette is unable to hate the other race, in spite of its destructive rage and runs to Tia the moment she escapes from the burning mansion: 'As I ran I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not.' (Rhys, 1999:45). The heroine's major source of her later emotional breakdown lies in Tia's rejection. The first traumatic moments lead to a very odd identification Antoinette-Tia which Rhys renders by means of looking glass imagery. Antoinette connects herself to a crying Tia thus symbolically connecting herself to both pain and suffering. Antoinette's face bleeds, and the idea of physical pain lies behind this, yet, at the same time she sees tears on Tia's face. Although the mirror stands for Antoinette and Tia's interchangeability in a world that makes its harsh demands on the girl representatives of both races, it is only Antoinette who suddenly realizes that she can no longer be comfortable with an identity that straddles such opposing worlds and embarks on a long journey doomed to failure. Rhys's novel, unlike other traditional (gothically inspired) romantic texts, demonstrates the futility of the attempts to deal with interruptions in the maturation process, as Antoinette's destiny is not a tale of recuperation or reparation and she is unable to build a sense of resistance to loss.

The mad woman in the attic, a stock character in 19th century Gothic fiction, is portrayed in terrifying but simplistic detail by Bronte, and called into question in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Jane Eyre accepts Rochester's version of Antoinette's sanity as she herself has heard of the screams and witnessed the psychotic episodes of arson and attempted murder for herself, and knows nothing of Bertha's personal history, but Rhys encourages the reader to question the origins of this madness by exploring how Antoinette came to lose her identity and sense of belonging.

Both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* dwell upon issues of justice and social fairness but the approach is different as the settings are different. Jamaica, the setting of much of Rhys's novel, is a lost Eden breathing social injustice and cultural tension. Nevertheless, the heroine can but feel affinity for this land mixed with a most painful sense of foreboding and destruction. Exotic and wild it may be, but not the kind of exoticism and wilderness reminiscent of the mythical island of Avalon, because the paradise is stained

with human evil doing: 'Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible—the tree of life grew here. But it had grown wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with that fresh living smell.' There are further Biblical references to the lost paradise: 'Our orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root.' (Rhys, 1999:45). The celebrated garden, therefore, is seen as having reached its nemesis as a result of a society built on human suffering. Whoever has the misfortune of still living in a dying place will, as a result, have to cope with the uncertainty of moral values, and lack of guidance. It is guidance that both Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway rely upon during hard times in their respective relationships with Mr. Rochester. Jane is safely seen away from Thornfield by a benign vision of a mother-figure embodied in the moon. Later on, faith supports her all the way to the place where she will be miraculously reunited with her cousins and even financially rewarded. Rhys re-works the very concept of such a benevolent spirituality and makes the mother-figure of Cristophine into an intermediary for the satisfaction of sexual bonding. As Humm (1994:63) states, 'Cristophine is a visible role model of the Other, self-made into self, in the full density of otherness with her powerful language and the medical power of obeah'. She links Antoinette to a more complex knowledge made up of magic, earth gods and Arawak history, but this knowledge does not facilitate her relation with Rochester since he comes from somewhere where there is an altogether different spiritual code. Antoinette does not employ Cristophine's powers to flee temptation but to evoke and succumb to it. 'Cristophine, if he, my husband, could come to me one night. Once more. I would make him love me' (Rhys, 1999:113). Making Rochester drunk with pleasure, playing on his senses, would ensure, in her opinion, the recuperation of true affection and love. The different strategies employed by the two heroines in order to secure the density of the man's feelings, morality and uprightness on the one hand and the so-called primitive allurements on the other, speak for the two fundamentally different worlds that the two characters inhabit. Both Charlotte Bronte and Jean Rhys are aware of the threat of awakening sexuality and the dangers it poses for a woman's well-being, if well-being means social and conjugal acceptance. The heroine's task is to destroy the mythic beast within, for the wages of passion are madness, disease and death, whereas virtues are repression and sublimation. Antoinette fails to do so and repulses her husband, while Jane, although consumed with desire rendered by Bronte via fire imagery, succeeds in

sublimating the physical into the spiritual and the domestic (learning foreign languages, cooking, etc.).

The marriage issue is differently worked upon by the two writers, since the reasons for marriage are different. Greed and profit dictate the Rochester-Antoinette union, whereas Jane and the same man-marriage is clearly depicted by Bronte as the natural coming together of two people who need each other for emotional and spiritual satisfaction. Antoinette's marriage literally and figuratively separates her from her homeland and serves only to drive her mad and to commit suicide on foreign soil, after she had been robbed of her very origins. In contrast, religious imagery and implications are at work within Bronte's book, allowing a morally redeemed Rochester and an enriched Jane to start anew, although in the shade of Ferndean and not in the opulent Thornfield. Theirs is a humble abode, sanctified into an Eden before the Fall by the power of the Maker and his mercy. The religious aspect so poignant in *Jane Eyre* is not possible in Rhys's novel because of a spirituality destroyed in the process of redirecting itself towards earthly possession and wealth. Cristophine voices the now common knowledge of a money-dictated marriage:

Everybody know that you marry her for her money and you take it all. And then you want to break her up, because you jealous of her. She is more better than you, she have better blood in her and she don't care for money – it's nothing for her (Rhys, 1999:152).

There is no redemption in Rhys's modernist novel for any or the characters involved, simply because the world they inhabit is chaotic, unfair and unordered, as far from Christian justice as any pagan realm. In this respect, human laws merely reinforce the chaos and point at the futility of any attempt to restore or create order and justice. Antoinette appeals to her own brother to save her from a marriage of slavery and deprivation but she is confronted with a sample of patriarchal implacability. Grace Poole, her guardian, recalls the scene:

I was in the room but I didn't hear all he said except 'I cannot interfere legally between yourself and your husband'. It was when he said 'legally' that you flew at him and when he twisted the knife out of your hand you bit him (Rhys, 1999:184).

The exoticism and the ‘otherness’ of the Caribbean, although amply employed by Rhys in order to emphasize Antoinette’s difficulty in positioning herself as either a colonial or colonized subject, are not the only means through which the novelist shapes the heroine’s road to failure. In fact, the final disintegration takes place in England, in this ‘cold cardboard house where I walk at night’ (Rhys, 1999:181). England is also the space of ‘otherness’ for Antoinette, as well as a locus breathing injustice and exploitation towards the colonies. Rhys, as a postcolonial author challenges the notion of England as a promoter of justice and fairness: “England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Exports coal, iron, wool” (Rhys, 1999:111). Rhys’s England is not Bronte’s, a space of reachable harmony and rewards, even after an existence of deprivations and frustrations (in the case of *Jane Eyre*), but the land of the colonizers and the patriarchal law-makers. In her capacity as a woman and one raised in a colony, of mixed blood and consequently inspiring the Victorian fear of miscegenation, Antoinette is doubly doomed once she reaches the soil of her husband’s native land.

Rhys has her heroine re-enact the death by fire that Bronte imagined for her. This can be read as a failed attempt to escape the canon, or, it may serve the purpose of emphasizing the impossibility of catharsis followed by happiness. Rhys’s universe is basically an unfair one, remedies fail to exist because of larger, structural imbalance. Obviously, the fire does not bring about a happy-ending for Antoinette, in fact she just acts as a messenger of freedom for Rochester and Jane to find their happiness in marriage, by solving the marital status of the former. However, the scapegoat atones for sins that are not hers and she does so in a world so corrupt that the sacrifice is barely noticed.

The narrative techniques in the two novels are also greatly contrasting. Whereas in *Jane Eyre* the heroine’s truths were never questioned and were offered in a traditional chronology, the structure of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is challenging the one-voice narrator and displaces perspectives, so as to achieve a fuller view. In a strictly modernist manner, flashbacks and internal monologues are woven into the novel’s structure, at a different pace, with the aim of creating a chaotic setting that can justify and sustain the equally chaotic character development, and also reinforce the moral relativity of the universe of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The absence of one direct narrator, the spokesman of at least his own truths, and the co-existence of juxtaposed voices trapped in isolation and alienation from self and others testify to the absence of any common standards by which the reader can

judge characters. In this sense, one can notice that even Rochester, although instrumental in Antoinette's death, is nevertheless granted a voice and a point of view, which further complicates culpabilities and final decisions on the characters' inner 'evil' or 'good' sides. Thorpe (1999:173) states that 'though it might be argued of her creator's earlier novels between the wars that Rhys was more concerned to do fictional justice rather to her women than their men, *Wide Sargasso Sea* stands out as her most balanced novel in its even-handed treatment of the sexes. Her inward presentation, in the second part of the novel, of Rochester's viewpoint - complex but not 'shadowy' - is unmatched in her earlier work, and its strength is enhanced by our contrasting recollections of *Jane Eyre*'.

Establishing a dialogue between texts and attempting to unfold layers of intertextuality is never a facile process, particularly when the 'influence' is explicitly acknowledged. In imagining a life for a marginal character and offering it a 'convincing' supplement or simulacrum, Rhys experimented in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the same manner as we find in John Gardner's *Grendel*, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Robert Browning's *Caliban upon Setebos*. It is impossible nowadays to see Jane Eyre as the cherished heroine of particularly female readers' youth. After perusing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jane Eyre acquires a new identity bestowed upon her by the mad Bertha glimpsing a pale girl, humming to herself as she wanders aimlessly through the house of a man who is responsible for the loss of identity of the gazer, i.e. Bertha Mason. In the same way, the 'vampire' mistress of fire, the beast unleashed at full moon, the avenging and merciless goddess of Thornfield destruction, becomes a different character whose actions are thoroughly justified in the light of our knowledge of her lonely youth and spurned love. Finally, the death by fire and the impotent, but nevertheless destructive, rage can no longer be seen as an act of self-immolation meant to glorify the triumphant societal integration of an English girl. Rather, it is a metaphor of 'light along the passage', as Rhys's heroine confesses in her last words, in the sense of helping with some difficult rereading ahead. As Rody (1999:218) states, "reading and resisting a nineteenth century novel, Rhys's text manifests early instances of the feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern sensibilities that have come to characterize late twentieth-century experimental fiction and fusing these revolutionary aesthetics, offers in its final section a revisionary paradigm for literary inheritance itself". That is not to say that 'escaping the canon' has been achieved nor that such a project is a realistic or useful one. Consequently, the act of 'burning down the house' seems to invite us, readers and critics alike, to re-evaluate our limits of gender,



race, class and assert a canon where Jane Eyres, Antoinettes and Rochesters can listen even when their voices have been maddened by silence.

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## **Metafictions of Corporeality**

**RECEDING BEHIND THE VEIL: ANGELA CARTER AND THE  
DISGUISE OF FEMININITY**

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Motto: “Am I fact? Or am I fiction? Am I what I know I  
am?”

Or am I what he thinks I am? “ (Angela Carter, *Nights at the  
Circus*, 1984: 290)

An emphasis on femininity and its construction is central to Angela Carter’s work, emerging from her desire to unveil “the nature of my reality as a woman, how that social fiction of my femininity was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing” (Carter, 1983:71). Among feminists it has long been established that “femininity” is a cultural construct: one is not born but rather becomes a woman, as de Beauvoir argues. Seen from this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists in imposing certain standards of femininity on all biological women, and making us believe that the chosen standards are natural. Patriarchy, in other words, implies that there is an essence of femaleness, called femininity, and that such an essence is biologically given. Femininity is then closely linked to the castrated female body, an image which provides a powerful physical correlative to the cultural assumption of women’s inferiority.

The castrated woman is the pivotal image in Freud’s narratives of sexual difference which is mainly based on the visibility of the difference: when he looks at the woman,

Freud apparently sees nothing. Therefore, the female difference is perceived as an absence or negation of the male norm. The visual perception of deficiency (the lack of penis) on the part of the little girl is the fundamental assumption behind the controversial Freudian theory of penis envy: the woman perceives herself as a castrated, a lesser man, and out of frustration develops her penis envy. The question which arises is: Why do men (including Freud) need to represent woman as castrated?

Feminist answers to this question begin with de Beauvoir's notion of woman as man's other: a man needs a defective other to confirm his own full manly reality. Luce Irigaray in "Another Cause – Castration" from *Speculum of the Other Woman* argues that Freud's theory of penis envy is a projection of the male fear of castration: as long as the woman is thought to envy the man his penis, he can rest secure in the knowledge that he must definitely have it. The function of women's envy is meant to bolster the male psyche: "To castrate the woman is to inscribe her in the law of the same desire, of desire for the same" (Irigaray, 1985:58). Woman is not only the Other, as de Beauvoir discovered, but is quite specifically man's Other: his negative or mirror-image. This is why Irigaray claims that patriarchal discourse situates woman outside representation: she is the dark continent, the negative required by the male subject's specularization. Irigaray also suggests that what is really at stake for Freud is the possibility that women envy not the penis, but the "omnipotence of gazing", the phallic gaze. As long as the master's scopophilia (i.e. "love of looking") remains satisfied, his domination is secure.

Jacques Lacan carries the logic of the other one step further. According to his theory, everyone is castrated, but masculinity is based on the denial of that fundamental lack. The individual subjectivity is constructed on castration: when a child enters language and the social order, it loses the direct relation to things, including mother's body, that it had had before signifiers intervened. The subject feels the loss of an original wholeness, imagined from the perspective of the symbolic order, as a lost unity with the maternal body. Although both male and female subjects are castrated, conventional masculinity is founded on a pretence of wholeness and on the idea of the phallus as a symbol of masculine power, authority and invulnerability.

In order to be the woman men desire, a woman must put on the masquerade of femininity; she must cast herself in the role of the castrated woman. This is her only possibility to appear desirable. In Lacanian terms, the veil constitutes the exemplary disguise. In a masculine symbolic order, "the veils represent the erasure of the female

subject, her transformation into a place-marker signifying lack...The veils' allure stems from their capacity to suggest an absence beneath – to suggest the nothing that supports the something of man” (Wyatt, 2000:72).

In Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, the central protagonist, Melanie, puts on the veils of femininity twice: once before her mirror when she dresses herself in the costumes pictured by various male artists, and again when her uncle Philip forces her to play a chiffon-draped Leda in a family show.

As the novel opens, Melanie is just coming into womanhood: “The summer she was fifteen, Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood. O, my America, my new found land. She embarked on a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself, clambering her own mountain ranges, penetrating the moist richness of her secret valleys, a psychological Cortez, da Gama or Mungo Park. For hours she stared at herself, naked, in the mirror of her wardrobe” (1). Melanie seems to discover herself for herself. She starts a journey into the uncharted territory of her own body, and this gives her the illusion that she is a subject in her own right. But the sequence of artists' names that follows – Titian, Renoir, Toulouse Lautrec – brings into focus the male hand, the male gaze, that direct and define Melanie even in the apparently private act of self-exploring.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger explains the close connection between woman and the gaze. “A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually” (1997:427). This determines not only the relations between men and women, but also the relations of women to themselves. Existing within a world defined by the male gaze and depending upon male approval for her welfare, a woman learns to see herself as men see her. Berger points out that the woman who watches herself being looked at cannot escape objectification. She becomes an object of vision: a sight.

Alone in her room, Melanie continues to think of herself as subject when she is already caught up in a system of representations that defines her as object: “A la Toulouse Lautrec, she dragged her hair sluttishly across her face and sat down in a chair with her legs apart and a bowl of water and a towel at her feet. She always felt particularly wicked when she posed for Lautrec” (1). In the act of posing, Melanie takes on the man's image of woman and presents that very image to his gaze, thus leaving no room for an autonomous

female subject. Carter throws her heroine into the same kind of crisis that Fevvers will later face in *Nights at the Circus*: “Am I fact? Or am I fiction? Am I what I know I am? Or what he thinks I am?” (290). But while Fevvers comes to understand that it is the others’ eyes that tell her who she is, Melanie has not come yet to this degree of maturity. Nor did Carter intend to portray Melanie as a woman of self-agency in this early stage of her literary creation.

Melanie accepts the culture’s representation of woman as her own because she believes it will give her power - the sexual power to attract and marry a romantic man who will take her to “honeymoon Cannes. Or Venice. Or Miami Beach” (2). It is only when she pictures her veiled self “gift-wrapped for a phantom lover” (2), that she acknowledges her subjection. As passive visual object offered to the man’s gaze, she is utterly dependent on his desire to invest her veils with charm and meaning. However, the charm attaches not to the woman, but to the veil: the woman herself recedes behind the identity of the veil which becomes a screen, a blank page on which the man can project his ideal of womanhood. Carter dramatizes here the construction of gender as presented by Teresa de Lauretis: gender is the product and process of both representation and self-representation. In this light, de Lauretis offers a suggestive example, showing that, when we fill in a form and “put a check mark on the little square next to the *F* on the form, we have officially entered the sex-gender system, the social relations of gender, and have become en-gendered as women: that is to say, not only do other people consider us females, but from that moment on *we* have been representing ourselves as women. ...we thought that we were marking the *F* on the form, in fact the *F* was marking itself on us.” (1987: 12)

Lacan’s theory of the gaze can shed light on how Melanie becomes a representation, how she is swallowed into the symbolic order. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan presents his schema of the visual field: when I look at an object an image comes between my gaze and the object; when I in turn become the object of the gaze, the gaze surveys me through an intervening screen. The first proposition clearly fits Melanie’s case, as she cannot see her reflection directly, but only in a form dictated by her culture. The second part of Lacan’s theory may seem inappropriate since Melanie is alone in her room and no one watches her. She, therefore, believes she is not looked at and this gives her the illusion of creating her own image in an autonomous space. But Lacan makes a clear distinction between the gaze and any specific eye, arguing that we are objects of the gaze even when no one else is present. The gaze is all around us since we

exist in a visual field. Melanie is alone but at the same time she is subject to the world's gaze that fits her into a screen of cultural images. When she imagines that she is the only possessor of the gaze, Melanie is clearly deluded: "In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture" (Lacan, 198:106). If we are fit into a frame of pre-existing images, Lacan argues, we find ourselves under a pressure to adopt those images. This is precisely what Melanie does when she poses for Lautrec, Cranach, the Pre-Raphaelites.

Lacan's notion of the mirror stage is also useful in considering *The Magic Toyshop*. According to Lacan, the child assumes as his own identity, the unified body image in the mirror. In Carter's fiction the mirror is a recurring theme. The author insists that our self-images are shaped by already determined projections and reflections. Melanie is caught in the Lacanian mirror-stage and accepts the icon in the mirror as her own self-image. In a final veiling, boastfully wearing her mother's wedding dress, Melanie exuberantly declares that she was the beautiful girl in the mirror: "She opened her mother's wardrobe and inspected herself in the long mirror. She was still a beautiful girl. She went back to her own room and looked at herself again in her own mirror to see if that said different but, again, she was beautiful. Moonlight, white satin, roses. A bride" (16). In this way, Melanie acknowledges her function as a cultural sign in a symbolic system not of her own making. The wedding dress suggests the alienation of woman into a symbol, and becomes a marker of femininity in Carter's novels: "It is the underlying male structure, the exchange of women between men, that gives the wedding dress its meaning: while a woman may think her wedding dress celebrates her power – the beauty and virtue that have secured her a husband - the white of the wedding dress refers to male interests only, signifying that the woman is unexchanged, unused, and so keeps her full value as commodity, as the gift that ratifies the bond between the father who gives her and the husband who takes her." (Wyatt, 2000:81). Melanie is fascinated by the symbolic and virginal white that shines virtuously in the satin, the fragile tulle or the rose petals.

Visually integrated into the cultural screen, Melanie leaves the mirror stage not as subject as she was tempted to believe, but as object of the gaze. Veiled as a bride, she offers herself as spectacle to the world's gaze: "*Look at me!* she cried to the apple tree as it fattened its placid fruit in the country silence of the night. *Look at me!* she cried passionately to the pumpkin moon" (16, my emphasis).

Melanie has, therefore, already integrated her cultural identity as object, well before she acts out Uncle Philip's script. Carter further complicates the psychoanalytic model of a femininity produced largely through father-daughter relations by connecting Uncle Philip's ideal of femininity as veiled nothingness to the representation of women in Western art and myth.

*The Magic Toyshop*, despite its touches of the fantastic and macabre, remains a family novel. Carter investigates the reproduction of male supremacist structures in the arena of the family. The particular household Carter treats belongs to the despotic Uncle Philip. Melanie and her little sister are forced to move to his house when their parents are killed in an air crash. Uncle Philip is a tyrannical master, demanding total obedience from his wife Margaret, suggestively portrayed as dumb, her younger brothers Finn and Francie, and Melanie herself. When not making toys or bullying his relatives, he stages performances in his puppet theatre. Melanie is recruited against her will to play a part in her uncle's entertainment, being assigned the typically feminine roles of nymph and victim of rape. In this adoptive family, Melanie slips into the position of daughter to Uncle Philip, and will thus go through the daughter's oedipal crisis.

The play *Leda and the Swan* staged by Uncle Philip fulfills the function of the oedipal stage, organizing Melanie's sexuality in accordance with her gender role. According to Nancy Chodorow, it is the father who is the agent of Melanie's transformation from active girl to woman-as-object. Fathers are generally absent or peripheral figures in early infancy and appear more centrally in the child's life during secondary socialization. Therefore, they are seen as separate people, as subjects in their own right. Once males begin to matter to the infant, the process of individuation will be developed, so that the child can perceive others (especially males) as subjects without threat to its own sense of sensibility.

Dressed as Leda, in a white chiffon costume designed by Uncle Philip, Melanie is utterly dependent on his voice for direction: "She halted, at a loss what to do next...She prayed for a clue. Uncle Philip read out: 'Leda attempts to flee her heavenly visitant but his beauty and majesty bear her to the ground'." (165-166). The swan to which Melanie will fall prey "was nothing like the wild, phallic bird of her imaginings. It was dumpy and homely and eccentric. She nearly laughed again to see its lumbering process." (165). This grotesque parody of a swan is however effective, holding the woman to her role within the male imaginary. And this role is precisely that of passive, silent object. Melanie's laughter



is snuffed out by the unexpected violence of the rape: “The swan made a lumpish jump forward and settled on her loins. She thrust with all her force to get rid of it but the wings came down all around her...The gilded beak dug deeply into the soft flesh. She screamed...The obscene swan had mounted her. She screamed again...After a gap of consciousness, she...looked around for her swan.” (167).

The act of rape retains the psychological effects so often underlined by feminists: it is not only a physical violation, but a denial of the victim’s agency and self-determination. In *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Susan Brownmiller argues that it is sexual violence, specifically rape, which enables men to control women. All women are afflicted by rape because the threat of rape subordinates women and therefore benefits all men implicitly. In Brownmiller’s view, rape stems not from a momentary loss of individual control, but is the act which links biological male-constructed aggression and patriarchy.

In *The Magic Toyshop*, Carter uses rape as a metaphor for the psychic castration of a young girl. In this way, Carter rejects Freud’s theory that the recognition of her anatomical lack persuades a girl to regard herself as “inferior”, and argues, instead, that oedipal socialization itself is a castrating process that strips a girl of her active impulses and subjectivity, reducing her to the feminine object required by a patriarchal social order. The play teaches Melanie precisely this: to define herself as object. “All her laughter was snuffed out. She was hallucinated; she felt herself not herself, wrenched from her own personality, watching this whole fantasy from another place; and, in this staged fantasy, anything was possible.” (166). Melanie is now the girl seen from outside, not from a subjective centre, but from a place that reminds the site of the male gaze. Once again she finds herself in the scopic field, being watched and watching herself being turned into an object of the gaze.

Even when the play is over, Melanie retains the consciousness of an object: “The cake seemed extremely exotic and unlikely, a figment of the imagination. She ate her slice but tasted nothing. The company around the tea-table was as distorted and alien as its miniature in the witch-ball.” (168). There is only one subject now, Uncle Philip, who organizes reality and places her as an object in his world. He imposes silence all around him, as a symbol of his mastering the household and his relatives: “His silence had bulk, a height and a weight. It reached from here to the sky. It filled the room. He was heavy as Saturn. She ate at the same table as this elemental silence which could crush you to nothing.” (168).

The oedipal stage which transforms an active girl into a speechless object is always dictated by the needs of a male-dominated social system. But the social institution imposes its laws and constraints through the private space of the family. Therefore, gender is a social construct produced in the context of identifications and values learned through relationships within the family. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Carter emphasizes the close connection between the two spaces: family and culture, by superimposing the myth of Leda and the Swan on Melanie's oedipal initiation. The rape of Leda represents a founding moment of Western civilization, since this rape engendered Helen for whom the Trojan War started, thus informing Homer's *Iliad*, the master epic of Western tradition. Rape is, therefore, a basic trope of our cultural heritage. Thus, Yeats' modernist update of *Leda and the Swan* celebrates rape as an act of power and beauty which again reduces the woman to a body part: her loosening thighs unable to escape the feathered glory of the Swan. Carter's clumsy, grotesque swan comes as a parody of patriarchy and mythmakers who disguise the principle of male domination into grandiose poetry. If Yeats mystifies rape as a moment of divine transcendence, Carter shows it to be an act of pure male violence.

Uncle Philip's theatre of gender gives shape to the messages about womanhood that Melanie gets from the artists of femininity for whom she poses in the solitude of her room. If during the mirror scene, Melanie is misled to believe that dressing provocatively gives a young woman sexual power and thus a sense of agency and free-will, Uncle Philip's dramatization offers a more realistic assessment of the veil's power. The rape of Leda clearly illustrates the power relations that patriarchal culture misrepresents as love relations. Since rape is a political instrument of oppression that threatens all women, Uncle Philip enacts rape to teach Melanie her innate subordinate role. Negated as active subject, Melanie is instructed, against her will, in the meaning of the veils. A woman exists only veiled, she recedes behind adornment, being absence, nothingness, void, as inconsistent as the veil itself.

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**NARRATING THE NERVOUS, BULIMIC BODY-TEXT IN ANGELA  
CARTER'S *THE PASSION OF NEW EVE***

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**The Passion of New Eve: a confusing space of transformation**

Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, published in 1977, is an "in-between text," a turning-point, a confusing space of transformation, that marks a gradual yet radical change in the Carterian corpus. After her realistic Bristol Trilogy (*Shadow Dance*, *Several*

*Perceptions, Love*), static texts, called mausoleum-like cabinets of curiosities by Lorna Sage (Sage 1994b:11), the rigid science-fictional dystopia, *Heroes and Villains* and the violent surrealist collage of *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Carter seems to turn decisively towards joyously turbulent, fantastic, picaresque allegorical adventures, energetic speculative fictions vitalized by a polyphonic magical realist voice—a voice that becomes more and more overtly charged with an ironic ideology of criticism and a feminist politics.

Carter's novels, in their chronological succession, shift gradually from a static gloomy realism to a dynamic picaresque magical realism, from ruthless heroes to witty heroines, from obsession with patriarchs to the celebration of daughters, and as Paulina Palmer claims, from coded mannequin to bird woman, from femininity as masochist entrapment to femininity as feminist self-realization (Palmer, 1984). In her "Notes from the Front Line" Carter describes *The Passion of New Eve* as an "anti-mythic novel [...] conceived as a feminist tract about the social creation of femininity" (Carter, 1983:71), while in an interview with John Haffenden she calls it "a careful and elaborate discussion of femininity as a commodity, [...] as an illusion" (Haffenden, 86) - and indeed the majority of critics praise the novel for being one of if not *the* most effective of Carter's feminist political attempts.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, the in-between novel can be interpreted as a re-enactment of the crucial turn in Carter's literary career, her transformation from what she calls in her "Notes from the Front Line" "a male impersonator" (Carter, 1983: 70) into a politically self-conscious woman-writer.

Yet, most strangely, the novel completely lacks the celebratory tone of Carter's later feminist novels, and to me seems more of a dark vision, "a bitter and quite uncomfortable book to read," or at most a "piece of black comedy" (as Carter herself describes the novel (Haffenden, 86). Therefore, in my view, the novel does not lend itself to a fully triumphant feminist reading. The text remains fuelled by the female body, yet both text and body are marked by pain, in Christina Britzolakis's words, "locked into a regressive circulation of literary metaphors of fatal, apparitional, mechanical femininity" forged by patriarchy (Britzolakis, 50).

The aim of my paper is reveal that *The Passion of New Eve* is a painfully passionate text fuelled by the grotesquely nervous feminine body marked by pain. I wish to highlight that as the novel unveils the grotesque agony of "becoming woman," the transitional polyphonic text is cruelly torn apart, painfully shattered into pieces by contradictory yet

fatally-embracing narrative voices: male impersonator, feminist, feminine, feminized transvestite, transsexual autobiographical, or transgender voices “become legion” so as to enact the confusion of the effeminate psychosomatic symptoms of body dysmorphia and to model the painful yet revelatory passion of the decomposing feminine body-text.

**A plot of pain. A “male impersonator’s” writing or a “feminist tract about the social fiction of femininity”**

The first reading discloses the novel as a piece of “male impersonator’s” writing by a woman-writer “suffering a degree of colonialisation of the mind” positing the masculinist point of view as a general one (Carter, 1983: 70). The story ruthlessly faces readers with perplexingly heartless protagonists lost in the chaotic scenes, the ill-logic and the ferocious scenarios of a post-apocalyptic, hellish world, and senselessly suffering in a picaresque journey that proves to be the vicious circle of a plot of pain, which inflicts particular torments on feminine characters. The novel’s very first sentence introduces to us the male protagonist, Evelyn, a young English professor with “perfectly normal” (9)<sup>2</sup> masculine desires and sexual prehistory: “The last night I spent in London, I took some girl or other to the movies and, through her mediation, I paid you a little tribute of spermatozoa, Tristessa”(5)—admits Evelyn, and continues his macho confessions by recalling how he likes to amuse himself by tying a girl to a bed before copulating with her, and how he enjoys making a nameless girl “get to her knees in the dark on the dirty floor of the cinema, among the cigarette ends and empty potato crisp bags and trodden orangeade containers, and suck[... him] off” while with necrophiliac arousal, and all the scopophiliac pleasure of his objectifying male gaze, with his sadism and fetishism satisfied he watches on the screen the “exquisite suffering”, the “emblematic despair” and the “wounds of martyrdom” of Tristessa, the ideal perfection of femininity, the adored movie star ravishing all male spectators with her “magic and passionate sorrow” and performance of pain (8-9). Evelyn, on arriving in America, naturally finds a sadistic pleasure in the chaos of dissolution embodied for him by the irresistibly luring, hyper-feminine Leilah, whom he cruelly denigrates, sexually abuses and abandons in the apocalyptic city to flee to the desert, willing to find there *himself*. Ironically, a group of militant feminist Amazons capture Evelyn and take revenge on him for his excessive, sadistic, misogynistic masculinity by granting him with *herself*. In the women’s city of Beulah, the self-made fertility goddess and mad scientist, Mother ritually rapes, castrates and surgically

transforms Evelyn in an elaborate sex change operation into a perfect woman, New Eve, designed as bearer of the New Messiah of Anti-Thesis. Though Eve escapes from Beulah, from then on she is doomed to face and identify with cruelly grotesque embodiments of femininity and must experience the pains of becoming a woman himself/herself. Castrated, raped, abused, humiliated, battered, exploited, persecuted on his/her voyage, New Eve is finally fecundated with a child by Tristessa, who turns out to be a biologically male cross-dressing man, a transvestite merely performing in drag the illusory essence of Woman, and by embodying his “ineradicable male” desires (173), propagating the patriarchal myth of idealized masochistic femininity. New Eve is always on the run in her picaresque journey, yet, being more and more violently interpellated as a feminine subject, she is constantly entrapped in narratives of victimization. She witnesses phallogocentric fictions of femininity - those of the Femme Fatale, the Angel in the House, the Mother, the Virgin and the Enigma - which each prove to be theoretically or practically damaging for female anatomy, agency and authorship in turn. *The Passion of New Eve* ruthlessly faces and disfigures its heroines with these inevitable yet insupportable communal myths, revealing them as mean, mutilating and meaningless by the multiplication of ruined, muted and grotesque feminine bodies. Thus, the novel narrates a story of passion in a gender-sensitive reinterpretation of the religious sense of the word: it is a novel on the passion of becoming woman. It demonstrates, *à la* Simone de Beauvoir, that one is not born but is rather painfully forged into a woman, by being “always already” ideologically framed icon-like by limiting patriarchal representations, and being culturally trapped by a social fiction of femininity associating her with suffering corporeality.

Yet, in spite of all the feminine sufferings and painfully grotesque female embodiments revealed in the novel, *The Passion of New Eve* can nevertheless be intended and interpreted as an “anti-mythic novel[...]conceived as a feminist tract” (Carter, 1983: 71), a metafiction on mutilating myths of femininity. The fundamental paradox of metafiction is that it has to paraphrase the representations, invoke the ideologies and repeat the very fossilized myths it aims to subvert. Accordingly, what I call *corporeal metafiction* is a genre of writing that seeks to analyze the text of the body and the body of texts, and undertakes to problematize the social-discursive construction, the ideological inscription of individual feminine *bodies* and of collective *corpuses* of canonized women’s literature. To accomplish this, on the one hand, it must necessarily replicate the ideologically prescribed, hierarchically-dichotomically engendered, paradoxically feminized subjectivity “written

on the female body” by patriarchal technologies of power, and, on the other hand, it must retell a narrative according to the traditional codes of “always already engendered” (see Butler, 1990) feminine meaning formation and text production, while managing at the same time to remain within the frames of stereotypical representations of femininity and stereotypically feminine representations. In my view, *The Passion of New Eve* is an example *par excellence* of corporeal metafiction as its aim is to exploit the feminist tactic of speaking in quotation marks, of rehearsing mean, muting and mutilating social fictions of femininity in order to *reveal* them as patriarchally inevitable, yet for a woman utterly unacceptable, and in order to *unveil* and question the conventional incompatibility of femininity/authorship/authority/subjectivity.

Carter’s strategy of “subversion from within,” her version of feminism based on repetition, on “putting new wine in old bottles and in some cases old wine in new bottles” (Carter, 1983: 76) seems to re-emerge as a recent trend in contemporary feminist thought. When Teresa De Lauretis provides a gender-sensitive re-reading of Foucauldian technologies of power, and reveals the technologies of gender, “ingendering,” “masculinization,” “desexualization” (De Lauretis, 1987:1-30) as inevitable phallogocentric ideological manipulations, she calls attention to the feminist potentials of an internal revision, and highlights the importance of the feminine subject’s “recognition of misrecognition”. De Lauretis, like Carter, maps out feminine roles and gendered identity as a series of other, minority dispositions, determined by sexuality, corporeality, desires and abjection, remaining forever impossible (as subjects) because of their marginal positioning in a phallogocentric (his)story. This mythic Woman is excluded from the active subject position, yet the embodied difference of the othered femininity is necessary for the constitution of the empowered masculine subject. Hence the concept of *feminine-subject*<sup>3</sup> becomes a paradox, since She is caught inside the system of representation, society, but always only as the outside of it. The De Lauretisan argumentation coincides with the Carterian narrative strategy: the repetition of arche-images of patriarchal visual mythology responsible for the cultural construction of *femininity* reveals the artificial constructedness of gender, and therefore enables women readers to inspect their internalization of images of femininity, to recognize their misrecognition as *feminine-subjects* interpellated by phallogocentric technologies of power. De Lauretis highlights that the female subject is always positioned paradoxically, being simultaneously addressed as “a-woman” embodying a singular identity in its plural, heterogeneous and uncontrollable bodily reality and as



“Woman” symbolizing the essential myth of homogeneous subjection and of ideologically constituted universal femininity. She encourages women to have a “view from elsewhere,” to do critical re-vision, gaining insight to their alternative, heterogeneous selves beyond the denaturalized, defamiliarized, deconstructed icons of femininity. (De Lauretis, 1987:124) In this process, the body is both *in* ideology, seemingly repeating the same, gendered patriarchal representations of women, and/yet *beyond* ideology, due to the political strategy of repetition with a difference, offering a demythologizing, ironic, critical metatext on society. Performing a subversion *from within* the system to be subverted so as to establish woman’s existence as a positive experience, staying and starting *from within* means the exposure of the masculine efforts to keep “her” *outside*, so the relocation of her *inside* as starting point institutes already a form of subversion. The violent hierarchy of binaries, the heterosexual gender asymmetry are destabilized *from the inside* by using the transgressive potential of woman’s paradoxical positioning itself, by starting out from a peripheral, antagonistic ~~feminine subjectivity~~ (versus feminine subjection).<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, *The Passion of New Eve* should be intended and interpreted as a feminist tract, despite/due to building the narrative on the very “process of physical pain and degradation that Eve undergoes in her apprenticeship as a woman” (Carter, 1998:592), since the text enhances the recognition of misrecognition of the paradoxically positioned feminine subject. Indeed, Carter’s grotesque suffering female bodies problematize the body discipline, a fundamental Foucauldian technology of biopower, that is, according to feminist critics, responsible for the ideological corporeal constitution of femininity via a prescriptive and painful stylization, representation and performance of the body conforming to the gender norms. Carter’s novel unveils how Western culture’s obsessive gaze always already outlines the female body antagonistically: as object of scopophilic desire and enigmatic vessel of life and death, as sublime essence of beauty and abjectified, uncanny other against which the speaking subject can define himself, as tempting and threatening, sacred and profane, corporeality associated with a femininity that remains an unresolved paradox. New Eve’s passion for becoming woman reveals how Western societies interpellate the female body as simultaneously idealized *and* normativized, decorporealized aestheticized *and* pathologically abjectified, eroticized *and* asceticized, marked by visibility as a real simulacrum in a society of spectacle *and* repressed, silenced, hidden as taboo in a society of *scientia sexualis* (see Foucault, 1978). The aim is to disclose the very process of how phallogocentric technologies of power produce, via the

impossible expectations of the engendered body discipline, grotesque female bodies. Readers are faced with the shameful scenario how the ideologically interpellated, feminized woman voluntarily carves painful marks of her gender upon her own body by internalizing icons of femininity under the constant, panoptical surveillance of the Foucauldian Eye of the Power (Foucault 1980), conforming to the expectations of the given social, cultural, historical era. The stages of New Eve's passion, scenes from demystified myths, ruthlessly represent how Woman's heels or toes are cut off to make her feet fit into the prince's shoes, to conform to his desires, how Woman is killed into the perfect mirror image where the looking glass speaks up in a male voice to tell "who in this land is the fairest of all," or how Woman is squeezed into the S size pink corset of the idealized yet normative Barbie doll, or into the iron maiden of beauty myth, concomitant with the constitution of femininity in Naomi Wolf's view (Wolf, 1991).

As I have tried to demonstrate above, despite its dwelling in images of grotesque embodiments of suffering femininity, *The Passion of New Eve* certainly lends itself to a reading which interprets the text as an internally subversive "feminist manifesto" enabling the "recognition of misrecognition" via a relentless ideology-criticism. This is all the more so, if we consider the fact that the novel is structured as a retrospective autobiographical narrative, in which the masculine Evelyn looking at women is from the very beginning, always already looked at by the "feminized" Eve looking back on him(self). No matter how misogynist, male chauvinistic the narrative and its images seem to turn, it is always easy to detect an ironic woman's voice complementing the macho confessions.<sup>5</sup> Eve's ventriloquist, ironic, feminist voice within Evelyn's macho confessions is certainly powerful enough to make readers smile (see Ward Jouve's account on her son's reading the novel). Yet, "defeating every pornographic expectation from male readers" (Ward Jouve, 1994:142), defamiliarizing the phallogocentric imagery and destabilizing the patriarchal narrative, still does not render, in this case, the novel fully comic, celebratory or feminist-wise satisfying. In my view, the reader can never fully forget about the actual female suffering and its direct material consequences involved in the text. Nevertheless, as I have pointed out in my introduction, despite its sado-masochistic tendencies, critics tend to praise Carter's self-conscious feminist project. Lorna Sage convincingly claims that Carter's story of the "woman born out of a man's body" reflects not only the woman-writer Carter's hardships of "coming out" as a feminist, but also provides a more general "allegory of the painful process by which the 1970s women's movement had to carve out

its own identity from the unisex mould of 1960s radical politics” (Sage, 1994a:35). But does *The Passion of New Eve*’s writer really succeed in leaving her “male impersonator” self behind, can she carve out an own feminist identity from the unisex mould, and is her feminist manifesto’s political project truly that self-consciously structured and reassuringly coherent?

My aim in what follows is to show, that in *The Passion of New Eve* the narrative seems to enact the principal paradox of metafiction, irony and the “transgressive reinscription” (see Dollimore,1991) of the internally subversive, demythologizing feminism it applies. Having it both ways, like the subversion from within the system to be subverted, here signifies an uncertainty, a vertiginous balancing in the void of nowhere without location, safety or stakes—leading to painful disillusion. Instead of exploiting the joyous, playful, celebratory potential of polysemy and polyphony, the numerous contradictory narrative voices seem to tear the text apart in a chaos where the dissolution of the shattered narrative reflects semiotized the painful fragmentation-decomposition of grotesque female bodies.

**Narrating a nervous bulimic body-text. *The Passion of New Eve* as a pathologically polyphonic text semiotizing female body dysmorphia**

As I have demonstrated, the *The Passion of New Eve* enacts the construction of femininity as the victimization of women, recalling the suffering inflicted on the feminized subject by the ideological technologies of gender, surfacing in violent body disciplines of the beauty myth, carving contradictory expectations on the paradoxically and painfully interpellated feminine subjectivity/corporeality. Paradoxically, in our post-industrialist, capitalist consumer cultures of mass production, societies of over-abundance, the constantly displayed, eroticized, excessively hedonistic, voracious, gluttonous female corporeality is simultaneously (dis)placed associated with cruelly asceticized, diminished, docile feminine bodies, tormented by the normalizing disciplines of the diet-, fitness-, cosmetic-, fashion-, plastic surgical-, pornographic- and beauty industries. As Naomi Wolf and Susan Bordo, among other materialist feminist theoreticians stress, beauty industries reinforce the social fiction of femininity by prescribing painful bodily modifications: binding, pushing, pressing, deforming, plucking, shaving, painting, dyeing, deodorizing, limiting, fasting, surgically manipulating, working out the female body serve to control its shape, weight, size, looks and materiality. This cruel over-all body management

guarantees women's habituation to external regulation, subjection and transformation, and assures their interiorization of "self-improvement" and self-discipline in the service of the patriarchally defined norm, while it enhances the "memorizing on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, insufficiency, of never being good enough, [via] practices of femininity that may lead us at the farthest extremes to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death" (Bordo, 1993: 166). In my view, *The Passion of New Eve* is an extraordinary text, since its self-contradictory narrative voices verbalize the direct material consequences of the painful social construction of femininity, via enacting the psychosomatic symptoms of the neuroticized second sex(text), semiotizing female body dysmorphia and narrating a nervous bulimic body-text.

### **Distorted bodies, vacillating subjectivities**

Before examining Carter's "symptomatic writing," it is essential to provide an overview of female body dysmorphia in general. Female body dysmorphia, also known as body image distortion syndrome (BIDS) surfaces in symptoms of eating disorders of psychosomatic illnesses as anorexia- and bulimia nervosa. This psychosis, dangerously inflicting corporeality, usually appears in young female patients, seriously frustrated by social expectations of femininity associated with slimness and eternal beauty. The patient, unable to conceive her objective body image, tormented by unrealistic phantasmagorias of her irreducibly obese corporeality, feels a compulsion to over-eat elicited by obsessive thoughts about the desired food that paradoxically also provokes an emotional, psychic disgust in her. The patient becomes an addict of "binge and purge," a compulsive devouring and disgorging of food, a recurring over-eating followed by (spontaneously or consciously produced) vomiting or diarrhea, which result in serious digestive disorders, a drastic loss of weight at accelerated speed in excessive amounts, and may even lead to death. (Interestingly, Carter herself, as a teenager at odds with the social, corporeal expectations of femininity, had also suffered from anorexia nervosa (Sage, 1994a:24).<sup>6</sup>)

Relying on Helen M. Malson's and Susan Bordo's <sup>7</sup> descriptions of the disease, I would like to argue, that the major characteristic of the anorexic and particularly the alternatively devouring *and* disgorging bulimic patient is a painful oscillation between the binary gender (op)positions. (1) On the one hand, drastically influenced by the patriarchal beauty myth, she *over-internalizes* the traditional masculine ideal of slender, suffering *femininity*, while, on the other hand she wishes to compensate for her lack of status and

power in society, to gain empowerment, by *becoming masculinized*, synonymous with the agency of autonomous subjectivity. Hers is a triumph of the *masculinized* mind and the will over the ruthlessly controlled, *femininized* body. (2) On the one hand, her disgust of disorderly fat, of erupting stomach, unwanted protuberances and excess flesh signals her *disgust of traditional femininity* confined to domestic sphere and maternal nurturing. Her self-starvation, purging, self-purifying vomiting marks an *attempt to disappear as feminine excess*, to reach a complete disembodiment, a *dematerialization* of the threatening and the traditionally over-eroticized *feminine body*. The cessation of such female corporeal functions as menstruation and the appearance of masculine bodily attributes as facial hair is often heralded as a *triumph of masculine self-management, eliminating the pathological, fragile, emotional aspects of femininity* and gaining complete mastery of the self. In the meanwhile, on the other hand, she *embodies exaggerated stereotypical feminine traits* in an unlimited excess, and becomes a caricature of the standardized visual image of the norm of feminine hyper-slenderness, “a virtual, though tragic parody of 20<sup>th</sup> century constructions of femininity” (Bordo,1993:170). (3) On the one hand, the patient obsessively *incorporates the stereotype of femininity as physical and emotional nurturer of others*. She develops a totally other-oriented emotional economy, suppresses her own desires for self-nurturance, hunger, independence, and considers self-feeding as greedy and perversely excessive via her strict control of female appetite. On the other hand, her compulsive over-eating marks her female hunger for public power, independence, sexual gratification, public space, autonomous will. Her insatiable voracity, her unrestrained consumption *stages exactly the stereotypically uncontrollable female excess*, uncontained desire, combined with all-wanting determination, and unbound free will.

The bulimic’s traumatic vacillation between compulsive over-eating and purifying vomiting, between insatiable appetite and ascetic self-starvation, between bingeing and purging, devouring and disgorging marks the paradoxically positioned feminine subject’s vertiginous balancing between the socially, culturally available gender positions, between the ideologically prescribed passive or excessive femininities and the always already masculinized autonomous self-mastering subjectivity.

### **Cannibalistic discourses, dissonant voices**

This pathological performance of this painful oscillation of the engendered subject in crisis, enacted by the bulimic body is ingeniously semioticized in the Carterian narrative

via the wavering contradictory narrative voices, disharmonious stereotypically feminine or masculine discourses constantly disagreeing with each other in the cacophonous textual chaos of the transsexual autobiographic(ation)al narrative. Thus, in *The Passion of New Eve*, the troublingly antagonistic palimpsest of the male impersonator's story and the feminist manifesto, the dissonant duo of the extremely effeminate transvestite and the ineradicably masculinist cross-dresser, the strange narrative duality of the "feminine" narrative convulsions and flows of the hectic hysteric and the stuttering pseudo-objective over-verbalization of the male hypochondriac meet (and diverge) in a pluri-dimensional collage. Moreover, the hybrid mixture of different genres, styles and narratives (combining magical realism, picaresque adventure, feminine romance, masculine pornography, Hollywood style mythomania and postmodern demythologization, fairy-tale fantasy, science-fiction dystopia, female Gothic, *Bildungsroman* and fictional autobiography) contribute to the fatal (de)composition of a pathologically polyphonic text. Contradictory narrative voices and cannibalistic cross-gender discourses violate, interrupt, abort each other in a shattered narrative that models the irresolvable conflict of nervous feminine subjectivity and the painful dissolution of the bulimic body.

#### **A dissonant duo or a transgender narrative?**

Eve/lyn's narrative questions the gender identity of the autobiographically narrated self, and reflects what Heather L. Johnson calls a "post-operative transsexual antagonism" (Johnson, 1997) of a multiply gendered writing subject, to (de)form a pluri-gendered narrative of this fictional post-transsexual subject, which never succeeds in providing a playful, celebratory, feminist-wise fully satisfactory (sub)version of existing binary gender categories and narrative possibilities. Instead of offering harmonic alternatives via a liberatory and reassuring polyphony of complementary or interchangeable voices, Carter's piece of transgender literature<sup>8</sup> remains stuck within a textual/sexual chaos. A cacophonous duo of dissonant voices from the radically stereotyped gender poles, the extremely effeminate transvestite's and the ineradicably masculinist cross-dresser's narrative voices constantly interrupt, violate, and abort each other, shattering the text painfully into pieces—and thus echo the painful gender trouble of the body dysmorphia patient.

Although, Johnson claims that Tristessa's transvestite narrative is a "lost history" engulfed by the "fully declared presence" of Eve/lyn's first person transsexual narrative constituting the novel (Johnson: 175), I think that none of the voices is guaranteed a "fully

declared presence” in the text, as the extremely effeminate transvestite voice decisively re- and re-emerges to infect, erase and take over the ineradicably masculinist cross-dresser’s narrative, only to be annihilated, overwritten violently in its turn. Eve/lyn’s reminiscences are repetitively turned into a Tristessian “symbolic autobiography in arabesques of kitsch and hyperbole” (5), filled with “her incomparable tears and every kitsch excess of the mode of femininity” (71), an over effeminate transvestite narrative characterized by uncertainty and illusions (“That night I stayed in a hotel that caught fire in the early hours of the morning—or, rather seemed to have caught fire, for there was all the appearance of fire.” (11)), emotionality and histrionic sentimentality (“Tristessa. Enigma. Illusion. Woman? Ah!” (6)), catachretic illogic and hyperbolic excess (see over-accumulation of metaphors in epitaphs: Leilah is fox, bird, racehorse, nymph, siren and succubus (18-27), Mother is Kali, Maria, Aphrodite, Jocasta, Danae, Alphito, Demeter, while Tristessa is Madeline Usher, Carmen, Juliet, Dido, Lazarus and Ezekiel among others). The engendered concept of this *écriture féminine* is symbolized by Tristessa’s writing/reading in glass tears (“I can read tears. They map our destiny when they flow down the face. I perform divinations by means of tears, I let my glass flow the same way, at random, in sorrow. I let the glass form the pattern of my tears and then I consult the augury and make my own memorials” (143)). Her glass tears are ruthlessly crushed to pieces by the hyper-masculine, misogynist Zero penetrating Tristessa’s glass house to destroy it—just as the recurring, ineradicably masculine cross-dresser’s voice shatters the over-effeminate narrative voice. The male impersonator in the feminine writing self, the ineradicably masculine Evelyn in New Eve is never fully eliminated from the narrative. As I have demonstrated, the text constantly enacts the construction of femininity as victimization of women and finds the sadistic pleasure of the male gaze (even) in the extreme chaos of her (own) dissolution (“the plastic surgery that turned me into my own diminutive, Eve, the shortened form of Evelyn[...]I had become my own masturbatory fantasy[...]the cock in my head, still, twitched at the sight of myself” (75)). The narrative voice oftentimes turns rational, objective (“as I fled the Woman’s Town, I felt myself almost a hero, almost Evelyn again, in my arrogant and still unaltered heart, I remained irrationally convinced I could escape them by a sheer effort of will” (82)). Eve/lyn’s voice is distanced, unmoved, even disinterested (“I felt a sense of grateful detachment from this degradation, I registered in my mind only the poignant fact of my second rape in two hours: “Poor Eve! She’s being screwed again!” (91)). The narrator is aware that in this didactic picaresque a passive hero

goes through the stages of his passion for the instruction of the readers, yet in the end may only return to the origins as a disillusioned (she-)man, (still) dreaming of destroyed, vanishing femininities (and masculinities) (“dreaming of[...]Tristessa’s[...] hall of mirrors[...]smashed, [...]he with the fatal red hole in his breast, [...]vanishes when I open my eyes” (191)).

The gender status of the ‘I’ is questioned doubled in the text, as the post-operative transsexual autobiographical writing subject’s gender-trouble is echoed in the “natural-born” transvestite’s incorporated narrative of the self. Both Eve/lyn’s and Tristessa’s intensive narrative destabilization of the gendered (auto)biographical self daringly switches between “woman,” “man,” “she,” “he,” until both of them arrive to “it”, a distanced third person pronoun, that strangely seems adequate to define the consequently de-, re- and de-gendered self, that is associated with an alienated thing<sup>9</sup>, an empty sign, a nothing, and that provokes the feeling of dissolution, confusion, regret and painful loss, instead of a triumphantly liberatory “selves-consciousness” generated by the availability of multiple identity/gender/narrative categories.

...like a drowning *man*...I was again the *child* whose dreams she had invaded and also the *young man* for whom she had become the essence of nostalgia and yet I remained *the thing I was*, a *young woman*, New Eve, whose sensibility had been impregnated with that of Tristessa during the insomniac nights of transmutation in the desert. *New Eve* looked down, in an ecstasy of regret, at this *sign* of love made flesh... (118-119)

...I crept up to *him* and kissed *her* pitiful, bare feet with *their* fine ankles and high ballerina’s arches. I could not think of *him* as a man, my confusion was perfect—as perfect as the exemplary confusion of the proud solitary *heroine* who now underwent the unimaginable ordeal of a confrontation with the essential aspect of *its* being *it* had so grandly abandoned, the implicit *maleness* it had never been able to assimilate into *itself*.” (128)<sup>10</sup> (*emphasis mine*)

The multiply-gendered narrative merely reflects a nervously narrated neurotic, “neither/nor” body, tormented by a gradual disembodiment resulting from the perpetual vanishing of the self, of a solid subjectivity.<sup>11</sup> In my reading, instead of polyphonic narrative potentials and heterogeneously fluid, self-consciously troubled gender identities, both the post-operative transsexual New Eve and the transvestite Tristessa strive for an autonomous female identity, a safely self-sufficient, enabling feminine self that



nevertheless remains forever unattainable for both of them. This is why the post-operative Eve/lyn declares disillusioned: “I know nothing. I am a tabula rasa, a blank sheet of paper, an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman’s shape. Not a woman, no: both more and less than a real woman” (83).

Thus, the polyphonic voices, the dissonant duos of Eve/lyn and Tristessa, of the ineradicably masculine male-to-female post-operative transsexual and the over-effeminate male transvestite, of Evelyn and New Eve, binary poles of stereotypical machismo and mystified femininity, of the male impersonator and militant feminist writerly selves never incite a joyous cathartic explosion in/of the text, but rather seem to contribute to the internal decomposition, decaying dissolution, painful disintegration of the narrative. The sudden gender-bending switches of the fictional autobiographical narrative appear as nervous contractions, neurotic tics, spasms of retching, involuntary scratchings of annoying itching, hysteric convulsions of madwomen combined with the stuttering, compulsive over-verbalization of male hypochondriacs. All in all, these inflections of gender and narrative seem to me much more pathologically painful than playful. Characteristically, these textual/sexual stumbles are associated with the experience of suffering: when Eve/lyn is raped by Zero his outcry of altruistic masculine heroism suddenly switches into her desperate moan of defenseless, humiliated femininity: “I began to cry, to drown the noise they were making [wives masturbating] and spare them a beating./ No. I’m lying. I cried because of the pain he caused me, my renewed eyes seemed to have been made of water, since often they would leak.” (107) Despite the performance of heterogeneous narrative/gender/identity, the suffering stays the same, as the textual twist seems to enact the tremble of the body in pain.

### **A bulimic imagery**

On a thematic level, the reader affronts a bulimic imagery that reinforces the irritating fluctuation of the multiply-gendered contradictory narrative voice, and highlights the paradoxical destructive construction of the corporealized destabilized feminine subject. During the picaresque journey, the devouring, disgorging mouth of the *vagina dentata* opens up gaping in New York to consume the autobiographical subject and initiate Eve/lyn’s story, and at the end re-opens in Mother’s cave by the sea-side to regurgitate her/him, disillusioned, vomited back to the point of origin, where gender trouble remains unresolved. The novel’s spaces all prove to embody the fragments of the fetishized and

freaked grotesque female body, that slowly disintegrates to its primordial iconic elements, painfully putrefies to abject fluids of body waste, and in the long run, (de)forms a violently (self)dissolving text of pain.

The starting point of Eve/lyn's travels is New York City, an alchemical city, tainted by a dark and dangerous mythical femininity emblemized by the *vagina dentata* that devours the hero/ine. This New York is not at all the "masculine metropolis" Nicoletta Vallorani claims it to be (Vallorani,181), but a city marked by the Big Apple, traditional sign of the primal sin, feminine fall, source of all pain. Evelyn, the future Eve and Leilah, the would-be Lilith - together embodying two aspects of the first sinful woman redoubled - meet, unite, taste the apple here to unchain a chaos that fails to bring illuminating knowledge. New York remains a dark city abounding with images of castration and of the devouring *vagina dentata*. It is the metropolis of a "country where Mouth is King" (10), its walls are everywhere inscribed with the insignia of angry women, a female circle with a set of bared teeth inside (11, 17, 23), it is peopled by "a special kind of crisp-edged girl with apple-crunching incisors and long, gleaming legs like lascivious scissors" (10), by female sharp-shooters and syphilitic whores "mouthing obscenities" while grabbing balls (13), and practising the humiliation of men and "bruise(ing) machismo (that) takes longer to heal than a broken head" (17). New York city is the home of succubus-like Leilah, who seduces and entraps the fallible Evelyn with the carnivorous flower of her yearning, engulfing, palpitating sex (18), who betrayed, issues voodoo threats against Evelyn's manhood ("she told me a chicken would come and snap my cock off" (32)) and thus, with this prophesy of castration forecasting Eve/lyn's destiny, becomes the mouth of truth. In a patriarchal paradox, the iconic *vagina dentata* seems to devour itself, as New York inflicts pain primarily on women. The aborting Leilah's black blood stains mark the destruction of the succubus in her and also the abuse of her femininity. Leilah's iconized then denigrated, fetishized then fractured femininity constitutes a terrible memento by violently embracing the surrounding space with the darkness of her voracious mouth and her bleeding vulva. The insatiable appetite of the dark city eating itself up mirrors the bulimic patient's pathologic hunger, yearning, self-demolition in a cannibalistic consumption of her/him/self.

The last station of Eve/lyn's picaresque journey is a cave by the ocean at the end and the beginning of the world where the hero/ine is led by Leilah-Lilith to meet Mother. As Eve/lyn crawls into a fissure in the rock, and painfully pushes herself forward in a

narrow stone track towards a cave that sucks her inwards, s/he reenacts a reversed birth. Evelyn's pain is the extremely dramatized version of the laboured infant's suffering ("my skin scored and grazed by the cruel embrace of the rock that kneaded my tender nipples unmercifully and bruised and jarred my knees and elbows. My hair snared on little outcroppings[...]every movement necessitated the most extreme exertion" (179) "cut and bruise fingers badly, painful buffeting from inhospitable granite" (182)), yet the cave's pulsating slimy velvet walls, the warm meat passage of the insides of the earth (184), clearly recalling the womb, draw her/him inward. In the cave's sphere, time is turning back on itself, the evolution is reversed, all is dissolving in the amniotic sea, as Eve/lyn is returning to the place of her/his conception, and re-experiences his/her initial being cannibalistically devoured by the *vagina dentata*, the violently embracing maternal womb, castrating him, creating her, painfully moulding this "newly born woman" into the iron maiden of perfect femininity, in order to give birth to the new Eve/lyn. Then, as Eve/lyn is expelled from the cave and is violently thrown up outside onto the green seaside, the devouring lips of the *vagina dentata* transform into a vomiting mouth. The cave embodies the disgorging oral orifice, given that Evelyn climbs into a "*fissure in the rock face*" (179), recalling the mouth, and is spat out by/through "the wide *mouth* of the cave" (186) (*emphasis mine*). In the meanwhile, (s)he is being regurgitated amidst abject materia and sensations reminiscent of vomiting: (s)he oozes forward like putrefied cheese in an airless, choked passage, surrounded by a scarcely tolerable stench, a faint reek of rotten eggs, a sulphurated steamlet, and with a sick sudden sensation of falling (180-183) is thrown up (w)retched to the bile green sea. Mother's grotesque cave unites the devouring vagina and the regurgitating mouth into one fissure, and therefore embodies the highest and lowest fetishized and abjectified cavities of female corporeal topography, fuses beginning and end, enacts the bulimic's passion, and reveals the picaresque journey as a vicious circle, an illusory motion, a static nomadism limited by iconic feminized landscapes of pain.

In the novel, hyper-feminine corporealities are identified via the accumulation of culinary metaphors and similes with delicatessen, "sweet sins" luring to be consumed, cannibalistically devoured yet difficult to digest, being the peak of temptation, gratification *and* remorse and pain for bulimics, leading to the binge and purge characterizing the "female malady." Leilah is linked to the hash candies, pink milkshakes, Baby Ruth and Americana lollipops she sucks on, while New Eve's flesh resembles ripe peach and her naked body forms a gingerbread-woman invitingly calling "Eat me!" As for Tristessa, her

iconic favorite is raspberry ice-cream, her fingers recall canned asparagus, and in Sarah Sceats's view, feeding on pills, s/he embodies the literally empty anorexic, an insatiable monster with a "masculine negative hollowness threatening with implosion" (Sceats 108). Moreover, the most telling combinations of gluttonous, gourmand culinary pleasures and of disgusted regurgitations, threatening disgorgings, associated with the painful enactment of the ruthless myth of femininity are projected upon Tristessa's ambiguous figure that is marked by "the *blood caked* at the corners of her mouth" (130) (*emphasis mine*).

On the cathartic meetings with Tristessa, crucial moments of the narrative, Eve/lyn repeatedly recalls a childhood memory, a memorably ambiguous gustatory experience melting oral gratification and displeasure, constituting an antagonistic fusion of gastronomic/psychic/physical pleasure and pain, linked to the Queen of Sorrow's hyper-feminine performance of suffering, accompanied by a sadistic, cannibalistic, scopophilic, super-masculine satisfaction. It is a gustatory experience combining the ideologically engendered complementaries of desiring and dissatisfaction, surfacing in a "transsexual" or "cross-gender" bulimic bodily reaction, oscillating between hunger and repulsion, devouring and disgorging/ being devoured and disgorged, excessive/ascetic femininity/masculinity, her and him and I and we.

For old times' sake at the cinema, I bought myself an ice-cream, since my nanny, another true fan, had taken me to watch Tristessa when I was a child and we'd always had a choc-ice apiece so the crackle of the coat of *bitter chocolate under the teeth* and the *sharp, sweet sting of the ice against my gums* were intimately associated with my *flaming, pre-adolescent heart* and the *twitch in my budding groin* the *spectacle of Tristessa's suffering* always aroused in me (8) (*emphasis mine*)

Now I saw *her in her spare and emaciated flesh*, she looked far more of a ghost than she had done when, the *choc-ice melting in my hand*, I sat in childhood cinemas redolent of wet mackintoshes, Jeyes Fluid, stale urine, and watched her—for example—nursing the lepers until she caught the *dread disease herself*[...]a *fallen woman*[...]she wore a *veil thick enough to hide the ravages of the disease*[...]So *she died and he was sorry and so was I*, I *licked the melted chocolate* from the silver paper, to extract a bit of comfort from it. So *some of my own tears must have glistened in Tristessa's eyes* since I had dowered her with such a shower long ago, far away, over the rainbow, when I was a child.[...]now she *gave me my tears back again* with interest (122) (*emphasis mine*)

The bulimic metaphors reflect the retrospective narrator New Eve/Iyn's antagonistic relation to the social fiction of femininity framed in a scenario of suffering. The female body itself is identified with food to be devoured and disgorged ruthlessly and repeatedly in a cruel, destabilizing abjection of the subject, that coincides with the rejection of the other(ed) (sex/gender) in the self.

Thus, in the long run, the neurotic bodies of anorectic or bulimic female patients may be interpreted as texts making ideology-critical statements<sup>12</sup> about the violently ambiguous social construction of femininity. These body-texts virtually and dramatically embody the dizzying see-saw of the paradoxically interpellated feminine subject, who is always already associated with a corporeality and suffering incompatible with the pleasures of masculinized agency, and who is doomed to sway between mutually exclusive, antagonistically engendered identity positions, bingeing and purging herself in the passion of becoming a woman. However, as Bordo highlights, even though these “duly” modified bodies may suggest androgynous independence by incorporating both genders' archetypal traits, yet in a “*pitiful paradox*” their parody, exposing the interiorized contradictions, finally becomes a “*war that tears the subject in two,*” destroying her health, imprisoning her imagination. Body dysmorphic patients, like *The Passion of New Eve*'s gender-troubled hero(in)es, merely mark “*pathologies of female protest*” “written in languages of *horrible suffering.*” They function “paradoxically, as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produce them, yet [they are] reproducing them rather than transforming, precisely that which is being protested” (Bordo 1993, 174, 176, 177) (*emphasis mine*).

### **The patho-logic (of) postmodern transsexual**

In my view, *The Passion of New Eve* does not offer enabling embodied protests of multiply gendered narrative voices. Nor does it empower gender-bender identities hiding the revolutionary political potential of Butler's destabilizing-denaturalizing parodic performance of gender. It fails to enact a fully celebratory feminist revision that reveals through the *différance* of repetition, the original as a copy of the copy. Instead, *The Passion of New Eve*'s reader is faced with aborted narrative voices, emptied symbols, disillusioning simulacrum and a painful perpetual vanishing of gendered identities in a nauseous, retching, self-crucifying narrative. Instead of Judith Butler's playfully gender troubling, parodically political transvestite performance, the Carterian text rather recalls Jean Baudrillard's postmodern reading of the transsexual or transvestite subject. (Butler 1990, 1-35, Baudrillard 1997, 23-28) In Baudrillard's view, symbolically speaking, all

postmodern subjects are transsexual transvestite beings characterized by a disillusioned play with the non-difference of genders, a disinterest towards sexuality as a source of pleasure, a surgical or semiotic manipulation of the body turned into a hyper-real prosthesis, an artificial, androgynous android. Baudrillard's transsexual postmodern subject is marked by a disbelief in authentic identity that is displayed through the over-theatricalization, the elusive performance of one's self-simulating image(s), surfacing in an ambiguous, ephemeral, changing *look*. Eve/lyn and Tristessa seem to foreshadow prophetically Baudrillard's contemporary gender-bending fugitives, these genetically baroque beings, grotesque mutants with confused non-identifiable gender identities, unreliable simulacrum, reflecting, from a pessimistic, paranoid perspective, a postmodern *Zeitgeist* of radical agnosticism, uncertainty, anxiety and chaos.

Moreover, the emblematic meeting-place of the Carterian transgender beings is the American desert, which is a symbolic landscape in Baudrillard's philosophy (see Baudrillard 1996, 7-19), as it constitutes the quintessence of hyper-real simulacrum, perfect pretence, utopia and dystopia realized in fiction. The desert, perfect dwelling place for the transvestite being, symbolizes for Baudrillard and Carter alike, ruthlessly transparent disinterestedness, irreferentiality and disconnection, a desireless immobility, an immanent and solar neutrality. This desert of an infinite meaningless contributes to the dissolution of the body, to an ascetic, anorexic, amnesiac, a-symptomatic wonder of disappearance, a vertiginous experience of vanishing in an excentric, centrifugal journey without of end. The transsexual body swallowed up by the desert of the real dis-appears as the anorectic or bulimic body hungrily hunting down lack with an all-engulfing emptiness.

Carter's writing style models the self-crucifying dissolution of the deserted, transsexual, bulimic body by de-composing an over-written, hyper-stylized, magically mannerist text that is unable to gain relief by outpouring in an overwhelming victorious flood. The nervous female body is narrated excessively: (1) via transforming the hysteric, obsessive, compulsive motor movements into repetition, (2) via turning body dysmorphic vomiting and diarrhea into an excessive accumulation of metaphors, metonyms, series of synonyms, avalanches of adjectives and adverbials, (3) via converting hypochondriac narrativization of the disease into lengthy sentences on the engendering construction of femininity, and (4) via translating hypersensitivity into a text on/of desire. Yet, the semioticization of the nervous body fails to become a sublimatory healing strategy. The text is unable to overflow disburdened, celebratorily. Instead, it suffers constipated and

retches uneasy. It trembles with neurotic convulsions and muscle contractions. It returns to its point of origin disillusioned. It lacks goals, depth or accomplished meanings. It suffocates in simulacrum.

### **Aborted/castrated narratives**

The magical realist picaresque story is full of surprising adventures, unexpected turns and stunning characters, thus, due to the very nature of the genre, it inherently guarantees a full pleasure of the text for readers ready to lose themselves in the fictive other words of the exciting narrative. Yet, the self-crucifying narrative seems to work on systematically establishing an un-pleasure of/in the text, by aborting the pleasurable, mostly linear flow of the retrospective autobiographical picaresque narrative, by betraying secrets too early, giving away punch-lines ill-timed, thus ruining narrative tension and “murdering” the whole story. When at the very beginning of the novel Evelyn pays a visit to a London cinema, he not only recalls desires of the past, his boyhood dreams and adolescent crush on Tristessa, but also forecasts future passions that are going to constitute the story to be told: “I would fly to a new place, another country, and never imagined I might find her [Tristessa] there, waiting for revivification, for the kiss of a lover who would rouse her from her reverie, she fleshly synthesis of the dream, both dreamer and dreamed” (9). Tristessa appears in person only on page 119 but already on page 9 she is disclosed as one of the protagonists of the passion. While an unnamed girlfriend performs fellatio on Evelyn in the same cinema, he muses giving away events to come: “She kept a hieroglyph of plastic in the neck of her womb, to prevent conception, the black lady never advised me on those techniques when she fitted me up with a uterus of my own” (9). Thus, we immediately learn the punch-line of the story, that the passion of new Eve will narrate the sex-changed Evelyn’s adventures! In New York, Baroslav’s gold (tellingly located next to the print of a hermaphrodite! (13)) is already predestined to be given to the seductress Leilah (14), while the chaotic city already opens up like the black thighs of Mother will (16). Crucial characters are revealed before their due arrival to the narrative. On entering the desert, Evelyn prematurely makes known that he will find himself there, “although this self was a perfect stranger to me” (38), whereas on arriving to Beulah, he lets out that “it is a profane place. It will become the place where I was born” (47). (He ironically comments upon succeeding events, unknown then: “that was the last I’d ever see of my facial hair, though I didn’t know that then” (55).) On stepping into Tristessa’s glass mansion, Evelyn

already sees New Eve reflected in the mirrors “as if she were wearing a bridal veil” (94), on hearing the first notes of music in the deserted castle without any trace of Tristessa, readers are already informed about the nearing tragedy: “by the time they crucified Tristessa, the music had diminished to no more than an asthmatic rubble” (116), while on the grotesque marriage ceremony (s)he discloses her/his final apparition on the novel’s last page as an expectant mother-to-be (“My bride will become my child’s father.” (136)).

Peter Brooks outlines a model for reading and understanding narrative plot in the light of the Freudian masterplot “beyond the pleasure principle.” He claims that “the desire of the text (the desire of reading) is desire for the end, but[...]reached only through the at least minimally complicated *détour*, the intentional deviance, in tension, which is the plot of the narrative” (Brooks 1984, 294). In my view, *The Passion of New Eve* consistently denies this illuminatory necessary distance between beginning and end, and provokes irritation, unease, a displeasure by refusing or working against the reader’s reading’s Brooksonian “dynamic model which effectively structures ends (death, quiescence, non-narratibility) against beginnings (Eros, stimulation into tension, the desire of the narrative) in a manner that necessitates the middle as *détour*, as struggle toward the end under the compulsion of imposed delay, as arabesque in the dilatory space of the text” (Brooks 1984, 296). The arousal of beginnings, the readerly curiosity, the desire for the end are satisfied prematurely. (Symptomatic of the bulimic narrative: devouring is followed by a quick disgorging, a metaphorical cannibalistic self-consumption, a disrupted metabolism denying the pleasures promised by the slow digestion of the narrative.) There is no place left for tension, for the pleasure of desiring, the narrative commits suicide by falling victim of the Brooksonian narrative “short-circuit”, that signifies the dangerous reaching of the end too quickly, of making the wrong choice, of achieving the improper death (Brooks 294). As Carter claims in her last novel, *Wise Children*, nothing is tragic, except untimely death. Accordingly, Eve/lyn’s narrative that is aborted/castrated by short-circuits models the painful passion of her/his story-telling itself.

### **Deserted symbols**

The bulimic narrative structure stuffs itself and regurgitates un-eased on the level of symbols as well. The novel can be read as a surrealist collage, since it overabounds with symbols, yet these enigmatic signs are either related to pain, or mainly they appear as pseudo-symbols, emptied of meanings, impossible to interrelate to create a coherent



emblematic system. The novel's symbols merely reveal in their imbroglio an inescapable disintegration of texts and bodies, as well as the illusory nature of fictional wor(l)ds.

Baroslav, the Czech alchemist, Evelyn's only friend in New York, heralds a "fructifying chaos of anteriority" that impels "towards the creation of a new order of phenomena of *hidden meanings*" (14) (*emphasis mine*), but only "undifferentiated dissolution" is born out of his cauldron of chaos. Ironically, when he is beaten to death in the streets, Baroslav's secret alchemical books, enigmatic objects, crucibles and alembics are cleared out of the way as his apartment is let to a bottomless go-go dancer! As several critics emphasise, the stages of Baroslav's alchemy (from nigredo to rubedo and to gold) accompany Eve/lyn on his/her passion (see Johnson 1997, 169, Day 108), yet this journey is a *circulus viciosus* leading nowhere. Baroslav's gold is good enough to enhance the dissemination of symbols void of meaning, a proliferation of simulacrums, that simply entails a final disillusion felt at the stagnant endpoint of origin upon the impossibility of rebirth: with the *alchemical gold* (given to Leilah at the beginning of the journey and regained at its end in the *cave* next to enigmatic objects as *Tristessa's photograph*, a *blood stain*, and a *swan-necked glass* flask with a chunk of *amber* containing a *bird-feather*), Eve/lyn buys a *coffin* from the *blind* Mother to *sail away* in it to nowhere on the transgender *fluid* of the "*ocean, mother of mysteries*, bear[ing] to the place of *birth*" (191).

Likewise, Zero's cacophonous symbolic rhetoric is regarded as nonsense by Eve/lyn: inspired by grass "his ranch house was Solomon's temple, the ghost town was the New Jerusalem, the helicopter his chariot of fire, his prick his bow of burning gold, etc etc etc." (100). Submerged in a similar catachresis, Tristessa's figure is another good example for the novel's twisted, chaotic iconography. (S)he fuses the Unicorn, the Baudelarian albatross, Jesus, Ezekiel, Lot's wife, Lazarus, Cassandra, the Enigma, the Virgin, the Mother, the Femme Fatale, the Masochistic Martyr, the Mirror, Madame Bovary, Catherine Earnshaw, Madeline Usher, Scarlett O'Hara, Juliet, Desdemona, Dido, the Camelia Lady, Bloody Mary, and many more—until in a crisis of identity (s)he is finally no-one.

Quite tellingly, a powerful symbol is deliberately and over-emphatically emptied of its meaning (via a proliferation of meanings), so that in the end it becomes a *pseudo-* and *meta-*symbol merely reflecting the inevitable disintegration of icons, and the delusive and insufficient nature of (iconic) representation. The albatross, "bane of Ancient Mariner," "a heavenly acrobat with angelic Icarian wings," "Bird of Hermes, the bleeding bird of the

iconography of the alchemists, [is] now[...]turn[ing] to dead and putrefying matter,” rotting, covered with carrion ants, so that it makes Eve/lyn vomit (44).

### **A disembodied body-text**

With a cruel irony and with the paradoxical ambiguity of the devouring-disgorging bulimic text, the baroque overflowing narrative is tainted with a minimalist-like neutralized voice. Manic over-verbalization is aborted by an ascetic taciturnity at the traumatic points of the plot, as Eve/lyn primarily narrates her passion, the detailed account of her apprenticeship into suffering femininity in a distanced, unmoved, even disinterested, laconic voice. When Mother ritually castrates Eve/lyn (s)he stoically comments: “Raising her knife, she brought it down. She cut off my genital appendages with a single blow[...]she excised everything I had been” (71). When Zero rapes her/him (s)he wonders disinterested: “I felt a sense of grateful detachment from this degradation, I registered in my mind only the poignant fact of my second rape in two hours: “Poor Eve! She’s being screwed again!” (91). And when Tristessa dies (s)he simply claims: “An officer shot Tristessa immediately with his revolver. A devastating sorrow overcame me. Then they dug a hole in the sand, threw in his body” (156). Along with other women in the story, Eve/lyn is violently battered and tormented, she undergoes a drastic operation, a mutilation, a rape, yet (s)he never spills any blood nor sheds tears. (She doubts the veracity of these “feminine fluids.” New Eve’s women’s bleeding or Tristessa’s trademark tears seem fake to her.) (S)he never “lives” or believes her/his pain. Hers is the anesthetized pain, the self-negating passion of the bulimic. Like in the case of the body dysmorphic patient, Eve/lyn’s corporeal fissure (the abject wound of her newly-formed vagina), her/his confrontation with bodily reality strangely opens up the way to disembodiment, to an alienation of the body. From this perspective, *The Passion of New Eve*’s anaesthetized passion (de)forms a disembodied body-text.

### **A novel of perpetual vanishing**

Although, as I have argued, *The Passion of New Eve* is fuelled by the presence of painfully freaked bodies and pathologically grotesque corporealities, the narrative is also marked by a “perpetual vanishing” of bodies. The novel’s gender-destabilization does not lead to a joyous celebration of heterogeneous corporealities allowing for subversively embodied dynamic subjectivities-on-trial, but instead—as in a text of pain—it guarantees

merely the disillusioned dis-appearance of no-bodies. In a scenario of perpetual vanishing, Tristessa is deprived of her essential markers of femininity and is buried in the desert. Zero loses his castrated phallic leg as he flies away with his wives in the whirlwind of the glass castle. Mother is denigrated a figure of speech and diminished, wanders off to die on the seashore. Lilith loses the carnal Leilah in her and disappears in the chaos of the civil war. Eve/lyn herself/himself casts away the phallic apparatus of his male member and denies the consolatory myths of motherhood interpellating her pregnant body, as (s)he leaves them all behind to sail away on the sea towards no-where, where (s)he is not hoping to find *an* identity matching the body that is not her/his anymore. The journey back to the “place of birth” is a voyage to the beginning and to the end, thus the picaresque turned circular loses its target, the quest for a self turns meaningless, the traditional teleology of the *Bildungsroman* is neglected, via the emptied symbols magical realism’s magic vanishes. Instead of the quiescence of a closure, an unresolved irritation remains in the plot (see Brooks 1984), as the Carterian overwriting style paradoxically seems to coincide with what Tom Paulin calls—though in a negative critique—a “permanent and infinite vanishing” of a borderless, expansive text (Paulin, 19 in Bristow-Broughton, 6)<sup>13</sup> that is torn apart by mutually abortive voices, all narrating the disillusion of subjects and the disintegration of bodies.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Harriet Blodgett praises the text for being a “genuine revisionist fiction” enhancing female power and countering the inscription of patriarchy. Alison Lee stresses its powerful critique of engendering images. Sarah Gamble underlines Carter’s successful transgression of the binary essentialism of representation and gender categories. Merja Makinen heralds female sexual and textual aggression represented in a positive light. Lindsay Tucker with Susan Suleiman, highlights the novel’s enabling postmodern feminist fictional strategy, while Heather L. Johnson enjoys her “frisson of narrative pleasure” due to the liberating possibilities of the refigured, transgendered body.

<sup>2</sup> All subsequent parenthetical references, if not otherwise stated, are to this edition: Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*. London: Virago, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Taking into consideration that femininity/ corporeality/ passivity are mutually exclusive and/ yet interdependent with subjectivity/empowerment in the patriarchal scenario of the subject-constitution, the paradoxically impossible antagonistic term *feminine subjectivity*, resisting and reinforcing ideology, should be marked by Derrida’s line of “erasure” (*sous rature*), marking/erasing suspicious, insupportable but inevitable concepts (See Bennington-Derrida,75)

<sup>4</sup> On the feminist tactic of “subversion from within” see my article on Cindy Sherman’s photography. (Kérchy 2003) For the elaboration of this argumentation I am indebted to Erzsébet Barát.

<sup>5</sup> Examples are numerous: The sadistic Evelyn calls himself a “tender little milk-fed English lamb” (9), he escapes New York “like a true American hero, [his] money stored between [his] legs” (37). Mother’s self-created god-head is “as big and as black as Marx’s head in Highgate Cemetery” (59), while her two tiers of divine breasts recall a “patchwork quilt,” “bobbles on the fringe of an old-fashioned, red curtain at a French window open on a storm,” and the “console of a gigantic cinema organ” (60,64,65). The captured Evelyn ceremoniously exclaims: “Oh, the dreadful symbolism of that knife! To be castrated with a phallic symbol!” (70), and is turned via the ritual surgery into a “Playboy center fold” (75). The lowly Zero enacts the Nietzschean *Übermensch* amidst abject waste and his pigs. The child crusaders claim to be the scourge of God in shrill, sweet, child voices (155). Tristessa “a star in space, an atomized fragmented existence,” forms “the *uroborus*, the perfect circle, the vicious circle, the dead end” by having “his cock stuck in his asshole” (173). The masculine entity of the ocean is called a “mother of mysteries” (191).

<sup>6</sup> As her intimate friend Lorna Sage writes on Carter: “Being young was traumatic, she had been anorexic, her tall, big-boned body and intransigent spirit had been at odds with the way women were expected to be, inside or outside.” (Sage 1994a:24)

<sup>7</sup> See especially the articles entitled “Whose Body is This? Feminism, Medicine, and the Conceptualization of Eating Disorders,” “Hunger as Ideology,” “Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture,” “The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity,” and “Reading the Slender Body” in Susan Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Los Angeles: California UP, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> The term “transgender literature” is likely to enter the literary theoretical canon as the American Literature Association’s 2005 conference in Boston presents a panel on transgender literature inviting papers on gender- bending, -blending, -changing, -exploring, -critiquing and -defying. (see *Literary Call for Papers: CFP@english.upenn.edu*)

<sup>9</sup> “I had become almost the thing I was” (107)

<sup>10</sup> “Tiny and Apple Pie had grasped *his* arms, though *he* showed no signs of running away *herself*, *he* was too dazed.” (137) “So *he*, *she* was lifted as on a wire, the mimic flight of the theatre, from the tomb *she*’d made for *herself*, *he* looked about *him* with the curiosity of Lazarus.” (143)

<sup>11</sup> This painful process is underlined by Eve/lyn’s self-reflexive comments: “something in me rang false” (106), “my new flesh momentarily betrayed me,” “even my memories no longer fitted me” (92), the constant pretence of a feminine self “kept me in a state of permanent exhaustion” (101).

<sup>12</sup> According to Bordo, the bulimic body-politics also reflects, besides the politics of gender, the unstable double bind of consumer capitalism’s oscillation between consumption and production, non-productive expenditure and accumulative restraint, desire and its controlling containment (Bordo 1993).

<sup>13</sup> Tom Paulin reproaches Carter’s writing for “an easy fluency and soft stylishness” “won at the expense of form and mimesis” and producing “an expansive territory without boundaries or horizons, a kind of permanent and infinite vanishing” (Paulin, 19 in Bristow-Broughton, 6)

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**EYE REPRESENTATIONS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE  
HANDMAID'S TALE* AND SARAH HALL'S  
*THE ELECTRIC MICHELANGELO***

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Of the sensory organs, the eyes are the most important and the most symbolic. They are usually interpreted as the gateway to the soul and regarded as the main conveyors of human emotions. The dark rings under the eyes, usually associated with physical tiredness, can also suggest a state of depression. However, in Byzantine and romantic portraits, such

dark rings seem to increase the significance of the eyes as indicative of the intensity of spiritual life (Nanu, 2001:94).

The eyes may also stand for clairvoyance or omniscience; they may be used as symbols of knowledge and creativity, light, vigilance, moral guidance and truth. Being organs of perception, the eyes represent one of the ways through which people have access to knowledge. In other words, seeing is equivalent to knowing (and knowing to having power). Through prayer, the eye turns into an organ of perception of the transcendental, divine world (de Souzaenelle, 1999:372). Prayers or meditation can lead to the opening of a third and inner eye, symbolic of the intensification of spiritual life. In Hindu culture, and also in Buddhism, the third eye (also known as “the eye of Buddha”) is represented by the small dot between the eyes, its purpose being that of indicating spiritual awakening (Emick, 2005). In her book, *The Symbolism of the Human Body*, de Souzaenelle (1999:380) points out that psychologists link the third eye to the feeling of guilt, as the person who feels guilty, also feels as if she is being watched by this divine eye which stands for his/her own judgment.

The eye as a symbol of judgment and authority, at the same time connoting omniscience, appears in Margaret Atwood’s novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1993). Here, the dystopic world of Gilead is governed by the eye of God, which is all-seeing and very similar to George Orwell’s (1990) all-pervasive Big Brother. The all-seeing eye (of God) is often associated with divine light, as it is usually represented in a triangle and surrounded by beams of light. In Atwood’s novel it represents the national seal, the state being a theocracy and the people indoctrinated with religion. In the context of the Gileadean society – patriarchal to the extreme – the eye of God may be likened to the Egyptian “eye of Horus” (falcon-headed god of the sun), usually connoting energy, power and masculinity. According to the myth, Horus was the son of Osiris and Isis; his right eye was white and represented the sun, while his left eye was black and represented the moon. In his greed for power, Seth, Horus’s brother, killed Osiris. Horus fought Seth to avenge his father’s death and lost his left eye which Seth broke into pieces. It was later found and reassembled by Thoth, the god of magic and of the moon. Horus gave his “new” eye to Osiris and brought him back to life (McDevitt, 2005).

A reminiscence of the “eyes of Horus” may still be found among the Maltese fishermen, who paint the bows of their boats with eyes which can show them the safe way back home during the day as well as during the night (Cary, 2005).



The eye of Horus or the eye of God may also stand for the “eye in the sky” manifested during total solar eclipses, when the moon seems to be surrounded by rays of light resembling a bird’s wings. This “winged eye” is painted on the vans driven by the spies of Gilead (Atwood, 1993), who are, in their turn, symbolically called “Eyes”. They are the representatives of (supreme) authority in the absolutist state, since they are the ones that make the arrests and that can report even on the high ranking officers’ loyalty to the regime.

The omniscient eye is used in Freemasonry, too, (a society – now more or less secret – which completely excludes women), where it stands for the “Great Architect” of the universe (Yronwode, 2003). The symbol also appears on the United States’ Great Seal and notes (atop a pyramid), where it bears the name of “the Eye of Providence”. Since Atwood’s fundamentalist Republic of Gilead has developed out of the United States of America, it is explicable why this symbol has become the crest of the theocratic government. But while the eye of God is meant to induce trust and peace, and awareness of God’s existence, “Gilead’s eye spreads distrust and fear” (Twohig, 1995:15).

The eye as national seal of Gilead, preceded by four figures, is tattooed on each Handmaid’s ankle, yet another sign of the omniscience and authority of the state whose main politics is women’s protection by controlling reproduction, and hence women’s bodies:

I cannot avoid seeing, now, the small tattoo on my ankle. Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse. It’s supposed to guarantee that I will never be able to fade, finally, into another landscape. I am too important, too scarce, for that. I am a national resource. (Atwood, 1993:63)

This “passport in reverse” is meant to constantly remind the Handmaids of their condition of mere receptacles or child-bearers for the Commanders they service, in a way similar to branded cattle easily identified and brought back by their masters if they had managed to escape. The Handmaids’ lack of any significance other than that of surrogate mothers is obvious in the way their names are made up of the possessive particle “of” and the name of the Commander, turning women into possessions; for example, Offred, Offglen, or Offwarren.

The eyes can establish a direct contact with the viewer. But looking is not neutral and it is usually controlled by men who “assess, judge and make advances on the basis of

these visual impressions”, as “control of women is now also affected through the scrutiny of women by visual ideals” (Coward, 1985:75, 81). The body is the first aspect of a woman that is analysed and ranked.

It is this control of women by visual ideals that Sarah Hall deals with in her recent book *The Electric Michelangelo* (2004), in which she makes use of eye tattoos to express her character’s ideas about the female body. Grace, Hall’s main female character, wants to transgress her gender role and simultaneously change the patriarchal view of woman’s body (pure, white, unaltered, but still alluring). By deciding to have her whole body tattooed with green eyes, she wants to disrupt and return the objectifying male gaze which turns her into a sexual body or “a body of Desire” (Davis in Leitch, 2002:41).

“All I can do is interfere with what they think is theirs, how it is supposed to look, the rules. I can interrupt like a rude person in a conversation. I can be rude” (Hall, 2004:274) is how Grace justifies her rebellion. And she further argues that “I don’t care if it is not thought of as beauty. I don’t need it to be. They can think what they like, but what they cannot do is use me with their damn eyes. Not ever again” (Hall, 2004:272).

Grace thus turns into a “lady of many eyes” (Hall, 2004:214), a monster or a new Medusa. However, she has thus gained more power over men (she has transgressed her gender role), who now feel threatened. Legend has it that Medusa was able to transform *men* into stones (since male heroes were the only ones who tried to kill her). But Grace’s tattooed skin could also be seen as an armour (Brînzeu, 2005) which she uses to protect herself against the evil eye – in our case, the reifying male gaze represented by Malcolm Sedak. In this respect then, her tattoos would be similar to a magical amulet, similar to the Middle Eastern “eye in the Hand”, which protects its bearer from the envious look and brings him/her happiness and riches. Referring back to the eye of Horus in Egyptian culture, where it has the power to bring back to life, Grace’s tattooed eyes confer her a new identity as a woman and clearly state that she alone is in control of her own body. She defies conventions and men’s stereotypes about women’s body, she tries to change the positions of man as consumer and woman as consumed, and she will pay a high price.

Just like Medusa, Grace can now turn men into stones, figuratively speaking, because they no longer feel sexually aroused at the sight of her tattooed body, now perceived as disabled. Their gaze can no longer turn her into a “body of Desire” (Davis in Leitch, 2002:41). She now has “Argus eyes” and her body has become “anaphrodisiac” (Hall, 2004:287) since men cannot control her body any longer. [Argus is another

mythological character who is said to have had a hundred eyes. He was thus very powerful, always on the watch, as some of his eyes were always open (Ștefănescu, Léauté, 1992:38-42)]. Sedak, an otherwise episodic character in the novel, feels offended at having his gaze returned and decides to restore her body to its original purity by pouring acid over her and maiming her for life.

The eyes, on which *The Electric Michelangelo* (Hall, 2004) is centred, allow the readers to imagine and experience the characters' pain and violence. We cannot help wincing and suffering with her throughout the graphic details of the description of her disfigured body. The tattooed eyes now seem distorted and trickling as if she had stepped out from a painting by Salvador Dali:

Her stomach was tight and hard as wood ash, collected in lumps and ridges, so she would never be able to bend over and slip a strap through the buckle of her shoe again, she would always have to retrieve a dropped item by bringing her upright body down on bent legs, blind to whatever was underneath her. Her pubic hair was mostly gone, just a few strands remained below a bald patch, so she looked like a little girl. He could see the slit line of her against a stripped membrane. Her left breast was made smaller than the right by the acid, which had swept through fatty tissue with abandon, and the nipple there looked like a piece of misshapen rock, chipped glass. The tattooed eyes on her torso had been erased in places, in others they had washed together in bizarre, non-descript patches of concentrated dye. Green from the largest ruptured iris on her abdomen had collected above her appendix, and it seemed in comparison a beautiful emerald seam against the strip-mined earth of the rest of her. No. She was like a fresco with a jar of paint stripper knocked over her. She had run, dried and hardened. Several of the eyes on her arms, legs and back had survived, but otherwise she was as streaky as an abstract painting. (Hall, 2004:305-306)

Although Grace's body is forever scarred and disabled, her spirit remains unbroken – as are some of her tattooed eyes – and she exits the scene avenged: she sets Sedak on fire while he is in a psychiatric hospital (where he has been taken following his insane act of purification), causing his eventual death.

As I have mentioned before, it is the eyes that establish a direct contact with the viewer and with the world in general. Through the eyes, a person witnesses and learns about the world. Since seeing means knowing, and knowing is usually associated with having power, women (Handmaids in particular) in Atwood's (1993) novel are not only

prohibited from reading and writing, but also from looking in any direction but ahead. The Handmaids have to wear the clothes which designate their role as child-bearers: all-covering red dresses as well as white headdresses with wings that only allow them to look ahead, up and down. They have to look down when spoken to by strangers – if at all – a reminiscence of Islamic traditions according to which women have to cover their entire body and hair (sometimes even the eyes and the face) as a sign of respect, modesty and submission to their fathers, brothers or husbands, but also in order to protect their chastity and avoid arousing men's sexual desires.

Moreover, the Handmaids have no access to mirrors, their individual selves being once more deleted. In psychology, mirrors are linked to knowing and to the idea of establishing one's identity, as it is during the mirror stage that the child develops self-consciousness and learns about its identity. The absence of mirrors is supposed to "save one from the traditional search for identity", and to establish a new ideal, namely "freedom from the constitution of an identity and from the struggle for self-definition" (Staels, 1995:159). In other words, the state aims at disembodied people, especially women, whose inner lives would come to be totally conditioned by the (moral and religious) law. However, the only "mirrors" Handmaids do have access to are the other Handmaids whose eyes are substitutes for real looking glasses; these reflections show them how they are supposed to be, as all the Handmaids dress and behave in the same way, their aim in life is (or should be) the same, and they use the same language.

Throughout Atwood's (1993) novel, Handmaids either kneel, or stand in public – thus expressing their submission and humbleness (Twohig, 1995:16) – and look up to a man in authority, i.e. the Commander to whom they are allotted and whose child they have to beget. At the same time, Handmaids are looked down on as women; their only purpose is to give birth to a healthy child for the Commander they service, who will afterwards pass for the Wife's offspring.

In conclusion, the eyes, and implicitly seeing/ gazing, are the means by which men control women's bodies, establishing stereotypes, or "visual ideals" (Coward, 1985:81) for women to follow. If women rebel against the patriarchal perception of the female body, they are muted in some way or other: Hall's heroine is maimed for life by a man, while Atwood's is minimized by men (again), as her narrating voice is finally deleted by the scientists who find the tapes on which she recorded her story. In both Atwood's and Hall's

novels, women matter most as sexual objects; it is not *they* who are important, but what they inspire in men (in other words, what men *see* in them).

Besides being organs of perception, and hence the origin of the look (controlled by men) and gaze (objectifying women, reducing them to mere bodies), the eyes are powerful symbols of authority, omniscience and omnipresence (the Gileadean eye of God, the spies/“Eyes”); they can represent protective amulets or armours, and means of asserting new identities.

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## **Gender, Culture, Society**

## FEMINISMS, ISLAMOPHOBIA AND IDENTITIES

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There has been a tendency of late to conflate all Muslims as belonging to a single nation and aspiring to a single political aim. This effect has been achieved by some authors so as to accommodate Islamophobia, but by others to generate a sense of inclusive unity that encloses all Muslims.

We contend that in the post 9/11 climate of Islamophobia women wearing the scarf, the *mohajabehs*, are making a political choice. They are publicly branding themselves as Muslims at a time when such a label carries the potential fear of making them vulnerable to open hostility. But the Islam that they embody is distinct and different from the stark, gendered divides envisaged by protagonists on both side of the Islamophobic divide.

The unity demanded by some of the highly vocal and visible Islamic groups marginalises the contestations posed within these groups by women who may be described as feminists. The specificities demanded by those who envisage Islam primarily as an antagonistic political force in the UK are very different from the flexibility that many women envisage. They aspire to belong to the *Umma* or people of Islam, conceptualised as crossing ethnic, racial, geographical and political boundaries, an identity that is primarily inclusive rather than exclusive. The multiplicities of identities of many *mohajabehs* sit more easily within the permeable unbounded *umma* than the constrained gendered boundaries of the combative male political Islamism.

Islam as a faith and Muslims as a whole have found themselves under something of a siege in a current climate of Islamophobia (Allen and Nielsen, 2002; Cummins, 2004a). In the battle of 'Jihad versus McWorld' (Barber, 1995), many ordinary Muslims have found themselves on the wrong side. They stand accused of being 'a threat' to the West (Buruman and Margalit, 2004) and its national security and insufficiently committed to the politics and values of their host communities.

Islamophobia creates a wide gap between the Muslims' perception of who they are and the ways in which they are viewed by the host society. Groups on both sides of the

divide demand that Muslims abandon either their faith or their national allegiance. The *Hizb ut-Tahrir* announces that it is no longer possible for the youth in the UK to be both British and Muslim and declare that it is necessary to ‘choose’ between faith and nationality (*Sunday*, BBC4, 24 August 2003).<sup>1</sup> Islamist groups such as the *Al Muhajerun* announce on their posters ‘you are either with the Muslims or with the Kaafir’ (*Guardian*, 9 September 2004) or parade their ‘choice’ in London by calling a conference on the 11 September 2003 to glorify the suicide bombers, calling them the ‘magnificent 11’.<sup>2</sup>

These aggressive political positions may be described as part of a concerted effort by revivalists in Britain to create a masculine, combative Islamic political identity that seeks to unite the Muslim community in opposition to the rising Islamophobia in the host society.<sup>3</sup> Their high-profile propagandist moves are countered by equally abrasive declarations made by parties such as the United Kingdom Independent party (UKIP) and politicians such as Robert Kilroy-Silk, who denounce the entire community of Muslims the world over as failing in every way, or writers such as Will Cummins who attack ‘the black heart of Islam’ and state categorically that ‘All Muslims, like all dogs, share certain characteristics’ (Cummins, 2004a).<sup>4</sup>

Politically, Cummins claims, Muslim voters have a ‘global jihadi agenda’. He compares voters in Leicester and Birmingham to the Janjaweed militia who have committed atrocities in the Darfur region of Sudan and claims that Islam is ‘sanctified by the principle [ ...] that any civilisation, however repulsive, has the same value as any other’ (Cummins, 2004b).

The abuse by the media and politicians is backed by ‘scholarly’ works by authors such as Huntington who claim to have come to the considered opinion that there has, of necessity, to be a clash of civilisations between the West and the rest (Huntington, 1997). Even elected representatives of constituencies with large Muslim communities such as the Leicester MP and Foreign Office Minister Denis MacShane declare that it is ‘time for the elected and community leaders of British Muslims to make a choice’ between being British or Muslim (*Guardian*, 2003).

The fears engendered by Islamophobia lead to political backlash on both sides and can play into the politics of groups such as the far-right British National Party (BNP) who capitalise on fear of the other. At the same time restrictive policies that specifically target Muslims are fuelled by measures such as the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act of



2001 that has led to wholesale arrests of rafts of Muslims. Many have been released, but some still remain in prison without access to lawyers or entitlement to due process.

The assumption that it was ‘Muslims’ specifically who have been the target of regressive measures in the West was intensified in February 2004 when the French government decided to ban the head scarf from schools and bar access to education to anyone wearing a religious insignia. The combination of these measures locates Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular as sometimes-unwilling emblems of combative Islam in the cross fire between faith and state policies.

This paper seeks to consider what this crisis has meant in terms of the life experiences of Muslim women in West Yorkshire and the strategies that they have forged to deal with these problems. It will reflect the views of Muslim women of different generations on Islam and politics, and the different parameters they have selected for defining their lived experiences and their own definitions of their identities, nationalities and allegiances.

### **The *Umma***

The call for supranationality made by *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and others is rooted in the historical claim that Muslims belong to the single community of the *umma* that, according to the teachings of the Prophet, recognises no divisions by race, class or nationality.

However from the very inception of the faith the *umma* has been, and remains, more of an ideal than a reality. It has been a concept that facilitated participation without imposing debilitating practical constraints. The millennial empire of Islam did not demand its people to make a choice between their nationality and faith; indeed it accommodated a vast diversity of faiths and nations under its *melliat* governance that allowed for peaceful co-existence and mutual respect between people of different colours and creeds.

The *melliat* system recognised and respected the different faiths and group identities and accommodated their needs. History denounces statements such as those made by *Hizb ut-Tahrir* that it is not possible for Muslims to be both British and Muslims and by the *Muhajerun* that the teaching of Islam condone acts of carnage and violence.

These are specifically male interpretations made by men and for men in a specific time and place: in the aftermath of 9/11 in the West. They are declarations that seek to secure the cohesion of the Islamic brotherhood and its solidarity in face of adversity. But they represent the views of small minorities on the margin: Qaiser M Talib writing in *Q-*

*News*, which describes itself as ‘the magazine for the global Muslim’, argues that giving air and print space to ‘this country’s extremist groups are in reality an Islamophobic journalist’s dream’ and ‘[t]hose who wish to damage the image of Islam in the West instead choose to interview those who they know will spout hogwash’ (Qaiser, 2003:17).

They orchestrate these views and the responses, which include the demonisation of Muslims by some politicians and newspapers in Britain and the US, spurring on the galloping progress of Islamophobia. There is also a fear on the part of Muslims of the spread of a new violent form of imperialism illustrated by the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the threats against Iran and Syria.

The calls for fraternity of the *umma* are specifically constructed as a reaction to a crisis. They are primarily addressed to young men, and recall the ideal state where Muslims had a single overriding political identity: one that extended beyond mere borders, nationalities and party political allegiances. At the same time, with the emergence of the scarf debacle, the *umma* is seen as requiring the explicit and public support of its women who are expected to endorse the ‘traditional’ gender hierarchies that many Muslim women may no longer wish to accept (Buijs, 1996; Moghissi, 1999).

There is a simplistic assumption that Muslim women as a whole and those who wear the *hijab*: the *mohajebah*, in particular do so not only as a matter of faith, but also as a political endorsement of the specific Islamist political views (Hamzeh, 2000; Ismail, 2003). This is not the case.

The call for British Muslims to discard their nationality in favour of their faith is unifying and empowering for a group that has been marginalised and labelled as ‘terrorists’ by the media and too often by neighbours and acquaintances as well. However men and women are likely to respond differently to the call for unity, not only because by and large terrorism is imagined to be the domain of men, but also because there is a gendered perception of Islam and *umma*.

It is the contention of this paper that the demands of politicised radical Islam, in terms of the prescriptions that it makes, are understood differently by Muslim women, including the *mohajebahs*. As Muslims, women from ethnic minorities, particularly the *mohajebah*, may have more in common with their ‘white’ British-Muslim sisters than their male cradle-Muslim brethren. Thus though there is a shared experience of Islamophobia, for Muslim women the *umma* means that this experience is not bounded by race and

ethnicity. The *umma* subsumes, without excluding, their race, ethnicity and nationalities. Nor is it impermeable to feminists' demands for active political participation at all levels.

For Muslim converts the decision to wear the *hijab* in the West is a public political assertion of the right to belong to the community of Muslims, but, particularly for convert women, it is not a rejection of home and hearth and kinship relations with their non-Muslim families and parents. Within liberal democratic states and feminist contexts their decision to wear the *hijab* is a matter of faith and identity and a political act of solidarity, but not one that delineates separation from their kin and communities.

### **Methods**

This paper is based on a series of interviews in three generational studies (Afshar, 1989a, 1989b, 1994) and research conducted by Franks with 'white' converts as well as cradle Muslim women who had taken the revivalist path (2001, 2004) and interviews with Muslim women in their third age in West Yorkshire (Afshar, Franks, Maynard and Wray, 2001).

Afshar had used the snowball method to meet with her respondents whom she initially interviewed in the 1980s. She has retained informal links with six of the younger generation of 'migrant' Muslim women in West Yorkshire particularly those who in the late 1980s and early 1990s were choosing to don the *hijab* and identify themselves as 'Muslims' (Afshar, 1989a, 1989b, 1994). Over the years they have had sporadic conversations, phone calls and discussions with occasional meetings at funerals, weddings and festive occasions. Contacts were more frequent and intense at times of crisis and more dormant at other times. Since the mid-90s younger siblings and friends as well as 'white' converts have joined this informal circle. They have agreed to read drafts of this paper and comment on it before publication.

The discussions with the older generation were organised and carried out by Afshar, Franks, Maynard and Wray (2001) as part of an ESRC funded comparative study of empowerment and disempowerment for British women in their third age. For this study Franks and Wray conducted focus groups and with Afshar used a semi-structured questionnaire format for the interviews. The women were between the ages of 58 and 85 years and in the case of South Asian women they often had to use interpreters.

The paper also draws on a series of interviews conducted in 2003 with Muslims of Pakistani origins in West Yorkshire as the British part of a Toronto based international

study of Muslim Diaspora. For this project, the interviewers used questionnaires and some asked the questions in Punjabi. Many of the interviewees who were first generation rural migrants were not able to read English. All the interviewers lived in the inner city. Four were Punjabi and Urdu speaking as well as two white English only speakers – one male community worker and Franks, a white female researcher. The English speakers were able to interview colleagues and young participants who had been brought up in Britain. Although data collectors networked through their own communities and contacts, the fact that there were four collectors from the Pakistani communities from different backgrounds (who did not know each other) meant that this was not a snowballed sample in the usual sense. There are limitations to snowballing in that the sampling frame is often constructed of a particular friendship network (Rutter, 2003). All the collectors of data did so through networking in the everyday world: for example when working and when visiting. One of the interviewers found that she could involve women from her community, when paying respects to the dead at the *Janazah*. She said ‘you sit there for a few hours and get talking’.

### **Identities**

*Hizb ut-Tahrir*'s call can be seen as a move towards the ethnicisation of political Islam, as it claims Muslims form a discrete cultural group. This claim is based on emphasising processes of cultural distinction and the construction of boundaries between those who belong and those who do not. The construction of boundaries through the emphasising of particular cultural differences, while other differences and similarities are downplayed, is central to the creation and maintenance of ethnic groups (Barth, 1969; Vermeulen and Govers, 1994). As such it may be drawing ethnic boundaries that focus on the situational character of identity and the definition of identities at the boundaries (Barth, 1969; Vermeulen and Govers, 1994). But political identity is not easily reduced to such boundaries (Cohen, 2000a).

The emphasis placed in a boundary approach to ethnicity on claimed cultural groups and the definition of identity at the boundaries in interactions with others make it rather inadequate for understanding the perceptions of their own identities by many Muslim women in Britain (Narayan, 2000:1083–5). They do not necessarily define themselves in terms of their nationality/ies or ethnicity (Schmidt, 2002). But the self-ascribed identity that they chose to construct within the constraints of their social/political/personal circumstances (Ghorashi, 2003; Vermeulen and Govers, 1994:1)

may be anchored in their faith; a definition that crosses traditional divides both personally and politically. It often is constructed through their lived experiences and encounters with the host society and its agencies.

It is difficult if not impossible to constrain women to the narrow prescriptive of a culturally constructed political divide that groups such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir* wish to impose on them. The multiplicity, fluidity, contextualised and contested qualities of identities that studies of gender have highlighted have undermined any notion of a single all embracing primary identity to which all others must be subordinated at all times and at all costs (Eley and Suny, 1996:10). Women often have more fluid identities than men; they are usually named after their fathers, and subsequently their husbands and known as mothers of their children. In addition to the nomenclature, life processes mark women physically and psychologically. Physical alterations and developments mark women's bodies and psychological changes affect them all be they celibate, married, mothers or not. Mothers experience additional physical and emotional changes, which accompany the move from being an individual to being another person's mother and perhaps being known by another person's name as his wife.

Over time the markers of identity change quite dramatically for women. More so for the migrant women who experience the additional complexity of changing nationality. They have moved across geographical and national boundaries to a land where, on arrival, they became 'different' and an 'ethnic minority'. Nothing in their earlier lives had prepared them for the experience of racism that many encountered as a result. The move has made much of the knowledge they had acquired up to then meaningless. Their language, their faith, their traditions and rituals all cease to be the 'norm'. Many have moved from warm open spaces into small cold surroundings where they have almost no skill and know how in dealing with the most basic requirements of everyday life. As Mrs A told Afshar in 1988: "You get closed in the *chardivari* (four walls). I was ashamed to go out, I didn't know anybody. Not like home with your auntie living next door [ ...] and then everything was different. How could you do your cooking or washing when there is nowhere to hang out clothes to dry or spread fruit and pulses to dry? It was cold and damp and I was really scared". Mrs B who had moved to the UK in 1968 told Afshar: "Things are difficult here. It was different for us. We were taught to look after the whole family: aunties, uncles, cousins. But things are different here because girls have to go to school. When they get back from school they have homework and housework as well. We can't

expect them to do as much for the family as we did. In these difficult circumstances what migrant women have found invaluable has been the social support offered to them by others of the same faith, language and culture. For many the one permanent point of identity has been their faith: But when you face Mecca and say the *nemaz*, then you feel safe and protected” (Mrs B).

Even though faith and its attendant rituals change over time, nevertheless it provides both a social and a psychological anchor. But faith is not necessarily seen as bounded and exclusive. Migrants can, and often do, see themselves as part of their kin groups (*biradari*), their birthplace, their country of origin and the host country. Some also see themselves as part of the generality of humanity.

In response to the question ‘how would you describe your ethnicity?’ D, who is 80 and a devout Muslim who prays five times a day, reads the Qur’an and fasts at Ramadan, told us, through an interpreter, that her faith was very important to her but she saw herself as a ‘human being’.

In terms of the multiple identities that they had, the young Muslim women we talked to saw Islam as one that connected them to a world of believers, *umma*, which in their terms knew no national or ethnic boundaries, far less kinship restrictions. As C explained to Afshar:

“We are at one with our brothers and sisters, here and the ones in Palestine and Iraq; we are all Muslims”. Their own understanding of their identity in terms of faith was closer to that of their ‘white’ British and Irish born sisters who had chosen Islam as their faith than to those of the cradle Muslims, their kin group, their parents or co-nationals. They were part of the universal revival that moved beyond the ‘identity face’ of Islamism (Ali, 2000) and created what may be called the ‘feminist face’ of Islamism (Karam, 1998).<sup>5</sup>

This is an identity, which embraces the trans-nationality of *umma* and does not confine itself to minority Muslim groups; faith supersedes nationality (Schmidt, 2002) and race and ethnicity, without replacing them. The Islamic views that these women have are based on the work of Islamist feminists the world over and are ‘non-negotiable’.<sup>6</sup> Too often the ethnic group imposes ‘traditional’ demands and restrictions on younger women, which have not been ‘internalised’ by them and which they often find hard to accept. There is often a gap between parental expectations and the willingness of younger women to act according to their demands (Barth, 2000; Jacobson, 1997).

The differences of views are sometimes more intense amongst young revivalist women who are born and bred, or largely raised, in the West. They frequently disagree with the interpretations of Islam of their parents. As P, a young British-born woman of Gujarati descent told Afshar: “I didn’t want to go the Mosque school, it was boring and I didn’t understand anything. But it’s different now. We talk about things and read for ourselves and find out what’s what. Now I can teach my mum.[ ...] We have a lot of arguments, but I think that she is pleased with me all the same”. Their British education and the demands it makes of them to have enquiring minds creates a new and more individualistic approach to understanding which results in a new ‘British form of Islam’ (Vallely and Brown, 1995).

This ‘modern’ Islamic interpretation is part and parcel of the Islamist feminists’ political and intellectual development over the past centuries the world over (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Afshar, 1998a; Ahmed, 1992). Through the twentieth century they have used their access to better educational opportunities to grasp knowledge about their faith away from recitation, *qara’at*, towards understanding, *tafhim*, and commentary on the texts, *tafsir* (Afshar, forthcoming). Muslim feminists are not willing to hand over their hard earned new opportunities to anyone, least of all religious zealots who have a specific agenda that does not include the liberation of women.

### **Nationality, Culture and Community**

Across the world politicised Islamist women have been reading the Qur’an and holy texts; offering their own interpretations of their Islamic rights, and writing about and fighting for these rights. The material, often translated into English, is freely available on the web and much discussed by various Islamist women groups. But the material used by international Islamist feminisms is seen by some Muslims migrants as a threat to their cultures and communities and their understanding of nationalities and the wider *umma*. Region and country of origin, together with religion, have formed dominant markers in popular and official understandings of multicultural communities.

In the case of Southall in West London, Baumann argues that a dominant model exists which tends to equate community, defined in terms of region or country of origin and sometimes religion, with culture. So Southallians act on a model of 5 communities, White, Black, Asian-Sikh, Asian-Muslim and Asian-Hindu each with their own culture (Baumann, 1996, 1997). However, this model of distinct ethnic communities masks the

differences within them and alternative bases of community and identity. Migrants' individual and group experiences contribute towards the re-construction of their specific understanding of nationality.

Much of the ethnic identity of migrant groups is shaped by their history of migration and their hopes and aspirations for return and the reconstruction of their communities, often in the remembered images of the past, within the new host society. The situation and circumstances in which women find themselves in the host countries have an important impact on identity formation (Ghorashi, 2003).

The nation is imagined (Makdisi, 1990) and referred to 'as something outside' the self (Cohen, 2002b:165). But 'for the purposes of personal identity the nation is reconstructed and mediated through the self' (Cohen, 2002b:166). It is also constructed through the stories of 'authentic' pasts that help shape the dreams of the future (Subramaniam, 2003:161). For the first generation of migrants, particularly amongst the kin group there is little need to define what is meant by the nation since there are clear points of reference, particular places, people and stories that can be repeated (Afshar, 1989b). They know where they came from, why they came and who they were (Afshar, 1994); they define themselves in terms of their kin groups, their social position and the locality in which they had grown up.

Some of the older women who talked to Franks defined themselves as Gujarati or North Pakistani. But most of the women who had migrated to Britain needed a wider categorisation. The move from birthplace to where they live now, sometimes passing through a different continent on the way, had given many of our participants a hyphenated sense of identity.

In an interview conducted as part of our older women study, R, who is 64, responded via an interpreter: "I am a British Muslim. But because I belong to Pakistan, I am Pakistani as well, I still have my family there and I still go back". For some, the migration had been a painful process. F told Franks about coming to England at the age of three: "My father came here in 1963 just a few months before I was actually born. When my dad decided he was going to stay in England he asked my mum to come over and she refused because I already had three older sisters and she didn't want to leave them [ ...] Finally my dad sent one of his cousins to persuade her. My mother talks to me about it and I find it really quite painful, the way my sisters were left behind". Migration not only wrenched maternal and kinship roots but also made such women into 'ethnic minorities'.



They were labelled with a unifying ascribed group identity (Afshar, 1994; Rouse, 1995) that may or may not have accorded with their own notions of self and nationhood.

Though different groups have different histories and different memories, their shared 'nationality' in Britain is based in a communality of historical points, often a shared education, kinship and language that has enabled groups of similar background to assume a shared understanding. Mrs T told Afshar: "We came over to my brother. He had a job, was a mechanic and he had a house. It was a bit tight, but we were happy. He got work for my husband and then we slowly found our feet". The communality of experience is more intense within the kin group (Afshar, 1989a) and groups of the same social and class background and considerably less so amongst the groups with different political views and aspirations. Thus even first generation migrants are sharply divided by class, education and politics and some feel closer to the host society than to their own. This is particularly true of women, such as divorcées or widows, who may have found it advantageous to migrate independently to start a new life. Mrs Z, a teacher who left Pakistan after a difficult divorce for a job in Britain, taking her daughters with her, told Afshar that she rejoiced in her new 'anonymity': "It was nice to be yourself. Nobody minded about the divorce and all that. Nobody wanted to blame me, I was just a teacher. It was just great not being fingered, being yourself and doing your job. It makes my life worth living."

Historically, nationalities have usually been bestowed by men to their descendents and there has been a tendency to see women's domesticity and care as the building blocks of culture and an effective means of securing a sense of community and ethnic identity. Women help to shape, develop and re-create the differing cultures and histories that they find themselves in. Culture in this context is understood not as an 'add on' but as an integral part of human beings and their relationships with others (Bhavnani, Foran and Kurian, 2003).

It is these inter-active processes that enable 'migrant' Muslim women to participate as active agents of change and who conceptualise the norms, mores, habits and customs that shape their lives. Amongst the older women who talked to Afshar one of the most effective in terms of transferring cultural mores was Mrs B whose son had married a 'white' convert. She explained: "All my grandchildren know their *nemaz*. I sit with them and we read the Qur'an and I tell them about our religion and about our village [in Pakistan]. My daughter in law usually joins us [...] She is a great cook, she can make perfect chapattis. We work together and we both enjoy it."

But there are tensions and cleavages between the genders and generations in terms of choice and prioritisations. They differ in their preferences in matters such as dress codes and cooking. Younger women may choose to replace the traditional scarf such as those worn by their mothers by the stricter *hijab*, which covers the head and is not loosely hung on shoulders but often they also discard the traditional *shalwar kameez* in favour of jeans and loose shirts. As N who is a highly educated accountant and *mohajabeh* told Afshar: “If you wear trousers and sort of things like suits then they don’t mind the *hijab* so much [...] so it’s easier to wear trouser suits and that sort of thing.” Though on formal family celebrations, most women of South Asian origin revert to the beautiful sari or *shalwar kameez*.

First generation migrant women create their own power base by re-constructing their ‘nations’ through stories, food and networks that create a functional power base for them within the domestic sphere. Hospitality, good food and care are seen by the older generation as an inalienable part of the culture and networking. Talking to older women Afshar found the conversations punctuated by delicious snacks and long discussions about how to cook samosas or how to make the perfect rice dish. Often the latter resulted in long arguments about the advantages and disadvantages of the distinct ways that Persians and Pakistanis cook rice. To prove who had the best method these discussions were followed by the inevitable demonstrations and general meals shared by all. But for the younger women, who are often in full time employment, cooking has become more and more simplified and the ‘authentic’ food is only to be found in the home of grandmothers. N explained: “I can’t be bothered to cook after a long day at work. It’s so easy to pick up a pizza or a samosa on the way home. It’s quick and less hassle. So usually I don’t cook.” Thus of necessity ‘cuisine’, which may be recognised as an important cultural signifier (Samad, 1998a), becomes diluted, changed and frequently acquires British characteristics which are included for convenience and to speed up the process of cooking.

For the older generations food remains of central cultural and emotional importance. Talking about and remembering the funeral ceremony with a sense of achievement a Muslim widow told us, as part of our 2001 ESRC funded older women study: “I cooked, my daughters and my daughters-in-law cooked a lot of food and it was very nice food and everybody shared. We had a lovely time. [...] we really had a lovely time ... It was good while everybody’s there.”

Whereas culture may be developed and perpetuated by women, it may be argued that nationality is a poor identifier for women; for long it has applied differently across the gender divides. The historical construction of nationhood and nationalism is masculine in terms of its character and demands (Adnan, 1993; Afshar, 2003; Basch, 1997). Women who have been the bearers of the nations have been given the nationalities of their father and their husband and, when migrating, have lost their birth right to their homeland only to acquire that of the male on whom they have been defined as a 'dependent'. They are subject to laws and requirements that are formulated and articulated as if all citizens were male.

The construction of nation and citizenship on the basis of 'fictitious ethnicities' (Radcliffe and Westwood, 1993) make women invisible, and do not meet their needs and demands. It is therefore not surprising that the primary identification of many of the older generation of British Pakistanis is with country or region of origin, rather than their relatively newly acquired British identity. Though they make the assumption that they are Muslim (Modood, Berthoud, Lakey, Nazroo, Smith, Virdee and Beishon, 1997; Samad, 1998b:432-3).

Second-generation migrant women have little reason to revert to a nationality that they have not experienced. Often they have not even seen their homelands; P, a British born girl of Pakistani origins who has never visited Pakistan, told Afshar: "'Pakistan' for me brings images of beautiful jungles and wild deer running along rivers." On the other hand Z, who had visited her parental village as a tourist, said that what was memorable for her was: "How lovely the village was in the spring and the delicious food that kept on coming." Other young women who had returned to rural areas have told other researchers that they were struck by the general levels of poverty, the lack of facilities and the restrictions placed on them (Jacobson, 1998). Young women who returned to cities were struck by the level of freedom and mobility enjoyed by women who had not been raised in the ossified atmosphere of being an ethnic minority in the West (Afshar, 1994). They found it hard to re-construct their national identity on the basis of their brief visits and the myths and stories heard from their mothers. They are all too aware that these re-created notions of nationhood were both idealised and unreal (Afshar, 1989b). Y, who is a young graduate, told Afshar: "Going back was OK. But I can't say that I wanted to stay. It was OK for a visit, but I missed my friends and felt a bit awkward. I couldn't really speak the

language and wasn't too sure about what to do. I was really ready to come back even though it was warm there and it's always cold here."

But the younger generation could not easily define themselves as British. In the 1980s many young schoolgirls told Afshar (1989b) that 'British' meant 'white' nationals. In the playground even those who were born and bred in the UK felt excluded by colour and creed. E told Afshar: "We just hangout together and they are on the other side [of the playground]. We don't go to their house and they don't come here." The distrust was re-enforced by the family. Mrs B told Afshar: "My granddaughter likes to go to play at her friend's house. But I always tell her not to go inside their houses, because you don't know what kin of people come to their houses." They, their mothers and grandmothers were all seen by the host society as 'immigrants'.

They could choose a hyphenated British-Muslim identity. But the boundaries created by such a label hide the complex intra- and inter-familial tension as well as the links and friendships made across the boundaries. Østberg expresses this complexity rejecting hyphenated identity as an analytical concept and replacing it with the concept of 'integrated plural identity' (2003:167).

However by 2003 when the Muslim Diaspora research was conducted, when questioned, many amongst the younger generation saw themselves as 'British Pakistani Muslims'. When asked 'what country do you define as your home country?', 23 of the 90 women defined their country as being Britain or England but of these only two were older women over 60 years of age. 21 participants described themselves as Pakistani – although these were mostly older women, two were under 19 and one of these was born in the UK. Two women described themselves as 'both' and one said: 'I'm not sure – Pakistani I think'. The majority who defined themselves as Pakistani were born in Pakistan and the majority who defined themselves as English were born in England.

The older women who participated in the ESRC research gave more complex identities as they were asked how they would describe their ethnicity. Since they were responding via an interpreter their replies may well have been influenced by the perceived necessity to explain the complexities to someone who was not of their own background. It may be that new technologies such as mobiles and the Internet have transformed relationships for young Pakistani people.

Knott and Khokher (1993) and Østberg (2003) have observed the fluidity that has developed between apparently opposing cultural styles. Østberg (2003) writes of the ease

with which Norwegian Pakistani children move between cultures and quotes Saima (14) who said 'I am wearing hijab and listening to techno' without expressing any conflict between these aspects of her identity. Similarly Khalid contacted his friends and Norwegian girlfriends by mobile phone and got to know the cousin in Pakistan, whom he was most likely to marry, by chatting on the Internet.

### **Hybridity**

The interactions of history, cultures and societies and the dynamic processes of change construct identities, which are pluralist, fluid, multifaceted and multidimensional (Fischer, 1986; Friedman, 1994; Giddens, 1991). Identities are much more of a process of change and continuity rather than a static attribute.<sup>7</sup> The continuity is sustained by shared memories, stories and cultural practices, change is both a reaction to circumstances and a process of negotiations that results in a multiplicity of identities that 'may or may not contradict each other' (Ghorashi, 2003:29).

However multiple identities are not disempowering, they may have a situational aspect. Where individuals have a choice in defining their identities then aspects of identity may be mobilised in different situations: they may present themselves differently in different contexts (Edwards, 1998; Ghorashi, 2003), they can adopt a single or a hyphenated identity. Women of all generations may think of themselves as migrants, as wives, mothers, or as 'British Muslims'.

Muslim women who talked to us generally accepted cultural, ethnic and national identities that defined them differently in different circumstances. Hybridity and hyphenated identities come more easily to women who through their life cycles move along and between identities. They are not necessarily 'assimilated', but many share the problems of women as a whole and have communality of experience with white convert

Muslim women who also cannot easily 'assimilate' within their own society. In terms of construction of an identity both the person and the face that they present is distinct and different from that of the older generation of Muslim women, it is also different from the youth-led Islamist revival (Castells, 1997) in the West. However, migrants such as R often do not have agency and cannot exercise a choice; they live in contexts of unequal powers (Bhabha, 1994; Ghorashi, 2003) that disregard their understandings of who they are and categorise them as 'migrants' thereby ascribing identities to them in terms of their creed, colour or ethnicity. Nevertheless even within the Muslim community the need to

retain a hyphenated identity remains real and powerful. It may be that young Muslim women with their shared concept of *umma* and their commitment to being British may be forging a new way towards social and political cohesion through hybridity.

As politically active Muslims they choose from the raft of Muslim societies those that reflect their views most closely. Within these societies they often initiate changes both in terms of internal politics and in terms of the recognition given to them and to their demands, without necessarily losing their ties with the host community. Younger women members of Muslims UK and the Islamic Society of Britain and FOSIS (Federation of Student Islamic Societies in the UK and Ireland) are from Arab, African, South Asian and white British backgrounds.<sup>8</sup> They told Franks (2001) that they were interested “in finding ways of being Muslim and British”. One respondent, the daughter of an Indian father and a white English mother, talked about the problems she faced as an English Muslim who could not find a place for herself in either community. She reported how some members of the white community hurled abuse whilst many Muslims, “more influenced by their cultures than faith found it hard to ‘locate’ an ‘English Muslim’” (Franks, 2001:137). As Zb, a high flying professional woman of Sudanese mother and a British father, told Afshar: “I can never say that I am British, because if I do they always say: ‘but where are you from originally?’”

### **Faith**

*Hizb ut-Tahrir* demands of its followers not to participate in the British political process. An angry young man, UZ, told Afshar: “My future wife is coming over and they want her to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen. But she can’t do that. It would be demeaning to swear an oath because we Muslims owe allegiance only to God Almighty.”

But many English-Muslims find it hard to accept *Hizb ut-Tahrir’s* demand that they should discard their British identity and become just Muslims. Though an important political statement in dealing with Islamophobia, this is a suggestion that is almost impossible for many to accept uncritically.

The ‘Muslim community’ in West Yorkshire is a multicultural community: it notionally includes African, Middle Eastern, South and South East Asian as well as white British and Irish Muslims. There are considerable cultural and linguistic differences between these societies and internally amongst each group. They adhere to different Sunni schools or are Shiias, Ahmadiyyas or Ismaelis. There are doctrinal differences on rituals

such as celebrations of the Prophet's Birthday and on legal matters concerning details of marital contracts and even about the correct method of washing before prayers and the names called in the *ashahd* during the daily prayer. The main Mosques often make exclusive claim to orthodoxy, but where numbers permit there are smaller mosques that meet the needs of the different cultures and smaller groups (Lewis, 1994; Vertovec, 1998).

There are also linguistic divisions amongst the Arabs, Persians and Pakistanis, as well as between them and Indian Gujarati and Bangladeshi Bengali speaking Muslims. Muslims in West Yorkshire are divided by their religiously and ethnically defined communities. They recreate their cultures on the basis of mutually independent cleavages of language, regional background and national loyalties. Kinship networks support and enhance these divides (Afshar, 1989a; Vertovec, 1998). Most marriages and joint commercial activities usually take place within *biradari* kinship groups (Ballard, 2001; Jacobson, 1998). Political alliances are usually made amongst specific *biradari* groups and endorsed by the community mosque.

Many of the older generations are more involved and interested in the politics of their homelands and tend to accept the mosque's lead in voting in the UK. There is reluctance to vote for 'outsiders'. Politics is understood and participation secured through kin and community networks. The moral economy of kin (Afshar, 1989a) demands that the younger generation elect the kin groups' candidate, despite the reality that the young often have political positions that do not necessarily accord with those of their parents.

The fears engendered by Islamophobia and the dependence of many Muslims on support within their communities make it much harder for the young to resist kin pressure in matters of local politics and at times of elections. *Biradari* kin groups are able to deliver local councillors who sometimes do not even speak English, but who have the support of their community. As Muhammad Ajeeb, who was Bradford's first Asian Lord Mayor in 1985 told the BBC: "*Biradari* plays a very dominant role in Pakistani politics.[...] Culture dictates that the elders' word is gospel. It is very difficult for younger members and women to change anything". (*Biradaris*, BBC4, 26 August 2003)

There is a generational divide, in terms of political and social adherence and activities, which is not easily bridged and is becoming increasingly more pronounced. Amongst the youth, Islam has become a more important identity signifier than it is for their parents (Samad, 1998b). Some even argue that the faith demands that they withdraw from

everyday British politics and concentrate on the faith and its teachings. Others are far less certain.

Whereas young women either choose the *hijab* or adopt their hyphenated identities, young men often have difficulty in defining themselves in terms of host or kin community. Some have been described as being perched precariously between the role models of “Lord Ahmed and Ali G” (Lewis, 2001). In West Yorkshire some young second and third generation males project: a ‘hard’ image of tough aggressive macho men ... [and claim] membership of *Hamas* and *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* ... Yet the same individuals do not know what *Hamas* or *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* represent and are unaware who the Shiias are, and how they differ from Sunnis. (Samad, 1998b:434).

However for these and other young Muslims, Islam as a religion is a core part of their personal and political identity, yet their interpretation of Islam is different from that of their parents. Given that “identities are the product of exclusion” and constructed through difference in relation to the ‘other’ (Hall, 1996), it maybe that this particular kind of masculine youth identity needs to be considered in the light of ‘compensatory masculinities’ which are constructed by minority youth and which are ‘racialised’ and ‘ethnicified’ (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Majors, 1990; Sewell, 1997) and are formed in opposition to the experience of oppression and dominant discourses of masculinity and attainments.

Following the 1995 Bradford ‘riot’, members of the Pakistani Muslim community attributed its manifestation on the expressed frustration of ‘disempowered and disenfranchised youth’ (Burllet and Reid, 1998). But there are young Muslims brought up in Britain who have a clear understanding of their faith. They are literate in English and their understanding of Islam is textual, often produced by Islamist groups in English, while their parents’ mainly derives from an oral tradition (Samad, 1998b: 434).

This generational divide is countered by a greater proximity of views and attitudes amongst some of the younger generation of Muslims. The language divide, which separated the communities, is bridged by the young who generally are fluent in English and not in their own mother tongues (Jacobson, 1998:96–8; Samad, 1998b:431–2; Lewis, 2001). An interviewee, who was a member of Young Muslims UK, told Franks how she was introduced to the Qur’an as a child and made to read it at the Madrasa but it was only when her brother introduced her to an English translation that she was able to connect with it and reoriented her life toward Islam.



However there is a gender divide and some of the young women have very different interpretations of the teachings of Islam from their male counterparts. Indeed in the current work of diaspora that we are conducting we found that in one university where it was felt that *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, who were indeed all men, had taken over the Islamic society, the women started their own organisation. Given the gendered understanding that traditional *Hizb ut-Tahrir* supporters have it would not have been easy for them to oppose the segregation. They had to accept that most women have different understanding and priorities. This is not to say that there are no female supporters of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*.

In specific cases such as the Women's Seminar '*Hijab* ban in France', (on the 21 January 2004 there was a meeting in London), organised by Sisters of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. It was supported by men and women. There was also a general appeal to the French government not to ban the headscarf from schools and public sector places of work. But often, as in the case of the young women who in the 1980s embraced Islam, and decided to wear the *hijab* as an act of solidarity with the *umma*, there are differences of interpretations, particularly in terms of the practicalities of living and working as 'Muslims'. As 'British Muslims' they did not always share the cultural ideas that their Muslim employers and parents retained. The docility required of these women as employees and as children who should accept practices such as arranged marriages, was difficult to negotiate. Not only the host community, but also some members of the faith community were ascribing an Islamic identity to these women that was not one that they themselves had adopted (Afshar, 1994; Samad, 1996).

September 11 and the subsequent intensification of Islamophobia (Allen and Nielsen, 2002) created a social context that constructed new meanings (Castells, 1997) that produced both solidarity and further tensions between generations and youths and young women in the Muslim community as well as between the hosts and the Muslim communities. Though by 1993, 87 percent of second generation 16–24 year-olds were born in the UK (Jones, 1993), young Muslims found that they were still ascribed with an identity that defined them as 'migrants' and, after September 11, as 'Muslims' who carried attributes of fear, terrorism and discord. The host society and the media were ascribing identities to these people that distanced them from the host and connected them to a constructed notion of their faith group. The new labels of 'evil', 'the enemy within' and 'terrorist' allowed little room for manoeuvre.

Many reacted by defining themselves as Muslims. In a recent set of interviews, conducted as part of a current Toronto based international study of Muslim Diaspora, a majority of the younger participants said that their faith had become stronger in recent years. The faith that they embrace is not necessarily the traditional beliefs that their elders wish them to have. Nor is their Islam limited to culture or constrained by the diaspora; their Islam is one that makes part of an imagined dynamic, unbounded world community – the *umma*. This is a righteous, strong and united Islam, which does not prevent them from retaining their identities as British, Pakistanis or Gujaratis, but encompasses all those identities within a permeable unbounded communality of dreams and aspirations.

The imagined community that the young refer to is not a homeland, it is not a geographical place and there is no intention of return. They have a universalistic Islamist consciousness that is not so much diasporic (Saint-Blancat, 2002) as rooted in the global concept of *umma*, the geographically unbounded single community of believers. There is no homeland; the earthly experience is merely a path towards the eternity. It is the correct path *seratol mostaqim* that matters, not the earthly political or regional divides. For many women the first steps on that path are through the adoption of a strict dress code and the wearing of the *hijab*.

### ***Hijab***

The decision to choose the *hijab* has not meant that the women concerned have abandoned their ‘British’ nationality. Many of the *mohajabehs*, the veiled women are comfortable with a multiplicity of identities and have defined themselves in terms of faith and nationality as British Muslims. In this there is a unity of understanding, aspirations and a communality of belonging that is shared by Muslim women across the boundaries of race, ethnicity and place of birth. For them there is little need to abandon the hyphenated British-Muslim identity for the singularity of political Islam.

These *mohajabehs*’ hyphenated identity is part of the complex self-ascribed identities that they share with some Muslim men. For instance many male and female members of the Young Muslims UK, who talked to Franks, were associating themselves with being British and Muslim. But young radical Muslims, who do define themselves as exclusively Muslim and not necessarily British, have labelled YMUK and Islamic Society of Britain as ‘Lassi Muslims’ (the equivalent of Champagne socialists).

However it is precisely within this forward looking Islamist context that young women of all colours and ethnicities can fit and function. Often women who define themselves as Muslim have a clear appreciation of both the rewards and the duties and obligations that the faith imposes on believers in their every day lives. These may not be the same as that which the more zealous men assume to be part of what Islam means in terms of rights and entitlements.

The choice to wear the *hijab* is a political act defining these women as ‘different’ and as Muslims at a time when rampant Islamophobia makes them vulnerable to attack and harassment for this act of defiance. However not all *mohajabehs* had initially sought to engage in a political act of resistance. Islamophobia defines them as ‘subversive’ and they have to cope with their ascribed identities of the enemy within. What the *mohajabehs* often had sought had been a ‘good Muslim man’ who would know and respect the rights of women. But this expectation does not sit comfortably with the desires of many of their radical Muslim male counterparts who prefer to seek a submissive bride from ‘back home’. So many of the *mohajabeh* find themselves of necessity obliged to fight for their rights on all fronts. Frequently the women who chose to wear the veil do not come from families who practice seclusion or insist on wearing the *hijab*; their mothers and grandmothers dress modestly, if from the subcontinent often they wore the ‘traditional’ sari or *shalwar kameez*, but not the *hijab*.

The head cover, which has been worn by young women, particularly in the West, is very much the product of the late twentieth century. It is a reconstructed emblem that allows them to combine jeans and jackets and the latest style in kitten heel shoes with the new tradition of the *hijab*. This is not a dress code that finds approval amongst some members of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. The clothes worn by the new *mohajabehs* are very distinct and different from that of their mothers and earlier generations of women in their kin groups.

Far from an indication of submission or docility the decision to wear the *hijab* makes a public statement that places the *mohajabehs* in the full light of the public gaze; something the parents and kin groups do not necessarily wish to see. It may even be seen as a clear indication of their new radical interpretation of the faith that they define as liberating rather than constraining. These views may well make it harder for parents to marry off their newly veiled daughters in arranged marriages. An interviewee for the Muslim Diaspora research, an art student and who wears *hijab*, told Franks: “The more Islamic I become the less likely it is I will be pushed into an unwanted marriage”. This is

because the parents are unable to criticise if she is following Qur'anic teaching. Young women often use their textual understanding of Islam to contest the traditions and restriction imposed on them by their parents.<sup>9</sup>

### **Conclusions**

Muslim women are creating a feminist political identity, which embraces the transnationality of *umma* and does not confine itself to minority Muslim groups; faith supersedes nationality (Schmidt, 2002) and race and ethnicity. Islam and *umma* as a political space facilitate the development of hyphenated identities. Young revivalist women who are born and bred or largely raised in the West fiercely oppose Islamophobia but also they often disagree with the cultural interpretations of Islam of their parents. Alliances between Muslim women of different colours and ethnicities and their radical interpretations of Islam and its teachings have helped create a new dynamic formulation of British Islamic identity that is bridged by bonds of friendship and scholarship. Their lived experiences make it possible for them to have hyphenated identities which are experienced as enrichment rather than lack.

The new Muslims may be 'Lassi Muslims', but they are also enlightened, cohesive and able to place themselves within both their kin and their community groups and within the host society. They may be the ones who reach out and even marry across the ethnic divides and forge religious alliances. They are the groups who are least likely to respond to the political demands of the zealous on either side of the faith and ethnicity divide. It may be that the realities of the lives and choices made by the new *mohajabehs* mark the first steps towards a new multicultural national identity and cohesion.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *Hizb ut-Tahrir* defines itself as a 'political party whose ideology is Islam, so politics is its work and Islam is its ideology'. Available at: <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org/english/>.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this article, Islamist is used to refer to groups who are choosing to use Islam specifically as a means of creating political allegiances and solidarities. *Al Muhajerin* is a voluntary organisation dedicated to giving *da'wah* to both Muslims and Non Muslims. *Da'wah* is explained to mean a 'call' or 'invitation', used to refer to a person being 'called' to follow Islam. However in October 2004, *Al-Muhajerin* closed its web site and announced that it was dissolving and ceasing its activities (*Guardian*, 13 October 2004).

<sup>3</sup> In this paper we will be using Franks' definitions for revivalism and its membership. Franks (2001) defines the 'revivalist way' as the modern-day path of a total commitment to Islam. In the case of Islam this may follow the classic revivalist pattern, described by Yvonne Haddad, of an initial love affair with Westernization and secularism quickly followed by disenchantment and an impassioned return to Islam (Haddad, 1983). The members of 'revivalist movements' are "those seeking a 'pristine' tradition of Islam[ ... ]stripped of all accretions. Present day revivalist movements in [...]Islam share this longing for an authenticity which they perceive in the early Islamic community. But this authenticity tends to be constructed in the likeness of dominant discourses of the time from which believers and scholars attempt to discern it' (Franks, 2001:11).

<sup>4</sup> Will Cummins is the pseudonym of Harry Cummins, a senior British Council Press officer who was sacked on the 1 September 2004. But the *Sunday Telegraph* has not retracted any of the statements made by Cummings in a series of Islamophobic articles published over three Sundays in July 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Islamism is used here to denote the newly emerging forms of Islam as political activism (Hale, 1996; Ismail, 2003; Nafi, 1998; Sayyid, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> There has been a continuing dialogue amongst scholars about Islamic feminisms. There is a group who have argued that it is possible to include as feminists Islamist women who are using the faith as a means of accessing rights and entitlements both in the private and public spheres (Afshar, 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Cooke, 2001; Karam, 1998; Mojab, 2001; Warnock Fernea, 1998). Cohen emphasises that while the ethnicity communicated to others may be contingent and variable, this is not to say that people do not invest hugely in identities and views of themselves, which they may not see as 'negotiable' (Cohen, 2000a, p. 5).

<sup>7</sup> Barth, 1994; Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994; Fischer-Rosenthal, 1995; Ghorashi, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> The Islamic Society of Britain and Young Muslims UK define themselves as a national organisation that aims to bring together Muslims and help them to use their common knowledge skills and efforts for the benefit of one another and British society as a whole, through the promotion of Islam and Islamic values. The Federation of Student Islamic Societies in the UK and Ireland defines itself as 'the premier Muslim Student representative body' and 'strives hard to uphold the motto: "And hold fast to the rope of Allah, all of you together, and be not disunited" (Quran, 3, 103)'.

Available at: [http://www.fosis.org.uk/about/intro\\_to\\_fosis.htm](http://www.fosis.org.uk/about/intro_to_fosis.htm).

<sup>9</sup> Ali, 1992; Jacobson, 1998:107–9; Samad, 1998b, p. 435; Shaw, 1988.

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**FIGHTING AGAINST THE *ETHNIC NICHE*: DEBJANI CHATTERJEE'S  
LITERARY PRODUCTION**

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The concept of *ethnic niche* featured in the title of the present paper is tightly connected with the definitions of Bengali/ Bangladeshi communities in the UK provided by critic Jamil Ali as "highly segregated" (Ali, 2000:7), and by sociology and anthropology professor John Eade as "encapsulated" within the British territory (Eade, 1997: 94). The numerous "Banglatowns" spread across the country can still be regarded as real *enclaves* in which the "official language" is Bengali (or Sylheti, a Bangladeshi regional variety). In them traditional, gender-related roles and the hierarchical relationship between the sexes typical of patriarchal societies (domineering, active man Vs. dominated, passive woman) which was rather plausible in the immigrants' mother country back in the '70s and the '80s - when wives started to join their husbands in the new land of settlement - are often faithfully reproduced by first and sometimes even by second generation immigrants. These immigrants find it difficult to share their cultural heritage and to effectively dovetail with the extended community (many women, for example, still have a poor degree of literacy in English and their experience of the "external world" is therefore limited and shrouded in *silence*).

The newest generations are mostly bilingual and have developed the skill of "switching linguistic code" according to whether they are interacting with people inside or outside the community. However, Bengali (as it happens to other "community languages") is generally taught only during Saturday/Sunday classes and it plays a marginal role in the social life outside their family and the circle sharing the same cultural background (Lawson, Sachdev, 2004:51). Moreover, recent "ministerial comments" quoted by scholars Lawson and Sachdev have promoted "a more assimilative ideology" and are prompting descendants from immigrants "to make English the main language in the most private

setting – the home” (Lawson, Sachdev, 2004:51), thus undermining the future of so-called “minority languages” and *silencing* the culture they convey.

The “war against Islamic terrorism”, which started following the attack against the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, has had its tragic aftermath even in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-faith UK, and has further problematized the above outlined situation. It has generated fear and suspicion towards Muslim citizens (as some Bengalis and most Bangladeshis are), thus multiplying cases of harassment against them (as can be observed on the internet site of the *Economic & Social Research Council*) and, consequently, thickening the invisible walls of the *ethnic niche*, perceived as a boundary and as a protection for both parties.

*Silence* and *isolation*, however, can be effectively fought against, as Sheffield-based Debjani Chatterjee (b. 1952), a British Bengali poet, storyteller, editor, educator, carer, former community and social worker, described in a recent interview as “a daughter of India and a child of the world” (Bakewell, 2004), has demonstrated. This paper sets out to explore the role that Debjani attributes to *the act of writing* as a powerful means of breaking the silence of the *ethnic niche* (thus unblocking channels of communication), of bridging gaps between apparently distant cultures (whose values are proudly asserted), and of contributing to mutual understanding and universal peace.

Due to the vastness of Debjani Chatterjee’s production (more than 40 volumes), the present analysis will focus only on *Namaskar* (her 2004 collection of poems including lines from 1989 to the present) as a meaningful introduction to the two literary projects she has promoted and is deeply involved in: “Bengali Women’s Support Group Book Project” (now called *Sahitya Press*) and “Mini Mushaira”.

Before settling in Sheffield, Debjani Chatterjee had lived in Japan, in Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Egypt and finally in several cities of the UK. Her transnational experience has enabled her to develop an inclusive and appreciative attitude towards the cultures she has encountered, thus avoiding the binary logic of mutual exclusion (mother country vs. new land of settlement, citizen vs. immigrant, insider vs. outsider, center vs. margin), which is the source of so many misconceptions, stereotypes and conflicts. Just to give a few examples of the idea of cultural syncretism expressed through her writing, in *Namaskar* (the Hindi word used to greet and therefore to *start communicating*), Debjani often employs the Japanese poetic form of the Haiku and she dedicates one poem to a “silent, invisible geisha” (Chatterjee, 2004:75) who “effac[es] herself from the day”, like many

women inhabiting the *ethnic niche* still do. Moreover, in the poem entitled “Sacred Cow”, the writer is capable of connecting the Hindu mythology of Bhoomi Devi - the Earth Goddess that appeared to Brahma in the shape of a cow - with Hathor, the heavenly cow worshipped by the old Egyptians (Chatterjee, 2004:84), thus unearthing forgotten bonds between cultures. In “I Remembered Cinderella”, instead, by drawing the reader’s attention to the Western, fairy tale heroine’s tiny feet (which, being opposite to the “large assertive feet/ of the wicked and ugly step sisters”, allow her to pass the glass slipper test), Debjani humorously reverses the stereotype according to which “the Chinese are strange” since “they have these fetishes” (Chatterjee, 2004:32) about women’s small, bound feet. Furthermore, Debjani seems to encourage a reflection on the sad, chauvinist equation “female beauty = stillness”, which apparently does not have any *national label*, as it is inferred in the final part of the poem: “I realized then/ that it is men/ who have fetishes/ about women” (Chatterjee, 2004:32).

Apart from uncovering connections and challenging stereotypes, however, this poetry collection seems to be meaningfully centered on the contrast between *silence* and the discovery of the *word*, which can be interpreted both as the individual path led by each immigrant, striving to acquire the new language without losing his/her own cultural and linguistic identity, and as the desirable journey of mankind, from conflict to peace. The experience of the “Rebel Poet of Bengal”, Muslim Nazrul Islam, as featured in the poem “Nazrul”, can be considered emblematic of the correspondence between “conflict” and “silence”. As Debjani remarks in her note to the poem, Nazrul’s “cyclone voice” and his

[...] songs and poems inspired the movement for freedom from British Rule. He married a Hindu and passionately believed in Hindu-Muslim solidarity in a united Bengal. He was heartbroken at witnessing the communal tension and violence when Bengalis killed one another [at the time of] India’s ‘Partition’ in 1947. (Chatterjee, 2004:19)

As Debjani seems to infer in her poem, the political and religious separation between West and East Bengal (now Bangladesh) corresponded to a scission inside Nazrul: “Partition hung like a vulture-cloud [...] Your mind and body parted, / as loved ones died around you” (Chatterjee, 2004:19). While the conflict proceeded, in fact, Nazrul progressively withdrew in his *niche of silence* and remained *speechless* for the rest of his life. Elsewhere in *Namaskar*, in the poem entitled “The Question”, Debjani writes of “the loneliness of city jungles” that “shelters the reluctant immigrant/ amid skyscraper towers

of silence” (Chatterjee, 2004:17), and in “Words between us” she draws another correspondence between conflictual situations and the loss of language:

Language breaks down and sounds have no meaning.  
Words splutter, dialogues die in mid air;  
you and I cross and there is no meaning [...]  
Silence replays the role of the jester.  
No more are we one, no longer a pair,  
You and I cross and there is no meaning. (Chatterjee, 2004:62)

On the other hand, as mentioned before, the collection features also the opposite journey, from *silence* to *speech*, signifying the assertion of the immigrant’s place within the new society, thus challenging the very definition of *ethnic niche*. In “Learning the Imperialist’s Language” Debjani describes her encounter with English, “the enemy’s language”, by saying that “because you were the enemy’s/ you had to be grappled with/ and ruthlessly mastered”, and she concludes by proudly stating that “No more the enemy’s/ you are now mine” (Chatterjee, 2004:61). In the poem entitled “To the English Language”, the writer seems to sketch the whole history of Bengali immigration to the UK by outlining her relationship to the “indifferent language of an alien shore”, to the “siren of the seven western seas” which, with its enchanting voice and its promises of better opportunities, summoned generations of cheap Bengali labourers and now pretends to ignore the new settlers, “tell[ing them] to go back where [they] came from” (Chatterjee, 2004:27). As Debjani writes, thus portraying herself as a positive role-model to emulate, she succeeded in tilling “the frozen soil of [the English] grammar” (strikingly contrasting with the “sweet and juicy” Bengali, with its “monsoon warmth”) she managed to “reap the romance of [its] promises” (Chatterjee, 2004:28), she learnt to endure the “whiplash of thoughts” that scarred her, those “barbed lines” that tore her apart. “I am here”, she proudly says, addressing directly the English language, “register me among your step-children” (Chatterjee, 2004:27). This poem is even more meaningful because it acknowledges and highlights the valuable contribution that Bengali/ Bangladeshi immigrants have given (and continue to give) to the complex texture of the British society, thus refusing to accept the solution of *cultural silence* as a dangerous means of gaining the full rights of belonging to the extended community: “[English], I do not come to your rhythms empty-handed/ – the

treasures of other traditions are mine,/ so many koh-i-noors, to be claimed” (Chatterjee, 2004:28).

The principles expressed in the poetry collection *Namaskar* inspired also the *Bengali Women’s Support Group*, founded in Sheffield in 1985 thanks to the joint efforts of Debjani Chatterjee and Safuran Ara, a Bangladeshi writer who lived and worked in social relations in Yorkshire for over twenty years, before going back to her mother-country. According to the *Declaration of Intents* of the group, this is an “anti-sexist, anti-racist, non-party political support group who include South Yorkshire-wide isolated women and their children” (Chatterjee, 1995). The group gathers Bengali and Bangladeshi women of first, second, third generation, coming from several social and cultural backgrounds (ranging from well-off graduates to housewives with limited proficiency in English and restricted financial means), and professing different faiths (Hindu, Muslim, Catholic), thus fulfilling Nazrul Islam’s dream of a religious pluralism in an imaginary Bengal without artificial, politically-determined borders. As Safuran Ara pointed out in a poem meaningfully entitled “For Debjani”,

We were just a handful of Bengali women:  
Oysters scattered here and there.  
Like crabs in separate shells,  
We each led individual lives,  
Restless and without direction.  
You came and banded us together. (Ara, 1999:63)

With the help of Safuran, Debjani Chatterjee succeeded in “empowering” those women, in prompting them to find a job, to overcome difficult personal situations and to learn English, thus acquiring the capability of effectively fighting against the *ethnic niche*. The shared efforts of the group allowed each woman to get her voice back, to come out of her protective but isolating “individual shell” and join together, thus generating a creative “collective energy” which is identified with the power of the Mother Goddess “Shakti”, notably worshipped by Bengali Hindus and highly respected by Bengali Muslims. Quoting Debjani’s words:



[As] Bengali women, we have always known that we can exert a *shakti* power, through collective action which neither men (nor even gods!) can withstand. Bengali mythology has empowered womanhood as being the embodiment of shakti.(Chatterjee, 1995)

One of the most remarkable outcomes of the *Bengali Women's Support Group* was in fact the "Book Project", which is now opening to the contributions of other South Asian community groups in the UK under the name of "*Sahitya Press*" (*Sahitya* is the Sanskrit word for "literature"). The "Book Project" published some educational bilingual (Bengali/English) posters: a whole set on Nazrul Islam's life and production (2001), and one entitled "Two Great Women of Bengal" (1993), featuring two important role-models for the women of the group: Hindu writer Sarojini Naidu (born in 1879 from a privileged social and cultural background) and Muslim writer Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain (1880-1932), who came from a poor family and, against her father's will, gained an education. In her words, quoted on the poster, "true freedom could not exist as long as women are not free". This powerful discovery of *words* to fight against the *silence of the ethnic niche* generated also four anthologies of short stories, poems, diary pages, recipes, notes by the women of the group, focusing on their daily life and on their experiences both in the UK and in their country of origin, which are joined together through *writing*, the powerful act that seemingly bridges geographical and cultural differences. One book was written entirely in Bengali, while the other three were composed at the same time in Bengali and English, through the collective work and efforts of the women, who helped each other to write and translate from one language into the other, employing what Debjani defined in the "Introduction" to *Barbed Lines* - meaningfully addressing "the reader, wherever you may be" (Chatterjee, Islam, 1990:7) - as a process of "transcreation". By this word, Debjani did not mean a scholarly, accurate translation (which would have somehow implied the idea of an "original" and a "mirror copy" in the other language), rather something closer to *a new creation* in the *parallel language*, thus showing the women's attempt at mastering and feeling comfortable in both languages, in both cultures. Quoting Safuran Ara's words, through the Book Project the women of the group have succeeded in "creating some sense of [their] lives on paper" (Chatterjee, Islam, 1990:16).

Another literary project Debjani Chatterjee has been deeply involved in is "Mini Mushaira" (the Arabic word for "gathering of poets") aiming at bridging another *gap of silence* between cultures (English, Irish, Indian and Pakistani) whose relationship with one

another has been deeply affected by conflicts and wars throughout history. “Mini Mushaira”, described by Debjani as a “multi-cultural and multi-lingual poetry group” (Chatterjee, 2003:25), was established in 1996 by an English teacher and writer, Simon Fletcher, by Pakistani British educator and writer Basir Sultan Kazmi and by Debjani, who involved also her Anglo-Irish husband, poet Brian D’Arcy.

One of Debjani’s most interesting literary outcomes connected with “Mini Mushaira” is *Generation of Ghazals*, a collection of poems featuring two generations of poets in Urdu (Nasir Kazmi and his son Basir Sultan Kazmi) translated by her into English. The dedication of the volume is truly meaningful in itself, and capable of casting light on the deeper intent of fostering communication and peace which lay beyond Debjani’s work as a translator: “To my fellow poets in Mini Mushaira: may poetry be a bond of enduring friendship between our four countries – Britain, Ireland, India and Pakistan” (Chatterjee, 2003:5). In her detailed introduction to the volume, Debjani explores the misconceptions commonly associated with the “opaqueness” and the untranslatability of *ghazals*, one of the most ancient and complex forms of poetry in Urdu, commonly used to express one’s feelings of love or loss. Besides challenging this stereotype and succeeding in her translation, Debjani re-contextualizes *ghazals* within the social and political framework of the times in which Nasir Kazmi wrote, namely the partition of India in 1947, thus spiritually joining him with the above mentioned Bengali poet Nazrul Islam who, strikingly enough, in his life experimented also with *ghazals*:

[Nasir Kazmi] was able to articulate the sorrows and the trauma of a nation partitioned and of groups of people displaced. The ghazal, which had traditionally conveyed the lament of lovers – parted or abandoned – was now challenged to express the anguish of lost homes and landscapes. (Chatterjee, 2003:12)

The idea of “generations”, so forcefully expressed in the title, implies continuity, survival, renewal. The “lost homes and landscapes” seem to be recovered in Nasir’s son’s idea of poetry, as it is possible to understand in the final piece of the collection, entitled “The True-hearted”, which can also summarize Debjani Chatterjee’s idea of writing as a means of fighting against the *ethnic niche*:

The true-hearted can settle – no matter which land.  
A flower wants to bloom, wherever its garden.

[...] Whichever the forest, a peacock needs must dance. (Chatterjee, 2003:81).

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**RADOJKA VUKČEVIĆ**

## IS A WOMAN STILL "A STRANGER AT SUPPER" IN MONTENEGRO?

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"Men are fighters. Who would protect us? Everything else has to be taken care of for them. That's what women are for." So says Milena, one of ten women one hundred years old or more who in Zorka Milich's study, *A Stranger's Supper*, offer a rare look inside the traditional tribal culture of Montenegro. Encouraged by the late Dr. Albert Bates Lord (*The Singer of Tales*, 1960), who had spent three years in Montenegro, Zorka Milich listened to these articulate centenarians explain what life was like for the women behind Montenegro's warriors.

Born as a disappointment to her parents because she was not a boy, the female in traditional Montenegro--roughly characterised as pre-World War II--was raised to serve and give birth to the male she could not be. During these five centuries the people living in this craggy Balkan region were at war defending their country against the Turks, Germans, or Austrians and fighting among themselves in defence of tribal and family honour.

Clearly the defining moment in each of these women's lives was their wedding. It marked not only the passage from adolescence to adulthood but to a whole life that from that point forward would be directed by the needs of her husband and his family. All women were subject to arranged marriages, and most had never seen their husbands before. Tradition dictated that a woman leave her family's home for his. She would become not her family's but her husband family's happiness. She would become "a stranger at supper". She took care of people who were at first little more than strangers.

This pattern continued during the 19th century: woman's role was significant both as a member of society and a family pivot. In the natural division of labour between man and woman, as practised before, a woman was charged with all the tasks related to running the family and the upbringing of children, care about clothing and sustenance and other jobs. These tasks were a particularly heavy burden in a time of war when she would take over the man's duties as well. In spite of everything, a woman was the most important person in the family. As a proverb goes, "A house does not rest on the ground; it rests on a woman"

What was all this like for the women who spent a whole century playing the defined role? Zorka Milich wanted to find out. Her first impressions when she was recording oral histories of these (thirty) one-hundred-year-old illiterate tribal women of Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Muslim heritage (1990) concerned their appearances: "Before me sat a very alert, elderly woman as 'to the manor born': imperial, confident, and proud, hands clutching a neatly folded handkerchief in her lap. In her eyes, gentle yet penetrating, lay the cumulative wisdom born of centuries of naked toil and agony in an androcentric environment. To say I was humbled is to barely express my awe" (*A Stranger's Supper*, XVI).

The author's first impressions were immediately followed by her amazement: "Whether a subject was feeling discomfort, fear, or embarrassment was impossible to discern. What she excluded was total resignation. There was a job to be done and she would do it, consistent with the pattern of her life: life is what it is, and to question or to complain is pointless" (*A Stranger's Supper*, XVI). Fatalistic determinism also meant the acceptance of the deaths of the dearest (husband, son, and brother) with Spartan courage: without a single shed tear. This created a pattern which all of them respected. These women were committed to the preservation of the patriarchy into which they were born and its culture, including their subservient status. They even participated in war. There were cases, unknown to other societies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a young woman would decide to take the role of a man in the family she came from. This would happen if her brother died in the war, and she had no parents. Then she would behave like men, they would have their hair cut, and would fight in the battles (There were 16 in World War I). They even "felt" like men. They were called *talije*.

Here are some excerpts from their oral histories:

**Ljubica:** When a woman is unfaithful to her husband he chases her out of the house. He cannot keep her. She disgraced his family, brought shame to everyone. She has to go, and that is all (40).

**Milena:** When my son died I told you how sad everyone was. But I never cried for him in public. That was not allowed. No mother is allowed to cry for her son. In your greatest pain, you could not cry. It was a sign of weakness (46).

**Petrana:** Have a baby in a hospital? What hospital? We had no hospitals, not even doctors. I did it all by myself (54).

**Jelena:** I remember four wars, Turkish, German, Austrian, and Bulgarian. We were always thirsty and hungry. We were always running away from an army. That is the way we lived most of my life (65).

**Vidosava:** Was I afraid that my brother-in-law would touch me? He would lose his life if he did. This is an honourable land. Our people have good character. No woman has to be afraid that someone will insult her (71).

**Gospava:** The *Svabe* never raped the woman. The army never raped. Neither did the Turks (83).

**Jovana:** When a woman cannot have children, sometimes her husband feels sorry for her and keeps her. And sometimes a good wife tells her husband to take another wife. When he brings in another wife, the two wives stay together in the house (100).

**Fatima:** What? My husband and I decide on how many children we should have? No, no! We never decided on anything, only what God wrote down (113).

**Paska:** I know of a husband who said to his wife who just gave birth to a girl, "If you have one more girl, I will kill you" (122).

**Nadira:** I would ask for my dead son to come back (135).

Where does Zorka Milich find an explanation for their behaviour? She finds it in pride - pride in their culture and identity. These women are pride incarnate, she believes. Their pride "emanated from the contribution she made to its continuity: raising children to uphold the legacy of their ancestors. In the main, that which nourishes her ego and sense of self is rooted in being the mother of warrior sons" (XVII). But this does not mean that the private persona behind the public persona is accessible to the outsider. On the contrary, concludes the author, "beneath the seemingly homogeneous characteristics of the society at large lies a complex being, restrained from personal expression for the betterment of the collective [...] Nonetheless, the doctrine by which they live and the face they present to the world can be corroborated by a glorious, admittedly brutal, history" (XVIII).

Christopher Boehm agrees with Zorka Milich as he believes that Zorka Milich's imaginative field-project has provided the answer to the question: what was it like to be a woman in a society so openly biased against females. "A woman's happiness in traditional Montenegro was determined by repeated throws of genetic dice. If blessed with many sons, she was widely respected and appreciated by her husband's family and clan", he explains. On the other side, Boehm claims that this attitude is understandable because their cultural tradition was built on several centuries of constant warfare and loss of sons.

While studying the history of Montenegro, Christopher Boehm acquired knowledge regarding the heroic epics, bards, and the stories of every Montenegrin's life. Impressed by the richness of the oral histories Zorka Milich collected, Boehm concludes, "Like the heroic epics, these autobiographical tales harken to certain themes and involve the use of a distinctive poetic language" (XXVII). Naturally, the descriptive language is rich, and it is decidedly richer when employed by women.

After I had read Zorka Milich's study I said to myself, "This is no longer so." I told Zorka the same. "Why don't you check", she asked me. "Of course I will", I answered absolutely positive that I am a hundred per cent right that things have changed completely in the meanwhile. I was hoping that the history of women will be the best indicator and level of modernisation in Montenegro. "Do all the women from three next generations think like me?", I asked myself. Am I not facing the rising awareness of women's condition in Montenegrin society when their educational, political, civil, and sexual rights are concerned? Do they still care for oral tradition, and use specific poetic language? My mother-myself-my daughter, three steps forward? All living in this century. Sharing the same time as Zorka's old women. A challenge was there.

First, let us hear the voices of historians about the three generations. The generation of my mother has experienced the greatest challenges as witnesses of World War II and bearers of the first women's movement in Montenegro. Their liberation during the War for Liberation was a part of the general revolutionary movement led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. In line with its platform the Communist Party of Yugoslavia supported equality of women and men in every respect. The aim of the movement was "cultural-political progress of the women of Montenegro and their better position in the society." Women were organised into sections; in 1941 during their First Youth Conference there were 3000 of them. Women were active in all other fields (nurses, cooks, etc) but none of them served on the battle field. It was only on 23 February 1942 that Tito gave the order (his article "The Importance of the Participation of Women in the Liberation War") that they could fight if they wanted. In three partisan brigades there were 400 women. Every 7th soldier was a woman. During the First Conference of Anti-Fascist Movement of Women (December 1942) Tito said that he was proud to have so many women fighting for freedom. Two women from Montenegro (Djina Vrbica and Stana Tomasevic) were members of the Central Committee. That was the first time in the history of this area that women massively participated in war, previously an exclusively male business. In 1944



their number increased to 120 000 members, or one-third of total inhabitants. Twenty five thousand were killed. They fought bravely. There was not a single case of desertion or treason. Obviously, tradition played the most decisive role (patriotism, honour, courage, freedom). Unfortunately the course of women's emancipation taken during the war did not continue at such rapid rate after the war. Women did use some political and civil rights accomplished in the revolution. However their emancipation slowed down and assumed an inconsistent path under socialism.

My generation is the generation in-between. In addition to our historical heritage, we were living between East and West, having been exposed to the influence of both civilisations. We were brought up between the Beatles and Dostoyevsky. Full of optimism, our generation insisted on understanding its struggle for emancipation as struggle against the bad sides of patriarchal society and as struggle for the essential correction of the traditional notion of a woman. While adopting contemporary values of an emancipated personality, it carefully kept its characteristics, by creating an exemplary synthesis of an emancipated personality, always aware that her equality was still under attack by the male population. We were aware that the Constitution (1946) promoted equality with access to education, and a free choice of profession. Although this was a big step forward, still, it falls somewhere between the traditional model of a woman and the raising of awareness.

My daughter's generation is trying to continue their mothers' emancipation during the time of transition and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. But, the slow and difficult transition follows the crisis brought by the changes of the social and political system. In that context, in the centres of economic and political power, the question of women's equality is current again. More precisely, "the raising of the level of its equality insists on stronger confrontation with social neo-conservatism" (*Deseti kongres istoricara Jugoslavije*, 450). Unfortunately, this "modern patriarchy, where the ritual acts through the codex of traditional family, precisely defined within the borders of the group, clan, or a tribe, threatens to decrease, if not destroy everything that had been achieved so far on the level of emancipation" (*Deseti kongres istoricara Crne Gore*, 450). A step back? One of the logical consequences of the economic transformation of the society is the woman who is again economically dependent on her husband or on his family (like most from my mother's generation). She is caught in the trap of ghettoisation and her self-respect is destroyed. Fortunately, the more ambitious ones have accepted the challenges of transition. They have become professional politicians and engage in business or work in vocations

once reserved for men only. Some look for their solutions in women's non-governmental organisations.

What does all this look like when heard from the representatives of these three generations? I decided to listen to 60 women's voices (twenty from each generation) from three generations of Montenegrin women. I took into consideration the following criteria: age, marital status, education, vocation and work. According to the age they were put into three groups: 21 women up to the age of 30; 21 women from the age of 30 to 50; 18 women older than 50. In terms of marital status only two women up to the age of 30 are married; 17 women from the age cohort of 30-50; 13 of those older than 50; 1 woman is divorced, and 3 are widows. In terms of education only 3 women finished elementary school in the oldest group, 12 finished secondary school, while 5 graduated from some university; in the middle group only one woman only finished elementary school, 8 finished secondary school as well and 11 graduated from some university; in the youngest group 15 finished high school and are continuing their studies while 5 of them graduated from some university. In terms of employment only one woman from the eldest group still works, while in the following group all of the women still work. In the youngest group only three women work. The women work as doctors, professors, teachers, nurses, shop-assistants, economists, lawyers, students, etc.

The questions for the three following generations had to be modified slightly. Some of Milich's were kept unchanged, while some had to be added to address contemporary times. The aim of this approach was to get the most complete pictures from these new oral histories.

While I was recording the oral histories of the three next generations my first impressions did not concern the physical appearances of the interviewees. Instead I was concerned with their much greater openness during the interviews. I was aware of the complexity of their beings, like Zorka Milich, but also of much easier communication with them and their readiness to talk.

Fatalistic determinism which dominated Milich's oral histories is no longer present in any of the three generation. Two thirds of the interviewed women believe that a woman has a better place in society. They control their lives, and change it. They justify their answers in connection with their financial independence. One third believes that they live worse than their mothers. This is an introduction to the answer to the crucial question of whether a woman is still a "stranger at supper." Two thirds of the women from the first

following generation think that a woman is still "a stranger at supper", in the next generation the number decreases to one half of them, while the youngest absolutely disagree. In this latter group only one of them believes that it is so.

All Milich's women were subject to arranged marriages; most had never seen their husbands. Asked if their marriages were arranged, as in Milich's study, these women answered negatively. Only two of them from my mother's generation were married in that way. Traditional marital customs have been weakening. None of the middle-aged and young woman had to respect an old custom and share wedlock (the first wedding night), with her brother and sister in law, who were supposed to show her their respect and protection. But, in my mother's generation one-fourth of them had to obey the rules of tradition.

Medicine has advanced in the meanwhile. We cannot speak about the number of new-borns or those children who died early the way described in Milich's oral histories. On the contrary, this topic of treating mothers' pains upon losing children is no longer present. But one great pain is still there: the pain of not having a son. Asked, as in Milich's study, if it was important to have a son, more than half of the women said "yes" and added "unfortunately". This paradoxical "yes" came as a surprise after their negative answer that a woman was not "a stranger at supper".

The women in Milich's study remember World War I and World War II. While some women in my study remember these wars, all of them remember the 1991\2 War, the Bosnian War, the Serb-Krayina exodus, the 1999 bombardment and the Kosovo exodus. All of them are aware of the rapes of other women not only in all of these wars but in peace as well. Unfortunately, the topic covering: wars, rapes, suffering, pain, does not have less importance than in Milich's study.

One of the additional questions asked concerned young men's obligation to enlist. The interviewees gave paradoxical answers. On one side, they strongly disapproved of wars, while on the other side they gave intriguing answers. While half of my mother's generation and mine were against this duty, my daughter's generation expressed a strong social neo-conservatism. Only three of them were against compulsory military service.

To be an unfaithful woman is not a vice as it used to be. Instead, these women now show understanding. They also show a similar attitude insofar as infertile women are concerned. These women are not condemned by other women, unlike Milich's oral histories. One-third of all of them feel sympathy, as the result of their seeing a woman

through her reproductive capabilities. One-third also consider the decision not to have children their legitimate choice. The most radical change, however, happened insofar as divorce is concerned. It is more readily accepted as one moves from generation to generation. In the youngest generation only one woman disapproved. Was one of the most important reasons for this change because of violence in marriage, about which they are well aware? Although none of them said they experienced it, the subject needs to be studied more thoroughly.

The choice of terminology, "a specific language of suffering", as Bowen calls it, is specially emphasised when war as topic is concerned. Nothing has changed in this sense since Milich's oral histories were recorded. The richness in their terminology is impressive. The number of terms describing a war is equal to the number of the interviewed women in all three generations. The apocalyptic vocabulary the women of all three generations use can be identified with the vocabulary they use to describe the time we live in: chaos, misery, insecurity, savageness, agony, despair, nonsense or humiliation...

Milich's last question to her interviewees was: "If you were given one wish, what would you wish for?" This generation would usually say: "I wish to die" and they would add "I wish my family to be healthy." Only one woman wished to see her long ago buried children. There is a historical shift insofar as women's feelings of the three next generations are concerned. Their own desires and their individuality develop slowly because even in this case women see themselves as a part of a collective and unconsciously recognises their implicit role to preserve the society they belong to. Only one woman belonging to my generation wishes something for herself, while five of the youngest feel the same.

In her conclusion, Dr. Milich says that in the 19th century a woman in Montenegro in spite of strict rules was respected. I feel it difficult to say so either for the 19<sup>th</sup> century woman, or for the three generations of 20<sup>th</sup> century women. For that reason I asked a direct question. Half of the women from the three next generations gave me a paradoxical "yes", while another half said "yes, but not enough." The power of hidden tradition came out equally in three opposite statements: a woman is not "a stranger at supper" versus "it is still important to have a son" versus "a woman has always been respected." I consider this an instance of non-awareness or of a history which is waiting patiently for its right moment to be exposed.

One cannot claim that in the eyes of these women they could recognise eternal wisdom as in the eyes of Milich's narrators. But it is impossible to hide amazement at the richness and complexity of a human being, who is less shy to present herself the way she is. But as in the past, even today dealing with the problem of equality (respectability in the case of oral histories) is a test for defining how democratic a society is and what its level of intellectual life is. A woman's need for equality as a part of her emancipation contains an immanent need for full human rights and respect for her dignity. For, we must not forget that the history of women is the best indicator of humanity and the status of women is an indicator of the level of modernisation in a society.

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## WOMEN WRITERS AND THE WAR EXPERIENCE: 1918 AS TRANSITION

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What does it mean to discuss women as a category within a temporal node such as 1918, which as a military and political moment would seem to belong to men? The complex political turning point of 1918, marked by war and the eventual end of war, had an impact on women that differed from place to place, just as the experience of the Great War differed among men. Yet war and a postwar politics of self-determination and extension of suffrage indeed possessed a lively, even life-determining importance for women. As a “total” war, World War I blurred the lines between men and women, between soldiers and civilians. It came at a moment when greater numbers of urban women (and of the working classes) had access to literacy. They could therefore participate in the widespread impulse to report on and shape the meanings of the war. We should remember, however, that oral cultures also shape the motives and meanings of war, as some of the materials discussed here will show. Not all women writers of the period adapted their focus or their forms to the rearrangements of the social order that accompanied the war, but a number did so in ways that often linked their literary experiments to those of their male compatriots, using neologisms, fragmented syntax, and generic innovations to evoke this historical rupture.

Literary theorists such as Julia Kristeva have asked whether women experience time in the same way as men. If diplomatic and military history seem to set the frame of war for soldiers, the boundaries are less clear for women’s understanding of war. Moreover, historians such as Joan Scott ask whether historical “experience” is not continuously reconstructed by the shifting nature of human subjects, a question that invites us to consider the recasting of war experiences over succeeding decades. On both these counts, the singular date of 1918 to mark a boundary between social-political systems may seem even more arbitrary in the case of women’s literary history than in that of men.

Certainly, the war had a catastrophic impact, an impact that continued beyond 1918. As on the Western front, many women on the Eastern front had lived under occupation. To a far greater extent than in the West, they had suffered from mobile battle fronts, forced displacements, and devastating scorched earth policies. Casualty rates on the Eastern front were far higher, transferring to women the increased burden of caring for

their families. Moreover, when the armistice was signed in November 1918, the war did not come to an end for most of the women in Eastern Europe. The “hunger blockade” against the Central Powers would continue for another eight months. The influenza epidemic attacked and carried away not only soldiers but those women and children who had been weakened over the course of the war by near starvation, including the distinguished Hungarian writer Margit Kaffka. The emergence of hyperinflation in the twenties made the simplest of household provisioning difficult, especially in urban areas. Armed conflict continued in places such as Latvia, Finland, Poland, and Carinthia; revolutions and retribution perpetuated violence. Women continued doing “men’s work,” since many of the region’s men would not return at all or would slowly find their way back from prisoner-of-war camps and hospitals. The temporal node of 1918 thus knots together preceding wartime experiences with the war’s continuing impact after the armistice. At the same time, texts produced at the end of the war and in the decade thereafter often connected the striking shifts in women’s lives catalyzed by the war to the expectations of political and social change that emerged at the end of the fighting. 1918 therefore was a highly symbolic, if often ironic, date.

The range of women’s texts that appeared bracketing this moment, from autobiographical forms to fiction to poetry, corresponded in some ways to the range of women’s experiences, from fighting, to nursing, to weeping. Chaotic war conditions had thrust women into a wide array of unfamiliar roles. A few thousand perhaps, notably in Poland, Romania, and along the Russian front, became soldiers or partisan fighters. Many more turned to nursing or relief work, traditional auxiliary roles for women in wartime. Others stepped into the shoes of factory workers, transportation workers, schoolteachers, or functionaries. Massive losses, disruptions, and innovations in labor assignments during 1914-1918 catalyzed many women’s responses in writing. Their efforts to record, to make sense of these events, or to resist the war took varied forms. That heterogeneity reflected women’s geographic situation (urban or rural), class positions, educational backgrounds, as well as ideological positions and degree of engagement in the avantgarde. Note that gender and class differences inscribed in these texts were not only reinforced by war, but also affected by access to literacy, salons, and publication. Not surprisingly, much of women’s self-expression poured into relatively informal autobiographical genres, into prose sketches, or into lyrical poetry – all forms that tended to be encoded as feminine and that permitted a relatively immediate inscription of experience.

Yet we must keep in mind that literary genres, however informal, were not the only form of cultural expression to which women turned. Most women, of course, especially rural women such as the famous Romanian soldier Ecaterina Teodoroiu, did not write at all. Instead, she and others participated in the highly ritualized forms of oral expression. Although from a simple peasant family, Teodoroiu had an unusual ten years of schooling. In the war period, she first joined the scouts, then became a nurse, and eventually joined the battalion in which her two brothers had served before they were killed. The Balkan tradition of the *vergina*, a girl who cross-dressed as the family son if there was no brother, may have helped legitimate this role. Wounded, Teodoroiu won medals and the honorific title of second lieutenant. After her death on the battlefield of Mărășești in 1917, the soldiers of her unit reported that she had sworn a powerful oath. Her oath reflects the recitative form of oral laments and prayers, such as the *doina*, an outcry of grief. Even where high rates of female illiteracy bar women from the history of literature, such oral forms offer a poetic outlet and a public, however short-lived.

I swear to fight until we no longer hear the footsteps of the invader on the soil of my  
fatherland!

I swear to fight until the eyes of our children and their parents no longer shed tears.

I swear to fight and to avenge those who have fallen far from the quick waters of the  
river Jiu and from the shadow of Mount Parângului.

I swear to fight and to scatter over the tomb of the hero who fell here clay taken from the  
old riverbanks that have been invaded and water from the heart of the Jiu, water which my  
merciless fight shall set free. ("Battle Oath," 84-85)

A soldier's oath of vengeance, this prose poem implies both a history and a promise; she makes a pledge with her hand not on a sword or holy book but on the soil. The simple anaphora that links each sentence or line by repetition to the next establishes a progressive image of the war as invasion, separation, death, and loss of national independence. Teodoroiu's chthonic imagery of the land and the waters of the Jiu are the sources from which her passionate patriotism draws its strength. The reversal of tears by these purifying waters provides an emotional symmetry that promises meaningful closure to the war for her listeners. Even if Teodoroiu wrote nothing, her oath became a legendary component of the Romanian war story.



Oral traditions also drew young Polish women into partisan combat that became the subject of postwar memoirs. Sophja Nowosielska Lipowicz was inspired by her grandfather's memories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century heroines Emily Plater and Henryka Pustowojt. First she joined Piłsudski's Legions in 1914 (her family brought her home), then she smuggled money and arms for the Polish Military Organization; in 1918 she volunteered in a defense force, eventually serving in the Polish Women's Voluntary Legion as a lieutenant. The 1917 popular uprisings in Russia, together with the formation of Maria Botchkareva's Russian Battalion of Death in 1917, may have served as a model for women's combat units in Poland as well. Although Nowosielska came from an indulgent and wealthy family that permitted her to spend summers as a tomboy on their estates in Romania and the Carpathians, she might not have written at all, had she not understood that her experiences reflected world-historical shifts.

Nowosielska dealt with some of these anomalies in her memoir *Pamiętnik bobrujski* (ca. 1921) by deploying an ironic, self-mocking tone. She recounts her inability to shoot when first passed a gun: she told the sergeant "the trigger is jammed," only to receive a quick lesson in handling a safety rifle, while already under Austrian and Ukrainian fire (*Hurricane*, 48-49). She describes wounded comrades as ragamuffins who played with toys in hospital, then returned to fight "with rifles against cannons." Changed not only by cutting off her hair and putting on men's clothes but by combat itself, she notes, "I am sure my mother would not have recognized me at that moment" (*Hurricane*, 56). A mother and schoolteacher in later years, Nowosielska combined a vivid storytelling ability with great pride in what she and other children had accomplished in freeing the cities of Poland from occupying forces; she signed copies of her memoir with her military title.

More highly crafted and politically sophisticated was the memoir of Alexandra Szczerbińska Piłsudska, tracing her growth from child patriot to militant socialist and eventual wife of Marshal Piłsudski. Like Nowosielska, Piłsudska as an orphan had listened to her grandmother's stories about participating in the insurrection of 1863. Starting in 1905, she smuggled weapons and military secrets, formed the women's intelligence section of the Riflemen's Association, then worked for the Polish Legions until her arrest by the Germans in 1915. Her *Memoirs of Madame Pilsudski* (1940), written in exile in England, is punctuated by sharply observed, often humorous or ironic stories. In one she recounts a narrow escape, when the stitching of a fellow smuggler's skirt gave way, releasing a

cascade of cartridges onto the cobblestone street. Her most horrific story depicts the attempted suicide of a group called “the prostitutes” (teachers, a dressmaker, and a secretary) who “had been forced by starvation to sell themselves in the streets of Warsaw” and were abused nightly by the German soldiers. When these women and girls swallowed several packets of needles in their hut, Piłsudska and her friends were able to save their lives, but not rescue them from their degradation: “it was wartime” (*Memoirs*, 251).

Piłsudska is highly conscious of political distinctions and of the heterogeneity of Polish society represented in her prison hut. Deftly she places into the mouths of others questions that she herself wants the reader to ask. Thus she recreates a Christmas Eve conversation with the German guard of her prison at Szczypiorno, who asks, “Gnädige Frau, I see that you have had much more education than I or any of the men in my regiment, so perhaps you can answer for me a question I have often asked myself. Why precisely are we fighting this war?” (*Memoirs*, 248). Piłsudska’s autobiography should be read not simply as a monument to her dead husband. Like Nowosielska, she unhesitatingly lays down a building block in the postwar project of nation-formation, and, at the time of publication, national resistance to Hitler.

Her memoir also marks an important confluence in women’s war texts of profeminist consciousness with historically innovative roles. Her attention to sexual politics helps make this a lively instance of the war memoirs that proliferated in the decades after 1918. She notes that by 1912 the feminist movement was beginning to spread through Europe (*Memoirs*, 204), and that socialism had promised a measure of freedom to women (*Memoirs*, 205). Into this historical context she sets the formation of the women’s section of the socialist Strzelcy, “the first women’s army auxiliary organization to be formed in any country” (*Memoirs*, 205-206). Already engaged in intelligence work in the prewar period, Piłsudska stresses the themes of disguise, falsification of identity papers, and covert operations. In a kind of underground writing, she permits the narratives themselves to carry the witty play between political resistance and resistance to sexual stereotypes. She particularly relishes examples of German and Austrian misreading of her identity and celebrates her defiance as a female courier on the road, able to cross and recross proliferating border barriers with impunity.

This lively prose modeled on the genre of the adventure story helped shape an avid audience for accounts about women’s exceptional contributions as soldiers, especially those with a high sense of drama like the memoirs of Nowosielska and Piłsudska. There

was also an audience for far more traditional war stories about nursing or relief work, roles that reinforced an accepted feminine image, domesticated women's involvement in the war, and extended temporally across the arbitrary line of the armistice. Women as soldiers fostered the notion that the war was an exceptional event. By contrast, women as nurses symbolically reassured audiences of the long-term stability of gender roles and the promise of recuperation of the social order after the war.

Not all nursing, however, took place in safe locations behind the lines. The Hungarian Countess Nora Kinsky was an energetic, daring, highly educated young woman, who sought precocious responsibilities early in life, becoming her siblings' tutor, then her father's secretary at 14. In 1914 she established a hospital with 110 beds on their country estate, and in 1916, chosen for her exceptional linguistic abilities, she became a delegate of the imperial Austro-Hungarian war ministry sent to inspect prisoner-of-war camps in Russia. In the next two years, she traveled from Vienna to near Vladivostok and back, moving after the February Revolution to Astrachan, where she stayed to nurse in a hospital for prisoners, until her brother could be released from his own prisoner-of-war camp.

Kinsky's diary, *Russisches Tagebuch: 1916-1918* (Russian Diary: 1916-1918) kept largely in French but published posthumously in German, offers a vivid, private version of her fact-finding mission, colored by observations of corruption in the administration of the camps, friendships across lines of official enmity, diplomatic imbroglios, and the collapse of the Russian economy. With a sharp eye for physical detail as well as for psychology, she traced anomie and despair among prisoners whom she interviewed in German, Hungarian, Czech, Croat, Polish, Romanian, Turkish and other European languages. Even in minus fifty weather she read Russian classics at night out loud with her Russian "chaperone," i.e. guard. Trapped later in a tuberculosis hospital during fighting between factions, she snatched moments to describe with humorous detachment the shooting and burning of neighboring buildings seen through the terror of her fellow nurses. These capsule entries resemble the snapshots that Kinsky, like so many other nurses at the front, took to preserve a memory trace of what they had observed and thought. As miniature ironic narratives, they resemble her epigrammatic understatement in response to the March 1917 uprising she witnessed in St. Petersburg: "What would they say at home, if they knew that I am all alone here! But I'm quite content, since I want to stay in this country, for it is certainly more interesting than in Chlumec" (*Tagebuch*, 94)

Kinsky reminds us of certain salient elements in women's literary history. Her elite background made it much more likely that she would undertake a wartime adventure, find official support even among Russian bureaucrats for her exceptional choices, write about them, and belatedly reach a cosmopolitan audience. (Her work was translated and published fifty years after her death.) Furthermore, young women like Kinsky who were very unlikely to be professional writers might nonetheless produce a memoir or autobiography about these years of upheaval rather than more elevated literary forms. To capture women's responses to the war and the turning point it marked, therefore, we need to include the more subjective, less formal genres, especially those written immediately at the time of the war experience. We must also note the frequent lag in publication that meshed with the exclusion of women from an emergent canon of autobiographical war writing, a lag that lasted even longer than the ten years before soldiers themselves began to print their diaries and memoirs in large numbers.

A few women, however, did approach the project of writing about the war with professional ambitions and developed aesthetic skills. They belonged to a generation of women who acceded to positions in artistic circles, collaborated on journals, and found a sympathetic audience. The Romanian novelist Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, for example, who worked as a Red Cross nurse during the war at the railroad station of Focșani, translated her experience into a dramatic "document novel," *Balaurul* (Dragon; 1923), centered on the figure of a young nurse. Noted for her Proustian psychological analyses of women's inner lives, she also dissected social relations in her contributions to the journal *Sburătorul* (The Incubus; 1919-1927), edited by Eugen Lovinescu. The war marked a shift from narcissistic heroines in search of themselves to more forceful psychological analyses. She became one of the major figures in the Romanian modernist movement with her analytic novels *Ape adânci* (1919; Deep Waters), *Fecioarele despletite* (1926; Disheveled Virgins), and *Concert din muzică de Bach* (1927; A Concert of Music by Bach), which stress morbid situations and liminal states of consciousness. She won the grand national prize of the Society of Romanian Writers in 1936.

In *Balaurul*, which she rewrote and polished over six to seven years, Papadat-Bengescu experimented with grotesque metaphors and neologisms. She fractured spurts of thought into free indirect discourse, to capture the incoherence of individual panic in the face of death and physical mutilation. Her verbal twists evoke the wartime perversion of logic. Life is stranger than art, she reminds us in chapter ten, "Omăruia i se vedea

inima” (“The Man Whose Heart They Could See”) turning that cliché into an instrument of social critique: “Fantasy is but a humble apprentice compared to the huge genius of evil” (Man, 357). Through the young nurse Laura, Papadat-Bengescu captures successive perceptions of the war like the packed cars of a military train (the dragon of the title). She compresses moments of crisis with almost hallucinatory vividness. Chapter one, “Goarna” (The Bugle), for example, offers a hyperrealistic impression of the advent of war through sounds perceived by Laura and others. The case of a “man whose heart they could see” is physically laid out for us by refraction through the eyes of others – the doctor, for example, tries to force Laura, the novel’s center of consciousness, to look at the gaping wound, but she deflects that imperative ironically toward its origin: “[H]ow did it happen?” she asked, to find out what she had not seen” (Man, 359).

The exposed organ is not, of course, Papadat-Bengescu’s real focus. Rather, she leads us to the intensive care unit, where Laura finds “everybody” and presses us to ask “How did the war happen?” There the patients, no matter what their initial wound or illness, are caught up in the same death and infected by a common hospital-born disease: “The contact of those wounds with organic ‘matter,’ the penetration of organisms by shrapnel of varied texture inside those bodies, permitted live, morbid putrefaction. In tandem with the standard rational treatments there simmered and burst out unexpectedly new and strange epidemics: typical gangrenes independent of the progress of the cure; infectious pustules linking disparate cases. A flora specific to modern wars” (Man, 361-62). This intense yet chilly scientific description evokes well the outbreak of resistant pathogens, at the same time that it permits, even invites, an allegorical reading. The chapter closes on the “rational” doctor’s complacency: “Even the doctor was saying that his had been indeed a unique case in the museum of war surgery—a liminal form of the huge ingeniousness with which destruction humiliated and dismembered worn out bodies” (Man, 362). It is precisely such liminal moments and figures that Papadat-Bengescu extracts from actual history, then transforms for the purposes of her art. Particularly penetrating is her ability to pin together the psychology of the doctor, the institutional construction of memory as a “museum of war surgery,” and the propagandistic absence of agency in a rhetoric of ingenious destruction.

Another writer whose artistic consciousness had already been shaped by the time the war began was Zofia Nałkowska, from roughly the same cohort as Piłsudska and Kinsky. Nałkowska grew up in an intellectual family amid the avantgarde, reading

Flaubert and Stendhal, and publishing her poetry in the modernist journal *Chimera*. The diary she kept during the war, *Dzienniki Czasu Wojny: 1909-1917* (Wartime Diaries) chronicled her observations; she also published in 1917 the short stories, *Tajemnice krwi* (The secret of blood) and in 1920 the novella *Hrabia Emil* (Count Emil, 1920) dealing with the war. Curiously, *Hrabia Emil* (published serially in *Swiat* in 1917-1918) depicts the sensitive protagonist Count Emil displaced in his country manor, which has been taken over for wounded soldiers. His situation of passivity feminizes him, in contrast to the women who take action nursing the wounded. Emil's emotional confusion comes to the fore, making him helpless: he calculates defeat and victory in the "currency" of blood and pain, and struggles to understand the meaning of barbaric drives and arduous suffering. Nałkowska does not sentimentalize women as nurses: if one shows compassion, another uniformed aristocrat is depicted as a sexual profiteer. Nałkowska's writings about the traumas of the war and about Piłsudski's legions reflect a complex mix of feelings: her diaries combine pacifism, welcome surprise at the revival of "the ghost of an independent Poland," and prescient fear that a new Poland would become "national-democratic and antisemitic" (Wartime Diaries, 252). As she foresaw, independence would be followed by the anti-Semitism of thinkers like Adolf Nowczyński and the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1920. *Romans Teresy Hennert* (Romance of Teresa Hennert, 1924) depicts the degeneration of wartime heroism into domestic violence after the war, in a comment on the brutalization wrought by men's military experiences. In 1933 she became the only female member of the Polish Academy of Literature, famed for her salon and patronage of younger writers. In 1946 she composed *Medaliony* (Medallions) a laconic series of reflections on the Holocaust.

A more explicitly nationalist stance was assumed by one of the most distinguished Latvian writers of the twentieth century, Anna Brigadere, the child of a weaver who became a preeminent playwright, poet, and prose writer. Brigadere was literary editor of the newspaper *Latvija* from 1908 on, and published reviews in the major periodical *Baltijas Vestnesis*. After she took refuge in Moscow in 1915, she contributed to *Latvju strelnieks* (Latvian Rifleman), published by the émigré community of Latvian intellectuals. Brigadere adapted her interest in folklore to a poetic allegory about the war in *Spēka dēls* (Invincible Son; 1917), which depicts the liberation of Latvia through an epic narrative about the liberation of a princess and the defeat of the devil. On the last day of 1917, however, she struck a less militant stance in a letter to her publisher, "My destiny – the

same as my nation's – is the orphan girl's role, without any rights. I have grown tired of fighting" (*Per garīgo*, 339).

We should not discount the possibility that some patriotic texts of 1914 to 1918 were the product of calculation. The Slovak novelist Božena Slančíková-Timrava, known as Timrava, grasped that she might win a competition set by the women's magazine *Žirena* if she wrote a war story "V čas vojny" (In Times of War; 1917). But her writings of the decade following the war indicted the postwar chaos and anarchy. *Všetko z národ* (All for the Nation; 1930) offered a critique of Slovak nationalism, and her sarcastic novel *Hrdinovia* (Heroes; 1929) masked its pacifist disillusionment under an ironic title. *Záplava* (The Flood, 1938) depicts the communist rule of 1919. In a related reversal, shifting from wartime writing that would not be censored to writing critical of the war, the Estonian Marie Under, whose salon brought together writers and artists and who led the group Siuru from 1917 to 1919, devoted much of her wartime poetry to love and nature, in classical, rhetorically decorated forms. By 1920, however, she released a rebellious antiwar collection, *Verivalla* (Bloodletting), whose apocalyptic, bleak vision was couched in startling figurative language and less disciplined syntax.

One slender but interesting strand of women's war poetry from East-Central Europe is the radical, even blasphemous cooptation of the prayer poem. Women's traditional literary assignment in war is elegiac: men wage combat, while women weep. These poems resist or complicate that role. It is difficult to say what might have shaped this common strategy across national boundaries: a secular turn linked to the artistic avant-garde, the sense of helpless victimization among peoples caught between the millstones of rival empires, perhaps even a rebellion against the association of women with piety and passive acceptance of their lot. Ariel Roshwald has also called attention to a Jewish tradition of iconoclastic responses to calamity that call God to account, questioning His commitment to the Covenant, a tradition revived during the war (*Jewish Cultural Identity*, 93). Certainly, blasphemous poems were also penned by male leaders of the avantgarde, such as the Hungarian writers Endre Ady in "Mai próféta átka," (Prophet's curse), and Mihály Babits (1883-1941) in "Húsvét előtt" (Before Easter, 1916). With "Fortissimo" (1917) Babits actually provoked the suppression of a whole issue of *Nyugat* (The West).

In this context, we can better understand a writer like the Hungarian Margit Kaffka, who turned to experimental poetry as a vehicle for responding to the war. A high-school teacher, Kaffka was a member of the avant-garde circle around *Nyugat*, praised by Ady

and a friend of Anna Lesznai. *Nyugat* published during the war a mix of material such as reports from the front, political reflections on Hungarian minorities, translations of Chekhov or Balzac, antiwar poetry by Ady and Babits, or minor poetry on the war by Sarolta Lányi. A feminist and pacifist in her politics, closer in this regard to Babits than to Ady, Margit Kaffka was complex and obscure in her style. Like Papadat-Bengescu she shocked the reader with neologisms, synesthesia, and grammatical disturbances. Married in August 1914 to the brother of the prominent writer Béla Balázs, Kaffka wrote impassioned verse letters to him; she left her teaching job to join him, and drew on impressions of his hospital at Timișoara in her fiction. A novella, *Két nyár* (Two Summers, 1916) traced the evaporation of initial nationalistic war enthusiasm and the working class heroine's bitter realization of the costs of war. Visiting the hospital where her husband's mistress has just given birth, she juxtaposes the blood of war with the blood of "surplus" babies in a birth clinic, a new generation "destined to be exterminated with most terrible weapons, in an infinite variety of bloody ways."

Addressing her husband in a free verse letter, "Záporos folytonos levél" (A Cry Through the Storm [A Letter], literally "Continuous Rain-shower Letter; Az élet útyán 86-89; Higonnet 461-3) Kaffka boldly declares as well as questions the right to private happiness at a time of apocalyptic suffering. In the first stanza, the long lines address the "millions of small soldiers" tramping on the front who yearn to return home and dare not question what or why. The second stanza speaks on behalf of the "millions of little women" who worry at home about their loved ones at the front. By contrast to the public realm of these suffering millions, the private passion of the speaker and her lover appears "invisible". Yet in the third stanza, that passion reclaims its right: "And yet ... only you and I! / I call out to you on this grim night / Nothing beyond us exists, we have only ourselves!" (*élet* 87; Higonnet 462) IN a flashback she momentarily recovers "our wholly private world" and ecstatic happiness when together in Italy, where "peace sang out" as they lit a candle; yet even there the stones spoke of past wars, and even there news reached them of the outbreak of war. In a shocking accusation, she suggests that God is hiding in shame, that he has tried to divide them in jealousy. The short final stanza returns to the initial contrast between the front and the home: the force of her private love seems to empower the suffering wives to reverse the work of war.: "Love is strong as death, hard as a coffin / Is true love" (*élet* 89; Higonnet 463).



One of Kaffka's most powerful texts is a prose poem that echoes the laments and denunciations of Biblical psalms. She had been convent educated and began her teaching career in a convent, a closed world that she described critically in several of her novels. In "Imádkozni próbáltam" (I Tried to Pray, 1918) she depicts God as a hidden god, one whom the human species has "formed . . . into the God of Terror." Despair pervades the text of "I Tried to Pray," where God may be a mere projection of the imagination. Kaffka condemns the prayers of those who implore that their enemies be ground to dust, those who have slaughtered in the name of religious difference, those who have invoked Hadúr, ancient Hungarian Lord of War. Kaffka appeals instead to an ideal of manifold differences: "How marvelously we all differed from each other, we millions and millions of individuals; in what myriad ways we mirrored your countenance" (Higonnet, 459) She reminds us that in peacetime, human arts record divinity and celebrate difference, as opposed to the uniformity of armies.

The prayer condemns a failed supernal power, as one that has made female fecundity meaningless. Kaffka's authority to speak is rooted in the fact that she is a mother, a maker of life through "millions of minutes." She turns from the present to the ancient female deity Gaea, whose chthonic cult of fertility was preferable to this destruction, and finally to the Virgin Mother, whose losses resemble those of grieving widows and mothers. While religious language offered a familiar frame of understanding to her audience, Kaffka's mix of allusions and her sarcasm defamiliarize the form.

Kaffka assembles a number of the themes that characterize wartime laments by women. She challenges a male God to find meaning in the works of men, to prove his identity as "Merciful Father" of men. Hers is the voice of a prophetess crying in the wilderness of war, heard neither by men nor by God. Turning away from this deaf divinity, as Babits would do in "Fortissimo" four years later, she invokes her femaleness and supplicates a female pantheon. The sense that as a woman she and her people have been swept helplessly into war finds expression through the prayer's oscillation from apostrophe, to exhortation, and finally despairing denial. Kaffka's life was cut short by influenza, but already from the outset of the war, she turned away from her previous impressionistic, lyrical voice toward a harsher style that used more painful and raw images and metaphors to describe wartime sufferings.

Because war curses all peoples, one might say that it forces the detour of prayer into dark paths. One brilliant instance is a cryptic diptych by Vida Jeraj [Franziszka Vovk].

This Slovenian poet and author of children's books wove black arts of imprecation into a funeral wreath entitled "1914." The first part baldly offers antithetical forms of prayer:

Black berries in a rose wreath,  
each a dead man's skull,  
each a drop of blood,  
May God have mercy!

Pray, pray, O Slovene,  
perhaps God remembers you!  
He who does not pray, shall curse:  
May Satan have mercy! (*Izbrano delo* 28; Trans. Ellen Elias-Bursač, in Higonnet  
554-555)

Just as metaphor transforms the dried blood in the dead man's skull into a black berry in a wreath, so too the poet transforms the physical destruction of life into a tightly patterned invocation and elegy in the voice of those left behind: "Where does that red trail lead in the snow?" In the second part of the poem, memory and loss become ghosts knocking at every door, awakening mothers to sleepless wandering on a fruitless quest across land and water, "nine mountains high" to recover their sons. The mothers' task of lament and recuperation resembles the arduous, even impossible task traditionally imposed on heroes in folklore. Jeraj fuses modernist techniques with traditional themes to expose the impossibility of women's traditional assignment to mourn.

War "silenced" men, as Walter Benjamin so famously observed in his essay on "The Storyteller," and it silenced women as well. Censorship affected some writers, but more important were the contradictions to which Benjamin points between propaganda and actual experience, between wartime necessities and moral values. The Slovenian poet and translator Lily Novy identifies preparation for war as preparation for death in her poem "Sprememba" (Preparation): "Just as sleep ends a brief rest, / what awaits us now is like sleep." In times when slaughter threatens and national unification calls, "We are all like iron fused by fire." Esthetic values, personal affections, and sweet pleasures must all be set aside. "Now we cannot speak of ourselves / nor of the fragile things we love" (Higonnet, 552-53). The elegiac mode turns prophetic, shifting from a focus on individual loss to the

loss of a whole world. The metaphors of hardness and sacrifice that energize the discourse of war are hung in suspension here, raising questions for Novy's readers to resolve.

The political upheavals that followed 1918, as Nałkowska had feared, also seemed to impose a choice between "hideous din" and silence. Danica Marković (1879-1932), a Serb schoolteacher and author of short stories, had participated in the Serb uprising against Bulgarian occupation during the war. But in the early 1920s, she composed "27-mi Juni" (June 27), a bitter poem about the perpetuation of pompous war mongering at the patriotic festival of Saint Vidovdan on June 28. The heat of emotions as a huge crowd gathers and drinks with "frantic clamor and rancor" is as searing as the midsummer heat that dries the speaker's flowers (*Trenuci* 34-35; Higonnet 541). Collectively orchestrated memory can become a psychological prison in which the many entrap the few. In the contest over the meaning of memory, the past continues into the present and the future. It is only in retrospect, after a second world war and further atrocities, that the prophetic power of such poems has become legible and that we have been able to write a cultural history to include them.

At the end of the twentieth century, the verbal dislocations deployed by so many of these women in order to evoke wartime disruptions have acquired their full expressiveness. These discursive ruptures speak to the question whether we should understand the war as a hiatus or as a rupture historically. Literary critics have asked whether women's writings at the critical threshold of 1918 marked their participation in modernism, or whether they perpetuated older forms, as well as older ideologies such as the chivalric cult of the soldier's sacrifice. Indeed, the relatively traditionalist poetics and politics visible in postwar literary production have often been understood as the special failure of women's writings.

The modest evidence presented here suggests that the story is more complicated. Each of the three areas I have sketched here suggests how East-Central European women writers participated in prevailing forms of expression but marked them with a difference. Thus, the female soldier's tale focuses on conflict, especially against weighty odds, a formula that provides the bedrock of most male soldiers' tales. Yet the most striking features of a story like that of Nowosielska are her ironic awareness of her exceptional status as an untrained girl-volunteer and her emphasis on mutually protective comradeship. Impelled forward by patriotism, her irony aims not at military incompetence (as in so many men's memoirs) but at her own anomalous situation.

Likewise, memoirs and fictions about nursing draw on traditional notions of femininity that often bolster traditional views of heroism in wartime and draw on older devices of realism. At the same time, however, the moral shock of militarized medicine and industrialized destruction of men's bodies could provoke among some writers a deeply ironic response to the war. In her nursing fiction, an avant-garde writer such as Papadat-Bengescu found a subject that impelled her into the experimental mainstream, where cubist fracture of perspective and a jazzy vocabulary mixing neologisms with technical terms could fuse in an estranged image of the war scene. Women who participated in the literary salons of Belgrade, Budapest, Prague, St Petersburg, or Warsaw were exposed both to international artistic trends and to national movements such as a return to folkloric roots. These women may not have traveled as commonly as did men from East-Central Europe, but books traveled to them. Just as Natalya Goncharova fused the rough form of wood-engraved *lubki* with avant-garde images of war, so writers like Brigadere and Vida Jeraj invoked the formal rhythms of folk narrative to give a deeper resonance to their literary images of the war.

The polyglot nature of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the experience of colonization by successive waves of imperial masters also created a rich linguistic pool for avant-garde writers in general, at a moment when a breakdown of older ideologies and discourses was being given expression through the breakdown of syntactic and semantic conventions. The resulting cultural hybridity in some women's writing may have been most conspicuous in their poetry. Autobiographical poetry was the most conventional of feminine forms, but the lives to be inscribed were suddenly very different. The verbal experiments that women wrote in response have not always been found acceptable. Indeed, they have won recognition more slowly than their male counterparts. Margit Kaffka's contemporaries worried that her style was either pompous (Ady, "Kaffka" 789) or not polished (Tóth, Kaffka"). Timrava's ambiguous prose, with its echoes of modernism, faced editorial cuts. More recently Ion Bălan condemned Papadat-Bengescu for her "lack of clarity" and "vaporous" gossiping "in an impossible spoken language" (629) and Sirje Kiin, while acknowledging the German expressionist inspiration of Marie Under's prose calls it "rambling", "brittle", "cacophonous" (283). Papadat-Bengescu, Kaffka, Under, and other women writers such as the Czech Růžena Jesenska explored transgressive linguistic forms in their representations of the transgressions of war. Had they been men, perhaps

these experiments would have found greater resonance and recognition in the years following 1918, when modernism reigned.

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**This article was first published in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, vol. 1. Eds. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2004, pp. 191-202.**

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**FEMININE IDENTITY**  
**AND**  
**AESTHETIC CONTEMPLATION**

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**Argument**

I have often wondered whether or not I am a feminist. The only conclusion that I have reached so far is that I am still looking for my identity. But what does *being a feminist* mean? Basically, it used to mean fighting for the same rights as men (this mentality marks modern feminism). Now it has led to fighting for the right to be different in the context of equality. Unfortunately, Romania is facing the coexistence of both meanings of the term “equality”, since Romanian women still suffer from a wide range of abuses.

In this paper I will explore the multiple ways (ranging from undesirability of feminization in antiquity, to the fashioning of bodies) in which patriarchy confirms the conjunction of femininity with an aesthetic and sometimes with death. I will proposition to illustrate that the female body as an object of aesthetic contemplation is also bound up with a certain violence towards femininity and, thus, towards women.

Furthermore, I argue that the construction of feminine illustrates a displacement in a gendered way of thinking from the aesthetic to the metaphysical. This mental pattenen enables even the best of women to become strongly misogynic.

**Gendered bodies and the aesthetic dimension**

In *Body Anthropology and Modernity* David Le Breton (2002), states that our existence is linked to our bodies: to live is to be only a body, a symbolic body. The modern body will always be separated from the self, from the others, from the world. Individualism has led us to accepting a positive, rational view of our bodies: body image is therefore remodeling continuously, translating what the subject is physically fit to do. But this body image is also socially determined to regard differently a change in a woman’s body in



contrast to a man's body. An elderly woman is at a loss socially speaking, since she displays no more of the freshness that comes with youth and vitality.

*To give an example, in Romanian culture, which is profoundly patriarchal, our literature lacks any character of a distinct elderly lady; old age is repulsive to our tradition, or even hilarious.*

In contrast, old age becomes men. They traditionally may acquire an increasing seductive force, an increase in energy, experience, maturity. Literature often offers images of a couple consisting of Lolita and an elderly man; Romanian 19<sup>th</sup> century literature is *par excellence* an eloquent example of such a mentality, male characters are 20 years older than their brides.

At the same time there is still strong resistance in our culture to a woman's attempt to seduce a younger man. It is condemned socially condemning to it; whereas the reverse situation is totally acceptable and even considered a sign of virility.

Therefore, it is obvious that there is a dramatic persistence of patriarchal social images regarding men and women. Men are subject to social appreciation based on a reflection of their links to the world; they will always be potential seducers. Women are subject to aesthetic contemplation, and to degradation over time. This leads to their social marginalization.

One might say that there is also a gendered patriarchal way of regarding body odour: a woman who wears too much perfume will always be considered as cheap whereas a man who wears (too much) perfume will give a sense of communicational discomfort. Social custom associates manhood with an absence of such suavity; such a man is not considered as virile and raises questions about his masculinity.

Aesthetic contemplation is also strongly linked to desire. In many patriarchal societies women tend to be tokens of exchange (according to Levi Strauss); at some level this excludes them from society and even from relations of desire which are inextricably linked to the patriarchal. Many canonical works must be reread in these terms: e.g. *Hamlet* concerns also a rivalry between Hamlet and Claudius over the Queen.

Such a gendered patriarchal approach to body aesthetic is by no means a modern "invention". Foucault, in his famous *History of Sexuality* gives an account of how violence has been associated with aesthetic contemplation of the feminine body. The Greek ideal of beauty resided in a harmonious body, but *not a feminine-looking one* which was undesirable. A juvenile male body would give birth to fascination not because it was close

to feminine beauty, but because it was everything but feminine (more specifically unmanly or soft).

In this world of a single sex - which did not change until towards the 18<sup>th</sup> century- the female body is always regarded as a surrogate for male body. Elizabeth I provides an excellent example of this tension between her political body and her private female body.

Denis de Rougemont gives an account of how things evolved in his *Love and the West* (2000). He points out that there has been a fundamental cultural misunderstanding of the connection between Plato's concept of Beauty and Love. Plato's reference to Beauty concerns essentially an intellectual Beauty, a non-existent perfection, the Idea of perfection. But this doctrine has reached us in a form of vulgar Platonism - the idea that in order to love our object of desire it has to be beautiful.

From the troubadours to the romantics we find the same misunderstanding of Plato's ideas and ideals. The troubadours offer the most resistant cultural construct in our collective memory: the birth of passionate-love in Christian culture, courtly love with its mannerisms, its esoteric dimensions and the dissolution of women's body. "*When myths lose their esoteric character and sacred force, they become literature*" (Rougemont, 2000:22).

There is a revival of the opposite pole of femininity, a femininity which strongly negates male sexuality, so that it becomes discomforting and castrating. The language of this femininity is violently passionate. Consequently, a man will exorcise the woman; obsessed with their fear of women men will try to calm down their partner's sexuality and subject them to a male order. Thus Romanticism (especially the German school) revives the myth of passion in which women are again depicted as bodiless, hieratic and virtual women, floating outside of any materialization, frequently ill, a mere vision rather than a presence. Women in Romanticism are always young and never touched by adulthood. There is also a royal femininity, frequently associated to death. On the contrary, the old hag, the woman-after-the-woman suffers from obvious decay together with the degradation of her beauty. Such women are associated to evil, darkness and insanity.

### **No pain, no gain - a few words on fashion**

It seems only fair to notice that today both feminine and masculine bodies suffer from damaging consequences of such aesthetic contemplation. Fashioning a proper look is valid both for men and women, beauty culture is seductive and destructive for everybody.

More and more men suffer from anorexia and punish their bodies spending exhausting hours in the gym. This discourse of fashion culture tells us what is beautiful and what is not in the myriad of instruction manuals: magazines, advertisements, films and window displays. It tells us how to become perfect and that perfection comes at a cost: “no pain, no gain”. The basic components of such perfect beauty are to be light-skinned, slim, carefree and young. In order to achieve this perfection we must punish our bodies. “*When it comes to beauty, there is no universal aesthetic as a guide: what is one woman’s mutilation is another’s decoration*”. As early as 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft would notice for the first time in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that beauty is only imprisonment for a woman’s body. The beauty system and patriarchy coerced women into making themselves beautiful, by following a cultural pattern in which the aesthetic is an essential ingredient of social acceptance (and of subordination).

### **Bodies of knowledge**

The entire modern period in philosophy and in particular that of Descartes is the source of our gendered male ideals of reason and objectivity. This norm displaces gender from the aesthetic to the metaphysical. In other words it stresses a period in philosophy coincidental with the rise of modern science, which generated ideals of reason and objectivity that are said to be deeply antagonistic to women and feminism. Cartesian rationalism and the norms of modern science mark a decisive break with a philosophical and cultural tradition that was more accommodating of female characteristics and powers.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century a feminine orientation toward the world was decisively purged from the dominant intellectual culture through the Cartesian “rebirth” and restructuring of knowledge and the world as masculine.

Descartes’ transcendental subject - the neutral human observer - eschews any involvement with the messy realities of corporeal existence. The separation of mind and body, of intellect and corporeality, is central to the claim of knowledge. Of course, not all bodies manage to be neutral and rational; bodies which are not able to transcend their own material cages are objects of suspicion in this model of knowledge. As far as the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were concerned, women are suspected of being too close to their bodies. The separation of mind and body was deemed foreign for them. Caught in their cages of bone, only with a supreme effort would they be able to break free of materiality and think rationally.

On metaphysical grounds women and other categories of “outcasts” are regarded as incapable of any valid relationship to philosophy. The response of feminist philosophy to this myth has been the retrieval of the historical record. A related development is the elevation to the canon of women philosophers like Mary Wollstonecraft or Simone de Beauvoir.

Women have been virtually anonymous and their alliance with philosophy was not at all easy. Since women were mainly actors in the social aspect of life (domestic and private) feminist historiography has turned to less ordinary accounts.

Resistance to this pattern of thinking extended to 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers in Romanian culture. A few years ago I came across a personal diary that belonged to an extraordinary woman. Her name is Jeni Acterian. After her premature death, her brother made the decision to publish her diary. *A Hard-to-Please-Person* is an account of an outstanding female personality. For 15 years Jeni Acterian would write down almost on a daily basis what was happening in her life or more accurately, what was not happening - all the things she expected from life and experienced quite late in her life and with some dissatisfaction. At no time did she think of publishing her thoughts; on the contrary, she meant to destroy the diary by burning it.

Instead of a novel or short stories that this brilliant teenager had set as a personal goal from the beginning of her notes or of a philosophical career, she left behind only a diary.

Jeni Acterian is an example. She has lasted, but her failure is exemplary. *The Diary of A-Hard-to-Please-Person* is a history of a woman’s failure as a philosopher and also as a wife and a lover.

She denies herself as a woman and assumes a so-called “male lucidity” in her essence, supporting the stereotypical female image as emotional and affectionate in contrast to men who are seen as removed, rational:

My femininity is only apparent and somewhat shallow. That is in writing, in love and sometimes in the every day life. Within me there is a square logical precision and even my feelings – when down there – lose their sweetness and become something of a grim cry. (Acterian, 1997:15)

This quotation, using the nominal predicative in the masculine genre and the cultural background in which she lives (she is a friend to prominent personalities like Emil

Cioran, Eugen Ionescu, Emil Botta, Clody Bertola, Marietta Sadova) has led me to the conclusion that her manifestation is a cultural construct. Existentialism was in fashion, but she seems to have embraced a less classical form of this philosophy according to which “existence precedes essence”. She is not keen on attaining a pre-determined existence, but on reaching an essence which transcends existence. Here she meets with Simone de Beauvoir’s philosophy, placing the body lower than the spirit, which leads –individually of course - to an admiration of a masculine way of being:

Here we have the key to the entire mystery. [...] The man assumes repeating life by transcending it towards the Existence [...] Woman’s misfortune lies in her biological destiny of repeating life [...] (Beauvoir, :34)

Women are enclosed in the jail of their body; therefore they are condemned to repeat life more than to create values. *This “handicap” can only be surpassed if she surpasses her biological state and her role as a mother in exchange for authenticity.* Therefore, meanings and values can only start when a woman has transcended emotional and bodily functions.

These conceptions are clear in Jeni Acterian’s diary. I can only consider that she displays a misogynist approach to her own gender. One must not forget that Romanian culture between the two World Wars stood under the sign of misogynist manifestations. Emil Cioran would write in *Pe culmile disperării*:

[...] A woman can temporarily save one who lives on the peak because [...] a contact with her can lead one to returning to naïve and unconscious voluptuousness of life. (Cioran, 1993)

It is obvious that such a characterization of woman is limited and unjust and needs justification. Cioran is undoubtedly a sexist. He believed that women were metaphysically inferior to men and said so explicitly:

A woman doesn’t risk anything on the spiritual ground because with her the duality between spirit and life suffers a lesser antonymic intensity than with men. The gracious feeling of life doesn’t lead to any metaphysical revelations. (...) Women are nice nullities. The more you think of them, the less you understand them. (Cioran, 1993)

Returning to Jeni Acterian's image of herself, I should point out that meaning and value do not imply losing sensitivity and bodily feelings. It would be as if people did not give any meaning or value to their deeds. If one sees humanity and sensitivity as having no meaning and value, then undoubtedly many people would be denied access to humanity.

This vision leads to a Manichean judgment which has its own dangers. It has us see matters with a critical eye and consider nature as being different, something else than spirit. Furthermore we forget that God is both materialized Logos and transcendence.

Her own distrust of her capacities as a woman destroyed her spirit. In a male-dominated society, she became the excluded opposite. But she excluded herself from herself. Deconstruction - with its reconciling nature of antagonistic elements - came too late for Jeni Acterian.

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# **Gender and Violence**

## **GIRL POWER IN THE BRITISH THEATRE OF THE NINETIES: VIOLENT DISORIENTED GIRL GANGS KICK TRADITIONAL IDEAS OF FEMININITY**

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The decade of the nineties was marked by violent events in both the international and national spheres. Reports of genocide in Yugoslavia's civil war and terrorism were broadcast daily. Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995) is an urgent ethical appeal about this war and the necessity for moral commitment. In Britain the media reported child abuse, domestic violence, murder and street crime. Nevertheless, "such events had little impact on the public taste for stylishly violent movies, which ... coloured popular culture throughout the decade ..." (Sierz, 2001:206). This Jacobean-like relish in violence was both reflected and contested in the nineties' theatre. A considerable number of British plays of the period portrayed crime and a worrying lust for violence. This glamorisation of violence was contested by a generation of new, young playwrights, such as Sarah Kane, Antony Neilson, Philip Ridley, Mark Ravenhill, Judy Upton, Rebecca Prichard, who used intensely violent images and shock tactics to draw attention to the *causes* of violence, rooted deeply in a social system without moral perspectives, based on consumerism and materialism.

Sex and violence became one of the confrontational characteristics of nineties' theatre. Most of the plays were staged in small studio theatres, and there was a feeling by the audience itself of being battered and bruised by the violence on stage. Sierz (1998; 2001) refers to this effect as "in-yer-face". If female adolescent violence is shown blatantly on stage, the social phenomenon implied causes an even more disconcerting reaction, as it utterly shatters the long-established image of femininity. Of the nineties plays that challenged the widespread ignorance about the reality of violence committed by girl gangs we should mention Philip Ridley's *Ghost from a Perfect Place* (1992), Judy Upton's *Ashes and Sand* (1994) and Rebecca Prichard's *Yard Gal* (1998).

Indeed, increasing teenage girl gang violence was causing social alarm in Britain, originated by a flurry of publicity about this female power-ganging. However, there was serious research on this subject. Antoinette Hardy, a Loughborough University postgraduate, presented her research at the Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group annual conference in Derby, saying that "the belief that violence does not compromise femininity



has spawned the abandonment of hair-pulling in favour of fists, boots and bottles (in Carroll, 1998). She further states the following disquieting facts:

The rate of female imprisonment for violent attacks had increased 43.7 per cent between 1991-96 – far outstripping the rise in male imprisonment ... There are nearly 3,300 women behind bars. ... More than half of women jailed were in for drug-related crimes. One in seven were convicted for violent assaults. Robbery, theft and handling stolen goods each accounted for another 10 per cent. ... Projections suggest that by 2008 adolescent females will outnumber males for violence (in Carroll, 1998).

When considering the frightening situation as described in Hardy's study, it is not surprising that several playwrights decided to write about girl gangs, thus introducing the spectator to the bleak and violent world these adolescents inhabit. The plays I am going to analyse raise important questions: Why do young women turn to violence? Is it a reaction to male power and the desire to emulate their violent macho bravado? Or is violence rooted in our social system, which does not provide alternatives for young people? Or is it the result of a traumatized childhood? In most of the nineties plays, the problems young people face are attributed to the years of Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher, based on the survival of the fittest, materialism and capitalism. The young people in these plays are members of a dysfunctional class, whose hope for a better future is constantly frustrated. In fact, all the young protagonists express anxiety to escape their bleak existence. The problem is that theirs is a way of no return. Violence and crime do not provide an escape, but lead to an even more hopeless existence.

Taking Ridley's *Ghost from a Perfect Place* (1994), the plot is based on Travis Flood, a famous gangster from the sixties' London East End, Bethnal Green, known as "The Man with the White Lily". He is the *ghost* who returns after an absence of twenty-five years. Travis is pained to discover that *the perfect place* of his memory has become a kind of wasteland. He arrives at a half-burnt house for his sexual encounter with the prostitute Rio, Torchie's granddaughter, whose whoring helps them to survive. In Rio's absence, he starts a conversation with Torchie that is centred on a romanticized vision of the East End in the sixties. Yet, as the first act unfolds, the spectator becomes aware of the "cosy lies about the glorious 'heyday' of paternalist gangsters" (Spencer, 21.4.94) such as Travis. First Torchie joins his sentimentalised wallow, which eventually acquires very nasty undertones. She starts to recollect her family's tragedy when her fourteen-old

daughter Donna was raped, became pregnant and died when giving birth to Rio. This tragedy caused Torchie's husband's mental breakdown and permanent hospitalisation. It gradually dawns on the audience that Travis might have been responsible for the family's disgrace: **Travis** "I did ... things. During the heydays. ... The things I did ... I ... I forget them because ... I had to forget. ... I *made* myself forget" (Ridley, 2002:260).

The remembrance of her unknown mother's tragedy has caused Rio to develop a frightful hatred of men. She uses her sexual wiles to deprive her clients of their money only to attack them savagely afterwards. Rio arrives for her sexual encounter dressed in a gold-leather mini-skirt, fishnet stockings and a baseball bat. She is followed by her Cheerleaders' gang. The trio - Rio, Miss Sulphur and Miss Kerosene - sadistically proceeds to torture Travis, burning his face and chest with lighted cigarettes. It is during this torture scene that he confesses to the atrocities to Donna, Rio's mother. However, when his paternity is revealed, Rio is unable to proceed with her retribution and frees Travis from his bonds. I share the opinion of most critics who have found this an unconvincing ending, because we are left without the catharsis of punishment, meted to the perpetrator of so much tragedy. According to Felman's trauma theory (in Buse, 2001:172-81), painful events from the past continue to haunt the present, as is the case with Donna's rape. Travis, *the ghost*, has inflicted horrific violence in the past and goes on haunting the present with his return to "the perfect place", which was anything but "perfect" - a place of violence and rape. The perpetrator becomes the butt of violence by a deeply traumatized victim, Rio, who has turned to violence as a consequence of the memory of everlasting sorrow experienced since birth. Ridley thus points towards the *causes* of violence, showing how violence often breeds more violence.

Judy Upton's play *Ashes and Sand* (1994) "just poured out" because of her anger resulting from "the impacted aggression of people from a socially deprived area" (Rickson in Sierz, 2001:216). In the *Introduction to Plays: 1* Upton states that *Ashes and Sand* is about the frustrations of being a working-class teenager, seeing the very limited prospects that are coming your way and dreaming of escape" (2002:viii). She adds that the plays published in the afore-mentioned volume were *her* escape (see Ref.). Upton started her career as a playwright when the Royal Court Young Writers' Festival visited Sussex in 1990 and encouraged her to write for the stage. *Ashes and Sand* is set in a seaside town, Brighton (as is *Bruises* (1995), where violence seems to be a means of communication (Sierz, 2001:215). The play is about a violent teenage-girl gang that ensnares solitary men

on the pier, then brutally attacking and robbing them. The gang of four working-class girls in their mid-teens is led by Hayley. The latter has kindled their dream of escaping to Bali with the stolen money. The gang is used to constant confrontations with the police. In this way they meet Daniel McClune, an attractive young Detective Sergeant who befriends them. The girls all fancy him, especially Hayley, who is obsessively infatuated with him. Daniel is an unbalanced young man who shoplifts women's shoes and wears make-up at home. He plans to get a transfer to Gibraltar, which is a kind of escape from himself and from the people around him. He admits to his colleague Glyn, who professes an unnatural fondness for him: "Life here's killing me" (Upton, 2002:38). As the play unfolds, it becomes clear that Daniel is a fake; he will not manage to work in Gibraltar nor will the gang escape to Bali. The play ends on a rather bleak note with the four girls practically raping him because of his failure to satisfy them sexually.

The play is divided into three acts with a number of vicious, short scenes. In fact, Upton says in a note to the playtext: "This was a story that needed many changes of location, lots of "scenelets", because "Hayley and Daniel ... rush around Brighton chasing their obsessions and dreams of escape" (Sierz, 2001:215). Rickson, the play's director, invented a maze of mirrors that allowed significant juxtapositions and rapid scene changes. Thus, the spectator witnesses the simultaneous presence on stage of the gang members as they seduce men, kick, stab and rob them savagely, events that are juxtaposed with scenes reflecting the corruption of the police, mainly Daniel's, and his connivance with the girls. We become eyewitness to his larking about with the under-age gang in the arcade where they habitually attack men. Significantly, there is a striking parallelism between the position of the Young Man who collapses groaning after the attack at the opening of the play, and Daniel's by the railing. To my mind, this foreshadows the brutal victimization of Daniel by the gang at the end of the play.

The four adolescents are as rough as any male counterpart could possibly be. To develop their muscles, they go to a gym kick-boxing three times a week. Hayley is bloodthirsty, cutting her own arm with a blade (45). In one scene she starts kicking a heart on the wall with her boot, harder and harder. "*She pummels it with her fists. She begins to shriek*" (34). Hayley's hysterical viciousness is shown when Glyn, Daniel's colleague, catches hold of her: "*She turns and attacks him with some ferocity. She knocks him down and breaks away. ...*" (Upton, 2002:35).

We get the impression that the girls' lives are almost spent. In fact, Hayley feels old at sixteen and thinks she looks "like an old tart" (14). She is raging in her escalating sexual lust for Daniel. Glyn tells her that her criminal records – vandalism, shoplifting and violent attacks - might wreck all her dreams. Robbery and violence are definitely not the means to escape a dreary, hopeless life. In my opinion, Upton's presentation of the girls' frustration lacks some convincing elucidation. She seems to justify violent behaviour as a way out of a demoralised existence. There is a feeling that the gang's savagery is rooted in vice, as robbing to escape to Bali is more exciting than working in a shoe shop, as Anna does, or doing the washing-up in a restaurant, a job offered to Lauren. On the other hand, their prospects are very limited, and they lack the incentive to face life.

It is interesting to observe that in spite of their savagery and male bravado, the gang members long for friendship and affection. Lauren, for instance, is dreaming about having a baby, preferably by Daniel. Hayley, in turn, shows a marked sense of tribal loyalty towards the other girls, a loyalty not always reciprocated. Her neurotic infatuation with Daniel induces her to persuade herself that there is a kinship between them. **Hayley:** "You told me once that there was something we have in common" (43). They seek temporary consolation with each other, though Daniel is incapable of responding sexually. In a touching scene (55) Daniel and Hayley, separated by a closed front door, "entwine their hands" (through the letter box) "in a ballet of touching that sums up both their need for affection and their separation" (Sierz, 2002:216).

It is certainly one of the ironies of the play that the sexual lust of the quartet, especially Hayley's, is focused on a man whose sexuality is disturbingly askew. Peter (11.12.94) rightly says: "Daniel fears love and/because he is incapable of it: the male world of power is built on insecurity and protected by evasion". Daniel rouses Hayley's intimacy, only to withdraw into a clouded interior world of abnormal fetishism. In fact, he fixes his sexual desire on symbols of femininity (instead of its actual flesh), such as the shoplifted high-heeled shoes lined up concealed in his home.

Daniel's character is certainly a case study of sexual psychology. Hidden from the outer world, he practises travestied rituals of worship of his fetishist objects: "Daniel *lights the candles. He puts a woman's shoe on the dressing table as if on an altar. He takes a shoebox full of make-up and a mirror from under the bed and puts on lipstick* (Upton, 2002:24). The ritual is abruptly broken up by Glyn's phone call asking about his application for the job in Gibraltar. Daniel tells him that they want a psychological profile,

and that he is “scared of what he (the psychologist) might show ... about (himself)” (25). This confession is interrupted by Hayley’s furious banging on the door: “Open the fucking door! I need to see you! I need to talk! Now! OPEN THE FUCKIN’ DOOR! OPEN IT! (26). Her fury is juxtaposed with the entrance of a psychologist, who starts asking him about his fears. During this questioning, Daniel “*is clearly ill at ease*” (26) and “*picks up a phallic-shaped desk toy from the top of the desk*” which he “*then hastily puts down, self-conscious, anxious that it might tell the shrink something about him*” (27). The psychologist goes on asking Daniel about his dreams, which, according to Freud and Jung, “focus directly on our anxieties and taboos” (28). Significantly, this interview is followed by Daniel being caught by the Store Detective when he is carrying a heap of stolen shoes.

What has caused Daniel’s perversion? A recurring theme in plays of the nineties is masculinity in crisis. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a fearful reaction to thirty years of feminism. So Daniel’s *angst* of sexual commitment might be rooted in his insecurity and emotional vulnerability. Rather than accepting normal intercourse, that is, physical contact, he consoles himself with sexual symbols. It is precisely his inability to prove his masculinity and to satisfy Hayley’s and the gang’s sexual desires that causes their fury and converts him into the sadistically mutilated victim of girl power. Daniel is left traumatised, while Glyn and a white-coated Doctor have come to his aid. Glyn is outraged at the Doctor’s insinuation that Daniel himself might have initiated it. Daniel. “My friend was attacked, what are you trying to say, that he was asking for it (65)? Woddis (14.12.94) has very rightly pointed out that this phrase “echoes all the judges who have ever accused women rape victims of having brought trouble upon themselves”. Throughout the play, Daniel’s unwillingness to smile is stressed, which symbolizes his disturbed psyche and unhappiness. I share Sierz’s view: “Upton’s Daniel does seem masochistically self-destructive, his need for violence matching the girls’ desire to inflict it” (216). Yet Upton considers that the people who suggested that Daniel deserved his violent fate suffered from a madness of our age (in Sierz, 2002:216).

The world Judy Upton portrays is indeed very depressing and perverted, where violence seems to be the norm, and where the characters’ dreams are shattered. Rebecca Prichard’s *Yard Gal* depicts an even bleaker world, but unlike the desperate ending of *Ashes and Sand*, in her play a tiny ray of hope glimmers through. Prichard was born in Essex, and studied drama at Exeter University. In her plays, she “offers a real insight not only into the social roots of violence, but also into the feelings of those involved in

perpetrating it” (Sierz (2001:226). Prichard has always involved herself in the social problems of British society. She worked in a hostel for young single mothers that moved her to write *Essex Girls* (1993). The play tells of the lives of young teenagers and the problems a seventeen-year-old single mother faces.

In 1997 Prichard was asked to write a play for Clean Break Theatre Company, set up by and for female prisoners. Every year a playwright is invited to become the company’s creative writing tutor. For nine months, Prichard paid weekly visits to Bullwood Hall prison in Hockley, Essex. While teaching there, she listened to the women’s stories and helped them produce their own writing. Following Augusto Boal’s renowned method used in his forum theatre (cf. Dwyer, 2004), the prisoners discussed the issues raised and tried out various drama techniques. This practice was followed by a rehearsed reading of *Yard Gal*. In May 1998 the play opened at the Royal Court before touring theatres and prisons (Sierz, 2001:227). *Yard Gal* is mainly a response to what young offenders told Prichard about girl gangs (Sierz, 2001:227). In this connection a critic observed: “Prichard could be accused of being a calculation anthropologist – a middle-class woman milking the less fortunate for juicy storylines” (Cavendish, 1998). Prichard actually stated that she started her teaching activity in prison with some preconceptions, but then she learned that “despite people’s different backgrounds, we’re all much the same” (Cavendish, 1998). She observed that “White women and black women often shared the ‘same rich slang’ and ‘created their own culture with both black and white elements in it” (Sierz 2001:227).

The beginning of the play suggests the proceedings of a workshop, when the participants are asked to initiate the performance. According to the stage directions: *Marie and Boo ... psych each other out as to who will begin the play*” (Prichard 1998:9). After some arguing Boo loses her patience and starts aggressively:

This is a story about me and Marie and the posse that we used to move with. It’s about chatting shit getting fucked, getting high and doing our crimes and the shit that be going down in the yard innit (10).

In *Yard Gal* two former close friends, black Boo (Bukola) and white Marie describe to the audience, in very graphic detail, their life as Hackney gals as members of a posse. The story is told in a language that is a mixture of cockney and Jamaican patois. Right

from the start we are given a rough guide to the kind of lives the six adolescents – 13-15 year olds - have led: children's home, drink, drugs, dancing in nightclubs, prostitution, shoplifting, detention in police cells, violent fights, murder. Prichard uses a very interesting storytelling technique, though she has been criticized for not showing enough action and for "not sticking to Aristotle's conception of plot" (Billington, 13.5.98). However, Prichard's play does not lack action, as the two girls change positions and imitate gestures and postures. Furthermore, pace of dialogue is very fast, like an attack and counterattack, mainly in Act I. In this sense a critic has said: "These 'best friends from time' finish each other's sentences, bouncing details between them like a basketball" (Benedict, 14.5.98). At other times, speech acquires the quality of a monologue (Act II), and finally the author uses the epistolary method (Act III), when Boo is in prison trying to communicate with Marie. I share Sierz's opinion when he says that Prichard's "use of spoken narrative onstage is a deliberate, and highly stylised, means of dramatizing relationships and events ... directly spoken narrative not only solicits audience sympathies, it also allows the pace of the play to accelerate in a way that perfectly matches the drug-fuelled intensity of the story" (2001:229).

The two friends proceed with their story to introduce the rest of the posse: Threse, Deanne, Sabrina and Deniz. We learn not only about their violent, criminal lives, but also about their vulnerability and the pain and loneliness that lies beneath all the bravado, swagger and coarse language. Prichard shows the adolescents' alienation and their victimization. In this respect the author commented: "It's really only in the theatre that you can reflect how shocking life is. There's a reality out there that you never see on television" (in Sierz 2001:229-230). None of the girls lives with a family; Boo and Deanne subsist in an unlawfully negligent kids' home. Boo refers to it as "a nut-house" (14), "windows broken for weeks..." (15). Marie, Sabrina and Threse loved climbing through the windows at night. "There was 'nuff drink and 'nuff gear there. You could get out ya box and nobody done nothing" (14). At that time Marie lived with her dad, who systematically abused her and beat her until the Council took her away. Marie and Boo met at school; Boo never used to talk. She was thought to be deaf and dumb (14), which surely was a reflection of her neglected childhood. Then she had a bad fight with Marie, and ever since they have been best mates. **Marie** "We go everywhere together and we done everything together innit" (14).

Marie and Boo tell the horrific story about Deanne's "accidental-on-purpose self-slaughter" (Nightingale, 13.5.98). Marie describes her as "lovely, womanly, with a baby-face, two years younger than the others (13), - which means that she was just about thirteen – but she was always upset. The posse used to squat in a top floor vacant flat in Hackney where Threse used to live. Though it was musty and cold and smashed they liked to be there "cos it was ours" (35). They had covered the floor with pillows, blankets, chip wrappers, cans and candles. The night of Deanne's death they were getting high with glue, drinking and dancing. Deanne stepped on the balcony with a bottle of rum, "swaying unsteady", and finally "she lose her balance ... (37). Critics have noted Prichard's skill at charting the emotions throughout the play, the shifting "from reckless euphoria to a sense of lost opportunities, broken friendship and lives of mere endurance" (Spencer 13.5.98). After this terrible happening the girls despair and try to cling to something. Marie first thought of going to see Nero, an older mate, dealer and lover, but then she thought of her Dad. She is not supposed to see him on her own. He was not pleased to see her. She was beaten up. Boo found her with her face mashed up. **Marie** "He was drunk. It was like when I was young. I could feel blood in my ears. I think he burst my ear. 'E wanted to kill me" (38). There is a moment of touching female friendship when Boo starts to cry and puts her arm round Marie, hugging her. The act ends with Marie asking: "What did I do to deserve him?" (39). This exposes Marie's terrible pain and shows her as a victim of society, one that does not provide for its children, but leaves them on the doorstep. They have to try to survive on their own, without love and moral support.

No wonder that these stranded adolescents try to find understanding among kindred victims; as in this case, Hackney girls with a gang of their own. The stories take us into the Hackney underworld. They are teenagers, but we have the impression, as with the gang members in *Ashes and Sand*, that their lives are long spent. Boo and Marie, for instance, talk about Deniz, who was tall, skinny. "Her face was old – she look about thirty, but she was fifteen like the rest of us" (21). One of the lowest stories the two girls tell concerns their riding in a policeman's car, blowing him and biting his penis (20). They used to talk to him like a mate while they were arrested and passed a night in the police cell, calling dirty jokes to him. He told them that he did not want to be a police officer. This assertion is certainly symptomatic of his frustration and we can establish a kind of parallelism with Daniel, in *Ashes and Sand*, who is also dissatisfied with his life. Both are degenerate



beings, hanging around with adolescents and taking advantage of their promiscuity and defencelessness.

Though the girls are normally “high” because of the drugs they habitually take, they dream about a different life. Significantly, enjoying a bright sunny day the gang talks about an escape from their risky lives. “Threse ... had this idea about buying a ki of gear, cutting it to make double our money, and selling it at a profit” (40) to get out the kids’ home and out of Hackney, perhaps escaping to the Bahamas. However, in a similar way to *Ashes and Sand*, their dreams will be truncated. Mockingly, the very moment Marie was feeling free looking up at the blue sky, they are violently attacked by Wendy’s rival posse, “a bunch of filthy slappers that work down Hackney station, and ... used to front us saying we steal their punters and deal on their manor” (18). Marie is stabbed and taken to hospital, while Boo is arrested. This event is the beginning of the disintegration of the posse. Only Boo stays with Marie, while the other members flee and avoid them. Boo lingers on her own, picking up punters to get money. When Marie is released from hospital, she looks in vain for Boo. Interestingly, when Marie and Boo are driven apart after the stabbing, they deliver their speeches monologue-like, a fact that, in my opinion, is indicative of their separateness. Marie finally meets Threse, who incites her to take revenge on Wendy. She does so by smashing a glass in her neck. Sabrina and Threse flee, afraid of being charged with murder. It is Boo again who stays with Marie outside the club. When the police arrive, Boo makes Marie “RUN” (52). Thus Boo, the black friend, takes the blame on herself, because Marie has just told her that she is pregnant. Marie’s attack on Wendy is the result of a terrible personal conflict. She totally abhors the idea of having a baby growing inside, which is alien to her for several reasons: Obviously, she does not know the identity of the father, and the suspicion of incest lingers in the air. Her Dad might be responsible. The other reason is her worry about the possibility of the baby being abnormal as a result of her being on the gear. These reflections show that Marie is not irresponsible, but that circumstances have thrown her into the violent and degrading life she has been leading.

The last act shows Boo’s loneliness, boredom and despair at being in prison. She misses her posse, above all Marie, who has stopped coming to see her. Throughout this act, there is the repetition: “I miss you Marie why ain’t you come and visit me”? (54) Boo’s speeches and the letters she writes to Marie give us a “revelation of the gulf that separates the imprisoned from the free” (Billington 13.5.98). It also discloses life in prison, the strict

rules, the monotony, and the tablets administered to sedate her. **Boo**: “for being a paranoid schizophrenic, for being a nutter” (54). She is thinking of the day of her release and what to do with her life. Her last speech is an indictment about the socio-political system that does not provide a future for the handicapped, the unfortunate members of society:

I don't think they should lock people away ya know. I ain't even nineteen and I feel like me life is sorted for me. I dunno how I'll feel when I get out. I think I'll feel lonely and lost. I'll try and find my own direction. But I think it will be hard. I think about not having my number. GJO664. ... I think about Marie you know. I'm glad she was my friend. But I need to get away from all that scene and people who knew me. Every one you known stays inside you a bit don't they. I'm on my own from now. But she was my friend. My best friend (59).

Marie, too, in spite of their estrangement, keeps writing about missing Boo. She has given birth to a girl called Bukola, after her “best friend”. Marie is trying hard to survive and to look after the baby, and above all, not to take drugs. “I 'ave to talk meself out of the gear all the time man. I thought it would change when I have a baby. But life gets harder I think” (59). She has been given a flat, and she wants Boo to live with her. But the play does not end like this. It stresses their separateness and loneliness. The last lines spoken recall Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1956) with the tramps' repeating: “Let's go”. Marie and Boo have finished the storytelling; they have fulfilled the task of performing a play. So Marie asks: “Can we go now?” Which is echoed by Boo's “Can we go?” (59). The lines also reflect, in my opinion, the uncertainty of their lives

Prichard commented on the sad ending. “I wanted the audience to feel the waste of young life and also my sense of anger about it” (in Sierz, 2001:229). These words clearly echo Upton's when talking about her play *Ashes and Sand*. However, unlike Upton's play, that ends on the bleakest note, in *Yard Gal* there is this feeling that Marie and Boo might be able to find a way out, due to their resilience. As Prichard stated: “there's a lot there about survival and I wanted to celebrate that too” (229), that is to say, the two friends do emerge tougher if sadder, because their lives will get harder. The small kernel of hope is a significant one, and there is the hint that shared experience between equals can result in individual change (Sierz, 2001:229).

To conclude I would like to quote Prichard's opinion on female violence. In answer to whether violence in *Yard Gal* is female self-assertion, she said:

The central paradox is that violence is the opposite of assertiveness; it comes from a sense of feeling completely helpless. ...Violence is fucked up whether it comes from women or men. Women should be able to develop their own forms of strength, without trying to behave like men. Female violence is a product of desperation rather than a quest for identity. Violence is a way of life in a world where you have to be violent just to survive. ...Violence comes from being paranoid and completely wired on drugs. ... Violence is an illness” (in Sierz, 2001:230).

According to these statements, the reason why adolescents join in gangs and lead violent lives lies in the fact that they feel vulnerable and lonely. As they have no families to resort to, they stick together in tribal loyalty to conceal their fear. Girl Power is thus often the outer shell to hide an inner conflict, a conflict stemming from the violence inflicted on them as victims of a society that turns them into perpetrators of violence.

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## **VIOLENCE AND GENDER IN AMERICAN SLAVE NARRATIVES**

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The subject of this essay is the other Southerners - the ones who served the needs and endured the demands of those we typically see as the mainstream Southerners, their white masters and mistresses - and their other Southern literature. The great majority of that literature exists in one particular genre: the slave narrative, a genre well described by the renowned African-American scholar Houston A. Baker, Jr:

Between 1820 and 1860, Afro-Americans produced innumerable written accounts of America's "peculiar institution"; they sketched in captivating detail their complex ethical and psychological orientations toward slavery and demanded, in unequivocal terms, the abolition of Southern tyranny. Their collective utterances make up what the Afro-American writer Arna Bontemps calls an "American genre" of literary narrative. The genre is more exactly known as the "slave narrative," and thousands of representative examples were published between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the American Civil War. Written by ex-slaves, the narratives reveal a common pattern of representation consisting of the narrator's experiences in slavery, his heroic journey from slavery to freedom, and his subsequent dedication to abolitionist principles and goals. (Douglass, 1986:8-9)

These narratives are, of course, a subset of a familiar literary genre: autobiography. And it is autobiographical criticism that has opened them to literary study, as James Olney reminds us:

Black Studies courses and programs have been organized around autobiography - in part, no doubt, because (as John Blassingame has pointed out) black history was preserved in autobiographies rather than in standard histories and because black writers entered into the house of literature through the door of autobiography. From Frederick Douglass to Malcolm X, from Olaudah Equiano to Maya Angelou, the mode specific to the black experience has been autobiography; and of recent times the critical literature has more than kept pace with the primary literature. In black autobiography and criticism of it, we have something akin to a paradigm of the situation of autobiography in general. It is very doubtful that Equiano, Douglass, and Malcolm X saw their works as texts that might be studied in literature courses, yet the past few years have seen literary analyses devoted to

all three; and Douglass and Malcolm X are firmly established authors in courses that find themselves, comfortably or not, within departments of English as opposed to departments of History or Social Science. (1980:15)

The point I wish to make about the genre is a simple but perhaps unusual one: that individual examples of the genre are necessarily incomplete, given the very gendered nature of slavery itself; and that the fullest sense of what the genre means to report - the dreadful nature of slavery, and its impact upon the individual slave - and the fullest sense of what the genre can be, depends upon combined reading of individual narratives by male and female slaves.

Hints of what I'm after here can be seen in a single passage from one of the most important and fully established examples of the genre: Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave*. It both embodies the violence we expect to read of in such narratives, and hints at the necessary gender differences I've just alluded to; the incident it describes occurred shortly after Douglass had been taken from his grandmother's house and brought to the plantation of his owner, Aaron Anthony, to begin his life as a slave. It's worth noting that Douglass would have been no more than seven years old as he witnessed this:

He had ordered her not to go out evenings, and warned her that she must never let him catch her in company with a young man, who was paying attention to her, belonging to Colonel Lloyd. The young man's name was Ned Roberts, generally called Lloyd's Ned. Why master was so careful of her, may be safely left to conjecture. She was a woman of noble form, and of graceful proportion, having very few equals, and fewer superiors, in personal appearance, among the colored or white women of our neighborhood.[...] Aunt Hester had not only disobeyed his orders in going out, but had been found in company with Lloyd's Ned; which circumstance, I found, from what he said while whipping her, was the chief offence. . . . Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders, and back, entirely naked. He then told her to cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d\_\_\_\_d b\_\_\_\_h. After crossing her hands, he tied them with a strong rope, and led her to a stool under a large hook in the joist, put in for the purpose. He made her get upon the stool, and tied her hands to the hook. She now stood fair for his infernal purpose. Her arms were stretched up at their full length, so that she stood upon the ends of her toes. He then said to her, "Now, you d\_\_\_\_d b\_\_\_\_h, I'll learn you how to disobey my orders!" and after rolling up his

sleeves, he commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor. I was so terrified and horror-stricken at the sight, that I hid myself in a closet, and dared not venture out till long after the bloody transaction was over. I expected it would be my turn next. It was all new to me. I had never seen anything like it before. (1986:52)

The passage importantly highlights the sexual nature of his master's anger and violence, both in its introductory "analytical" comments and in the vivid visual representation it offers us. As Douglass himself has revealed, in a passage that precedes this one by a few pages, there is a deeply corrupt *double* motive in the slave-owners' sexual predation upon his female victims: financial incentive is added to sexual sadism: ". . . the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers; and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable" (1986:49). And so, like a male slave, a female slave may experience horrifying violence (as Douglass shows); but added to her experience is the ever-present threat of sexual violation and violence. And this means that to fully understand the experience of American slaves, we need autobiographical witness from Douglass's Aunt Hester's pen as well. Fortunately, we have that too - and an example as compelling and developed as Douglass's: Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Early on in Jacobs's *Incidents* comes a scene distinctly parallel to Douglass's witnessing of his Aunt Hester's horrifying beating:

When I had been in the family a few weeks, one of the plantation slaves was brought to town, by order of his master. It was near night when he arrived, and Dr. Flint ordered him to be taken to the work house, and tied up to the joist, so that his feet would just escape the ground. In that situation he was to wait till the doctor had taken his tea. I shall never forget that night. Never before, in my life, had I heard hundreds of blows fall, in succession, on a human being [. . .] Some said master accused him of stealing corn; others said the slave had quarreled with his wife, in presence of the overseer, and had accused his master of being the father of her child. They were both black, and the child was very fair. I went into the work house the next morning, and saw the cowhide still wet with blood, and the boards all covered with gore. The poor man lived, and continued to quarrel with his wife. A few

months afterwards Dr. Flint handed them both over to a slave-trader [. . .] it was a crime for a slave to tell who was the father of her child. (2000:15-16)

Reading Douglass's and Jacobs's passages together, one might be immediately struck by the fact that in both cases the violence is prompted by a sexual complication. And so, at the very start we have confirmation - from both genders - of the sexual predation common within the system of slavery, and of the complications (of desire, economics, and paternity) that it draws both master and victim into. Still, while both genders give witness to this particular corruption, each must experience it differently: the male slave as either jealousy or helpless rage, the female as direct physical and psychological trauma.

What this difference means can be well illustrated by two passages about "resistance" - one from Douglass, the other from Jacobs.

When he is sixteen years old, Frederick Douglass - already literate (a rarity for slaves), discontented to the point of rebelliousness, and physically strong - is handed over by his master to a "slave-breaker": Mr. Edward Covey. Almost nine months into his year of abusive and exhausting field work, Douglass admits himself "broken in body, soul, and spirit [. . .] a man transformed into a brute" (1986:105). But at this lowest point, when Covey sets out to bind him in preparation for yet another beating, he resists:

[. . .] but at this moment - from whence came the spirit I don't know - I resolved to fight; and suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose. He held on to me, and I to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected, that Covey seemed taken all aback [. . .] This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood [. . .] I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping me, must also succeed in killing me. (112-113)

Clearly, for Douglass, this is a fundamental spiritual and psychological moment. But it also illustrates - as clearly - the predictably *physical* nature of male slave resistance.



The privileges of male strength allow him to resist in a direct, physical, and “honorable” way.

Different and more complexly ambiguous is the resistance that Harriet Jacobs - at the same age as Douglass - chooses against the ever more pressing sexual threat of her Master, Dr. Flint (in reality, Dr. James Norcom (1778-1850)). After months of unsuccessfully trying to “seduce” Jacobs into an ongoing sexual relation with her, Flint decides to force the issue, and informs Jacobs that he is building “a small house for [her]” in the woods near his home - a house in which he can have free and private use of her. She frames her resistance - for her readers - with a desperate admission of guilt and shame: “And now, reader, I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame [...] but I have promised to tell you the truth [...] Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness [...] The influences of slavery had had the same effect on me that they had on other young girls; they had made me prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world. I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation” (2000:60-61). What Jacobs has decided upon is a freely chosen sexual relationship that she hopes will pre-empt the forced sexual relationship that Flint now pressingly insists upon:

[...] it chanced that a white unmarried gentleman had obtained some knowledge of the circumstances in which I was placed. He knew my grandmother [...] He became interested in me [...] He expressed a great deal of sympathy, and a wish to aid me. He constantly sought opportunities to see me, and wrote to me frequently [...] I felt grateful for his sympathy, and encouraged by his kind words [...] By degrees, a more tender feeling crept into my heart. He was an educated and eloquent gentleman; too eloquent, alas, for the poor slave girl who trusted in him. Of course I saw whither all this was tending [...] It seems less degrading to give one’s self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment [...] When I found that my master had actually begun to build the lonely cottage, other feelings mixed with those I have described. Revenge, and calculations of interest, were added to flattered vanity and sincere gratitude for kindness [...] I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day. Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others. (61-62)

The differences between Douglass's and Jacobs's resistances could hardly be made clearer - the one a matter, fundamentally, of matching physical force with equal or stronger force; the other a matter - as fundamental - of surrendering the body sexually, by choice, to avoid having to surrender the body to force. Jacobs trades the repulsive sexual violence of her master for the chosen violence to self of her affair with Mr. Sands (Samuel Tredwell Sawyer (1800-1863)). It is a resistance inevitably complicit with the terms of abuse which the slave system would have imposed upon her by force, and remained a life-long source of complex acceptance and regret on Jacobs's part.

The different, more inescapably sexual story that Jacobs tells has an important impact as well on her style - as can clearly be seen by comparing several other passages typical of the two slaves' complementary but distinctly separate texts. Here is Jacobs's comment on the same issue on which Douglass is quoted above - that the legal linkage between the slave mother's status and that of her children allows male slave-owners' sexual exploitation to be "profitable as well as pleasurable":

No pen can give an adequate description of the all-pervading corruption produced by slavery. The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The lash and the foul talk of her master and his sons are her teachers. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner, or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will. She may have had religious principles inculcated by some pious mother or grandmother, or some good mistress; she may have a lover, whose good opinion and peace of mind are dear to her heart; or the profligate men who have power over her may be exceedingly odious to her. But resistance is hopeless. (2000:57)

Douglass's analysis doesn't hesitate to speak of the slaveowners' "lusts," but cannot, of course, create the detailed description Jacobs carves out of her own experience, or express the feelings natural to the victims of those lusts. Jacobs's witness here - direct, almost overwhelmed by the reality, leading to four despairing words - is crucial to our understanding.

Eventually, Dr. Flint finds the most powerful means to bend Jacobs to his will: he will have the children born of her liaison with "Mr. Sands" put to plantation life, so that they may be, in her own words, "broke in" (105). In the face of this threat, she resolves upon escape, a resolution that leads her eventually to seven years' imprisonment in the

narrow attic of a shed attached to her grandmother's house. Here is her own description of her earliest time in this hideaway:

The garret was only nine feet long and seven wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light or air [...] To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house. The air was stifling; the darkness total. A bed had been spread on the floor. I could sleep quite comfortably on one side; but the slope was so sudden that I could not turn of the other without hitting the roof. The rats and mice ran over my bed; but I was weary, and I slept such a sleep as the wretched may, when a tempest has passed them over. Morning came. I knew it only by the noises I heard; for in my small den day and night were all the same. (128)

Here again is a very different kind of resistance than that which was available to Douglass, an erasure and a disappearance - a resistance in which her continued, heroic endurance must serve as the equivalent - equally successful - of Douglass's violent, public physical resistance to Edward Covey. It is a resistance *to be suffered*, to be endured, rather than a resistance that directly asserts. Unlike Douglass's physical struggle with Covey, Jacobs's resistance plunges her into a condition of absolute privacy and inwardness, an isolation at once physical and psychological.

This sense of imprisonment drives the most striking of the metaphors though which she represents what slave life has been for the African-American *female*:

You may believe what I say; for I write only that whereof I know. I was twenty-one years in that cage of obscene birds. I can testify, from my own experience and observation, that slavery is a curse to the whites as well as to the blacks. It makes the white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters and makes the wives wretched. And as for the colored race, it needs an abler pen than mine to describe the extremity of their sufferings, the depth of their degradation. (2000:58)

Frederick Douglass's language is no less passionate or vivid than Jacobs's, but its register is more analytical, and - given his masculine status - more openly defiant. In 1818, he is shifted from the Anthony plantation to city lodging with Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Auld, of Baltimore, where he is taught the rudiments of reading by his mistress - but only for a short

while. When her husband finds out what she has done, he admonishes her sternly, in front of Douglass:

[...] Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. To use his own words, further, he said, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master - to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world". "Now," said he, "if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy." These words sank deep into my heart [...] I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom [...] I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read. The very decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instruction, served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. (1986:78-79)

Notable in this passage - which does actually threaten any free future Douglass might aspire to - is a lack of the personal violence and physical violation that permeates so much of Jacobs's pre-escape life. And the resolution it leads to, while difficult, is direct and energetic. It will engage Douglass with the world more and more; Jacobs's road to eventual freedom will engage her in a withdrawal that will leave her with permanent physical scars.

A similar contrast is available in one of the most famous passages of *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave* - Douglass's high-rhetorical address as he overlooks Chesapeake Bay:

Our house stood within a few rods of Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition. I have often, in the deep

stillness of a summer's Sabbath, stood all alone upon the lofty banks of that noble bay, and traced, with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean. The sight of these always affected me powerfully. My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships: "You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O, that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas, betwixt me and you, the turbid waters roll [...]" (106)

Notably, the metaphors available in both passages (Auld's harangue, the Chesapeake Bay address) are more clearly rhetorical, less personal or bodily than those of Jacobs. Such a difference remains available at many other moments in Douglass's *Narrative*, as in his heartfelt but not particularly personal description of the slave-traders that lurk outside his cell (following his first failed attempt at escape, in 1836) as "so many fiends from perdition. A band of pirates never looked more like their father, the devil" (129).

Still, whatever the differences of register and rhetoric that we can tease out from our understanding of how differently gendered Jacobs's and Douglass's experiences of the horrors of slavery are, it is clear that we need both realities of textual witness to grasp the full nature of Southern slavery.

And confirming the importance of what they share, both come to achieve their fullest humanity in assuming a complete public identity, one directly expressive of the right and the ability to speak of and out of their experience - to a *white* audience. Douglass does so in one of his *Narrative*'s most remarkable and moving passages. In it, a man who began his autobiography by emphasizing how much of the reality of his birth and parentage had been taken from him, claims for himself - in exactly dated detail - a newly defining rebirth:

But while attending an anti-slavery convention at Nantucket, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, 1841, I felt strongly moved to speak, and was at the same time much urged to do so by Mr. William C. Coffin, a gentleman who had heard me speak in the colored people's meeting at New Bedford. It was a severe cross, and I took it up reluctantly. The truth was, I felt myself a slave, and the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down. I spoke but a

few moments, when I felt a degree of freedom, and said what I desired with considerable ease. From that time until now, I have been engaged in pleading the cause of my brethren - with what success, and with what devotion, I leave those acquainted with my labors to decide. (1986:151)

Jacobs claims her own public identity in a final address to her readers, who have primarily been the *white women* of the north, those most capable of understanding the wretchedness of her life as sexual prey:

Reader, my story ends with freedom, not in the usual way, with marriage. I and my children are now free! We are as free from the power of slaveholders as are the white people of the north; and though that, according to my ideas, is not saying a great deal, it is a vast improvement in *my* condition. The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble. I wish it for my children's sake far more than for my own [...] It has been painful to me, in many ways, to recall the dreary years I passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could. Yet the retrospection is not altogether without solace; for with those gloomy recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea. (2000:224-225)

In its specifically motherly concerns - the mention of marriage, the desire for “a hearthstone of my own,” the fact that her wishes concern her children more than herself, and the “tender memories” of her own mother's mother - it calls us back directly to the gender of the writer.

And it reminds us that in American slave narratives we find ourselves engaged by a genre in which the textual equality of male and female is our best guarantee of truth. In this genre we have not only a uniquely American form of literature, but one of the earliest examples of the necessity - if *all* literature is to speak the fullest truths of our human condition - of that long neglected double voice, the complementary witness of female and male writers.

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## ANDA ȘTEFANOVICI

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Trying to establish a hierarchy of Hawthorne’s women is probably a most difficult task. The easiest aspect that everyone notices is the distinction between the dark, or the sinner, and the fair, or the pure, Puritan woman. The paradox here is that it is exactly the dark religion that matches the fair woman. In *The American Woman*, Emerson said: “All things have two handles: beware of the wrong one.” (Bradley, 1965: 1037); it is a good piece of advice.

A subjective approach might rank Zenobia on the first place, while an objective one focuses on Hester. First of all, Hester’s roots belong to Old England. Such a place should have produced a pure, gentle, fair creature. Instead we have this passionate-for-a-minute Hester, whose most striking aspect is her dark, abundant hair.

To a childish question, “How come?” one must bring into discussion the idea of predestination elaborated by St. Augustine and adopted by the Protestants. Augustine says that there are persons predestined to salvation and that, even if their deeds are immoral, they will still be saved by God’s grace. The remainder are predestined to suffer. The end of the novel, and especially some aspects concerning Arthur might be explained by means of the doctrine of God’s grace that elects only the chosen ones: “It is singular, nevertheless, that certain persons who were spectators of the whole scene, [...], denied that there was any mark whatever on his breast, more than of a new born infant’s.” (Cowley, 1976:541) According to St. Augustine, God does not have to give any explanations for his preferences.

Despite this belief, the idea of not accepting imposed dogma and, as a consequence, of acting and rebelling characterizes all Hawthorne’s women: “Preach! Write! Act! Do anything, save to lie down and die.” (Cowley, 1976:483)

In one way or another, these women all try to change their pre-established condition – the passive element – but their rebellion is what causes their perdition. For the Puritan shepherd there is only one possible type of woman: the lamb-like one, the meek woman that patiently waits for the Easter slaughter. Priscilla is her embodiment.



Priscilla's merit as a character is that she represents a pure type of womanhood. Yet, the adjective does not suppose greatness; it refers to a category that is self-sufficient, that receives no influences from the outside, she does not accept the feminist ideas hinted at by Zenobia. In this respect, she is pure and made up of a single element: light.

Hawthorne's greatness lies in the dark. Herman Melville, cited by Bernard Cohen in *The Recognition of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1969:32) praised his "Blackness, ten times black." This mixture of shadow and of ray is the core of Hawthorne's creation. The light without the dark, the woman without the sin – the passion is inconceivable. Hawthorne's women are projections of his own dual nature. This is similar to Poe's technique of the *Doppelgänger*, of the split self or at least it has to do with the psychoanalytic idea that truth lies in repression. In this respect Hyatt H. Waggoner stated in Cohen's anthology:

Like the Existentialist philosophers who articulate the sensibility of our time, Hawthorne is more concerned with the experienced toothache than with orthodontic theory. Like them too, he distrusts the claim of objective reason to be able to arrive at humanly relevant truth: his empiricists all end unhappily." (Cohen, 1969:241)

Sartre's name is linked to existentialism. One of his works, *Muștele* (*The Flies*) pointed out some ideas that are concerned with Puritanism, a doctrine based on the principle of fear. Jupiter advises Oreste to leave people alone with their remorse and superstitions, because this is the sense of their existence. God likes these pathetic souls. It seems that in Hester's community these gods were the respectable Mr. Wilson, Mr. Bellingham, as well as Mr. Winthrop. They were the stage directors of a play of sin and retribution – the stage was the scaffold and the stage light was the plain daylight.

A peculiarity of the Puritan doctrine was their focus on the preacher, and implicitly, on the auditive element instead of the visual one. The preaching was performed at a pulpit that lacked any kind of adornments, lest they should tempt the eye. Fear was the core of the well-prepared preaching. This aspect is present in Sartre's play too, when a mother tells her son that he must be afraid, very afraid, because this is the only way he would become a good man. Hester's sin develops the Puritan oratory: "the elder clergy man, who had carefully prepared himself for the occasion, addressed to the multitude a discourse on sin." (Cowley:358) Hester's punishment to wear that "A" letter hides the Puritan psychology that focused on the impact that an image – usually forbidden – would produce. This is the explanation for Hester's allowance to decorate her "sin". The eye, longing for an image,

would cling to the angles of the sinful A and never leave it. This staring violates intimacy; it is a moral whipping.

The idea of *contemptus mundi* that characterized the Middle Ages reached the peak in the Protestant doctrine: spite for the smile, spite for colour, spite for life and even for a child. Jean Delumeau in *Păcatul și frica (The Sin and the Fear)* cites what St. Augustine thought of childhood – that a child is still a sinner and that he was conceived in sin. He even asks himself whether he has been innocent. As for Hester's sin, it belongs to the neo-platonic tradition: the union of two bodies has an irrational character, it causes man to be degenerate and places him next to animals.

According to Augustine, the union had to lack any sign of passion and to resemble the hands that joined one another. Hester broke the law and her sin was unpardonable. The first of the Christian virtues was virginity. The *contemptus mundi* proclaimed the nostalgia for the primitive angel-like human being, for the sexless spiritualized one destined for pure contemplation. Augustine's doctrine imagined a celestial fortress where people who act purely will in the end replace the fallen angels. Hilda's refuge in the dove-tower may be seen as a hidden desire to replace such an angel. But in Hawthorne's earthly fortress sin educates: he has no need to make Hilda asexual, rather to consider her a passionate and contradictory woman.

Though the prototype of Puritanism, Priscilla fails to impress mainly because she is deprived of the sense of the past: "But the past never comes back again." (Hawthorne, 1986: 76) This contradicts all Hawthorne's philosophy expressed in *The House of the Seven Gables*:

[... ] all human progress is in a circle, or, to use a more accurate and beautiful figure, in an ascending spiral curve. While we fancy ourselves going straight forward, and attaining at every step, an entirely new position of affairs, we do actually return to something long ago tried and abandoned, but which we now find etherealized, refined and perfected to its ideal. The Past is but a coarse and sensual prophecy of the present and the future." (Hawthorne, 1986:259)

Puritanism became a legal form of hypocrisy illustrated by both Dimmesdale and Bellingham; the latter kept a slave and inhabited a mansion that resembled Aladdin's palace. This doctrine equals the male domination and anticipates miscegenation; thus, the episode of the sailors in *The Scarlet Letter* is very suggestive: "The buccaneer on the wave

might relinquish his calling, and become, at once, if he chose, a man of probity and piety on land.” (Cowley, 1976:517)

One last detail is that in *The House of the Seven Gables* Hawthorne’s philosophy about the past that chains the present assumes the fictional garb of the Italian boy with his barrel organ. In spite of our dreams or of our thoughts, we all dance according to the same tune.

Hawthorne’s name was also connected to Transcendentalism. However, in his case the only aspect of Transcendentalism that matches his situation is the Feminist movement, and because of this, we will speak about an authentic transcendentalist Zenobia and of an apprentice Hester.

Except for Hester, all the other women are built in opposing pairs: Phoebe and Hepzibah, Miriam and Hilda, Zenobia and Priscilla. Hester is the only one who opposes herself: her strong Puritan beliefs and her timid feminist ideas. We could say that Zenobia’s principles are but a burst of Hester’s repressed thoughts towards the end of her experience.

The motto of the Transcendentalist movement is the one Emerson stated in the beginning of his “Self-Reliance”: “Net e quaesiveris extra – Do not seek outside yourself” (Bradley, 1965:1067). It is sin, in one form or another, which obliges Hawthorne’s characters who can no longer stand their isolation to go for a dip in the sea of humanity. It happens with Clifford, Phoebe and Hester who, when seeing Roger among the crowd, understood that: “Dreadful as it was, she was conscious of a shelter in the presence of this thousand witness. [...] She fled to refuge, as it were to the public exposure, and dreaded the moment when its protection should be withdrawn from her.” (Cowley, 1976:354)

Of all Hawthorne’s female characters it seems that only Phoebe experienced no drama, since she was the product of society. Her isolation in the house is, we might say, accidental, and her development, her blooming into a woman seems to follow the normal, physical aspect. Hester’s facing the people in the scaffold scene, as well as Clifford’s wanting to jump out of the window, may be understood through Emerson’s statement in “The American Scholar”: “The world, this shadow of the soul, or other me, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys, which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself.” (Bradley, 1965:1042) Here, it was Emerson’s contradiction that allowed a comparison, since he had a reputation for selfishness exemplified when he said that he would leave his family for the sake of isolation.

The drama that Hawthorne's characters experienced during their isolation might be explained by what Henri Bergson thought about society. In his work *Cele două surse ale moralei și religiei* (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*), Bergson argued that even the ego belongs both to the self and to society, and that, if somebody wishes to separate himself from society, he will not be able to do this, because he will live out memory and imagination that society developed in that person.

Bergson presents a very interesting case – that of a criminal who, despite his living in the middle of a community does not confess. He feels much more isolated here than on a deserted island, Bergson says, because in the last case the criminal would find solace in imagining society, whereas here, in the middle of it, he feels lost because of his crime. The only possible way to reintegrate would be to confess. This theory applies to Dimmesdale's case: "... There was an air about this young minister – an apprehensive, a startled, a half-frightened look, as of a being who felt himself quite astray [...] and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own. (Cowley, 1976:356)

Hawthorne's Transcendentalism implies feminism and the Feminist movement, whereas Puritanism is reduced to male dominion. His revolt against Puritanism is the revolt of his feminine soul against the tyranny of his male ancestors.

Margaret's Fuller's beliefs (the high priestess of the New England Transcendentalist group, as she used to be called) influenced Hawthorne a lot, as it can be seen from his *French and Italian Notebooks* gathered in Cowley's *Portable Hawthorne* (1976:659). In these writings he dedicated several pages to her memory: "On the whole, I do not know, but I like the better for it; the better, because she proved herself a very woman, after all, and fell as the weakest of her sisters might."

This statement puzzles us and, though we are warned in the preface to *The Blithedale Romance* not to make any comparison between the narrator and the author himself, we cannot help ourselves. It is too obvious: the "very woman" is the one that allows an element of weakness – hence, Coverdale's exclamation in the end: "I – I myself was in love with Priscilla." (Hawthorne, 1986:284)

In *Păcatul și frica* (*Sin and Fear*), Jean Delumeau analyzed all the forms of that wide-spread phenomenon: *contemptus mundi*. Delumeau mentions Antonio Vieira's Jesuit opinions. He tries desperately to find out the cause of Adam's Fall. It seems that the results of the Fall - all the sufferings of the body and all the vices of the soul - happened and continue to occur because of a woman. However, in the conclusion of his Jesuit opinions

he speaks of a legitimate wife, not an adulteress one, one who is not guilty and is created to be so by the hands of God.

It surely took a great effort to demolish such a conception and, until Margaret Fuller's age, there had been a long and harsh epoch that tried to repress any sign of passion or any hint of temptation: girls resorted to painful methods or customs, such as pressing metallic strips against their bosom, thus preventing the natural development that might lead into temptation, and when, at the moment, the true nature of woman emerged, the hunt for witches began.

In *Magia și Vrăjitoria în Europa (Magic and Witchery in Europe)* James Sharpe presents many famous situations in which witches were involved. Thus, in 1478, the Duchess of Bedford was suspected of having used witchcraft; Jane Shore who was in love with Richard III, was accused of witchcraft. The 17<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the outburst of a plague of witches. In 1692 the plague reached New England as well

Researchers try to explain the hysteria by considering its economic aspects. Yet, this is not the cause that interests us, but a name: Hawthorne – the sin of a father that Nathaniel tried to take upon himself. In *The Custom House*, he states: “At all events, I, the present writer, as their representative, hereby take the shame upon myself for their sakes, and pray that any curse incurred by them [...] may be now and henceforth removed.” (Cowley, 1976:300)

Eventually, the witch hunters were tamed. In *The Legend of the Sleepy Hollow* W. Irving managed to offer an unforgettable, comical image of the woman who no longer bewitches, but rather smites:

And he had seen many specters in his time, and been more than once beset by Satan in diverse shapes, [...] he would have passed a pleasant life of it, in despite of the devil and all his works, if his path had not been crossed by a being that causes more perplexity to mortal man than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together, and that was: a woman.” (Bradley, 1965:380)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the situation reversed. In order to see the manifestation of the unnatural you had to pay ... the tax collector was nobody else but Westervelt ... the woman ... from witch to victim: Priscilla and even more Beatrice.

Hawthorne's preference for all the aspects related to womanhood is analyzed by Millicent Bell in his Introduction to *New Essays on Hawthorne's Major Tales*. Here it is

stated that those tales that Melville called “black” seem to bespeak hostility to the feminine, a desire to write masculine will on the feminine body as literalized in *The Birthmark* or in *Rappaccini’s Daughter*, both of which anticipate *The Scarlet Letter*.

In the Introduction to *The House of the Seven Gables*, Milton R. Stern details the literary context of the epoch. The way for an American romancer to break into the American literary marketplace was through short literary pieces accepted by the magazines that published fiction and poetry. But this literary market was for ladies, as gentlemen’s magazines published articles on political, social, and military issues. So, Hawthorne had to make some compromises. The best example is *The House of the Seven Gables* which ends in an unexpected way for what we know of Hawthorne.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was proud of the American woman and he clearly expresses that pride in *The English Notebooks* included in *The Portable Hawthorne*: “The women of England are more atrociously ugly than any other human beings, and I have not yet seen one whom we should distinguish as beautiful in America.” (Cowley, 1976:641) The most striking difference lies in their character: “They certainly look much better, able to take care of themselves than our women; but I see no reason to suppose that they really have greater strength of character than any.” (Cowley, 1976:642)

Puritanism puzzles or gives birth to paradoxes such as the depiction of womanhood. Inconsistency is part of a woman’s nature (George Sand proclaimed that as one great Truth) and has nothing to do with miscegenation. A fiction that tries to deal with such a delicate matter is bound to produce confusion; first, we deal with Hawthorne, and secondly, with woman. The author’s obstinacy in presenting the same peculiarities of the sinner type of woman produces the *metaphor* of the Dark Lady.

Between 1800-1860 America was flooded with novels and poetry volumes written by women for women. These books proclaimed a cult of domesticity based on values of gentle virtues such as piety, purity and passivity. But sometimes a woman, whom Reynolds calls *the adventurous feminist*, commands and acts just like a man. This critic establishes twelve types of American women identifying the figure of the woman victim with the dark lady’s wrongs. Yet, Reynolds’ dark woman has almost nothing to do with Hawthorne’s Dark Lady.

Prior to Hawthorne’s woman, we have an American woman whose basic characteristic is strength. Reynolds adopts Margaret Dalzeil’s opinion about the British heroine - *lovely imbecile* - inherited from 18<sup>th</sup> century didactic fiction, a character that was

fragile, religious and dependent on a man. Compared to this type of heroine, the American one had all the rights to be called an *Amazon*. Reynolds considers that the best explanation for this adjective was offered by Tocqueville whom he quotes: “In the USA, Protestant teaching is combined with free constitution and a very democratic society, and in no other country is a girl left to look after herself.” (Reynolds, 1988:341)

The above-mentioned conditions created what Reynolds named the moral exemplar of womanhood, divided again in the angel, or angelic woman, and the practical one. Now we approach Hawthorne’s territory. The critic considers that an angel’s basic function is a religious or philosophical one and that, despite her strength for good, it did not echo in the feminist matters. Initially, this type served as a means of erasing the tradition of Scholastic Calvinism; it affirmed faith in man’s salvation through this angel-woman. The practical type of woman, best illustrated by Phoebe, had to render the efficiency of good works, and her indomitable cheer flew in the face of Calvinistic gloom.

Leslie A. Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1984:78) analyzes the issue of womanhood from a sexual point of view. He bears antipathy for the pure, fair maiden derived from Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*, stating that:

“The scarcely distinguishable ingénues of Cooper, the incredible Lucy over whom Melville drivels in *Pierre*, Hawthorne’s Priscilla and unbearably dove-like Hilda: these are the scandals of our literature.”

Fiedler states bluntly that in Hawthorne’s case, everything is explainable by his being married to an ethereal ice-lady. Thus, his dark ladies stem from his obscene fancies.

Gloria C. Erlich in *Family Themes and Hawthorne’s Fiction* considers that all of the author’s fictional projections are deeply rooted in his own biography: “Sibling incest, dark women contrasted with fair ones – these staples of Gothic romance – were amplified by Hawthorne’s family experience.” (Erlich, 1986:93)

She offers some very interesting family details: Maria Louisa, Nathaniel’s younger sister, stands for the fair type of woman, being a capable cook and a seamstress. Ebe, the child whose whole name Nathaniel was not able to pronounce is Elizabeth, the older sister. She was an imperious and brilliant type of woman, totally independent. She was a dark-haired woman, having a possessive attitude toward her brother and an unveiled antipathy toward Sophia.

Erlich focuses on Hawthorne’s experience recorded in *The English Notebooks* about meeting a Jewish woman from London in a restaurant. This figure seems to explain

the terror behind many portrayals of the dark, exotically suggestive women like Hester, Zenobia, Miriam and Beatrice. Hawthorne's journal is the most efficient instrument to use in a psychoanalytical approach: it is here where we find Hawthorne's acting like Giovanni:

I never should have thought of touching her, nor desired to touch her; for, whether owing to the distinctiveness of race, my sense that she was a Jewish, or whatever else, I felt a strong repugnance, simultaneously with my perception that she was an admirable creature. (as cited by Erlich, 1986:94)

A synthesis of all these qualities and flaws may have been captured by Leslie Fiedler when he states that the Dark Lady represents the hunger of the Protestant male not only for the rich sexuality he had rejected as unworthy of his wife, but also for the religion he had rejected and for the social, or racial groups he had excluded.

The same Dark Lady is viewed as an *American Madonna*, the title of John Gatta's book. He considers the *Marian image* in Hawthorne's fiction as well as the author's duality between Protestantism and Catholicism. Gatta notices that the image of the Madonna offered Hawthorne a symbolic correspondent for his faith in the saving force mediated through womanhood. At the same time, Nathaniel's deprivation of an earthly father led him to regard a woman as providing access toward a celestial father, the woman being his mother who was viewed in curious virginal terms because of her seclusion.

The critic distinguishes between two types of Mary that correspond to the fair and to the dark lady: the first is *St. Mary the Virgin* with her mystique of surpassing purity and latent sexuality; the second is *Mother Mary* whom we can identify with Hester. These two types combine and create what Gatta calls the Christian Magna Mater in Hawthorne's fiction.

His conclusion is that Hawthorne's ambiguous women embody a redemptive but non-virginal aspect of the archetypal Madonna and that, whether a terrible anima, a mother, or a virgin, they all offer man a chance to fulfill himself. The historical Madonna was no angel and it is through her body that Mary became blessed. This idea sustains the greatness of all Dark Ladies.

A study of woman in Hawthorne's fiction conducted in a different way than a chronological one must be focused on the way woman splits into contradictions or on the way she unites them.



*The House of the Seven Gables* represents the literary womb that gives birth to all the other types of womanhood. This literary womb was initially abused by Pyncheon's pride; thus, it was doomed to poor functioning and to a premature birth. We recognize such abortive creatures in Hepzibah as well as in Clifford whose conception as a male seems to be accidental; differently stated, it is a sexual decline. Phoebe is to be analyzed only in extremes: as the one who saves because she represents a new type of womanhood - the one who engages herself in social matters, or as a plain woman whose passion was exorcised and whose broom was transformed into a practical thing.

The offsprings of this wounded womb will be Zenobia and Priscilla, both representing pure types of womanhood, that is, comprised of a single element – the light or the dark. We have stated that Priscilla represents the authentic Puritan, consequently we are obliged to name Zenobia as the authentic sinner; yet the term must not be considered in its most negative connotations. Her sin consists in pride and mostly in the way she treats Priscilla.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the third romance in my analysis, the two opposing principles fuse and produce Hester. She inherits Zenobia's strength and Priscilla's skill: the skill of sewing. The Transcendentalist gene is only a recessive one in Hester. In turn, she will become the literary mother for Hilda and Miriam. It is Hilda who will continue her religious aspirations, while Miriam will replace sewing by a superior form of art, painting. More or less a failure (depending on the critics' taste), *The Marble Faun* clearly presents two types of womanhood: the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene.

In *Omul și Mulțimea (The Man and the Crowd)*, Jose Ortega y Gasset tells us a fable: while he was travelling back to Spain, he met on board a ship some American women that were offended when he treated them as women and tried to talk to them accordingly. They demanded Gasset that they should be treated as human beings and not as women ... the principles of equality had erased the very essence of womanhood. In spite of his exaggerated praising words, Gasset managed to rehabilitate the concept of woman and of the female body, which are both a shield and a vulnerable pawn. According to Gasset the body itself is a soul. Consequently, women pay so much attention to the needs of their body and decorate it. This statement fits Zenobia perfectly.

As strong as she may seem, the strength of a woman lies in her flaws, too. Zenobia is a perfect example. Then we can understand Hawthorne's opinions about Margaret Fuller: too much strength might scare and too much weakness fails to impress.

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## The Conundrum of Gender

**JEANETTE WINTERSON AND THE UNGENDERED NARRATOR**

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This paper about Winterson and the totalizing body aims to deal with the ungendered as well as gendered body from the perspective of her novel *Written on the Body* which appeared in 1992. The novel is a story of love and loss, but Winterson has managed to create that rare thing - an original novel about love. The storyteller of the book falls in love with Louise who is married to a cancer specialist called Elgin. Interestingly enough, Winterson never reveals the gender of the storyteller and we are left to work out for ourselves whether the story deals with a heterosexual or homosexual relationship. Louise leaves Elgin and moves in with the storyteller, who is unaware of the fact that the beloved is seriously ill.

The story is told mainly through flashbacks and transformed into a love poem where the loved one's leukaemic body is described in every detail with words, which are both wonderful and terrifying at the same time. It is a tragic tale that Winterson gives us in *Written on the Body*, but she delivers it with the humour that is ever present in her work.

The ungendered narrator of the novel is one of the most discussed features of the text, garnering ambivalent responses from the majority of its reviewers. The ambiguity of the gender can be seen as novelistic trick, a stratagem conferring mystery to the book.

One critic describes it 'as the book's principal conceit, its greatest weakness, and perhaps its greatest strength', while another claims that the 'plot hovers dangerously on the precipice of device'. Other reviewers have dismissed the ungendered narrator as a 'gimmick', viewing it as a trivial narrative strategy employed to assert the point that gender is unimportant to lovers.

(<http://www.ags.uci.edu/~clcwega/revolutions/Stevens.htm>).

These critics claim that the popular romantic notion of falling in love is a connection between the souls or inner selves of two individuals and that this trite sentiment could have been more effectively conveyed by other means than a somewhat disconcerting device. The lack of gender gives the text subversive possibilities; it is true that in Winterson's novel the unspecified gender conveys the idea that gender is unimportant to lovers, but

...at the same time it implicitly highlights the fact that within contemporary dominant discourses, gender is not only important to lovers, it is what constitutes desire and sexual object choice.[...]...the process of falling in love does not occur independently of socially

constructed gender positions. Instead it occurs within systems of gender and sexuality which regulate both desire and sexual object choice. (ibid.)

From this point of view, the ungendered narrator is not a trivial device, but rather a narrative strategy that challenges traditional binaries and compulsory heterosexuality, inciting readers to imagine a world in which desire has no more gender imposed boundaries.

In case the reader is eager to unveil the narrator's gender, he is given some pale 'clues' that are intended to confuse him even more and send him once and for all into a maze of supposition. The only thing we know is that the narrator develops relations with both women and men (mostly women), so that sexually speaking he/ she might be catalogued as bisexual. Equivocal terms and phrases like "chest, shirt", "I quivered like a schoolgirl" (Winterson, 1992:82), "creature male or female" (84) are just some of Winterson's manoeuvres in the construction of the novel. Nothing is revealed, but towards the end, Gail, a friend from the north of England who has recently got knowledge about the author's loss, imagines the loved one as "tall, dark and handsome" (144). The first two adjectives are not really helpful, as they are characteristic for both genders, but *handsome* is mainly used for the male of the species, having as equivalent for feminine *beautiful*, that Winterson handles for Louise's depiction: "tall, red and beautiful." (144) If the world uncovered in this novel corresponds to our patriarchal everyday routine universe, it would be clear enough that, as long as Gail expected the narrator to have a masculine lover, the narrator was a woman. The conclusion might be correct if the hypothesis had no flaws. We cannot though take the patriarchal world as a correct premise, as long as Winterson appeals to different strategies to unbalance the world ruled by men. She herself jokes in her writing by wondering if she has been a reliable narrator.

John Sutherland argues that Winterson's "general avoidance of male characters' combined with the fact that the narrator apparently sits down to urinate, suggests that the narrator is a woman." (<http://www.ags.uci.edu/~clcwegsa/revolutions/Stevens.htm> ).

The sentence we have in the book does not make any clarification of gender: "I went and peed in the coffee pot" (Winterson, 1992:70). Far from having any thorough information, one critic jumps at the conclusion that the narrator should be male because "he broadcasts his current affairs without hesitation, even to near strangers; it's difficult to

imagine that such love is not heterosexual.” (<http://www.ags.uci.edu/~clcwegsa/revolutions/Stevens.htm> ).

Men are generally recognized for boasting about their sexual adventures, but this is not enough evidence. To conclude our discussion of this topic of a certain gender assigned to the narrator, most reviewers have assumed that the narrator is female, associating him/her with the author and finding more and more hints that suggest such a reading. As in many interviews Winterson has recognized that she gets inspiration from her real life and background, that her novels are autobiographical to a certain extent, a female narrator seems to be the easy solution. But the important questions that should be posed here are: what motivates the desire to know the narrator’s sex? And how would the knowledge affect our reading of the text?

Any attempt to determine the narrator’s gender is vain, as there is no information about the narrator’s body that could lead us to a precise conclusion. And that is exactly the point; it implies that such information is irrelevant. Confirmation of the narrator’s sex would only reinforce gender stereotypes rooted in male-constructed knowledge about sexed bodies, such as men are naturally aggressive and dominant, while females are frail and appropriate only for child bearing and rearing.

The theories about the narrator’s sex and gender go far beyond clear, firm delimitations.

Judith Butler’s theories of gender provide insight into the subversive status of the ungendered narrator. Butler believes that gendering, or assuming sex, is part of a complex process that constitutes subjects, ushering them into the symbolic and allowing the appropriation of the “speaking I”. She goes on to explain that:

...the formation of the subject simultaneously produces a ‘domain of abject beings, those who are not yet *subjects*, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. Butler uses the term *abject* to describe ‘the unlivable and uninhabitable zones of social life’ populated by those ‘who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the *unlivable* is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. She claims that this zone functions as a ‘site of dreaded identification against which and by virtue of which the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claims to autonomy and life’.” (<http://www.ags.uci.edu/~clcwegsa/revolutions/Stevens.htm> ).

Considering Butler's point of view, if assuming sex is part of a complex process constituting subjects, we can include Winterson's ungendered narrator in the category of abject, unlivable bodies. Language reinforces this idea; it excludes the possibility of an ungendered person's existence. We cannot say "s/ he" or "him/ her", but calling the person "it" reinforces the idea that such a person could not exist as a subject, but only as abject, unlivable body. The narrator is not half "she", half "he", but really a different category, which could be described as the slash between the two.

Butler claims that the process of gendering works for compulsory heterosexuality, and attempts to construct a "natural" link between gender and sexuality. She explains that

heterosexual logic conflates identification and desire: 'If one identifies as a given gender, one must desire a different gender.' Homosexuality functions similarly: if one identifies as a given gender, one desires the same gender.'

(<http://www.ags.uci.edu/~clcwega/revolutions/Stevens.htm>).

In other words, both heterosexuality and homosexuality are constructed around gender difference; both identifying as a gendered person and desiring another gendered person is what constitutes both heterosexuality and homosexuality. In this framework, lesbian and gay identities are considered problematic as they reinforce gender difference. Winterson's total lack of sexual identity labels such as homosexual/heterosexual or bisexual which are conspicuously absent from the text. Such terms would have very little meaning in the text because sexuality has been dislodged from both gender and identity in Winterson's fictional world. *Written on the Body* deregulates desire, constructing sexuality as fluid and nomadic.

Winterson's purpose in adopting this writing strategy was to imagine a character that is ungendered and a world in which ungendered body matters. The idea of gender starts from a person's genitalia and later, it develops around secondary sexual characteristics. These distinctive signs must play a major role in the type of body image one has, and the type of self-conception directly linked to the social meaning and the value of the sexed body. Elizabeth Grosz considers that

the much beloved category of *gender* so commonly used in feminist theory should be understood, not as the attribution of social and psychological categories to a biologically given sex, i. e. in terms of a mind/ body split, but in terms that link gender much more

closely to specificities of sex. Gender is not an ideological superstructure added to a biological base; rather, gender is the inscription, and hence also the production, of the sexed body. (Grosz, 1997: 306)

Gender is perceived as a continuation of sex, of a sexed body and from this point of view, our ungendered narrator can be assigned a sex from its sexual specificities. Gender cannot be neutrally attributed to bodies of either sex: the “femininity” of the female body cannot be the same as the “femininity” of a male body, because the kind of body inscribed makes a difference to the meanings and functioning of gender that emerge.

In her article entitled *Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory*, Jane Flax recalls the female perspective of analyzing gender relations. She considers that the goal of feminist theorists should be the study of the way gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think, or do not think about them. She presumes that the thorough study of gender can help us gain a critical distance from existing gender arrangements and on pre-established beliefs. Her relating to gender could offer us another perspective about the ungendered narrator:

Gender relations enter into and are constituent elements in every aspect of human experience. In turn, the experience of gender relations for any person and the structure of gender as a social category are shaped by the interactions of gender relations and other social relations such as class and race. Gender relations thus have no fixed essence; they vary both within and over time. (Flax, 1997: 171).

Flax’s reading guides us towards new meanings: there is no gender assigned independently from social relations, from interacting with people and creating a gender or yourself. The ungendered narrator can enter into the possession of a gender through its interactions with the characters in the novel. Social class can be a clue here; the majority of relationships outlined build on similar social classes; almost all relationships have an intellectual background. The only exception refers to Jacqueline, a kind of household pet; she was taking care of the animals in the zoo. The narrator’s affair with the zoo-keeper proves to be a failure mainly due to their divergent cultural preoccupations. The gender assigned has no stable significance; it can fluctuate according to time and relations, that is, each person can build him/ herself new gendered identities related to behavioural perceptions.



Classifying a body according to gender is connected to a social position in the world, to embodiment. "As Donna Haraway argues, the 'body' in liberal theory was neutral, sexed but not gendered." (Betterton, 1996:14) Underpinning feminist thinking in sociology, psychology and cultural theory, there is a very clear distinction between *sex* and *gender*.

The very existence of an ungendered narrator illustrates that gender and sexuality are constructed as fluid and multiple in the world of the text and the narrator does not assume a sexed position because there is no norm requiring him/ her to do so. The only thing we know, is, that in Winterson's text, the narrator is described having relationships with both men and women, displaying an openness to various forms of relationships and desires. Technically speaking though, the character can be labelled *bisexual*, a person with open views on life.

Bisexuality is a term that challenges the well established dichotomies of masculine/ feminine. The "masculine" part of the dichotomy concerns all that implies human, mind, self, reason, culture or white, while animal, body, other, emotion, nature and black are deemed "feminine", and subordinated to their male counterparts. Another split deriving from this one is the heterosexual/ homosexual. Heterosexuality is conceptualized as masculine, homosexuality as feminine. By challenging the heterosexual/ homosexual split and the construction of the "sexual other", the bisexual movement provides a theoretical framework to resist all dualisms. "The bisexual existence brings the straight and gay worlds together, attesting to the existence of a sexual continuum, rather than two separate worlds separated by an impenetrable fence." (Sturgis, 1997: 383).

Bisexuality is the unification of the two sexual directions, and the text's construction of sexual object choice as functioning independently of gender could be viewed as an affirmation of bisexuality. Although the text clearly refuses monosexuality (clearly expressed relationships with both feminine and masculine characters), it seems to me that it also goes beyond the contemporary constructions of general bisexuality. Even if bisexuality/ monosexuality constitute themselves in a pair, the term itself linguistically reinforces the binary opposition of homo/ hetero, that it supposedly transcends. Perhaps Winterson is attempting to construct a way of thinking about gender and sexuality that transcends contemporary division of society into heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality. It is true that the narrator, as well as other characters, has relations with both men and women, we have less attention paid to the differences based on gender than on

each character's individual practices and pleasures. We can neither speak of sexual practices, nor about experiences that could be attributed to a certain gender only. The new perception of gender and sexuality was defined by other theorists:

... Derrida's formulation of a 'sexual otherwise': 'At that point there would be no more sexes, there would be one sex for each time. One sex for each gift.' Wittig possesses a similar vision: 'For us there are, it seems, not one or two sexes but many, as many sexes as there are individuals.' The narrator, ungendered, androgynous, is not necessarily bisexual, but rather is at the center of a heterogenous array of sexual differences. S/he is a foil in a sense, who highlights the multiplicity of gendered positions and sexual possibilities.

<http://www.ags.uci.edu/~clcwega/revolutions/Stevens.htm>

To conclude on the issue of sex and gender of the narrator, I should say that the ungendered narrator in Winterson's *Written on the Body* is not mere a stratagem increasing the textual interest, but is nonetheless a device that challenges the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality. In Winterson's world obtaining the status of a subject does not build upon gender, or assuming sex. In concluding reflection on the writer's strategy, we can state that she delineated a world in which ungendered body has come to matter. Winterson's discourse supports feminist theories in its assumption of non-compulsory heterosexuality. Even more, she imagines a new world, a world without sexual rules and constraints, where people could freely express their sexual object choice. Some lines in the novel testify to her aspiration – a gender-cleared universe, that, as readers we might find utopian.

The main character switches genders and sexual habits with an ease that seems a little forced. All the other characters, which are aware of the ungendered narrator's sexual affairs, are constructed as living in a world without typical sexual practices distributed according to genders. No one shows the least astonishment, especially when every individual has strange and unique experiences. Winterson's world is populated with characters that try to break the boundaries and clichés of our minds set-up for compulsory heterosexuality and predictable love-makings. The writer herself insists that her use of an ungendered narrator is intended to be perceived beneath the traditional divisions of gender:

I mean, for me a love story is a love story. I don't care what the genders are if it's powerful enough. And I don't think that love should be a gender-bound operation. It's

probably one of the few things in life that rises above all those kinds of oppositions – black and white, male and female, homosexual and heterosexual. When people fall in love they experience the same kind of tremors, fears, a rush of blood in the head.[...] And fiction recognizes this.” (www.jeanettewinterson.com)

The central story of *Written on the Body* concerns the narrator’s love affair with Louise. Their rapturous affair inspires frequent meditations on the narrator’s behalf about the nature of love and human relationships. The love story is projected unto the reader as a series of flashbacks, and the whole romance is thoroughly depicted by Winterson as an X-ray of a complete relationship.

In the novel, Louise contrasts with all other characters already by her description, but especially with the ungendered narrator. The narrator’s lover, is not only gendered, but portrayed as excessively feminine. The visual impact reigns first over the other senses:

If I were painting Louise I’d paint her as a swarm of butterflies. A million Red Admirals in a halo of movement and light. There are plenty of legends about women turning into trees but there are any about trees turning into women? Is it odd to say that your lover reminds you of a tree? Well she does, it’s the way her hair fills with wind and sweeps out around her head. Very often I expect her to rustle. She doesn’t rustle, but her flesh has the moonlit shade of a silver birch. Would I have a hedge of such saplings naked and unadorned. (Winterson, 1992:29)

Louise, the loved one is for the narrator a hymn dedicated to love, life and passion. Louise is everything the narrator has ever dreamt of. She represents the feminine side, as she is associated with the “moonlit shade”; the tree is a symbol of life, fecundity, fertility.

Winterson’s construction of Louise as extremely feminine can be viewed as an attempt to create a space between androgyny and utmost femininity in which multiple degrees of femininity can exist. The writer has chosen not to create two ungendered characters, but a range of gender possibilities through a variety of characters who display different degrees of femininity and masculinity.

Winterson’s text plays upon the concept of womanhood. The ungendered narrator can boast with a great number of female lovers. They are all extremely different, and they all play different parts. The fluidity of gender reveals that in the textual world Winterson has constructed, masculinity and femininity do not bend upon male and female characters

necessarily. Except Louise, who is very feminine, the other gendered characters do not leave clearly the impression of belonging to a certain sex. Many characters in the book fulfil the androgynous myth: neither male, nor female. The characters gendered by the pronoun “she”, exhibit behaviours and beliefs that are in conflict with traditional constructions of femininity. The female characters perform various gender roles, slipping back and forth to traditionally feminine and masculine positions. They work to denaturalize dominant conceptions of gender difference and expected social behaviour. For example, Bathsheba, a dentist, was happily married but promiscuous. She wanted to establish total property over the narrator’s body. Then, there was Inge, the Dutch “anarcho-feminist and committed romantic”. She wages a campaign against patriarchal oppression by blowing up urinals. She saw the Eiffel Tower “a hideous symbol of phallic oppression”. (Winterson: 1992: 21) It is with Inge that the narrator discovers his/ her preference for body surfaces and superficialities. All their encounters reflect their spirituality; the bodies they discuss about belong to Renoir. The body of Inge though has become a treasure for the narrator, who especially idolizes her breasts. If all the approaches Winterson made were mere subtle references, a woman’s breast is more than Freud considered:

I had idolized them simply and unequivocally, not as a mother substitute nor a womb trauma, but for themselves. Freud didn’t always get it right. Sometimes a breast is a breast is a breast.’ (24).

The female breast can mean more in itself than Freud tried to associate it with many substitutes. If you love someone, all the parts on the loved one’s body are worshipped and you try to find a secret code only visible for you in certain lights.

Jacqueline was the ideal mistress. “A sort of household pet. She traded sex and sympathy for £50 to tide her over the weekend and a square meal on Sunday. It was a civilized if brutal arrangement.” ( 25).

Contrary to the other women from the novel, Jacqueline is the only one who is described as a motherly, nurturing type. She is good to everyone beginning with the animals in the zoo and lover. Jacqueline’s descriptions make us distinguish a very submissive type of woman. But when the narrator leaves her, Jacqueline’s femininity is not positioned as inferior to the narrator’s androgyny, nor is it the cause of the narrator’s

rejection of her. It is the relationship's lack of passion and its flatness that makes the narrator eager to split.

Catherine wanted to be a writer, so, she exercised her imagination by inventing scenarios. After some happy and careless nights, Catherine said she would leave, as writers do not make "a good companion.[...] It's only a matter of time, she said, before I become an alcoholic and forget how to cook." (60) Judith was working in a greenhouse breeding rubber plants and used to spend her afternoons deeply sunk in Conrad's writings. She belonged to that small group of persons who could only achieve orgasm "between the hours of two and five o'clock." (75) Trying to satisfy Judith meant a challenge to the ungendered narrator, as their lovemaking and the visitors were only separated by a wall of glass. Forbidden things are known to be the best arousals.

The male character who gets the greatest attention is Elgin, Louise's husband. Winterson adjusts her language to his description in order to reach a precise reaction. If the female gendered characters surprised by their overt sexuality and their particular habits, Elgin is the character everyone seems to mock. His physical description disadvantages him in favour of his intelligence. He was an Orthodox Jew, but by contrast with his parents who believed themselves superior as the chosen people, Elgin was weak enough to give up his origins. Winterson portrays Elgin as a physically unattractive character, who compensates for his frailty by a bright mind. Ironically enough, the cancer expert, aiming at the Nobel prize, knows everything about cancer, except what causes it and how to cure it. Sexually, Elgin has long given up satisfying his wife and only finds comfort in geishas from across the sea that play sadomasochist games on him. Elgin is the main male character in the novel, and Winterson presents him as aligned with contemporary phallogocentric discourses. He only feels comfortable with scientific discourses or technical equipment; that is why he is incapable of satisfying Louise emotionally or sexually. The message we have to understand is that Louise, the *femme fatale* under all her aspects gives up the patriarchal values and a "happy" traditional marriage in order to find sheer satisfaction outside of the customary couple. The discourse switches from the male gendered one to ungendered one, whether it is male, female or androgynous. Once again, love needs no gender. What characterizes a person is not his/ her sexual organ, but the ability to be open and honest, which of course, is independent of their biological sexuality. These features of communication unify people and cross Winterson's whole novel to confer continuity upon it.

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**THE LONG SHADOW OF THE LADY**

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### Beyond “pretty” and “gay”

In October 2004 Alan Hollinghurst - who had already been short-listed for the Booker Prize - won that much coveted literary award. Most of the media coverage of the prize focused on the book's gay theme, noting that it is the first winner with such a subject in the Man Booker's 36-year history. Chris Smith, Britain's former Minister of Culture, and the first openly gay cabinet minister, said of the panel's decision: “It resulted in a winning novel that is exciting, brilliantly written and gets under the skin of the Thatcherite Eighties (...) The search for love, sex and beauty is rarely this exquisitely done.”

In his turn, Hollinghurst wonders why, in 2004, a gay-oriented novel still causes such a stir. "I'd hoped myself that we had gone beyond classifying books in quite such a way," he said in a telephone interview. "I've tried to write from the presupposition of a gay perspective, as opposed to most books being written from the presupposition of a heterosexual view", he explained. When he wrote his first novel, the very explicit *The Swimming Pool Library*, published in 1988, that approach may have seemed new and a little bit shocking Hollinghurst conceded. But 16 years later he guesses most readers are far from being aghast at a gay-themed book's win and he suggests the sense of surprise comes mainly from tabloid newspapers looking for an exciting angle on a literary story. "There's been such really big changes [sic] in terms of the social attitudes over the intervening years," he said. "People are much more familiar with the presence of gay people."

The main character Nick Guest's homosexuality undoubtedly makes for an important part of *The Line of Beauty*, but I think it is far from being the only big theme of the book, which focuses rather on the dark underside of, and the profound lack of compassion that characterized, Margaret Thatcher's 1980s London. The 1980s are wittily invoked in the novel: wild parties (complete with cocaine: the title of the novel refers to Hogarth's work as well as to a line of cocaine and casual sex), yuppies, the go-go capitalism of the era which was followed by the stock market crash of 1987, conservative social politics, Merchant-Ivory remakes of somewhat mouldy literary novels (Nick and his boyfriend plan a film version of *The Spoils of Poynton*, probably the unlikeliest candidate among Henry James's novels for a successful film), and AIDS (Ken Schellenberg, the editor of *The Gay Herman Melville Reader* deems this to be the least emotional treatment of AIDS he has ever read – (Schellenberg, 2005:34)).

In *The Comedy of Being English* Colm Tóibín (2005:6-10) states that Hollinghurst's imagination is too deeply complex, too richly burdened to be simplistically reduced to narratives impelled by an urgent and overwhelming need to write about gay desire and sexual freedom - his novels are actually concerned with history, consciousness, art, England and the rhythms of language in ways which make Hollinghurst unique among his contemporaries (this accolade is all the more impressive given that Tóibín was one of the six authors shortlisted for the 2004 Booker).

In *The Line of Beauty*, Hollinghurst takes up a whole swathe of issues raised in the years during which Thatcher dominated Britain with her powerful personality and aggressively conservative policies. The book begins in the wake of the prime minister's landslide 1983 re-election, that unique moment in Conservative history when 401 MPs were returned to Parliament, and it ends just after her next electoral triumph four years later. Fresh out of Oxford as the story opens, Nick takes a room in the London home of a college friend's wealthy, ambitious parents, the Feddens. Father Gerald is a newly-elected MP in Thatcher's Tory party and his rise through the ranks is swift; he has just been offered a junior ministerial position, and is clearly in the ascendant, giving Nick a window onto a world of callous privilege, of unprecedented social polarization, a world full of self-serving politicians who think only of the rich while unemployment rages and inequality grows. Nick soon finds a lover and begins exploring another side of London, filled with attractive, available men, cocaine and, in due course, AIDS.

Hollinghurst confesses to having felt compelled to write about the Thatcher years, which he sees as an era of greedy policies whose effects still scar Britain. The powerful prime minister's hard-driving conservatism and devotion to market forces permanently altered the nation's political landscape, shifting debate to the right: "It was a period of such extraordinary, violent change and of course the time in which the AIDS crisis really peaked and those are two things which have sort of weighed on my mind for a long time," he said. "I had a sense of unfinished business, I wanted to go back and look at that period." Hollinghurst's social criticism is witty and indirect: the reader experiences the '80s through Nick, who is initially dazzled by the world of wealth and power his hosts inhabit and only gradually comes to see the corruption and moral bankruptcy underpinning it.

"I thought it would be more interesting not to do a sort of frontal assault on the whole thing...but for it to slowly reveal itself in its true colours [...] Rather than run on for ages about how awful Mrs Thatcher was, I thought it would be more interesting to write



from a slightly unusual position, from the inside. Getting drawn into the Tory establishment – the ironies in that seemed more fruitful and interesting” (Hollinghurst quoted in Gardiner, 2004).

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. A fabulous era to be a true-blue Tory or "one of the keen professionals of the age, the banker, the dealer, the estate agent"; a frightful era to be gay, part of an ethnic minority or unemployed. Prices of shares and property hurtled towards record heights. The AIDS epidemic began to wreak havoc (see Dascăl, 2001:61-92). Such is the backdrop for Alan Hollinghurst's fourth novel, *The Line of Beauty*. Nick's own arc of development, from inexperienced gay youth ("he felt he had the wrong kind of irony, the wrong knowledge, for gay life. He was still faintly shocked... at the idea of a male couple" (2004:19)) to jaded seducer and arriviste is presented in the manner of a "rake's progress". Though he disagrees with Tory politics, Nick senses in Gerald (a buccaneering samurai of entrepreneurship – a human prototype socially engineered by The Lady's politics) "a mixture of piety and condescension rather like his own (104)". At the same time, however, it is Nick's doubleness that offers such a complex perspective on the events narrated, because this is the story of Thatcher's Britain from the point of view of a gay outsider, observing from the inside (Wood, 2004:47). Nick is at once insider and outsider, at once known friend and unknown homosexual. While Nick is ingratiating himself into this society - like Charles Ryder the narrator of *Brideshead Revisited*, he is politic, adaptable and mild-mannered - he is leading a very different life outside it, or alongside it. Like his namesake Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Guest is able to dabble in the parties and the high society of an upper-class world without ever quite belonging to it.

He stays with the Feddens for years almost as an extended member of the family ("the family instinct was weak in him - or if it flared it involved some family other than his own" (172)). Nick's other motivation to stay with the Feddens is to remain in London to pursue his thesis in literature, or, as Nick describes it, "Oh ... it's concerning - Henry James ...' He'd developed a reluctance that was Jamesian in itself to say exactly what its subject was. There was a lot to do with hidden sexuality, which struck him as better avoided (139)".

Hollinghurst's book is broken into three parts, dated 1983, 1986, and 1987 - the rise and dip of the greedy, money-infested, sex-loaded 1980s, the narrative thread metamorphosing gradually into a spoiled ogee curve of its own. The ogee – the S-shaped

double curve was described by William Hogarth in his 18<sup>th</sup> century *Analysis of Beauty* as the epitome of beauty and elegance in painting. The title is deliberately ambiguous as the line of beauty also refers to the corrupting and dangerous beauty of drugs, as in “to do a line of coke”. Nick and Toby, and all their chums, have come down from Oxford, with everything ahead of them. The 1986 section represents the decade's ripe, wavering acme: parties, cocaine, the swill of money, and sex still unhaunted by AIDS. But in Hollinghurst's account we can glean little pleasure; there is only degradation to be found in this particular ‘line of beauty’.

In the novel's final section, titled "The End of the Street", everything unravels, as we knew it would. Leo (Nick's blind date, a black council worker) dies of AIDS, and his next lover Wani Ouradi is now terminally ill with AIDS. Gerald Fedden narrowly retains his parliamentary position in the General Election of 1987, but he is soon being investigated for financial irregularities. The baying press, now camped outside his Notting Hill mansion, discovers that his lodger, one Nick Guest, is the lover of Wani Ouradi, the son of the supermarket millionaire and Tory Party donor.

Although we could read the novel in the key of a *Rake's Progress* Nick is never intended to feature as a Thatcherite businessperson, but rather as someone who is carried along on a stream of benefits from that particular age, from that ‘self indulgent opulence’, by virtue of his charm. Of course the precariousness of Nick's situation as a gay man in the '80s Tory stronghold must catch up with him; in the background of the novel AIDS casts a long shadow.

Like Hollinghurst's previous heroes Nick Guest is well-educated, an aesthete with sophisticated tastes in music, art, architecture and antiques, highly sexed and also very English in his reticence, self-consciousness, wryness and arrogance. There is an abiding melancholy, an aura of sadness and nostalgia that remind us of William Beckwith, the hero of *Swimming Pool Library* and the first chapter is strikingly reminiscent of the first few pages of that 1989 novel “the last summer of its kind there was ever to be (i.e. the last summer before the disease struck). I was riding on high sex and self-esteem. It was my time, my belle époque” (Hollinghurst, 1989:3). He is someone on the make from the very start of the novel, a young man determined now that he has arrived in London to go far.

There is the same atmosphere of aesthetic arguments and homosexual athletics as we found in his previous novels, but there is a further emphasis here on public life, the trappings of power and its discourses. One of the most remarkable features of the Thatcher

government in the 1980's was the aura of sexual attraction between the lady and her younger male ministers. Gerald and his colleagues speak of the Lady with genuine feelings of awe, wonder and sexual fascination. She almost makes it to several parties in the book, but by the time she finally turns up Nick has discovered cocaine and has also found a number of lovers. He manages these in the upper rooms of the house while soon observing the prime minister in the grander downstairs rooms. He also manages perhaps a most memorable phrase about Thatcher's personal aura: "she noticed nothing, and yet she remembered everything" (2004:385). It is of course the cocaine speaking when he invites her to dance: "He gazed delightedly at the Prime Minister's face at her whole head, beaked and crowned, which he saw was a fine if improbable fusion of the Vorticist and the Baroque. She smiled back with a certain animal quickness, a bright blue challenge" (384). Despite the romance of high politics and high art, Nick's rich sex life in the book is presented as anything but an innocent time. It is no longer the "last summer of its kind there was ever to be". In both *The Fold* and the *Spell* there is a shadow of AIDS, as minor characters offstage fall victim to the disease. But in this book, as a dutiful chronicler of the age, Hollinghurst deals with it more dramatically.

### **The recent history of a 'problem'**

A stereotype of the "effete literary intellectual", "of disturbing and corrupting pansy mannerisms", of a "fascistic" centring of normal Englishness (by identifying, 'othering', thus despising and ghetto-izing an out-group will always adhere to post-World War I culture (Sinfield, 1993:60-85). While some authors try their best to repudiate the sissy image of the pansy boys they actually succeed in giving it further currency.

Along the lines of the masculine/feminine divide, homosexual subculture has been perceived as weak, effaced or relegated to the privacy of the closet; it has been represented as narcissistic, a dangerously 'effeminate' individualism in a context that required the solid virtues of the public, masculine world. The masculine/feminine opposition in the representation of the intellectuals of that period only overlaid another: masculine/homosexual. T.W. Adorno remarked: "the stereotype of the artist remains the introvert, the egocentric idiot, *frequently the homosexual*" (Sinfield, 1993:64).

Homosexual and bisexual men and explicit sympathizers had dominated the literary scene and the cultural establishment ever since the rise of the Bloomsbury set in the 1920's when according to Goronwy Rees "homosexuality at Oxford and Cambridge was among

undergraduates and dons with pretensions to culture and a taste of arts at once a fashion, a doctrine and a way of life". One view of this scene is given in *Brideshead Revisited* (and there are many echoes of it in Hollinghurst's *Line of Beauty*).

Nevertheless until the Cold War homosexuality was mainly viewed as a submerged discourse only implicitly subversive of certain institutions. Yet from 1939 to 1954 prosecutions for homosexual offences rose fivefold. Once it could be linked in a paranoid way with communism, it could be invoked to reinforce the Cold War [started 1947] and stigmatized as *treachery* against the Western Alliance. In the United States homosexuals and communists were hunted out of public life.

The Labour Government in Britain initiated a purge of communists from the Civil service. Homosexuality was generally attributed to aesthetes, to artists and intellectuals for they were thought to be more progressive. The patriot of the Cold War era was cast in the mould of the virile, no-nonsense, resolute, firm individual. It comes as no surprise that radical commitments seen as threatening the *status quo*, social stability etc. were construed as 'women's business', 'dandified', 'watered-down Marxists', over-emotional, superficial and 'feminine'.

There was a famous scandal in 1951 in Britain, the scandal of the missing diplomats, Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean, and very soon in the media coverage of the event 'emotional maladjustment' surfaces as being the key to their personality and reprehensible actions (Sinfield, 1993:77).

Homosexuals became subverters of the state and the elite. 'The sneer at the queer' occurred again and again in the writings of the 1950's generation, the queer being presented as threatening, predatory, vampirical in John Osborne, in John Wain's *Hurry on Down* and in John Braine's *Room at the Top*. In *The Golden Notebook* Doris Lessing makes her heroine complain that there are no longer men, just little boys and homosexuals.

Anti-effeminacy dominates the Movement, whose manifesto described the ethos of the anti-wet, sceptical, robust, ironic, virile hero. Leslie Fiedler puts his finger on it when he says that the young British writer is able to define himself against the class he replaces, against a "blend of homosexual sensibility, upper-class aloofness, liberal politics, and avant-garde literary devices" (quoted in Sinfield, 1993:80). John Wain is known to have called for a revival of what Donne and Leavis had singled out as 'masculine persuasive force'. In most of their writings - and I refer here to the Movement and to The Angry Young Men - male hostility towards women goes hand in hand with homophobia. We can

find an intriguing paradox at work here: while homosexuals were manifestly marginalized and oppressed in real life so far as they were associated with the literary establishment they seemed dominant and central.

In 1967 the Sexual Offences Bill passed through Parliament having been preceded by similarly laudable attempts (e.g. the Wolfenden report of 1957) at removing the statutory penalties in force for certain homosexual practices. Leo Abse in his analysis of 'the question' in his speech introducing the Second Reading of the bill in December 1966 said: "Surely, what we should be preoccupied with is the question of how we can, if it is possible, *reduce the number of faulty males in the community* (emphasis mine). How can we diminish the number of those who grow up to have men's bodies but feminine souls? It is clear from the number of homosexuals who are about that, unfortunately, little boys do not automatically grow up to be men; manhood and fatherhood have to be taught. Manhood has to be learnt". (National Deviancy Conference 1979:163) These words undoubtedly echo the theory that gained ground in the sixties that sex and gender roles are not biologically determined but socially learned, they are the product of a certain environment rather than genetically induced.

Yet this awareness did not stop Abse from making the very crude assumption about gender, that there are two necessary categories, masculine and feminine and that you are either one or the other or an unacceptable confusion of the two. During the Thatcher years that, amongst many other things, defined its ethos as anti-sixties, anti-loony leftism, anti-emancipation, anti-liberation, the 'problem' is bound to feature quite high on the agenda.

In the overall efforts to promote a conservative construction of normality, of the sacrosanct nature of the nuclear family, the regulation of wayward sexuality could not be allowed to be missing. In this context the introduction of Section 28, as it was known when it reached the statute book (having been Clause 28 of the Bill), caused a heated debate about legitimate and illegitimate forms of sexuality and it is certainly indicative of a kind of moral panic through which sexual identities have been regulated and defined. What it demonstrates is the cultural and political underpinnings of the construction of sexuality in the Thatcherite Years and the ways in which these culture-bound norms successfully reproduce the dominant discourses.

There are other issues which have to be considered in connection with Section 28: the AIDS crisis which has been used as an opportunity for renewed homophobic attacks on gay men; there was an undercurrent of increased pathologization of homosexuality

associating it with promiscuity, disease and a risk to both public health and morality (see Stacey, 1991:284-304).

For Thatcher's Conservatives there was a further important association of gays and lesbians with Labour party politics, and many Labour Councils in many important cities - Manchester, Sheffield and London continued to have substantial effects on the political and social life of Britain: gender, sexual and anti-racist politics were a central part of the activities of such councils before the central government stepped up their attacks on these bodies.

The appearance of this law is no coincidence, since the attacks on the 'loony lefties' were fuelled by their association with lesbian and gay rights, with single mothers – in a word Thatcher's *lean kine and free-riders* - the great dissolution factors of the family and civilization as Conservatives know it (see Dascăl, 2000:156-158). Introduced in 1987, thrown out and reintroduced following the third historic re-election of Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1987, and then passed in May 1988, it was finally repealed by the Blair government only as late as November 2003, despite firm promises having been given during the electoral campaign of 1997 to have this discriminatory and ineptly worded piece of legislation abrogated.

The law stipulated that local authority should forbid the promotion of homosexuality, the teaching of it or any encouragement of its acceptability as a pretended family relationship and that it should forbid the granting of any financial or other assistance to such purposes. Even before it was passed through parliament numerous incidents of anti-gay and anti-lesbian discrimination began to appear: teachers were suspended for "coming out" in schools, universities tried to ban lesbian and gay societies, adult education programmes insisted that lesbian and gay courses change their names or be dropped, public librarians described the policing of their shelves by right-wing groups, a Women's festival, an annual event, was prevented from including any lesbian events by Labour councillors who feared negative publicity.

The fear of prosecution lead to many attempts at self-censorship and informal regulation. The success of Section 28 can therefore be seen in terms of its having legitimated existing homophobia and of a government-sponsored incentive to put prejudice into practice.

What seems amazing from the point of view of media discourse analysis, though, is that the process of constructing this through the media and popular culture channels

involved a narrative based on a fundamentally perverse discursive reversal. This is precisely like the paradox I highlighted earlier – a marginalized, ‘otherized’, ‘emasculated’, powerless group is constructed as powerful, threatening and thus legitimating the government’s attack upon them. Reversely, the normative institutions of heterosexuality are constructed as the powerless, the persecuted majority.

We may talk in terms of a backlash here, but it is intimated that the homophobic backlash of the ’80’s was self-inflicted by the lesbian and gays who had brought their problems upon themselves (Stacey, 1991:289). But it was not only the tabloids that adopted such a disparaging tone. Very well-known journalists of the leftist, progressive press such as the well-known columnist Polly Toynbee (the *Guardian*) contributed to the same homophobic craze: “the tragedy of the gay movement is that it has nurtured within it the seeds of its own destruction” (14 January 1988:13).

In the popular imaginary there is also a close link between gays, and their vampire-like needs and the drug-pusher image, as well as AIDS. Even Kingsley Amis, who refers to himself as one who has a number of sympathetic portrayals of queers in his books - rather difficult to find and *Lucky Jim* would not be a good example, but probably a short story like *I Spy Strangers* is a better example - has said in the *Sunday Telegraph* “My own belief is that queers were better off when less was known about them.

One of the great liberal fallacies is that hostility and prejudice come out of ignorance, but to explain what they do to each other does not make queers more attractive. There is a deep abhorrence which will never be reduced and which will, indeed, only be exacerbated by finding out more” (5 June 1988: 18). The terms of the debate were extremely interesting. There was the ‘born that way’ argument of the opponents of legislation, the argument of sexual identity as fixed in a person’s biological make-up, a fatality thus; the ‘Oscar Wilde’ argument: are we going to build pyres and stoke them with books? So, what about Marlowe’s *Edward II*, Shakespeare’s sonnets, Plato, Forster, Wilde, Tennessee Williams, Ginsberg, Genet?

Ian McKellen’s public and proud declaration of his homosexuality was part of a more general realization of the importance of coming out amongst those who have previously never seen the necessity to do so. The arts lobby provided a strong focus for the campaign against the proposed legislation. The libertarian argument was to the effect that sexuality was a private matter and not something which the government has any right to legislate about. This kind of challenge was very useful in opposing David Alton’s Private

Member bill to reduce the upper time limit of legal abortion from 28 to 18 weeks, where it was very effective because it undermined the right of men to pass laws which regulate and control women's bodies.

The weight of the argument was of course based on the "private is political" tenet: there are power relations at work and patriarchal ideologies that inform private sexual violence: hence, sexual practice and pleasure are politicized questions. The libertarian argument, especially in its more radical forms, denies the extent to which the personal has already been constructed within particular discourse power relations. Sexuality has already been subject to regulation within patriarchal relations so opposing a piece of legislation will not keep politics out of the bedroom.

Feminists developed their own campaigns round the Clause: this was a direct backlash against feminism, repressive, meant to return society to pre-feminist, if not Victorian values. Unlike previous legislation which was fought on the basis of individual sexual acts being indecent or immoral, now this law was fought on the basis of the social reproduction of sexual identities and life styles through state institutions, social constructionism, political construction of sexuality, the denaturalization of it. The struggle to define the terms of the Section 28 debate can be seen as an attempt by the right to reclaim territory from feminism.

The clause had important side-effects, perverse effects that cannot be ignored as attempts at regulating sexuality proliferated, and spawned opposing strategies. The huge national and international debate on the Clause surprised even the most optimistic members of gay and lesbian communities: there were 'Stop the Clause' Campaigns in the whole country demonstrations, benefits, rallies, concerts, meetings, publicity stunts, celebrity, leafleting public meetings, also a proliferation of lesbian and gay activities. Ironically, lesbian and gay subcultural social activities thrived and romances were started in the context of the banning of the promotion of homosexuality.

The television series *Out on Tuesday* produced by Abseil productions (its name being derived from the lesbian campaigners against Section 28 who abseiled into the House of Lords during its final reading; it was the first lesbian and gay weekly magazine programme in Britain); there were also others screening an adaptation of Janette Winterson's *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* at prime time on BBC2, the inclusion of gay comedian Simon Fanshawe, well known for his cabaret acts on sexual politics in the BBC programme *That's Life*. They all added enormously to the increasing visibility of lesbians



and gays on television. Hollinghurst spoke to *Advocate* columnist Charles Kaiser about *Thatcher then, Bush now, and gay life on both sides of the Atlantic*. “It was a terrible time on almost all fronts (Mrs. Thatcher’s time). I suppose her main antigay action was Clause 28, which was passed in 1988. Local authorities were prohibited [by the law] from spending money on anything which “promoted homosexuality” - which is actually an amazingly Thatcherite view of sexuality: that you could promote it. If you got Saatchi & Saatchi or someone to do an advertisement, it might really catch on! I remember when that was, because it was just the time *The Swimming-Pool Library* was coming out, and it was held up as an example of the kind of book that you might no longer be able to buy for a public library. The talk about it actually rather helped my book when it came out.

The [Tony] Blair government vowed to repeal [Clause 28], but they had a lot of trouble getting the repeal through the [House of] Lords. It was finally done last year (November 2003). In fact, no action was ever brought against a local authority, because of the fantastically inept wording of the law”.

What Hollinghurst added was also important : Thatcher never played the sexual politics card, never used gay bashing (compared to the way the Bush administration used the issue of gay marriage to energize their base or pander to prejudice in the most recent US presidential election). “What happened in America was staggering - the spectacle of an election which really has been won by manipulating sentiment about gay marriage. Probably Bush himself couldn’t care less about it. It was just a cynical exploitation of bigotry. It’s a staggering thing - getting enough people to vote against giving a minority of the population certain rights. There wasn’t that sort of mobilization of antigay feeling when Thatcher was prime minister, though such feelings certainly informed their initial reactions to the AIDS epidemic”.

The construction of sexuality in Thatcher’s Britain must be seen as a constant struggle where the attempts to control and repress may produce contradictory, perverse, opposite effects. This productive dimension of sexual discourses was emphasized by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* vol I: “there is no question that the appearance in 19<sup>th</sup> century psychiatry, jurisprudence and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and sub-species of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty and psychic hermaphroditism made possible a strong advance in the social controls into this area of perversity; but it also made possible the formation of a reverse discourse; homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or naturality be

acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified”(1978, 101).

### **Closing remarks**

The change in attitudes over the last 20 years is absolutely enormous. In most places there has been a beneficial shift in attitudes. But changes which have evolved over quite a short period might be reversed in a short period. Has the world really changed enough between *The Swimming-Pool Library* and *The Line of Beauty* so that critics could distinguish between a gay novel and a fine novel? One would like to distinguish between the "Gay Sex Wins Booker" coverage of the Booker Prize in the autumn of 2004 and the critical reception of the book when it came out in the spring of the same year, which was considered even by the author himself “the best that any of my books has had...the homophobic note of disapproval, masked by boredom, was only really struck in one of the reviews”.

Let us return to the *denouement* of Hollinghurst’s novel. Gerald Fedden is finished as soon as the financial engineering (“creative accounting”) he had become embroiled in is revealed and even worse when ‘the problem’ of their guest-cum-tenant is brought out in glaring daylight. The Feddens turn on Nick, who has kept, it seems, so much from them. "It's the sort of thing you read about, it's an old homo trick," Gerald tells Nick, in a final scene of some power. "You can't have a real family, so you attach yourself to someone else's. And I suppose after a while you just couldn't bear it, you must have been very envious, I think, of everything we have, and coming from your background too perhaps ... and you've wreaked some pretty awful revenge on us as a result"(2004:481). The novel ends with Nick's ejection from the house and family. On the other side, despite the looming disaster “still, they had all the rest, sex, money, power - it was everything they wanted” (2004:472).

He stands outside the building, literally homeless, feeling a kind of terror, "made up of emotions from every stage of his short life, weaning, homesickness, envy and self-pity....". In order to turn his beautiful novel into a beautiful and moral one, moreover, Hollinghurst effects a narrative unravelling so extreme that the book also ends up holding to a somewhat trite and anachronistic vision of the homosexual as a figure always doomed to be unhoused and exiled from happiness, solitary and lonely, without family or friends, always nostalgic for a bosom that has always, if only secretly, rejected him. If this picture

of gay life were proffered by a straight writer, it would seem the merest sentimental prejudice.

Proffered by a gay writer, amid the ruins of 1980s AIDS, it seems appropriately melancholy; but it is worth pointing out that Hollinghurst only reaches this sentimentality--banished Nick standing outside the place that has been his home for four years because his novel has needed the extremity of its moral turn, in which, as it were, the story itself must turn on its beautiful creations and devour them in moral flames. It is at once domestic and political, psychological and historical. It is funny, moving, and finally despairing, as despairing as the hostility and lack of tolerance that still haunt alternative life styles, despite historic strides such as the recent legalization of gay marriages in the very heart of Europe: Belgium. Yet in a joint IPP (Institute for Public Policies) and Gallup survey on tolerance Romanians scored an incredible 86% against when it came to accepting homosexuals as neighbours (*Evenimentul Zilei*, November 2, 2003:2).

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## **Women in a Changing World**

**GENDER INEQUALITIES WITHIN THE ACADEMIC ELITE**

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The main focuses of this work are gender inequalities in the academic elite of the University of Novi Sad. The analysis was based on empirical research (a questionnaire used for similar survey at the University in Oslo, Norway, and the University of Montenegro). The questionnaire was adapted to correspond to the situation in Serbia. The questions were redefined with the aid of female students of the Centre for Postgraduate Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Novi Sad. The available statistical data reported by the administrative services of the University and certain Faculties were also used.

In this work, the academic elite is defined as persons in formal outstanding university positions (Rogg, 2003). We are aware of the limitations imposed by such a definition. These limitations are demonstrated by the fact that it excludes people in other academic positions, whose real and potential influence on scientific and educational processes at the University could be great. Nevertheless, we consider this definition useful in our attempts to answer the question of who is winning the competition for leadership at the university and its departments, and which type of prerequisites (or capital) qualifies them for these positions. We have also assumed that the number of influential people who are not in leading positions is not large.

We have set two main hypotheses. The first one is that the structure as well as the internal hierarchy of the academic elite is gender marked. The second hypothesis is that socio-cultural capital is an important factor in obtaining a leadership position, and that women need more capital than men. Our task was to examine the content and size of the cultural capital owned by the members of the academic elite, and to determine whether it distinguishes different positions.

The main problem for this research was the unwillingness of the current members of the academic elite at the University of Novi Sad to answer the questions posed in the Questionnaire. The first research was carried out in June 2004 and then again in April 2005. Around 100 questionnaires were sent, and only 38 were filled in and sent back, three of them incomplete. In a way, this expresses either lack of understanding or lack of willingness of the academic elite to be the subject of scientific research.

In the analysis that follows, members of the elite were categorized into four groups based on their responsibility and influence on the operation of the University and its particular institutions:

1) Rector and Vice Rectors; 2) faculty deans; 3) faculty vice deans; 4) heads of departments/Institutes.

### **Gender Structure of the Academic Elite at University of Novi Sad**

Our research has shown that women are generally underrepresented in leadership positions at the University of Novi Sad (Table 1). Women comprise one fifth of the total number of the top leading positions in the current academic elite. Data also indicate that gender structure varies in different positions: more women can be found among the vice dean positions, while they are underrepresented among the deans (less than one sixth) and directors of the departments/institutes (one fifth).

Table 1. Gender distribution in various positions (in percent):

Position	Male	Female	Total % (N)
Rector and Vice Rectors	75.0	25.0	100 (4)
Deans	84.6	15.4	100 (13)
Vice Deans	70.6	29.4	100 (34)
Heads of Departments/Institutes	80.0	20.0	100 (94)

In the current term of the Rector Office, the misbalance manifests itself through three male Vice Rectors and one female Rector. In the fifty years of the University's existence, there have been only three female Rectors and four female Vice Rectors. Two women have been Rectors since 2001, after the democratic changes, and one in the late nineties. During the school year 2004/2005 for the first time a female student was elected to the student Vice Rector position. Thus, there are trends of changes at the highest level of academic hierarchy.

Women are deans at only two of thirteen Faculties (Humanities and Law). An illustrative example is the Faculty of Humanities, where the first female dean in its fifty years of existence was elected in 2002. The teaching staff at this Faculty currently consists of 64.9% of women, or 182 out of 265 professors and assistants, while its student population is 87% women. The largest and most prestigious Faculties – The Faculty of Technical Sciences and the Medical Faculty – have never had female deans. At each of the other Faculties there have been one or two women at this position in four or five decades.

Vice dean positions often host more women, but they still represent the minority, below one third of this sub-elite, and with substantial differences between the Faculties. All three vice deans of the Faculty of Sciences are women, two out of three at the Faculty of Humanities. Yet none of four vice deans at the Faculty of Technical Sciences is female and only one of the vice deans at the Medical faculty is a woman. One fifth of the heads of departments/institutes are women.

According to the findings of our research, reasons for such global under-representation of women and substantial variations in gender structure at different levels of the academic elite should be found among the following circumstances: imprecise institutional frame for selecting and electing people into leadership positions at the University and its units; the impact of informal networks of influential individuals in principle in favour of male candidates; and the actual choice of candidates for these positions, with manz fewer women willing to participate.

The basic principles for electing the present Rector, Vice Rectors, the deans and vice deans are stated in the Law on University (*Zakon o univerzitetu, Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, godina LVIII, broj 21, 23, april 2002*), and criteria are further defined by the statutes of the University and its Faculties. The Article 101 of the Law says that ‘Rector and Vice Rectors are elected without an open competition for the period of two years, from among full professors holding permanent positions at one of the Faculties’. The Article 102 states that the candidates for Rectors are nominated by the Faculty’s scientific and educational (or educational and artistic) boards. Initial nominations come from departments, and are accepted or rejected by the mentioned Faculty boards. This is precisely the stage of the procedure where transparency is lost. The process of nominating the candidates is moderated by lobbying groups, which usually seriously affects the outcome of the elections. It is evident that, despite the general public attitude of removing politics from the universities in Serbia after the fall of the totalitarian regime, elections for leading positions are influenced by political parties through lobbyists and in other ways, maintaining the main impact on the election outcome. Since women are more rarely members of political parties, chances for their election into leading positions are slimmer. The interests of political parties clearly suppress equal gender opportunities and often also other principles, including scientific credibility.

In the previous Law on University as well as in the new one (introduced in 2005) and in the University and Faculty statutes, there is no mention of a gender quota for



nominations. The only novelty of the new Law is that the Article 4 contains the principles of the University educational activity. The sixth item of these principles is ‘the respect of human rights and civil freedoms, including the prohibition of all kinds of discrimination’.

The Elections Law in Serbia does state mandatory nomination of at least 30% of women on each list of candidates for the Parliament and local assemblies. However, such a quota is not stated for other governing bodies. A Norwegian research project on elites performed by Elisabet Rogg found that the Equal Opportunities Law for both sexes has resulted in some sort of gender balance in certain aspects of the academic elite (Rogg, 2003). We could thus assume that such a law would help establish a gender balance in the governing bodies of the universities and other institutions in Serbia as well as in other countries in transition.

The data on nominating candidates for leading positions at all levels indicate a sufficient number of female candidates. It is also established that, even when nominated, women withdraw from the competition more often. This is problem, which, no doubt, deserves an independent research.

A Danish study (cited by Rogg, 2003) showed that if the elections are public, the differences between sexes are smaller, whereas in positions where the elections are carried out based on merit they were greater. Due to strong traditional cultural patterns in Serbia, public elections (like the elections in socialist system) did not provide higher female presence at leading positions. It is our opinion that the chances for women lie in the precise statement of the conditions for a given position and higher rating of the professional achievements for election to leading positions. In Serbia the transparency of the election procedures was improved by the university statutes clearly quoting the conditions for the election for the Rector position, rather different from the previous very general statements of these conditions. The introduction of secret voting could also be considered as a positive change. However, since the processes leading up to the elections are not transparent enough, this prevents the achievement of the balance in the academic elite.

Since it has already been stated that gender misbalance among the deans and heads of departments/institutes is the most pronounced one, we tried to describe in more detail the causes of such a state which has lasted for several decades. One of the basic reasons, not debated much in public, is the fact that it is the Faculties and *not* the University that receive the funds from the state and from the tuition fees. The departments and institutes also possess their own funds they can use by themselves. It is an empirical regularity, with

a historical background, that men are more interested in positions with bigger budgets, because they have more power. In addition to this, a contributing factor is the fact that they can influence the development of the entire Faculty or Department, including the directing of development of the educational staff, making the competition for this position extremely tough. It is characteristic that the heads of departments/institutes keep these positions during long periods, just confirming their importance.

When interviewed, the current female deans said that they feel that women are less prepared to compete for the leadership positions, because competition is more and more fierce and includes wide lobbying networks, which women usually do not have. They also pointed out the tendency to dismiss women as not being serious candidates even if they have strong scientific reputation, and they see more precisely defined election procedures as a better chance for women to join the academic elite.

### **Cultural Capital of the Academic Elite**

Since getting the position of full or associate professor is a prerequisite for being elected into leadership positions, professional academic achievement (in teaching or research) as a way of legitimization for election into leading positions was not considered in this research. We have considered the quality of the educational institutions where the members of the academic elite obtained their B.Sc/A, M.Sc/A and Ph.D. degrees, the success achieved during the studies, sabbaticals and specializations abroad, membership in various boards, councils and committees at the University and other cultural and public institutions and companies, the time dedicated to the jobs related to leading position.

When we consider the rating of the university institutions in Serbia, one can state that most prestigious ones are the Faculties of Belgrade University, as the first University founded in Serbia and the one with most famous scientists in the past. One must however note that there has never been a strong distinction into elite and non-elite Faculties in Serbia. It was only in the early nineties, with the opening of the private Faculties which mostly maintain low criteria for examinations and student ranking, that a distinction was formed between the state funded institutions, considered to be of higher quality, and private Faculties, being generally educational institutions of lower quality. Yet, it was traditionally considered that studies at the Faculties of the Belgrade University bring a higher scientific and professional legitimacy than studying at the universities in regional centres. We accept this attitude in the present analysis.

Gathered data indicate that the structure of the present academic elite of the Novi Sad University is characterized by certain gender differences. All male members of this elite have completed their undergraduate studies at the University of Novi Sad, while more than one quarter of women completed their undergraduate studies in Belgrade. Data indicate that these are the women from the families with higher cultural capital. Differences in favour of men appear in graduate studies: half of them completed these studies at the Belgrade University, versus only one third of the women. When it comes to the university where Ph.D. degree was obtained, the differences are even more pronounced: one third of men obtained their degree at the Belgrade University, while only one woman defended her Thesis at Belgrade University and another one in Hungary. One can assume that it is more difficult for women to be absent from home and family and for that reason accept to look for higher degrees at their own institution (university), while it is easier for men, in general, to decide to be absent from home, than to self-exclude themselves from the competition for higher academic degrees. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that fewer men from the academic elite have spouses with Ph.D. and/or Master Degree, than is the case with the women from this elite. These data also indicate to a certain that the University of Novi Sad is rather 'closed' concerning the development of scientific youth in general and not only in regards to gender differences in obtaining Master and Ph.D. degrees.

The female part of the academic elite is distinguished by the higher scholastic achievement at undergraduate studies. Almost half of the women have an average mark between 9 and 10 (out of 10), in general closer to 10, versus only a one quarter of men. Precisely 40 percent of women and 70 percent of men have very good scholastic achievement – between 8 and 9. Three interviewed persons did not provide this piece of information in the questionnaire, so we can presume that these persons have lower average marks. It is evident that joining the academic elite is easier for the women with higher scholastic achievement which, in our opinion, should be related to the higher degree of the self-consciousness and self-confidence of this group of women, correlated with higher readiness to compete for leading positions.

Studying abroad and going on sabbaticals also appear as a distinctive discriminatory feature between men and women in the academic elite: two thirds of women and one half of men had specializations abroad. This is another fact in favour of the hypothesis that women need more cultural capital to enter the governing hierarchy.

One can also notice that studying abroad and international experience has not been a necessary condition for being elected into the academic elite of the University of Novi Sad until now. With Serbian universities joining the Bologna processes, these elements of the cultural capital played already an important role in the election of the present Rector and vice Rectors. While they have not had selective roles for other leading positions, they will surely have one in the future.

Gathered data on memberships of scientific and evaluation committees, editorial boards of journals, scientific boards of the university and Faculties, boards of volunteer organizations and unions as well as members of the governing bodies of institutions and state- and privately-owned companies, show that the number of male members increases with the importance of the function of these bodies. This is shown mostly through the gender structure of the evaluation committees and boards of the research projects: almost half of the interviewed men are the members of such bodies and only 13% of women. Smaller, but still significant disproportion appears in the structure of the scientific committees at the University and Faculties: 65% of men and about 47% of women. Percentage of men of the elite in the governing bodies of institutions and state-owned companies (40%) is almost double compared to the percentage of women (20%). With regards to the number of editors and members of editorial boards of scientific journals there are no major differences between the male and female members of the elite. In the boards of volunteer organizations and unions, there are almost one third of the interviewed women and a single man.

There is no doubt that membership in the boards and committees with socially important authorities and influence, as well as at those related to a financial gain represent an important form of the scientific and public legitimization. One can assume that in an environment with strong elements of patriarchal relations such as Serbia, this leads to advantage for men, since the networks for proposing and deciding about the members of influential boards and governing bodies of institutions and state-owned companies are mostly male. The more frequent high position of men in the university hierarchy is thus related to their more frequent election to the mentioned prestigious institutions.

When it comes to time dedicated to work within the leadership position, data do not indicate any significant gender differences. There are practically no variations in the categories which dedicate a respectable amount of time to these activities (4-8 hours and 1-3 hours). This implies equal dedication of men and women to the obligations related to the

leading positions. It is only in the category of persons which dedicate the least amount of time to these jobs that the number of women is twice larger. This difference can be assigned to greater dedication of a certain number of women to their family obligations (small children, illness in the family and similar). The men within this category are most often preoccupied with additional jobs.

### **Social Capital – Family Background, Marital Status, Number of Children**

Gathered data indicate that within the academic elite of the University of Novi Sad there are certain variations in the social capital and credibility between women and men for reaching leading positions. We present here only the most general findings.

Research on academic elite in several countries has shown that there is a fairly small percentage of women reaching the highest academic positions. This is why it is often assumed that they need to compensate for their sex by increasing their family capital (social and cultural). Our data confirms this assumption.

Table 2. Educational level of parents (in percent)

Educational Level	Men		Women	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Primary school	30.0	55.0	6.6	33.4
High school	35.0	20.0	6.6	20.0
College	10.0	15.0	13.5	20.0
University	20.0	5.0	46.7	26.6
Ph.D.	5.0	5.0	6.6	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(20)	(20)	(15)	(15)

When we look at the education of their parents, we see that women in elite positions come from families with more educated parents than men. The proportion of women whose parents reached secondary and higher education is larger than the proportion of men with such background: almost three quarters of women from the academic elite has fathers with higher education, while for men this number is less than one third. There appears a difference in the education of mothers of men and women in elite positions. Almost half of the mothers of the female elite reached secondary and higher

education, whereas with the male elite such is the case with one third. The relative number of those members whose mothers have finished only the elementary school is approximately equal. This might be because most of our test subjects were men from the Faculty of Technical Sciences. Previous research into the social background of students in former Yugoslavia has shown that there is a high percentage of working class children entering technical faculties. All in all, such a high percentage of members of the academic elite whose mothers are not further educated was not expected. This confirms large vertical mobility in Serbia through education during the socialist period, which would be interesting to compare with academic elite in other countries.

As indicators of social background of the academic elite, we have also considered the parental occupation status. It can be seen that about one third of male elite and over 40% of female come from upper middle class. In addition to this, more fathers of the female elite were company directors or held other high and public positions; indicating higher social background of women from academic elite.

Working status of mothers is another element of cultural capital we presumed would influence women's achievement. The data shows a higher number of mothers working in state-owned companies among women than men (nearly three quarters to one half). The male elite had mothers who were farmers, whereas none of the female elite had mothers from agricultural families, while housewife mothers were equally represented in both elites. Although the difference with regards to mothers working or not is not great, it still confirms the findings of other research that mothers who have a career of their own are a favourable influence on their daughters' achievement. They are a model to copy and they raise the level of their daughters' ambitions.

The established differences in the family background support the previously presented statement that women need higher socio-cultural capital for reaching the leading positions, i.e. that cultural capital is more often hereditary by the members of female than male elite. In this context, particularly important is the finding that the women at the highest levels of the university hierarchy also possess the greatest social capital in the female part of the academic elite. In their case, one can therefore speak about cultural reproduction over a longer period.

Geographical origin is commonly included in sociological studies on the list of distinctive features of a likely academic career and academic elite. The data gathered in this research project indicate certain differences between men and women from the elite

with regards to this. The majority of the members of the academic elite come from bigger towns and cities which are also university centres: rather over half of the men and 60% of the women. However, when we consider people from middle-sized towns, the female elite has a slight advantage. On the whole, we have confirmed that the academic elite is recruited mainly from urban areas, especially university centres. The only difference is that more men than women originate from small towns and villages – nearly one third.

Table 3. Educational level of spouse

Educational level	Men	Women
High school	5.0	7.7
College	5.0	7.7
University	75.0	38.5
Master's	-	7.7
Ph.D.	15.0	38.5
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(20)	(15)

The educational level of the spouses of both the male and female elite is generally below the elite's level. However, the absolute majority of both men and women have spouses with a university education or Ph.D., indicating that marriages are realized with the persons in the same social (academic) circle. An important difference is demonstrated by the fact that nearly one half of women from the academic elite have husbands with Ph.D. or M.Sc. degree while only 15 % percent or less than one sixth of men has the spouse with that educational level. One could assume that the basis of this difference is the traditional pattern of different gender roles in the family, although it might or might not be explicitly (or just implicitly) present in the career choice of the male members of the academic elite.

Differences in marital and family status between men and women exist in the sense that over one fourth of women are single, while practically all interviewed men in the academic elite had families. Men lived in families with several children – three quarters of them with two or three children, one quarter with a single child and none without children. In rather opposite manner, little less than half of the women had two children, one fifth had one child and one third had none.

There is no single view on the influence of husband and children on a woman and her career. Some have the opinion that it is an advantage with regards to the support a woman gets from her family, as opposed to the academic community where she is exposed to competition and stress in her struggle for a career and leadership. The other, widespread opinion is that having a family and children limits women (Rogg, 2003). Our data confirms this second assumption, and clearly indicate that the family burden is greater for women than men, which is why there are more women than men in the academic elite who live alone or without children. It is without a doubt a price women pay for becoming a part of the elite, and also the reason why many of them choose not to compete for leadership positions.

In what way do the cultural capital and high positions in the academic environment reflect on children? Does the reproduction of the cultural capital exist at this level of the social stratification? The data of this research indicate a clear trend of social group self reproduction. The children of the persons belonging to the academic elite who already have their own career have completed undergraduate studies and several of them also doctoral and graduate studies. There are just two cases of the lower level education (grammar school and college). All teenage children attend grammar school, and all children at the age for university attend undergraduate or graduate and doctoral studies. The majority of them have a high level of the scholastic achievement, expressed by high marks, with only a few having one rank lower than the excellent one.

Concerning the type of the schools attended or completed by the children of the members of Novi Sad academic elite, there are no large differences. The only difference is that more women have children who have completed or are attending doctoral or master studies. Here the high level of the professional aspirations and scholastic achievement of the children is clearly related to the social status of the parents and cultural capital of the family, since most often both parents are University professors. With regards to the relation of the parental status within the academic elite with the scholastic attainment of the children, it is evident that there is a reproduction of the cultural capital par excellence.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analyses of the gathered empirical data we can underline a few important characteristics of the gender inequality among the academic elite at the University of Novi Sad:



1. Under-representation of women is clearly expressed in the whole hierarchy of leading positions. This confirms the findings of the studies of other hierarchies of power in Serbia (political, management) that the 'gate' to these hierarchies is very narrow for women. The empirical rule that with increasing level of power the participation of women decreases is shown specifically in the Novi Sad academic elite: the number of women is smaller at the leading positions with higher financial authorities.
2. No strong differences within the academic elite were established with respect to the academic capital which legitimizes a person for the election to a leading position. Our study pointed to the following factors as the determining ones: (a) Formal prerequisite for the election to a leading position is the academic title of associate or full professor, implying the possession of the academic capital (master or Ph.D. degree, research projects and scientific publications, textbooks, mentoring experience). (b) Non-existence of the elite universities in Serbia and their strict separation from the others which is related to the absence of large differences within the academic elite of Novi Sad University. An important difference is shown only through the fact that an important form of the legitimization for obtaining positions in the Rector team was specialization abroad and major experience in the international collaboration.
3. Limiting factors for the election of women into leadership positions are present in the form of stronger lobbying networks for the male candidates, indirect involvement of political parties where men have the power, as well as the lack of transparency in the election procedure, which is carried out without an open competition and insufficient choice of female candidates.
4. Cultural capital is a feature which distinguishes men and women within the academic elite. Regularity has been established that achieving the leading positions demands a higher cultural capital for women than men: higher scholastic achievement at the undergraduate studies, specialisation abroad, and experience in the international collaboration.
5. Gender misbalance in favour of men with respect to the membership in the boards and committees with important social influence and power, as well as financial gain, is a striking confirmation of the strength of the patriarchal regime.
6. A clear trend is discernible that women of the Novi Sad academic elite have parents with higher education and higher occupational status more often than men shows that women

must compensate for their gender by higher resources in the family background (Rogg, 2003:5).

7. The finding that women have spouses with Ph.D. or master degree more often than do the men is another piece of evidence to support the conclusion that women need stronger support from the family, either from parents or from their own family, for achieving the leading positions.

8. A significant number of women living alone, without children or fewer children, as opposed to the male elite, whose members are all married and with more children, indicate that having family and responsibility for the children are disadvantages to women leaders, whereas these are not (or not significant) disadvantages for men. It is this finding that demonstrates the 'limitations' for women at leading positions who pay a high price for entering various types of the elite. This price is precisely the reason why so many women do not enter the competition for leading positions.

9. Scholastic achievement, choice of the school and professional orientation of the children of the interviewed members of the academic elite indicate a strong trend towards cultural self-reproduction. An interesting finding is that children of the women from the elite show higher scholastic attainment and more frequent orientation towards the academic career, than the children of men. One can assume that in the case of feminine part of the elite we encounter the cultural reproduction in a longer period or through three generations.

10. The general conclusion is that gender inequalities among the academic elite at the University of Novi Sad are very large, which means that the patriarchal pattern of power is being kept in the academic environment as well. Signs of its weakening are still not pronounced in the present conditions of democratisation of our society in Serbia.

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### **Acknowledgement**

The author gratefully acknowledges the help of the female students of the Centre for Postgraduate Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the University of Novi Sad in the preparation of the Questionnaire.

**GENDER IN THE ACADEMIC ELITE IN A POST-COMMUNIST  
SOCIETY – THE CASE OF MONTENEGRO WITH A SIDE-GLANCE AT  
NORWAY**

**ELISABET ROGG**

All over Europe there is now a focus on women in sciences. This concern reflects both the perspective of human capital - no nation can afford to base its economic, social and cultural development on only one half of the intellectual capacities of its population – but also the sense that this is a question of justice. Since 1999 the European Commission has initiated and funded reports on women in sciences in all Western European countries as well as in the eight new member states that were formerly communist states. These reports show that although young women now make up at least half of the students in higher education, the participation of women is reduced as we look higher up the academic hierarchy (Osborn et al., 2000; European Commission, 2003a). Even though this is a general phenomenon in all European countries there are important variations. The best documented differences concern the gender distribution in the professoriate. Official figures show that Latvia has the highest proportion of women professors, 26,4 percent; in half of the post-communist states in the European Union there were more than 20 percent women professors (Latvia, Bulgaria, Poland and Estonia) whereas only Portugal and Finland out of 16 Western European countries had passed 20 percent in 2000 (European Commission 2003b, Fig 3.1.b).

The main focus of the studies initiated by the European Union has been on member states and associated countries; thus with the exception of Slovenia, there is a need for recent empirical studies in the English language from states within former Yugoslavia. My focus is on Montenegro, characterised as one of the least developed parts of former Yugoslavia (Blagojevic, 1991). Yugoslavia stands out as somewhat different from the other post-communist states concerning research and higher education, economic development and gender relations. The main reason for this is that Yugoslavia did not join Comecon, directed by the Soviet Union, but tried to establish a “third way”, a welfare society with elements of a market economy (Besic, 2004). From my outsider's point of view, the literature available indicates that the heritage from the communist period in Yugoslavia as well as the new situation in Montenegro as part of the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro is characterised by several equivocal features, of which I shall concentrate only on academia and gender relations:

- Although academia was deteriorating, without a market economy, politics with particular selection criteria and state controlled arts, academia stood out as the most

attractive career path for the intellectual elite during communism. But party membership was a precondition for an academic career (Blagojevic et al., 2003a). For the Montenegrins the situation was even more complicated: As higher education in Montenegro only was accorded full university status in 1974 with the establishing of University of Montenegro, many scientists of older generations had to study and establish their academic career in other parts of Yugoslavia.

- Women gained access in a situation when academia is described as deteriorated: the student population grew far beyond the demand for highly educated people and science received less funding and prestige, and there was a brain drain, especially of men (Blagojevic, 1991).
- While Yugoslavia's faster development before the economic collapse made women's upward mobility rather easy and less dependent on membership of the communist party, the gender contract was based on the idea of *complementarity of inequality*. Men were, for historical reasons, perceived as warriors, while women were seen as subordinate assistants for men and as caregivers (Blagojevic et al., 2003c). This pattern of warriors and caregivers was even more pronounced in Montenegro than in, for instance, Serbia and Croatia and has seen a revival since 1990 (Besic, 2004).

The situation for women in the Montenegrin academia thus appears to be at least as contradictory as in other post-communist states: The revival of pre-communist gender ideology points to a marginalisation of women in relation to public affairs including science. On the other hand, a rather new, but also rather poor university may open up for women's easier access to senior academic positions. In this article I shall discuss these contradictory features in the Montenegrin context. The questions I want to address here are firstly: What is the present gender structure at the University of Montenegro? Are there indications pointing to a relative inclusion of women or feminisation of the scientific staff? What are the reasons for increased inclusion of women in Academia? Is it reasonable to conclude that women are allowed into positions with diminishing prestige and power in Montenegro or is women's inclusion a result of women's increased proportion in higher education and hence scientific qualifications on par with men? Secondly I shall focus on the career pattern of the senior academic staff, asking if female and male academics build their academic careers differently. As far as possible I will compare Montenegro with Norway.

The theoretical focus and tools for analysing gender relations in academia in “East” and “West” in Europe should be understood within their contexts. Comparing the recent situation the states in the “West” are relatively affluent welfare societies where the ideal of academic autonomy has been cherished if not always practiced and funding of science has been more or less adequate. Gender equality ideology exists in varying degrees and political measures to ensure equal chances in working life and politics have been adopted by the European Union during the last years. The Nordic states have been in the forefront concerning political measures to enhance gender equality. In the Nordic context Norway was the first state to introduce preferential treatment of women including appointment to academic positions, as the Gender Equality Act opened for moderate or radical quotas in all public work positions in 1981 (Fürst, 1988; Rogg, 2004).

Recent analyses concerning gender relations in academia in the Nordic countries mainly follow two opposing lines of argument: On the one hand, the “pipeline” perspective is focused on *women’s inclusion*, arguing that the proportion of women on higher levels will mirror the proportion on the level below. As women increase their representation among graduates and PhD candidates equally compared to men, eventually they will assimilate the current practices of science and be equally represented in the highest positions (Ståhle, 1993; Husu, 2001a). The opposing argument focus on *women’s exclusion*: From explaining women’s lower representation by reference to their family obligations and shorter tradition for academic work, the focus for analyses is now on the academic culture. This culture is understood as predominantly male where men act as gatekeepers and practice unintended discrimination of women resulting in a “leaking pipeline” where women more than men on every step on the academic career ladder seem to “seep” out (Fürst, 1988; Husu, 2001b; Henningsen, 2003; Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2003; Rogg, 2003; Bjerrum Nielsen, 2004).

The states in the “East” or more precisely the post-communist states have suffered an economic breakdown and a collapse of their relatively developed welfare arrangements during communism, which allowed women possibilities for the reconciling of the demands of work and family. In Academia the transition period from 1989 has meant a movement from what the Serbian sociologist Blagojevic terms “Funding without freedom, to freedom without funding”: While science was highly praised and appropriately funded, but under systematic political control during communism, the economic breakdown with the waning of communism and the new market economy has left science without proper funding but

with freedom from political control (Blagojevic et al., 2003a). Communism also included gender equality ideology, and women had legal right to work, to be free and independent, the right to own property and the right to divorce, as well as the right of protection from violence (Besic, 2004).

Recent analyses on gender relations in academia in these states have mainly been focused on *women's inclusion*, also named *feminisation* of academia. Although male dominance is acknowledged, focus has been on the ambivalence inherent in a situation where women during the last 10-20 years have become relatively included in a deteriorating academia (Blagojevic, 1991; Blagojevic et al., 2003a, 2003b). This process is in line with the thesis the Norwegian social scientist Harriet Holter formulated in 1976: In a patriarchal society women are integrated into institutions with shrinking importance (Holter, 1976). Her thesis is criticised in the Nordic context since the 1990s; there is however a question if this thesis is more appropriate in societies more openly patriarchal than the Nordic countries have been the last 15 years. In France, a society probably more patriarchal than the Nordic countries, Bourdieu claimed that positions that are feminised either already have lost or is losing status and this process is strengthened because men leave these positions as women enter them (Bourdieu, 2000). The recent focus on feminisation of academia in post-communist societies appears to be similar to the pipeline hypothesis. There are however important differences between the two academic contexts: As a career in Nordic academia is perceived as attractive, academia in post-communist societies are at best perceived as ambiguous. In this respect I hope to contribute to the discussion of the appropriateness of concepts developed in the western context for discussing phenomena in post-socialist states.

### **Data material**

An overview of the gender structure of the academic staff at the University of Montenegro is based on sex-disaggregated statistics from the university's central administration in 2001 and 2005 compiled for this project. Sex-disaggregated statistics concerning the student population and the academic staff are not compiled and published as a regular procedure in Montenegro<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the "Enwise report" lack of sex-disaggregated data represent a problem for gender equality politics in academia in the Enwise countries (post-communist countries who have joined the European Union) in general (European Commission, 2003a).

Information concerning career patterns and working conditions among higher senior staff; heads of departments, vice-deans, deans and one vice-rector at the University of Montenegro, is mainly based on a survey conducted during 2003. Initially, the plan was to collect material that would allow for a comparative analysis of the Montenegrin and Norwegian academic elites. The Norwegian material was collected in 2000 for the Norwegian Power and Democracy Project with a response rate rarely found in surveys: 96 percent covering the positions of rectors and vice rectors at Norway's four universities and the rectors of scientific and state university colleges (Rogg, 2003). The same questionnaire with some local adaptation was translated into English by me and further translated into Serbian by social researcher Milos Besic. As academia in Montenegro consists of one university, the definition of the academic elite was extended to include heads of university departments, deans and vice-deans of the faculties, rector and the vice-rectors. Unfortunately the Montenegrin material only comprises 54 percent of the relevant group, 6 women and 28 men, after four rounds of reminders. The material has been translated to English and processed into an SPSS-file by Besic. Because of the low response rate the material can only supply indications concerning academia in Montenegro; no general conclusions can be drawn. To increase the information about women's situation, the survey material is supplemented with interviews with two women professors and with information published in a report based on a survey material of 25 women and 11 men. This material includes professors, but not higher senior academic staff as defined above (Bjeletic, 2005).

The difficulties in obtaining material from the Montenegrin academic elite is worthy of some reflections. The four rounds consisted of one personal delivery of the questionnaire in a meeting at the university where all relevant staff were supposed to be present, personal delivery to their post-boxes at their respective university offices, personal visits together with Besic who offered to take down the information through interviewing in Serbian and finally personal visits by professor Borislav Djukanovic. One reason for the low response rate seems to be that the scientific staffs at higher levels in the university are often unavailable: being in a high position involves going to meetings and cooperation within Montenegro, but also abroad to foreign institutions. Another characteristic of the Montenegrin university is that visiting professors, mainly living in Serbia, also hold high senior positions. This taken in consideration, still leaves an open question as to why they did not answer a questionnaire they had at hand when they were present. Experiences



gained by other researchers working in Montenegro and elsewhere in the region, indicate that there is a general problem of trust concerning collection of personal data in academia.

### Gender structure

The structure among the academic staff in Montenegro and Norway early in this century shows that a gendered pattern prevails. The further up in the academic hierarchy, we see a lower representation of women (Table 1).

Table.1 Women in academic positions in Montenegro 2005 and Norway 2003.

	Montenegro	Norway
Full professor	15%	17%
Associate professor	21%	33%
Assistant professor	43%	43%
Assistant	51%	*

Sources: Central administration of University of Montenegro  
Hovdhaugen et al. (2004).

\* Comparable data not available

According to Blagojevic only 11 percent of all the teaching staff at the University of Montenegro were women in 1986/87 whereas the whole of Yugoslavia had 19 percent women in university teaching positions at that time. Only Kosovo had a lower representation of women with 8 percent. However, on the level of assistants Montenegro was on par with Yugoslavia in total with 36 percent (Blagojevic, 1991). During the four years between 2001/02 and 2004/05 women's representation, not only on the level of teachers in general, but also in positions as full professors has increased: from eight percent in 2001 to 15 percent in 2005 (Table 2). The figures also indicate that even if there

Table.2 Women in academic positions in Montenegro 2001 and 2005.

	2001	2005
Full professor	8%	15%
Associate professor	29%	21%
Assistant professor	29%	43%
Assistant	48%	51%

Source: Central administration of University of Montenegro

is no direct career path from assistant to university teacher, women who were assistants in 2001 have taken a step up on the career ladder to become assistant professors in 2004/05<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, women have been recruited in greater numbers than men to the position

of assistant. Another indication of recent tendency towards feminisation or relative inclusion of women in Montenegrin academia is supplied by information of the time persons in high senior positions have held their recent post. Although there are very few women among the respondents, it is interesting to note that five out of the six women have been in their position for less than six years, after 1997, while one third of the men have been in their positions for six years or more. This tendency is also apparent in Bjeletic's material where almost half of the women had held a position in academia in less than six years while one fourth of the men had worked more than 15 years at the university (Bjeletic, 2005).

Also in Norway, the gender distribution in the professoriate has been changing since mid-80s: Since 1961 until 1986 the proportion of women professors were 4.6 percent, then there was a rapid increase to 10 percent in 1990. In the period 1990 – 2000 there was a steady, but slow increase to 13 percent. In 2005, the women proportion reached 17 percent of the professors.

It might be rather obvious to think that the same processes were at work in these two states, and the explanation near at hand would be the pipeline metaphor. A closer look at national specificities show, however, that in Norway the substantial increases from 1987 to 1990 and from 2000 to 2005 was a result of gender equality measures. The first leap was due to political intervention as the Parliament granted the universities 10 upgradings to permanent professor positions earmarked for women with outstanding qualifications. The following two years more upgradings were granted and the Ministry recommended the universities to use the general upgradings granted to enhance gender equality. At the University of Oslo this resulted in an increase from 19 to 42 women professors. The second leap occurred both because the Parliament granted 20 new upgradings reserved for women but also because of heightened focus on gender equality within the universities, spurred by an amendment in the Gender Equality Act in 2002: All public institutions were obliged to take actions to enhance gender equality and report their results. As no such interventions are known from the Montenegrin context, there must be other explanations: according to the two opposing hypotheses the relatively rapid growth in women professors in Montenegro may be explained by the negative hypothesis that women gain access to

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<sup>2</sup> Assistants are recruited among MA students as well as graduated MA candidates. Until 2004, it was possible for assistants to be promoted to assistant professor after taking their PhD.

institutions with diminishing importance, power and prestige or shrinking institutions versus the rather positive pipeline metaphor.

The hypothesis stating that women get access to shrinking institutions may in this context be indicated by a) male brain-drain or b) women get access to positions in *sciences* with diminishing importance.

One argument concerning male brain-drain states that men leave their academic positions only if they cannot combine work in academia with parallel activities in business and other academic institutions (Blagojevic et al., 2003b). Included in the survey material there are some indicators relevant for discussing this question. The respondents in senior positions were asked if they had any additional jobs, and men answered this question positively more frequently than women. Of the six women in the material, three had one additional job; two doing “something completely different from the work at the university” and one was lecturing in another institution. Among the 27 men who answered this question; two thirds had additional jobs varying from one to eight. The average number of additional jobs was one and a half. The most frequent activity was lecturing in another institution or physical work (six persons) while five reported that their additional job consisted in cooperating with a foreign partner or working for an NGO. These figures indicate that even in positions of high responsibilities in academia, especially men find the time to supplement their income from their main position with additional work. It is difficult to estimate how widespread the opportunities for parallel careers are in the Montenegrin academia, but the problems the project had in approaching the relevant respondents at their institutions also indicates that a parallel career may be rather common. In Bjeletic’s material, covering persons in positions from assistant to professor, 53 percent reported that they had part-time work in addition to their position at the university (Bjeletic, 2005).

The hypothesis that women gain access to positions in sciences with diminishing importance is based on an assumption of gender typical qualifications, that women are qualified in ‘soft’ and men in ‘hard’ sciences. In the post-socialist context sciences of direct interest for business and enterprises, technology and business schools, have better funding and more prestige than humanities and social sciences (Blagojevic, 2004b). One indication of relative growth or reduction is the number of academic staff in different fields of science. In Montenegro there has been a growth in academic staff in nearly all sciences from 2001/02 to 2004/05 varying from 7 percent at the Faculty of philosophy, which is the

greatest faculty at the university to 50 percent at the Faculty of tourism and catering – the smallest faculty at the university in 2001/02. Among the sciences that are supposed to be of special interest in the market economy, technology and business schools, the increase has been between 38 percent (civil engineering) and 8 percent (electronics). The school of economics has seen an increase of 27 percent in the period. Reduction in academic staff concerns the Faculty of metallurgy and technology, the Faculty of mathematics and natural sciences and the Faculty of medicine. Except for the Faculty of metallurgy and technology, a faculty that educates people for the mining industries that has seen a backlash after 1990 and thus is a faculty of diminishing importance, I can offer no explanation why there has been a reduction of academic staff in the other two faculties.

The development in gender structure at the University of Montenegro shows that the increase of women professors has taken place in all sciences except the Faculty of tourism (Table 3). On the assistant level women have been recruited also to traditionally male

Table 3. Women and assistants according to fields of sciences in Montenegro 2001 and 2004. Percentages.

	Montenegro	
	2001/02	2004/05
<i>Technology*</i>		
Full professors	8	13
Associate professors	24	14
Assistants	40	41
<i>Sciences</i>		
Full professors	0	6
Associate professors	17	0
Assistants	48	55
<i>Law</i>		
Full professors	18	25
Associate professors	20	25
Assistants	40	60
<i>Economics</i>		
Full professors	0	18
Associate professors	44	20
Assistants	53	38
<i>Phil. &amp; lang.</i>		
Full professor	8	16
Associate professors	33	29
Assistant	59	64
<i>Medicine</i>		
Full professors	33	67
Associate professors	40	-
Assistant	50	0
<i>Drama, music and fine arts</i>		
Full professor	9	13
Associate professors	25	20
Assistant	41	50
<i>Tourism</i>		
Full professor	0	0

Associate professors	0	0
Assistant	100	50

\*The faculties of Civil engineering, Electronics, Mechanical engineering, Metallurgy and Marine faculty

dominated fields of science, almost on par with or even more than men. Nine women professors have been appointed in the four year period: three in faculties marked by reduction of the academic staff, one in a faculty with reduced number of full professors, but with increased staff on lower levels (Maritime faculty) and five in faculties with an increased number of academic staff, including full professors. This implies that the relative inclusion of women is ambiguous: even if some women entered positions in faculties that may be characterised as deteriorating, others entered positions as professors in faculties with opposite characteristics. The explanation for the relative inclusion of women may rather be related to a specific feature of the University of Montenegro: the system of promotion that functioned at least until 2004. Unlike Norway the Montenegrin system allowed for academic careers based on promotion all the way from assistant to full professor. In the Norwegian system there is a competition among applicants for the position of associate professor and a professoriate may be obtained through competition among applicants or through promotion. This system of career building implies that there is no competition between several applicants to one position; the chances for men to become professors will not be reduced even if women are appointed as full professors. This logic, that women have easier access to positions if men's chances are not reduced, either by increasing the number of professors through special measures, as in Norway when there were leaps in the numbers of women professors, or by a system of promotion, points to two principles. The first is that male dominance prevails and is not challenged, the second is that gender conflicts are reduced as the promotion procedure overrules the zero-sum game inherent in competition for one position. Thus, the promotion system helps the pipeline to function – but this depends on recruitment of women on lower levels. In Montenegro this may be related to the relative young age of the university: The two women professors I interviewed pointed to the fact that they were the first to have PhDs in their specific fields at the time when the university was in the process of being established as independent from the University of Belgrade. Therefore they were appointed as associate professors directly after their PhDs, and then advanced to full professorships after five years.

To sum up: Both in Montenegro and Norway gender structures in academia prevail: the higher up the ladder, the lower the proportion of women. In both countries there has been an increase of women professors, and in Montenegro this has occurred rather rapidly the last four years. The tendency is not so marked as to justify the use of 'feminisation'; rather the concept of 'relative inclusion' is more appropriate. Even if women at present dominate at the level of assistants, there is no direct career path guaranteed to higher levels in Montenegrin academia. One important condition would be that assistants are allowed by their professors to spend adequate time on their PhD work, and are not exploited as some kind of personal assistant for the professor. Montenegro's participation in the Bologna process may have the result that the system of promotion all the way up from assistant to professor will be abolished as local customs will be overruled by the European meta structure; this may mean that women's chances through this route will be severed.

Montenegro certainly fits in with the description of the state of the universities in post-socialist countries in general, as 'freedom without funding', signifying a deteriorating condition. According to one hypothesis this allows easier access for women because of the male brain-drain. The case of Montenegro does not support the hypothesis of the male brain-drain. Men remain in their academic positions. Why they do is a matter for speculation: is it because of freedom for intellectual work or for pursuing a parallel career outside academia? Or because of the relative prestige still attached to the position as professor? Or because there are few attractive alternative careers available?

Another line of argument for explaining women's relative inclusion is the pipeline hypothesis. In the Nordic context this has been dismissed and replaced by the metaphor of the 'leaking pipeline'. The dismissal is based on very slow increase in women professors when appointment of women follows regular procedures; in Norway this applies both to application and competition for one specific position and to processes which involve applying for promotion based on personal qualifications. In Norway these contributed to an average of 0,2 % annual growth from 1990 to 2001. The recent development in Montenegro indicates that the pipeline hypothesis must be more specific. The pipeline may function in certain conditions: Sufficient recruitment of women to positions from which it is possible for them to launch pursuit of an academic career through promotion based on individual qualifications, and working conditions that allow for the necessary time to qualify. This requires, for instance, that women should not have heavier work-loads than

men, a prerequisite that seems not to be the case in Norway as women more often than men report to spend longer hours teaching (Hovdhaugen et. al, 2004).

### **Gendered career patterns**

Studies of recruitment to elite positions in capitalist democracies show that people in these positions are distinguished by more social and cultural capital than the population at large (Bourdieu, 1996; Roustetsaari, 1993; Christiansen et al., 2001; Gulbrandsen et al., 2002; Klausen, 2002). In academia recent Scandinavian research shows that these elites also are male dominated, ranging from 92 percent men in Denmark and 81 percent in Norway to just above 70 percent in Sweden (Christiansen & Togeby, 2002; Skjeie & Teigen, 2003; Jonsson, 2006). One explanation for this gender structure involves to the pipeline hypothesis, while other explanations point to the gendered codification of ‘the leader’ and ‘the researcher’ and the processes leading to higher senior positions. To be successful in academia as well as in other leading positions, the ideal person is perceived as someone with outstanding academic merit, and also with a long term and full-time devotion to the work and the workplace, entirely loyal, able to discretely demonstrate interest in the position and with demonstrated success in similar institutions (Bourdieu, 1988; Brouns and Addis, 2004). Although this ideal appears as gender neutral, empirical studies show that this ‘neutral’ person is a man: the “Mathilda Effect” points to the systematic underestimation of women’s academic merit, women are perceived as mothers and unable to full devotion and loyalty to the job (Husu, 2001a; Brouns and Addis, 2004; Skjeie and Teigen, 2003). Concerning the processes leading to top positions it is argued that gate-keepers who are predominantly men will favour men through the tendency of “homosocial” recruitment (Skjeie og Teigen, 2003; Brouns and Addis, 2004). A further feature of the recruitment process that favours men relates to social networks. The notion of the ‘strength of weak ties’ points to the importance of knowing and being trusted by someone who knows and is trusted by someone in a gate-keeping position (Granovetter, 1973). According to these arguments women must invest more heavily in relevant resources if they are to be perceived as equally qualified for elite positions (Jonasson, 2006). These resources may be scientific capital, in the form of higher grades or more extensive scientific production, social and cultural capital in their family backgrounds or heavier time investment in academia, both in years or in weekly hours. Specific features of the recruitment processes may also contribute to the gender structure: The Danish elite

study concluded that there was better gender balance in elite positions where selection was carried out through public elections, while in positions where selection was based upon merits or what they call mixed principles, gender differences were greater (Christiansen & Togeby, 2002). A Swedish study of the academic power elite shows a greater proportion of women in positions that are partly politically appointed (Jonasson, 2006).

As mentioned above, the data material on the Montenegrin academic elite concerns only 54 percent of the potential respondents. Hence it is difficult both to give an account of the correct proportion of women and to explain the criteria and processes whereby women and men are recruited to elite positions in Montenegrin academia. In the material studied women comprise 18 percent of leaders at the levels ranging from vice-rector to head of department. This proportion is a little higher than the proportion of women professors in Montenegro in 2004/05 (15 %). As can be seen from Table 4 no woman in the position of vice-rector answered the questionnaire, only one dean of a faculty answered while the majority who answered are heads of departments. Also among men the highest frequency among the respondents were heads of departments (Table 4)<sup>3</sup>.

Table 4. Distribution of women and men on different levels in the Montenegrin elite material of respondents.

	Men	Women
Vice rector	1	0
Dean	5	1
Vice dean	7	2
Head of department	14	3
Total	(27)	(6)

The respondents to the questionnaire are also distributed in different faculties. There were no respondents from the Maritime faculty, the faculty of Mechanical engineering, Law faculty or the Faculty of tourism.

Table 5. Distribution of women and men in different faculties/institutions in the Montenegrin elite material of respondents.

	Women	Men
Technology & Natural sciences	2	12

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<sup>3</sup> Because the data material on the Norwegian and Montenegrin academic elites differ concerning the composition in positions, no comparison will be made.



Humanities, Arts and Social sciences	3	9
Health sciences	1	3
Research institutes		3
Total	6	27

### *Own investments in academia*

In the material there are the following indications of investments relevant for an academic career: level of education, education abroad (outside former Yugoslavia), working years in the two most recent positions and hours spent on work in the academic positions or on other activities.

When women and men in parallel positions are compared, there are no differences between them: the woman and the men who are deans have their PhDs; the exception is one male dean who has a MA in an artistic subject. Male and female vice-deans in humanities, arts and social sciences have MA level qualifications while men with PhDs in positions of vice-dean are in technology and natural sciences. On the level of heads of departments, men have their qualifications at BA, MA and PhD levels while the only woman leader in a technological department has a MA degree. In the faculties for humanities, arts and social sciences one male leader holds an MA while the women and the other male leaders hold PhDs. In the Medical faculty one male leader holds an MA, while the female and the other male leaders hold PhDs. As these figures show, there are no systematic differences between levels of seniority or between different fields of science. Thus, even though there are more male heads of departments who have arrived in their positions without a PhD compared to women, the differences are too small to allow us to conclude from this data that women have invested more in higher education.

Studying abroad is often seen as an extra asset in academia as scholars get acquainted with new perspectives. Also, to be allowed access to a foreign university is seen as a sign of quality in itself. In the Montenegrin material, one out of the six women and one out of three men have studied abroad.

How many years a person has worked within the academic setting may be interpreted as a sign of devotion and loyalty towards the institution. An indication of perseverance is given by information about how many years the respondents have worked in their current and previous positions. The figures indicate that men has invested more time in the Montenegrin academia as the majority

Table 6. Women and men in the Montenegrin elite material according to when they started to work in their previous position.

	Women	Men
1980ies	0	2
1990ies	2	18
After 2000	4	7
Total	6	27

of women started to work in the position they had before entering the current leading position only after 2000. On the other hand, the majority of men started during the 1990s (Table 6). Even if this partly may be explained by the time they finished their higher education; the majority of male respondents finished their education in the 1960s or 1970s while the female respondents finished their education in the 1980s or 1990s; it seems evident that men have devoted more of their years in academia than women in this material.

Hours spent on the job and on job-related activities may also be interpreted as signs of devotion. The figures in Table 7 are composed of questions that were assumed to distinguish between women and men; women were assumed to spend more time at home with their families and men more at their institution or on other kinds of jobs, in line with the notion that women owe their lack of career to their obligations at home (Skjeie and Teigen, 2003). Contrary to these assumptions male leaders do not report spending significantly more time than women on work in or for their academic institution in the Montenegrin material. Even more unexpected from an outsider's perspective was that both the male deans and the heads of department reported to spend more daily hours at home than their female counterparts. Correlations between their answers to this question and questions concerning other jobs they might have, convinced me that 'spending time at home with my family' signifies more than household chores both for male and female leaders: both men and women not only work on additional jobs at the weekends, but also work from home during the week,

Table 7. Weekly use of time on work in own institutions and on other activities among women and men in different leading position in Montenegrin academia. Means\*.

	Work at own institution	Other activities**
<i>Deans</i>		
Women	50	36
Men	50	33,2
<i>Vice-deans</i>		

Women	50	31,5
Men	50,5	47,6
<i>Heads of departments</i>		
Women	40,5	32
Men	49	34,2

\* Means among respondents who have indicated that they have spent time on these activities.

\*\* Based on answers about 'daily hours spent at home with my family', 'daily hours spent on another job' and 'hours during the weekend spent on another job'.

but men spend more time on this than women. This is also indicated by the number of additional jobs reported by women and men as noted above. The rather widespread practice of at least a 'double work burden' even among persons in leading academic positions must be understood in relation to the relative pauperism among public employees in the middle classes. Consequent upon the economic recession these groups have seen a dramatic decrease of their income which they improve by other means of income – if they have the freedom to organise their time for additional jobs. Still there is reason to assume that women and men differ in how they spend their time at home: A recent study of the gender relations within the Montenegrin family supports this; Montenegrin men, even among the middle classes, are not great home-makers (Besic, 2004). The main point is, however, that even if both women and men spend more than a 'normal' working week of 40 hours working in their institution, this does not indicate that they are as entirely devoted to academia as the notion of the 'researcher' prescribes. Almost half of their working time is spent on other kinds of work.

According to the hypothesis about what it would take for women to reach the same academic positions as men, women would have to invest more heavily in relevant resources. The figures that are supposed to indicate heavier investment in academia, through education, long time devotion over years and in weekly work, do not support this hypothesis in the Montenegrin academia. But other resources, social and cultural capital inherited through the family background may have contributed to women's careers to top positions.

### ***Inherited capital***

In the material studied social and cultural background is measured by parent's level of education and occupation. Although the material based on the Norwegian academic elite is more 'elitist' than the Montenegrin, as it comprises rectorate and university deans exclusively, it may be interesting to compare the inherited capital in these two elites. In both countries one political goal has been to counteract tendencies to social reproduction through education: In Norway this has been done through education free of charges and

state funding of students living costs, in Montenegro while it was part of Yugoslavia it was aimed at by giving priority to students from working class families (for Norway: see Hansen and Rogg, 1991; for Yugoslavia: see Lazic et al., 1994). In neither country has this been entirely successful, as may be seen from the family backgrounds of the members of the academic elites. But it appears to have been somewhat more efficient among men than among women: In both countries the male elite appears to have higher educational mobility compared to their fathers than women: Almost 50 percent of the male academic elite in Norway and two out of five men in the Montenegrin elite had fathers with less than secondary education. Women, on the other hand, build their academic careers to a greater extent on inherited academic capital, and Montenegrin women more so than the Norwegians. In Montenegro, all but one grew up with a father with higher education while such family backgrounds account for just half of the Norwegian women (Table 8).

Table 8. Fathers' level of education in the Montenegrin and Norwegian academic elites.

	Montenegro		Norway	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
No education	0	3	1	1
Elementary school	0	8	2	20
Secondary school	1	6	3	3
Higher education	1	5	0	7
University	4	6	6	13
No information	0	0	0	1
Total	6	28	12	45

In Norway women entered higher education to the same degree as men only at the beginning of 1980s. If the same situation also holds for Montenegro, as indicated by the figures that concern the elite material above (the majority of women being educated after 1980, and the majority of men before 1980), it is interesting to notice that one third of the women in the academic elites in both countries grew up with mothers with higher education (Table 9). This may signify both that mothers have played important roles as models for their daughters, but it may also be an even stronger indication of the family's social position in society, as there is a tendency for marriage to occur more often when the man has a higher position than the woman, also in educational level.

Table 9. Mothers' level of education in the Montenegrin and Norwegian academic elites.

	Montenegro		Norway	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
No education	0	8	1	1
Elementary school	1	13	3	24
Secondary school	3	2	4	12
Higher education	0	0	4	7
University	2	5	0	1
Total	6	28	12	45

Another indication of resources in the family background is father's occupation. In the Montenegrin material almost half of the men did not answer this question, but the pattern among those who answered supports the figures on parents' educational level, at least as far as women are concerned. In the Montenegrin material almost all the women grew up in higher class families. In the Norwegian material the men's family background is more evenly distributed between higher and lower class with rather few from the middle class, while the female Norwegian academic elite are more evenly distributed according to class background.

This may have been a contradictory situation for women in the Montenegrin setting during the communist era as intellectuals at that time had to pass through mandatory check-ups in order to filter out from promotion those who were uncongenial to the regime. These screening processes were conducted both with regard to the person in question and his or her family (Blagojevic et al., 2003A). This may have contributed to the rather low representation of women before 1990. One may ask if there existed a pool of well qualified women who had less opportunity to be promoted because of their family background and had better chances after the breakdown of communism?

Also geographical origin may be seen as contributing to social and cultural capital; especially growing up in the capital or a university town means greater access to the dominant culture and makes easier the development of a social network that may enhance an academic career. In the Montenegrin context an overwhelming majority among women both in the elite material and in the survey of women academics at lower levels grew up in the capital: All of the six women in this survey and 40 percent of the 25 women in Bjeletic's (2005) material. In her material only one woman grew up in a village (op.cit.).

This geographical background differs markedly from that of men in these studies. Among men there was also a differentiation between elite and academics at large: Nearly 50 percent of men in high senior positions came from the capital, while 18 percent in Bjeletic's material had this geographical background. Even so among men in the elite material 36 percent had grown up in the countryside. A representative survey from Montenegro indicates that both men and women in the academic elite differ from the population at large as 47 percent of the men and 40 percent of the women had been born in a village, but only 10 percent men and 16 percent women had been born in the capital (Besic, 2004). These figures indicate that men's chances of an academic career are relatively less dependent on the place of geographical origin within the country. On the other hand, the concentration of women from larger cities, both in Montenegro and Norway indicates that growing up in the countryside or in smaller cities is a hindrance to a woman's academic career. Taking into consideration the traditional gender contract in Montenegro, it appears that life in the capital also means greater freedom of choice than women can enjoy in a village. Another benefit related to growing up in a city where there is a university institution is the possibility of developing an independent network or being able to profit from the parents' network to enhance one's career. Although academia ideally should base recruitment and careers on merits only, personal and informal networks seems to improve a persons' chances of an academic career (Brouns and Addis, 2004). If women in leading academic positions more often than men grew up in families rich in educational capital and within the higher echelons of the social structure, this may have contributed to the academic career of some women in the Montenegrin material.

Before finally summing up it is worth noticing that in the elite material from Montenegro women and men resemble each other when it comes to level of education and working hours within academia. They differ insofar as men have devoted more years to academia and women may have profited from more resources in their family background and by growing up in the capital. In the first part of the article it was pointed out that the University of Montenegro is fairly new, and that some women have achieved their positions as professors because they were the first in their fields to obtain PhDs. In the material related to the academic elite, women gained their top positions rather late: in the 1990s or later. This leads to a discussion of two hypotheses that may oppose each other or represent an interaction of circumstances: The first is that women are included into

positions in previously male dominated areas that are shrinking or no longer attractive to men. The other, hitherto not presented, concerns politically specific features of Montenegro.

Applying the hypothesis of deteriorating institutions, women should have easier access to faculties in decline: in Montenegro these include the faculties of Metallurgy and Medicine. One of the women in the material has been appointed to a high position in the Faculty of Metallurgy, but this is also the case for relatively young and newly educated men with PhDs and men with no prior academic career, coming in from the enterprises. An alternative hypothesis would be that it is better to pursue a career within academia than outside if career chances in business are slight. In the faculty of Medicine there is also a woman in a top position, but, as noted before, the reason why this faculty has seen a decline in academic staff is difficult to understand, especially in a time when Montenegro is seeking independence from Serbia. The other faculties where women have gained top positions are faculties experiencing growth.

The other hypothesis which focuses on the specific political situation in Montenegro points to the situation during the 1990s. In 1997 two major political parties ran for election: one party opposing Milosevic and his war regime and the other, less critical towards Milosevic. Before the elections people in all superior positions, in factories, service and in state institutions, and also academia, were asked to declare loyalty to one party or the other. After the election, a process of 'cleaning out' supporters of the losing party took place. Although academia was predominantly for the winning party several leading positions became vacant (Besic, 2005). In the elite material less than one third, eleven men and one woman had gained their leading position before this event. This may indicate that a combination of processes have been at work: firstly there was a pool of qualified women available who did not initially have great chances for an academic career because of higher social background before 1989, secondly there were vacant positions open to competition after 1997 and thirdly, because of these women's relative closeness to the centre of power – as children of higher classes and the network at hand in the capital – they had learnt the lesson many of their sisters in the West have not yet learnt, namely to be strategic concerning choosing ones favourites or friends, that is the strength of weak ties.

The final conclusion: women's access to higher academic positions in Montenegro is partly due to their own investments in academia that are on par with men's. The relative

age of the university has enhanced women's career chances when they were the ones who were first to achieve a PhD in their specific field. But even if there were no specific political measures to enhance women's possibilities to a career in the Montenegrin context, as compared with in Norway, specific political features may have increased women's chances to reach high positions.

On a theoretical level the different hypothesis on gender in academia Western understandings would profit from being confronted with contexts outside their own rather affluent and open societies with the specific contexts in other parts of the world, and even within Europe. The specification of the pipeline hypothesis is but one example.

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