



Università degli studi di Napoli
"L'Orientale"

Disrupting Historicity, Reclaiming the Future



edited by
Silvana Carotenuto,
Francesca Maria Gabrielli,
Renata Jambrešić Kirin

Materia Postcoloniale/Postcolonial Matters



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Disrupting Historicity, Reclaiming the Future

Silvana Carotenuto, Francesca Maria Gabrielli, Renata Jambrešić Kirin

Every writing or revision makes the ‘discovery’ all over again.
(Hortense Spillers)

The aim of this volume is to intervene both in the ways women inherit the past and open up towards the future, mobilizing feminist epistemology and feminist legacy in order to establish the agenda of a hospitable Europe and a collaborative world, a humanistic university and a peer reading sisterhood instead of the fallacy of excellence and academic proficiency. It is the critical incentive for the authors of the contributions presented here – who use different conceptual approaches to theory, history and cultural texts, but also to women’s lives, experiences and legacies – to reveal the strategies that we have used and still use in historical and sociocultural locations in order to confront the ‘foreclusionary structures’ of the grand narratives and to establish a more intimate relationship with the ghosts of a traumatic past and the promises of a future that cannot be fully anticipated.

Although most authors focus on the theoretical reverberation of silenced, neglected and insufficiently explored women’s discourses, social criticism is the corollary of a shared endeavor – encouraged by the Dubrovnik feminist course¹ – because, as Linda Nicholson notices:

¹ The edited volume *Disrupting Historicity, Reclaiming the Future* consists of selected proceedings from three sessions of the postgraduate course *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective* (held in May 2014, 2015, and 2016 respectively). This postgraduate course started in 2007 at the Inter-University Centre Dubrovnik, an independent international centre for advanced studies, in order to connect feminist scholars and activists from the North and South of Europe with the idea

Social criticism without philosophy is not possible, and without social criticism the project of a feminist theory, which is committed at once to knowledge and to the emancipatory interests of women is inconceivable. Social criticism needs philosophy precisely because the narratives of our cultures are so conflictual and irreconcilable that, even when one appeals to them, a certain ordering of one's normative priorities and a clarification of those principles in the name of which one speaks is unavoidable.²

This volume offers a constative, performative and eventful act of social criticism through the thoughts and practices, the arguments and forms of the presented essays. All and singularly, the contributions are organized around four areas of militant debate: 'Herstories', 'Foremothers', 'Revisions', 'The Future'. The commitment is here declared through the engagement that 'History' must be, individually and collectively, changed in 'Herstories', inscribing a transformation in belonging and in plurality, the deviation of historical universality into the particularity and relevance of the tales that give voice to the female capacity to 'disrupt' the order, the norm, the patriarchal authority of the discourse, thus transforming the archive of the 'one' and of the 'unique' into new and unexplored areas of future and productive encounters among women. It is the recovery and the discovery of what in/of their stories has been historically kept at the margin, a recovery and discovery that positions itself on the border (the essays revendicate their being 'late', 'off-center', 'outside', 'experimental', 'utopian!') which becomes the liminal place where to illuminate the blind spots of History/city, in its normative project aimed at the invisibility and hypostatization of women – indeed, the opening essay of the volume deconstructs the 'eternal present' entrusted and imposed on women in their historical un-presence (Sanja Milutinović Bojanić).

It is a transformative capacity that unfolds in the section that follows: for the creation of 'Herstories', it is necessary to learn from our 'Foremothers', by creating and recreating, always already, legacies across times and experiences, by opening the Matriarchive

of developing it into a transnational platform of exchanging knowledge among feminist teachers and students. During the twelve years of the regular program the course was attended by more than two hundred participants from all over the world and the papers presented within its frame have been published in five edited volumes (publications in English and Croatian/English languages are accessible at <<https://zenstud.hr/izdavastvo/knjige/>>).

² Linda Nicholson, "Introduction", in *Feminist Contentions. A Philosophical Exchange*, Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, Nancy Fraser (eds.), Routledge, New York and London, 1995, pp. 1-16.

of women – from Isotta Nogarola’s fifteenth-century *Dialogue on Adam and Eve* (Francesca Maria Gabrielli) to Jane Addams’ early oral history project among American disenfranchised women (Katherine Borland), from the life stories of Croatian women born between the 1920s and the early 1940s (Marija Ott Franolić) to the legacy of Yugoslav interwar women communists (Renata Jambrešić Kirin) – by inscribing on the page and in the world those matriarchal theories and actions capable of teaching us, now, in the present, how to carry ‘the burden of representation’ that history has bequeathed upon us (Brigita Malenica).

If the set time of these openings of the female archive is the fifteenth century, the strategies operating in the volume’s analyses gradually reach the present, our contemporaneity, the actual emergence of technology, media, the culture of visibility, cinema, music. The ‘burden of representation’ is thus exposed to the epochal transformation, that is, to the invention of a complex and critical female philosophy in line with the theoretical teaching of Hannah Arendt whose life and thinking are specifically reclaimed here through their ‘rewritings’ or ‘Revisions’: first, ‘across media’ by the German director Von Trotta (Lada Čale Feldman), and then in the musings around the ‘abject body’ by Julia Kristeva, Lidia M. G. Zerilli and Judith Butler (Iva Rogulja Praštalo). Here, while Margarete von Trotta’s biographical rendition of Hannah Arendt insists not so much on the philosopher’s own allegiances but rather on the feminist implications of her acting on the public stage, Arendt’s concept of theory and practice is juxtaposed and weighed within the consideration of feminist theory in relation to feminist activism and vice versa (Daša Duhaček).

It is, once again, the question of how to intervene in the archive by producing revisions or poetics as practices, acts of interventions in our contemporary experience. Already in ‘Herstories’, the essays intervene in the critical debate with their proposal of a feminist political agency (Brigita Malenica), a feminist ‘New Historicism’ via ‘Virginity stories’ (Dubravka Dulibić Paljar) and ‘Witchcraft trials’ (Nataša Polgar), discussing the representation of woman as confined to a time-less time (Sanja Milutinović Bojanić), and articulating the dilemma of representation in the positing of a feminist academic unit (Brigita Miloš). In ‘Foremothers’ there is the revindication of the performativity – that matters – of women’s claims to agency and intellectual power across history. Specifically, perhaps intrinsically aware of the necessity to acquire a common language of sensibility, the gaze and the heart open up in ‘Revisions’, to the dynamics of the experimental Yugoslavian

cinema (Petra Belc Krnjaić), and to the personal, generational and global resonances of pop music (Ana Fazekaš).

The time of the future – never to be defined in closure, always in its becoming and openness to what-comes (at the end of the volume, Svetlana Slapšak, in her analysis of female science fiction novels by Ursula Le Guin and others, speaks of ‘love’ for *l’â-venir*) – announces itself. Indeed, ‘The Future’ is the time of the announcement, pregnant with promises (which are acts in themselves) and instances of the messianic, generative of the hope of a renovated encounter between the East and the West (Durre Ahmed); the invention of acts of hospitality, different from the implemented politics of rejection of Fortress Europe, towards the migratory experiences and the contemporary writings of women who know the diasporic sufferings of their peoples, and, together, the creative force of their survivals (Simona Miceli); the utopian writing practiced by the post-Yugoslavian literature in experimental forms and contents (Tijana Matijević); the generosity of spirit and flesh inscribed in the speculative science fiction by Nigerian-American Nnendi Okorafor (Silvana Carotenuto).

The circle of History is opened to be never closed again. On the threshold of time and space, these essays prove ‘strategical’ in that they can be read ‘vertically’ within the limits of their sections, but also ‘horizontally’ in the resonance and organicity of their thoughts and interconnected practices, in the militant lucidity of setting the nodal times for their necessary historical rewritings, thanks to the political and cultural offerings of their ‘other’ theoretical, political, epistemological and philosophical representations. Vertically and horizontally, these critical contributions are writing their own ‘herstories’, learning from the experiences of the women who have thought, written and communicated strength and wisdom before us, offering their – ancient, almost without time, far-away, calling from intimate pasts – practices and poetics as essential signposts along the critical path that reaches out for the future, where, finally, they are able to read and write other fictions – what extraordinary freedom is inscribed in these future enouncements! – of times of peace, unconditional hospitality, political utopia, and transformative love.³

³ In her deconstructive feminist philosophy, Peggy Kamuf articulates the “heart of love: it is that which should be able to hold together in an essential relation the movement towards the animate as well as towards the inanimate, towards life as well as non-life, or death, and therefore towards that which can be preserved in life as well as that which has never had or no longer has any life as such to be preserved. At the heart of love, all these apparent oppositions would

In line with the epistemological project of feminism in a transnational perspective, a whole universe of women authors (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak would speak of a 'planet'), including both young and established researchers, delineates in this volume its determination and passion, fragility and strength, analysis and joy, to 'disrupt historicity' and, as the last act of our common responsibility, to 'reclaim the future.' In this universe, regardless of the authors' theoretical concessions and reflexive perspectives (historical or future oriented), what matters is to rethink the question of gender and how it is constructed (in legal, national, religious, theoretical, literary, artistic, popular media discourses), advocating emancipatory interpretations of women's agency and subjectivities "as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see and therefore live-afresh".⁴ In this sense, the *radical critique* proposed by Adrienne Rich, as well as her extraordinary po-ethics of 're-vision',⁵ is central, bearing in mind that "'Woman' in history neither speaks (testifies), nor scrutinizes (renders judgment). She is denied the right to testify and pass judgment, thus denied the right to history. To the extent to which she is denied the status of witness, she is also kept within the bounds of the present" (Sanja Milutinović Bojanić). The authors use different women's texts (artefacts, experiences, ideologies) from the (patriarchal) past

be suspended, no longer or not yet in force, or already ruined, in ruins". Peggy Kamuf, "Deconstruction and Love", in Nicholas Royle (ed.), *Deconstructions. A User's Guide*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2000, p. 153.

⁴ Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken. Writing as Re-Vision", *College English*, 34, 1, 1972, p. 18.

⁵ 'Poethics', which proves essential for the writing and teaching of Adrienne Rich, is defined by Joan Retellack in the following terms: "A poetics can take you only so far without an h. If you're to embrace complex life on earth, if you can no longer pretend that all things are fundamentally simple or elegant, a poetics thickened by an h launches an exploration of art's significance as, not just about, a form of living in the real world. That as is not a simile; it's an ethos. Hence the h. What I'm working on is quite explicitly a poethics of a complex realism" (*Poethical Wager*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2003, p. 26). It could be said that all the essays presented in this volume, are engaged expressions of the 'poethics of a complex realism'. Among several epistemological positions, the feminist re-vision is particularly fruitful, because, according to Rich: "Re-vision, the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction, is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is a part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society". Rich, *When We Dead Awaken*, cit., p. 18.

and/or (neoliberal) present in order to allow themselves to testify to the subjugations, confinements, limitations or subsistence, but also to the acts of subversion, disobedience and revolt that women perform and have performed in various historical gender regimes.

Nowadays we are confronted with the spectres of globalized conservative counterrevolution and backlash against 'gender ideology'. It is thus necessary more than ever to look backward and forward, testifying to the extent by which feminism has historically been and still today proves to be the precious form of resistance and insurrectionary power, capable of producing new figurations of the future. The ongoing struggle for protecting women's civil, political and reproductive rights should include the pursuit of new modes of emancipatory self-knowledge (commitment to women's agency and sense of selfhood), as well as the reappropriation of women's histories in the name of an emancipated future. It is more important than ever to expand our horizons, invent feminist critical gestures, refine our competency of entering into the archival boxes and reclaim sociality ensured by virtual worlds.

In their efforts to reveal trajectories, values, beliefs and hopes of minority subjects "without and outside history", feminist scholars were among the first to call into question the white supremacist/patrimonial/colonial concept of His-story and its foundational role in Western thought. In recent years, not only women's (transnational, cultural, social, economic) history but historicity itself has become one of the primary objects of feminist scrutiny. This has been part of a broader discussion about the 'affective turn' in the Humanities, and the need to 'queer' the Euclidean notion of space and time according to the Deleuzian concept of assemblage, which is more attuned to experiences of the present as deprived of linearity, coherency, and permanency. Feminist perspectives on history/icity have been enriched by assumptions of postcolonial critique, marxist feminism, cultural studies, the history of emotions, psychoanalytic concepts. In *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, Joan Wallach Scott argues that it was with the help of psychoanalytic theory, which posits sexual difference as an insoluble dilemma, that she elaborated her argument about the mutable meaning of gender (roles, norms, practices, differences) through history and across socio-cultural contexts. The impossibility to hold meaning in place makes gender such "an interesting historical object", an object "that includes not only regimes of truth about sex and sexuality but also fantasies and transgressions that refuse to be regulated or

categorized”.⁶ In questioning the standard parameters of feminist historiography, Scott advocates the (psychoanalytic) methods of looking for emotional investments of historical subjects that cannot be explained ideologically or empirically. As the authors of the articles included especially in the sections *Foremothers* and *Revisions* remind us, the archives must be transformed from bastions of patriarchal power run by the death drive into repositories of passion and empowerment, as well as feminist “discoveries”.

The feminist scholars collected in this volume articulate challenging responses to the question why it is important to disrupt historicity and undo patriarchal/colonial/hegemonic power paradigms in the name of a desirable future. The authors who speak from the European semi-periphery, from the ruins of disrupted, denied or instrumentalized socialist worlds, and classified archives, voice the urge to delineate and explain diverse trajectories, fragmented and zig-zag modernist timelines, and, together, to deconstruct or ‘disrupt’ official historiographies, national politics of memory, and hegemonic places of knowledge production. Some of the authors express the impasse between the need to historicize the particular conditions of women’s experiences and the ethico-political demand to strategically use an ahistorical notion of *woman*. All of them are exploring new and fruitful ways of challenging Western linear teleology and the uses and abuses of history it entails. With singular and metonymic theoretical pursuits and ethical interventions, they (re)discover the best of women’s intellectual heritage and create a bridge between history, theory, social criticism, and everyday activism so as to be able to understand the ruptures, fragmentations, interruptions, and zig-zag lines of modern temporalities while resisting all dogmatisms and forms of despair.

Let us conclude with a last note on why we consider that the feminist responsible task today is to reclaim the future. The action of ‘re-claiming’ is inspired by Judith Butler’s philosophical reading of the counter-figure of Antigone, the tragic woman who does not believe or act in view of an utopian future (the idea of an imagined perfection/salvation/integration in the future) but who engages with a specific form of ‘faithfulness’ (how could we do without the sense of the future, the proposal, the imagination, hope?) and ‘betrayal’ (do we still believe in the ‘empire’ or

⁶ Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2011, p. 5.

homogenous course of history, in the metaphysical notion of progressive time?). She knows that “the norm has a temporality that opens it to a subversion from within and to a future that cannot be fully anticipated”; her language is “the very language of the state against which she rebels and a politics not of oppositional purity but of the scandalously impure”.⁷ Inspired by the mimetic, transformative and excessive claim of Antigone, relying on her acts of disturbance and destabilization (of hegemonic power), the contributions included in this volume reveal the full spectre of (feminist) challenges and responsibilities in various disciplines, discourses and interpretations, motivated by the urgency to use their knowledge, positions and teaching skills for envisioning, imagining, hoping for a new future.

The future is a sensitive zone of contestation: on the one hand, the materiality of contemporary and absolute *danger* is compromising our sense of the future, producing a global refusal and denial of what might appear on the horizon of the unexpected; on the other hand, the already-constituted norm/ality of generalized lack, fear, anguish, threat, precarity and unpredictability, cannot but reveal the ghost of a *radical futurity* that keeps haunting the present. We firmly believe that, between radical futurity and the apocalyptic future, there is room for a future that pronounces difference, responsibility, democracy, justice, and the task of hospitality towards the other as distinctly feminist concepts and practices.

⁷ Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim. Kinship between Life and Death*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000, p. 21, p. 25.

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On the Eternal Present

Sanja Milutinović Bojanić

Summary

In addition to its teleological framework, the use of the word 'history' (especially) in the Western, Judeo-Christian world, includes a duality and intertwining of two senses: sight and hearing (Benveniste). Their rivalry is that of two traditions, the Greek and Roman. The authority of the figures of witness and judge draws its origin precisely in the visual and aural ways of knowing. The epistemological thematization of history follows the same path, particularly when it comes to 'woman'. Often mute and blind, she is never witness/judge to many crucial events. 'Woman' in history neither speaks (testifies), nor scrutinizes (renders judgment). She is denied the right to testify and pass judgment, thus denied the right to history. To the extent to which she is denied the status of witness, she is also kept within the bounds of the present. The teleological framework of history allows the female only the now. These claims are elaborated through a reading of the painting *The Fountain of Youth* (by Luca Cranach the Elder) and representations of this concept that emerge from this work of art. The woman of the past could use her senses only for the purpose of conserving or regenerating youth as time-less time, without testimony or judgment. Woman here is understood not in the literal sense of the word, but rather, as a metaphor for all those in history who could not leave trace of their authentic existence.

Prologue

"... But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in. Can you?", Catherine Morland asks diffidently Miss Tilney in Jane Austen's first novel *Northanger Abbey* (1803). And Miss Tilney replies shortly, "Yes, I am fond of history," intensifying Catherine Morland's uneasiness in searching ways to express her displacement:

I wish I were too. I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all – *it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention* (my italic). The speeches that are put into the heroes' mouths, their thoughts and designs – the chief of all this must be invention, and invention is what delights me in other books...¹

How do we understand the historical value of the past and how is at all possible to understand the epistemic status of any past narrative, constructed on the foundation of a general historical matrix? It is not only a matter of the spun yarn of *HIS-STORY* as opposed to *HER-STORY*. Nor only of the female perspective that is supposed to complete the general and given idea of relations of power. It is not enough to merely shift from the margin of the system and framework of power to finalize a picture that always lacks objectivity. We are dealing with a centuries old machinery of meticulous argument construction that grounds the *epistemē* of history and modalities of memory of the so-called Judeo-Christian and Muslim world. History is not only information handed down unchanged and linear, from generation to generation; nor does any historical interpretation get indemnity through cultural process of accepting or rejecting certain narratives. In the Western world, within the last few decades, historians have come to recognize that historical *epistemē* comprises a record of human activities in every sphere of life, not just political developments.

Even in the more recent history of Western democracies, at moments when the paradigm of continuity and heritage (conservative and teleological by its very nature) was replaced by some revolutionary forms of creative energy (in turbulent periods of radical change), the axis of violent hierarchies has still been preserved, and has thus maintained the polarization and opposition of strong/weak, old/young, rich/poor, and of course male/female. It is established to the point of cliché that women *en masse* prepared and supported the French revolution as early as the salons of the *Ancien Regime*, as well as then spoke – such women as Olympe de Gouges or Madame Roland, Madame de Staël, Madame Clement-Hemery – from public pulpits and in revolutionary clubs, advocating its values. Still, by 1793 women

¹ Jane Austin, *Northanger Abbey*, Janet Todd (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, chapter 14.

were expelled from debate clubs, as well as the military, and in 1804, with the Napoleonic Code they lose their hard-won status as citizen. Thanks to one *global* historical event – as the historians around Patrick Boucheron at the College de France call the 1789 revolution² – in a very short span of four years, women, shoulder to shoulder with men, were active in the public sphere. In the words of Geneviève Fraisse,³ the French revolution simultaneously allowed and prevented the presence of women in public, as well as in civil society, while after the revolution, they unambiguously lose their political status, once again becoming, in the civil sense, subjugated. Still, for the sake of clarity of argument, let us leave aside the myriad shades of sexual difference and their implications in which it can never be understood as static, but precisely as a variable operational value. Moreover, by insisting on sexual difference, my intention is to indicate the oppressiveness that neither begins nor ends in sexuality, but is interwoven with and holding together class, race, ethnic and other forms of negative differentiations.

What are we actually talking about and could we find answers to why *HIS-STORY* prevails over *HER-STORY* in the case of linguistics and the archeology of the very word ‘history’? Does understanding this history, we have been handed down for several millennia allow us the freedom of departure from masculinized historicity?

Could not the profiling of the development and shift of epistemological paradigm of history and historicism contained in the historical systematizations of Gianbattista Vico, Michel de Montaigne, all the way up to Hegel and modern historicism, as well the various dynamics of historization, yield a pattern that prevents the abandonment of the matrix of the tenacious survival of *HIS-STORY*? Is a different form of development possible, some new contingency that would be neither a reflection in the mirror, nor a negative, nor Rorschach like imprint? Could a new historicism of the second half of the twentieth century, in its decentralized discourses of subaltern, postcolonial studies, not carry this change? Historical value of the past is nearly always reactualized in present political and ideological trends, and every glance backward renews that portion of the past repeated in

² Patrick Boucheron, “Présentation générale”, in *Histoire mondiale de la France*, Patrick Boucheron, Nicolas Delalande, Florian Mazel, Yann Potin, Pierre Singaravélou (coordinateurs), Le Seuil, Paris, 2017, p. 7.

³ Geneviève Fraisse, *Muse de la Raison. Démocratie et exclusion des femmes en France*, Galimard, Paris, 1995, p. 23.

history. More specifically, history does not of itself repeat; rather, persistent returns to certain constructions of significance and determination of meaning within history entrenches established narratives, further preventing emancipation from heroes and “quarrels of popes and kings”. It is very difficult indeed to oppose historical stereotypes and clichés with micro-narratives, consistent and brief stories that in their micro-materiality mark the points at which historicism is changed. It is difficult to thematize history without thinking of time as duration.

This text comprises two parts and deals with, on the one hand, the underlying paradigm of the beginning of Homeric (heroic or divine) discourse on history (crucially different from the one that appears with Herodotus), and on the other, a semiotic reading of the late Renaissance painting by Luca Cranach the Elder, *The Fountain of Youth*.⁴ The question is truly whether man has broken free of historical self-thematization that arbitrarily, beyond the reach of its *epistemē*, could interpret and narrate any phenomenon whatever. Thus, the heroic discourse on history, the divine/male gaze onto history, man and his world (as well as the world in general), draws into a strange relation as if toward a relic, and certainly into the matrix of nostalgia. Yet, since *nostos álgos*, the painful state of needing to return, appears with the very consciousness of the impossibility of return to the place from whence we all issued (one does not need either research on Freud who spoke of the womb as the first place of the *unheimlich*), nostalgia ought to always be tempered rather than fanned. Inevitably related to melancholia, nostalgia thus resonates heavily in man’s world and demands woman to behave in a way that time and place are not the issue of her reflection.

The example of a semiotic reading of the small-formatted oil on panel, *The Fountain of Youth*, will serve us to illustrate certain elements of epistemology of history that could uncover the foundational and resistant, ever on the razor’s edge of sexism and misogyny, missing from the understanding of the historicity of history. Yet, it is not the feminist point in such a reading that is crucial, but rather the awareness of a narrowness of field of vision that has in the history of Western civilizations completely excluded the gaze of the other (seeing the other from the point of view of Other) thus establishing the uniqueness of the male gaze which

⁴ Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Fountain of Youth*, DE_smbGG_593, in Cranach Digital Archive <http://lucascranach.org/DE_smbGG_593> [Gemäldegalerie, revised 2010] (03/2018).

depicts world and women from a masculine and heterosexual point of view, and exhibiting women as objects of male pleasure.⁵

With this comparison between the heroic and divine of history and a small Renaissance painting, the text illustrates the problem of the perception of passing time and knowledge of past events, in order to reveal the phenomenon of the eternal present of perception and knowledge. What did knowledge of the world and its events consist of prior to Herodotus or Thucydides, or any number of other great systematizers of the past who have built their epistemological matrix into a continuous sequence of the past? My toolbox contains linguistic and semiotic elements. Regarding the motives that underpin the aesthetic analysis of the painting, my focus does not remain on description. It does not offer finished meaning, but puzzles over places of the obvious and stereotypical, providing in their stead questions with neither simple nor unified, certain answers. Aside from a standard compositional interpretation, it is not crucial to focus on the structure, configuration or color saturation of the chosen canvas. Even the fact that it is a painting and view bathed in light, offering serenity, cannot overlook the framework of the oblique and cunning intentions of the motif of eternity itself.

Connecting knowledge, perception and history with visual material, my goal, aside from showing their interconnection, is to reveal the invisible mechanisms always missing from frameworks of feminist epistemology of history, preventing its emancipation from traditional historical *epistemē*.

Archeology of Naming

Using a comparative method of internal reconstruction of a proto-Indo-European language,⁶ linguists have recognized two roots that connect knowledge and perception: **ǵneh₃-* and **weid-*. Both have a great number of derivations. In general, the first leads towards a meaning of that which is knowledge, or better still, cognition [as in “(re)cognition of person,”], while the other to the meaning of that which is learning [as in “learning the facts”]. The root **ǵneh₃-* gives forms such as the Greek *gignōsko* (with the suffix **skē/o*) and Latin *(g)nosco*, as well as the Greek and

⁵ On male gaze in visual arts, see Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (2nd ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire England, New York, 2009, pp. 14-30.

⁶ James P. Mallory, Douglas Q. Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World*, Oxford University Press, London, 2006, p. 320.

Latin deverbatives, *-gnosis*, that is, *-nōtiō*. In French, *gnoséologie* is defined as “étude des fondements de la connaissance”, [studies of foundations of knowledge] for which the English uses the term “epistemology”. Hence the French *connaissance* corresponds to the English knowledge.

On the other hand, **weid-* is the root of the Latin *videō* (*videre* or French *voir*, to see), the Gothic *witam*, the German *wisen*, the English *wit* or Sanskrit *vedā*. The same root gives the Doric Greek aorist *idéin*, the perfect *woīda* (“I know”). This last form suffered certain changes over time, first losing the diagrapha (also known as the *wau*, which most resembles the contemporary Latin letter ‘f’), after which it remains only *oīda*. The second change refers to the temporal dimension added in translation, since the first person singular of the indicative, *oīda* refers to an action begun in the past but with some connection to the present moment. This is a verb tense of present perfect that still exists in English. In French the translation would be in the present tense, thus turning the verb *voir* (to see) into *sa-voir*, that is knowledge. What I have seen in the past, I now know (*j’ai vu avant, je (le) sais, maintenant*).

To arrive at the form I seek to reconstruct, that is, the single form offering the experience of seeing [*voir*] that is accumulated into the form of knowing [*sa-voir*], let us recall the mentioned conjugation and the form that in the second person singular gives the word form *oīsta*. Using Grassmann’s law of dissimilation of aspirated vowels in Sanskrit and Ancient Greek,⁷ which states that when a single word features two successive aspirated vowels, they lose their aspiration, the word form *oīsta* can indeed be reconstructed back into its older form and root **hoīsta*.⁸ At first glance it is perhaps not so easy to recognize that we are looking at the word history; however, looking at the deverbative *histōr-historos*, meaning ‘one who knows’, or ‘one who knows something after having studied it’, it becomes clear that the word ‘history’ in Ancient Greek designates precisely what has been seen and accumulated into knowledge/cognizance of the facts.

Similarly, in his study, *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*⁹ Émile Benveniste pays close attention to the

⁷ Hermann Günther Grassmann (1809-1877) was a German polymath, renowned in his day as a linguist and now also admired as a mathematician. He was also a physicist, neo-humanist, general scholar, and publisher. His mathematical work was little noted until he was in his sixties.

⁸ Neville E. Collinge, *The Laws of Indo-European*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 1985.

⁹ Émile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes. Pouvoir, droit, religion*, vol. II, Minuit, Paris, 1969, pp. 173-174.

etymological power of the word form *ístō*. The context of his analysis is specific, since it points to key elements that comprise Indo-European social world, meaning that the word form *ístō* is again studied alongside with the verb *voir*, to see, but touching on *history* only indirectly. As a linguistic archeologist, Benveniste studies the institution of the oath and its role in the construction of the hierarchy of power of community. The institution of the oath also issues from the root **weid-*, and when dealing with the entwined problem of the witness and judge, Benveniste has reason to wonder about the difference in meaning between the two: “does ... *ístōr* refer to the ‘witness/*témoïn*’ or the ‘judge/*juge*’?”¹⁰ He offers a clear answer: “The judge is not a witness ... precisely because he is *-ístōr*, an ocular witness, the only one who can pass judgment in an argument or debate”. Benveniste insists on the fact that “basic value of ocular witnessing follows from the very name of the witness, *-ístōr*”.¹¹

But what happens at the moment when there is no visual witness, yet *histōr-* is still summoned? What powers mark the witness who could also become arbiter and pass judgment? The word form *-ístōr* acquires attributive meaning “which renders un-appealable judgment, cuts short the debate (*neikos*, dispute) about something that ought to be a question ‘*de bonne foi*’”. Thus in the *Iliad*, Ajax ask that Agamemnon be *histōr*,¹² to decide who came first in the race organized by Achilles. Whatever Agamemnon’s role in the conflict between Ajax and Idomeneus, it is known that Agamemnon could not have seen with his own eyes who had the advantage. Consequently, it is patently clear that one with authority or one higher in the hierarchy is making the decision. Another example of the same contradiction is the famous scene with Achilles’ shield, claimed by two men each accusing the other of murder, and seeking a *histōr*. In her text about the role and function of the *histōr*, Evelyne Scheid-Tissinier writes: “Stepping into dispute (*neikos*), the *histōr* is not one who, by his intervention alone, can put an end to the differences by adjudicating between conflicting versions, but is, rather, the guarantor (for the present or indeed for the future) of what will have been agreed upon by the two parties”.¹³

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 174.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Homer, “*Iliad*”, in *Homeri Opera*, translated by D. B. Monro and T. W. Allen Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1920, lines 18.482-87.

¹³ Evelyne Scheid-Tissinier, “A propos du rôle et de la fonction de l’*ιστωρ*”, *Revue de Philologie*, 68, 1994, pp. 187-208.

Of course, everything is complicated with the arrival of Odysseus, who, keeping his anonymity despite the great pain he feels making him shed tears, allows in his presence the reciting of events in which he was himself participant and to which he was witness: "I respect you, Demodocus, more than any man alive / surely the muse has taught you, Zeus's daughter, / or god Apollo himself. How true to life / all too true ... you sing the Achaeans fate / all they did and suffered, all they soldiered throughout, / as if you were there yourself (*autos pareon*) or heard from one who was (*akousas*)".¹⁴

Are not Odysseus' mimicry of identity, his interrogation and turn, indications regarding the abandonment of a literal reading of history, since Odysseus actually recognizes in Demodocus the gift of the Muses who "for in no wise to all alike does he give pleasure / with this song. Ever since we began to sup and the / divine minstrel was moved to sing, from that time yon / stranger has never ceased from sorrowful lamentation; surely, methinks, grief has encompassed his heart".¹⁵

The *histôr* is blind but loved by the Muses more than anyone else, since by stripping him of the gift of eyesight, they give him the power of mellifluous song. The art of epic storytelling, epic choice of heroic destiny has made that the blind singer *see* and *know* better than the participant himself in those historical events of which he sings. The clairvoyant, stripped of one of his basic means of perception, is inspired by Zeus' and Mnemosyne's daughters, the Muses – so he sees all. This *seeing* and *knowing* is similar with another word that brings together perception and knowledge/cognizance. 'Evidence' – following any dictionary – is a word that comes from the Latin *evidens*, *-entis*, "that which can be seen from afar", something *ex-videre* or "beyond ken".

As the warrant of epic poetry, the *histôr* did not necessarily know the facts, but was cognizant of what transpired. He gained insight based on intuitions given to him by the Muses.

It is noteworthy that Herodotus himself, considered the father of history, used the word *histôr* in the form it was used above all by doctors. We encounter this form mostly in Hippocrates' *On Ancient Medicine*, in which *histôrie* simply represents research or findings of specific inquiry. *Historié* serves Hippocrates as a kind of *ersatz* link between what he sees and hears and speech, "*logos*" or autopsy. In other words, it becomes the connection between

¹⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, cit., lines 8.546-51.

¹⁵ Ivi, lines 8.538-545.

simple testimony and fact established by inquiring with his own eyes. The authority of knowledge or skill that grounds the expert opinion of the doctor is certainly subject to time that erases almost all traces.

But this is when the mother of Muses, Mnemosyne, that is, memory, steps onto the stage.

The Fountain of Youth as Cure for Memory

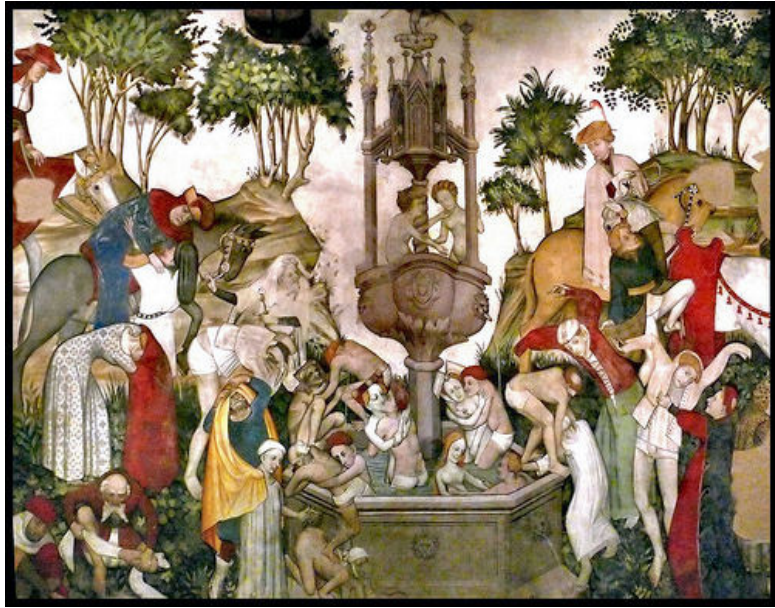
A semiotic reading of Luca Cranach the Elder's painting enables, by way of counterpoint, the illustration of, on the one hand, perception as sensory certainty, and on the other, the understanding of the flux of time, that is, the interruption and stopping of time with the intention of eclipsing the need for knowledge. Following the dynamic of representation, the sequence of appearance, the conventions of the genre that confirms the canon of a given style of painting, using a semiotic reading of this canvas, I will attempt to illustrate the previously presented elements of linguistic analysis of the production of history by providing a conceptual structure of female temporality.

Semiotics will be useful in this task, precisely because it does not insist on an inherited focus on established ideas about ways of seeing and understanding, but adds to the literal two-dimensionality of the painting a third dimension, allowing us to analyze the nature of time and thus the understanding of *epistemē* of history.

The painting is at Berlin's Gemäldegalerie, one of the world's most important collections of European painting ranging from the 13th to 18th century. Property of Joachim II, Elector of Brandenburg, from the mid-16th century, and kept in his *Kunstammer* until the early 18th century, it was displayed as a part of a collection designated for a public art museum. After the Wars of Liberation and the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the Prussian reformist monarch sought to transform Prussia from a predominantly military state to a cultural one.

Luca Cranach the Elder painted *The Fountain of Youth* in 1549. Despite the claims made in 1943 by Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub – the German art historian known between the two world wars for his exhibit on new objectivity – that the sources of Cranach's painting reach as far back as the French Middle Ages, the most likely inspiration for Cranach's work was a scene in Castello della Manta in Piedmont. In the *Salone baronale*, a typical example of a Roman Gothic villa, there is a fresco, *Fonte della giovinezza*, painted at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

Fig. 1: *Fontana della giovinezza*, Fresco, in Castello della Manta, Sala Baronale, XIII c., © Elio Pallard, April 25, 2008, <<http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/nsaram/2440679884/>> (03/2018).



The scene is one of the most commonly painted in the Middle Ages, depicting Herodotus' brief note about a natural source of youth from Ethiopia (*Aethiopia*), land of "burnt faces". Right away, in figure 1. by analyzing the basic elements comprising the specific motif of the source of eternal youth and rejuvenation, we can see the well-established reference to the exotic and secret powers that bring about a reversal: turning the white European man if not immortal then at least long-living. The occupying and patronizing spirit of colonization, even prior to the development of the technology of colonial power, can be easily read in Herodotus' legend. A "soft primitivism" (and of course that we might here question whether it is possible to grade primitivism) leads us to the first circle of differentiation of values of Western civilizations.

In *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus*, Stewart Flory provides following indication: "Aethiopians possess certain amenities associated with soft primitivism: 'a fountain of youth' and certain 'table of sun' (3.23.2), which supplies the people automatically with their diet of boiled meet (3.18)".¹⁶ In his *Histories*, Herodotus writes:

When the Ichthyophagi showed wonder at the number of the years, he led them to a fountain, wherein when they had washed, they found their flesh all glossy and sleek, as if they had bathed in oil –

¹⁶ Stewart Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1987, p. 98.

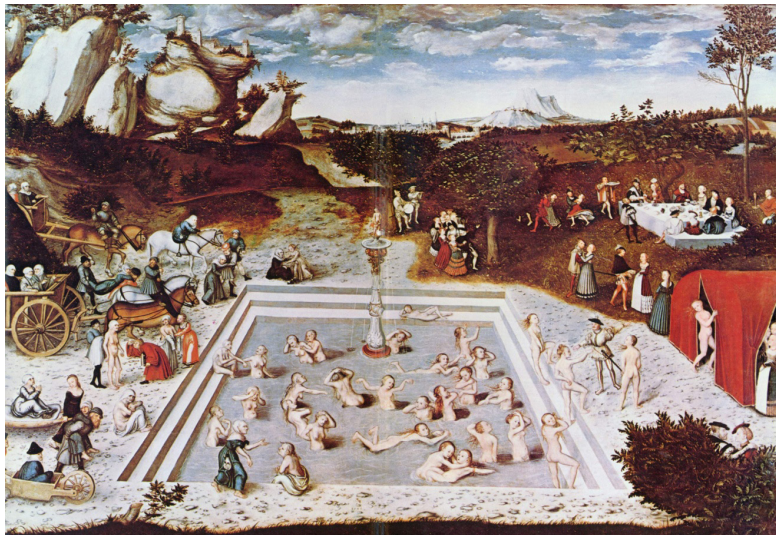
and a scent came from the spring like that of violets. The water was so weak, they said, that nothing would float in it, neither wood, nor any lighter substance, but all went to the bottom. If the account of this fountain be true, it would be their constant use of the water from it, which makes them so long-lived. When they quitted the fountain the king led them to a prison, where the prisoners were all of them bound with fetters of gold. Among these Ethiopians copper is of all metals the most scarce and valuable. After they had seen the prison, they were likewise shown what is called “the table of the Sun”.¹⁷

Just like hunger for past, innocent, heroic times, the reference to “soft primitivism” of Oriental cultures carries a romantically longing look towards youth, eternity and narcissistic preservation of superficiality. Anything not present in this very moment and place is often warped, either through hyperbole or another metaphorical form, rendered unusual in order to be preserved as attractive. It is often falsified and supplemented. Indeed, special, ornate decoration is reserved for those elements whose simplicity and ‘primitivism’ remain fundamental to the understanding of the cycle of life and production. Entirely predictably, water, the element that ought to wash the weight of even the smallest misstep or crime, is necessarily permeable and light. It resists nothing; it is “so weak that nothing would float in it, neither wood, nor any lighter substance, but all goes to the bottom”. In other words, not only that nothing floats on the water, but also with it all lapses into oblivion. Water plays the role of the liquid that returns to a state of no experience, water recaptures innocence of ignorance. The motif of liquid washing is a constituent element of any initiation effort of acquisition of new or different states of consciousness, but also an expression of innocence, a state unblemished by experience. It is more than certain that Herodotus’ half mythological, half historical approach in narrating this episode – let us use an euphemism here – borrowed from other storytellers and collectors of fantastic and wondrous stories. History has a hard time untying the double bind of the tendency to tell what was seen along with what belongs to the domain of dreams. Indeed, in a case of bitter bit, Herodotus cannot but mention Hecateus in his *Histories*, on one occasion mocking him for his naïve genealogy and, on another, quoting Athenian complaints against his handling of their national history, all the while obscuring him as his main source.

¹⁷ Hippocrate, *Œuvre complète, L’ancienne médecine*, vol. II, translated by Jacques Jouanna, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2003.

We also read something like that in Porphyry in a quote recorded by Eusebius. Legend, however, tells that Hecateaus invented and embellished even more those events he did not experience first-hand. At least in the case of the fountain of youth, history entirely constructed its own reasons and origin of the acquisition of eternity. Looking more closely at this motif, problematizing the status of the female in the complicated historical *epistemē* indicates only to an extent the iceberg of a topic that reveals much more than only a simple status of the memory and gender-related temporalization. What can we read and what themes are evoked by looking at the canvas?

Fig. 2: Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Fountain of Youth*, DE_smbGG_593, © Cranach Digital Archive <http://lucascranach.org/DE_smbGG_593> [Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, revised 2010] (03/2018).



It is possible to read and interpret *The Fountain of Youth* from left to right. In the landscape details we can best see the bases of primitive perspective and the paintings relative depth. The whole can be divided into several semantic parts, each tied to specific terms. The axis and central part is composed of the fountain itself, and the source, completed by human hand. The frame and edges outline the border marking not only a change from one cosmic and aggregate element into another (soil/water; solid/liquid), but personify a transfer from one life age into another. The fact that there is an established indexation of the spatiality, helps in understanding the relations that in certain positions ascribe negative or positive values. The stereotype of the habit of reading from left to right can here be clearly applied. The spatial distribution of the painting signifies that left is that which has passed, decay, old age, end of life; while on the right is the

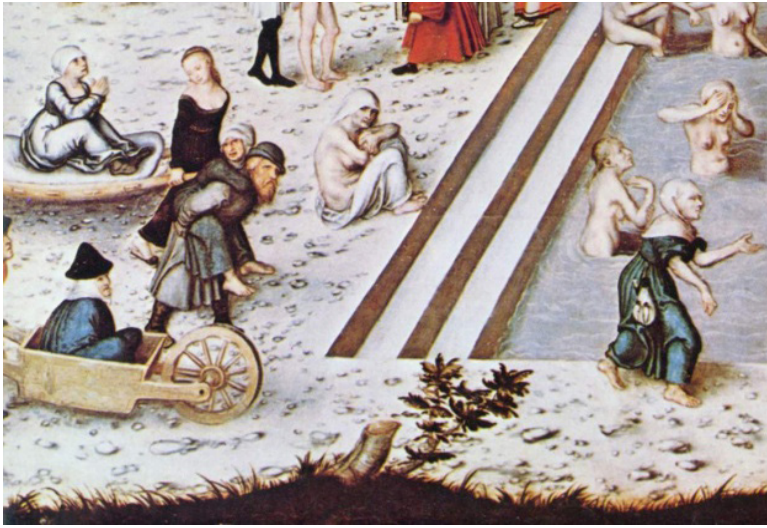
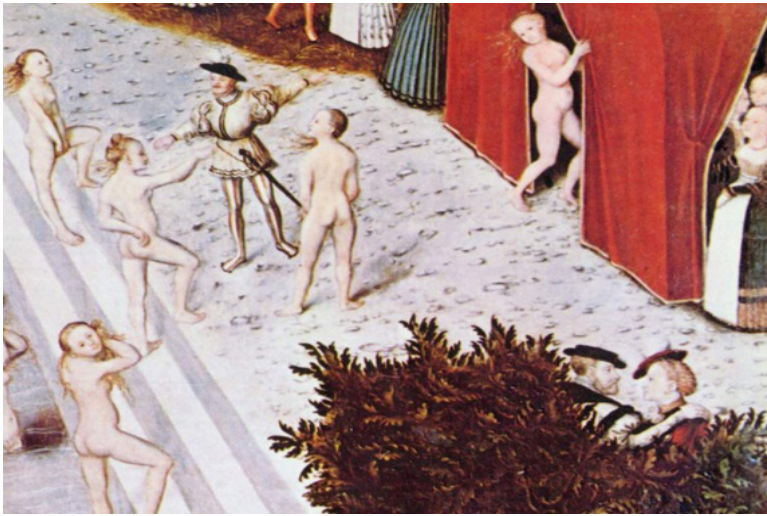


Fig. 5 and 6:
Details from Lucas
Cranach the Elder, *The
Fountain of Youth*.



The figures we recognize as old women, impaired women of various ages, certainly used up by life, brought on stretchers to the edge of the fountain. A plethora of movements and positions also indicate their need for someone to help, assess, evaluate them. We also see the figure of a priest who meticulously notes the changes in the physical appearance of each woman. It appears to be part of the ritual itself. The novelty introduced by Cranach is certainly the figuration of exclusively female bodies that bathe. It is precisely this exclusivity in the painting that allows such an interpretation, indirectly connecting the relinquishment of right to *historié* that woman and the female are never able to seize.

Frozen in the present moment, stripped of eyes and ears that would otherwise be necessary to acquire the right to testimony and judging, and to a narrative about what is factual, what has transpired – woman plays a role only in the present. Not only is her existence limited to the present, but the only tense that can bring fulfilment and satisfy woman's ascribed role is indeed the frozen present. Her purpose is fulfilled on the surface (of her body, no less), when, upon bathing in the fountain, she regains the right to be seduced anew and participate in social games. The layout of figures and events on the right portion of the painting indicate a potential and encouraging reproductive function of woman. A great number of young women is coupled with men. Yet, when alone (if they are at all allowed to be alone), they are obviously with child. The cretinization, stripping of solitude and functional dependence prevent the female figure from becoming its own independent subject. Exposed to the gaze of the other, she becomes akin to a marionette. And while the female figures on the right help and hold one another, on the left, they become vivacious, (more numerous), as well as more insouciant. The most far-reaching consequence of this difference in care and regard for one another lies in the obvious gradual stifling of specific solidarity of care when the woman returns (recapturing her state of eternal youth and absence of memory) into the state of the eternal present. By injecting her with the elixir of youth, it is as if she is also given the accompanying serum of oblivion that will materially and physically keep her in a state of superficial indifference.

Fig. 3 and 4:
Details from Lucas
Cranach the Elder, *The
Fountain of Youth*.





To give a sharp transposition of the elements present in the painting, in comparison to any composition that imitates Renaissance or classicist forms, a scene such as this as well as the message it carries could be found in any so called contemporary women's magazine. By directing attention to the care of the body and its conservation in the struggle against aging, we see the promotion of the values of young, wholesome, near perfect bodies, fed on the fiction of eternity. The passing of time, the possibility of perception and understanding of the body as changing, as a variable constant, these are not considered positive values. In accordance with that, decay and gradual loss of the power to seduce are stigmatized, thus preventing any form of testimony or judgment. By philosophically problematizing the passing of time and the status of historicity of *epistemē* of knowledge, we return, as if in a magic circle, to the problematic of awareness of the role of the subject of history.

Even if we were to willfully ignore the aesthetic and semiotic details that connect testimony and judgment with the senses of sight and hearing, it is clear that woman (as a metonymy of a figure rendered by history into a form of a beautiful object) is denied space in which she would, as Odysseus does, perform the turn required to be at once judge and witness of events in which she has participated. Although with Herodotus, history acquires the epistemological contours it still draws on today, Odysseus' testimony and judgment change considerably the image of the world in which he has lived, prompting him to change, travel and cunningly adapt his life circumstances, thus, above all, extending his life. All this, of course, is not applicable in the case of the female subject of a historical event. Even if it presents an unavoidable

figure without which history would be absolutely unthinkable in its present form (such as Cleopatra or Queen Elizabeth I), these historical persons in their descriptions remain remembered for their so-called masculine, ruling and exclusive characteristics (the very ones that ensured their indubitable importance).

For us, however, the question of conditions under which the figure of the woman or the female could defeat the historicist heritage of masculine forms of history remains hypothetical. Can anything change if one agrees and continues the analytic of history that has always been determined by masculinized experience of testimony and judgment? Should we invent the representation of female eyes and ears, which would not be blind and deaf to history? Which is the history written onto their very bodies? In other words, can anything change if women follow the matrix of action established on a present tense frozen by male eyes and ears, only through a male gaze?

Here is how Jane Austen dramatized this question, and how two heroines of her *conduct* novel show the construction of *epistēmē* of the past and historical:

Historians, you think, [said Miss Tinley] are not happy in their flights of fancy. They display imagination without raising interest. I am fond of history and am very well contented to take the false with the true. In the principal facts they have sources of intelligence in former histories and records, which may be as much depended on, I conclude, as anything that does not actually pass under one's own observation; and as for the little embellishments you speak of, they are embellishments, and I like them as such. If a speech be well drawn up, I read it with pleasure, by whomsoever it may be made...¹⁸

¹⁸ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, cit., chapter 14.

Lost and Found: Female Subjectivity and Political Agency as a Feminist Utopian Horizon

Brigita Malenica

Summary

Economic and social changes in the 1970s, but especially the breakdown of real socialist states in Europe, fostered a radical change of the notion of political subjectivity. Furthermore, political and feminist theory have been confronted with a vanishing political subject, based on political identities, that could enable social movements to question current global inequalities, exploiting economies, and political practices from a clear political standpoint. The article reflects recent leftist and feminist debates on these dilemmas and on the complicity of feminism with neoliberal political economies. Asking how crucial the concept of a subject is for political agency, I discuss the accusation towards feminist theory of fostering the culturalization of the political. While describing the ongoing processes of depoliticization of social structures, the aim of this paper is to broaden the analytical lens on these phenomena. Referring to the political theories of Isabell Lorey and María Pía Lara, the core thesis of this paper points to the need for a repoliticized field of representation as a precondition to rearticulating a universal notion of political subjectivity from a feminist perspective. The concluding interpretation of Milo Rau's theater play *Compassion. The History of the Machine Gun* thus aims to show that analyzing cultural representations still offers a fertile ground for discussing and expressing political collective imaginations and a common utopian ground for future political subjectivities.

After 1989: The Loss of Political Subjectivity?

In the wide historical context of globalization, the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked only one point in the long story of capitalist expansion efforts. The outsourcing of industrial work

and thus the proliferation of ecological pollution from Europe to Asia, were accompanied by the financialization of markets, the economization of society and the hegemony of the neoliberal political project – all of which gave the ongoing privatization of common goods a feeling of inevitability and political normality. At the same time, manifold socialist state-projects came to an abrupt end, concerning Soviet imperialism and its Socialist satellites on the one side, national liberation movements in Africa and Asia on the other, and non-aligned Yugoslavia as a multi-ethnic mediator in between. Although the inner contradiction between emancipative politics and the autocratic rule of Communist Party structures was undoubtedly one of the core problems of the socialist political system, this fact alone does not explain its collapse.¹ At the same time, the disappearance of socialist states in Europe marked the gradual loss of an emancipative notion of universal politics and, in particular, the total loss of a systemic and political counterpart for neoliberal thoughts and forced capitalist practices.

In view of these events, the main question for the following considerations is: where do feminist politics and theory stand after nearly three decades under post-socialist conditions? If feminism is still understood as a social movement that pursues the political objective to create a more democratic and equal global future, the political events of 1989 have to be considered in their paradoxical dimension for emancipative politics. On the one hand, formal democracy seemed to gain a wider global influence on states and societies in the 1990s while on the other, the universal dimension of political subjectivity underwent two opposite developments.

From the 1960s onwards, new forms of political agency, activated by women, people of color, indigenous people and ethnic or sexual minorities opened pathways for a wider notion of democracy. With the impetus of newly evolved social movements, their claim for political participation and full citizenship challenged the inequalities that are inherent to modern democracies. The crucial goal which these political projects had in common was to struggle for, formulate and live a universal right for political and social subjectivity and thus to change the conditions of the activists'

¹ Rather, as Dieter Segert claims, the breakdown of the socialist state has to be analyzed as a more complex process of political transformation, de-ideologization and the challenge of modernization. Dieter Segert, *Transformationen in Osteuropa im 20. Jahrhundert*, facultas, Wien, 2013; similarly Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions. The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York and Oakleigh, 1999. All translations from German into English in this essay are mine.

lives as well as to create more opportunities for others. The results were twofold: first, from this perspective democracy is no longer equivalent to democratic institutions and their representatives but is rather related to a way of living.² The ascension of human rights to universalist principles for political rights is also closely related to conceptions of a universalist democracy that is not bound to nation states. Second, social movements brought cultural difference in conjunction with identity politics into political struggles for social justice. With 1989 and its aftermaths, it is no accident that ethnicity sounded the death knell for the working class. The violent breakdown of a multi-ethnic Yugoslavian state is therefore emblematic for this political occasion. To put it into more general terms, class differences, social justice and social structures vanished as relevant political arguments while culture remained and gained more significance.³ This led to a paradoxical situation: while social movements called for a universal implementation of citizenship, political subjectivity became culturalized and ethnicized at the same time. As a consequence, the current success of right-wing parties and the decline of the political left in Europe is borne by cultural difference as the crucial argument. On the other hand, these developments are again also reflected by leftist debates on a toothless and politically adapted feminism as result of a culturalized notion of the political.

Moreover, these processes are supported by the formation of new and renewed nation states in post-socialist Europe and the expansion of supranational institutions under a neoliberal governance regime. They constituted coexistent but not always congruent perceptions of the idea how to build new and how to transform existing democratic states. At the same time, neoliberal ideas joined forces with new political practices in stressing the necessary role of competitive elites and transparent, market ruled state bureaucracies, thus drawing an ideal of a slim, competitive and democratic state.⁴ These forces were timely for being applied to and tested on post-socialist states during transition. As critics point out, while proclaiming transparency and individual freedom through market rules, current theories as to public administration and institutional political practices produce new

² Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age*, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles and London, 1984.

³ Michel Wieviorka, *Kulturelle Differenzen und kollektive Identitäten*, Hamburger Edition, Hamburg, 2003, p. 33.

⁴ Christoph Butterwegge et al., *Kritik des Neoliberalismus*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, 2008 (2nd ed.).

informal ways of decision making by fostering expertocracy and lobbyism instead.

Neoliberal ideas of appropriate current statehood do not only conjure up a minimized welfare state however, they also imagine a strong state, where executive organs are to be strengthened.⁵ In summary it can be said that the 1990s marked the triumph of neoliberalism, which succeeded not only in transforming statehood and democratic institutions but also society itself, all the more as informational politics displaced other forms of political articulation. Sociologists like Manuel Castells (in reference to Jean Marie Guehenno) concluded that the result of these transformations is a vanishing autonomous political subject, which is substituted by temporary coalitions.⁶ Sociologist Ulrich Beck described this phenomenon from the perspective of the post-industrial individualization. In view of the decline of collective identities and the coercion to build and to perform an individual self, Beck stresses a renaissance of political subjectivity.⁷ From his point of view it is not the loss of the political that marks our times but its shifting to subpolitics, to new political fields and agents, to economics, experts, temporary civil movements as well as to individuals.⁸ Additionally, in this light this shift also implies a destabilizing of traditional left-wing/right-wing divisions.

Hence, 1989 has not only changed the bipolar system of global political power but also the concepts of statehood and of politics as well as the predominant patterns for expression of political conflicts. These changes were slight but radical. As a consequence, the 'working class' vanished as a political term and a legitimate political subject. Something similar applies to feminism, as during the 1980s the notion of women's representation as a universal emancipative political subject was called into question.⁹ This process began in 1978, when several articles in the feminist journal *m/f*,¹⁰ criticized the then prevalent concepts on the reasons for women's suppression as prehistoric. Especially women of color challenged from within the predominant western feminist debates and their

⁵ Ivi, p. 249.

⁶ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, vol. 2 of *The Information Age. Economy, Society, and Culture*, Blackwell, Malden, Mass. and Oxford and West Sussex, 1997.

⁷ Ulrich Beck, *Die Erfindung des Politischen. Zu einer Theorie reflexiver Modernisierung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1993, pp. 152 and 155.

⁸ Ivi, p. 162.

⁹ Ernesto Laclau et al., *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Verso, London, 1985, pp. 1114-1122.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 155; Adams, Parveen et al. (eds.), *The Woman in Question: m/f*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1990.

notion of a universal female subject, as well as feminist post-colonial and poststructuralist feminist theorists. Judith Butler's book *Gender trouble* was also published in 1989. Its critique of politics of identity has deeply influenced the struggle for a feminist claim of a universal female subjectivity. I would like to stress at this point that it is no coincidence that the above mentioned theoretical references are mainly from the late 1980s and the 1990s. In fact, a renaissance of political and sociological themes, debates and terms discussed two decades ago can be observed in attempts to understand the current crisis of democratic societies and the strengthening of authoritarian regimes.¹¹ While at the eve of the 21st century two political identities that represented emancipative politics – working class and women – lost their discursive ground, at the same time ethnic, national and religious identities¹² juxtaposed post-identitarian or post-national theories and political practices.

Today, the question of how to become a social and a political subject is no longer the same as when it was put forward in the past century by workers, women and colonized people. In the end, it was not only Margaret Thatcher but also the decline of the socialist state that made the triumphant breakthrough of neoliberal thought and practices in Europe possible. However, the implementation of neoliberal governmentalities cannot be separated from a post-industrial development of global economics. The influence of neoliberal economic theory on decision makers which grew steadily from the 1940s onwards, found its first peak in the 1990s and has since radically changed ontological notions of sociality and social justice. Liberal and bourgeoisie perceptions of the human, of modern subjectivity, of individuality and freedom have not vanished but have been adapted to neoliberal requirements. Modern freedom, equated with the assurance of private freedom through judicial security and legal equality of all humans, have been substituted with an individualized freedom lived out in a risk-taking meritocracy, which is itself ruled by the market. From a neoliberal perspective, inequality is a necessary pre-requisite to achieve more efficiency. Political governance is no longer limited to state institutions but is accompanied by the internationalization of market principles and their coercive effects on every individual. Personal responsibility and – in Foucauldian

¹¹ Heinrich Geiselberger, "Preface of the editor", in idem (ed.), *The Great Regression*, Polity, Cambridge, 2017, <<http://www.thegreatregression.eu/preface-of-the-editor/>> (04/2018).

¹² Antony D. Smiths, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, pp. 221-226.

terms – self-guidance and self-governance have radicalized the image of a modern, autonomous and self-controlled subject. While until the 1990s a coherent identity was assumed to be an inevitable precondition for every individual person to act as a reasonable and autonomous subject, flexibility and adaptation of identities has become the postulated answer in present times.

A crucial point where these transformations intersect politically is the heightened significance of civil society in discourses on democratization processes, just as Ulrich Beck has anticipated more than two decades ago. Concurrently, the liberal notion of civil society as central political space, where interests and opinions should be expressed, was also adopted by neoliberal policies, as they forced the privatization of the welfare state and an informalization of political decision making. Critics of neoliberal policies point to the economization of the private sphere as well as of civil society and its effect on the subject as economic self.¹³ Also, institutions of civil society, especially NGOs were criticized for their role as a “Trojan horse for global neoliberalism”¹⁴ in fostering capitalist neo-colonialism.¹⁵ In the context of post-socialist Europe, notably women’s NGOs were the target of feminist criticism on neoliberal privatizations of welfare institutions, supported by imported concepts of “cultural feminism”¹⁶ or feminist anti-étatism and its privilege of “recognition over distribution”.¹⁷ A (not explicitly) feminist-critical, but rather more general forerunner is the critique of the impact of new social movements – and thus of feminism, too – on the stabilization of current capitalist neoliberal conditions. Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello formulated this thesis on discursive adaptations of anti-capitalist critique into a new capitalist practice in their work *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.¹⁸ They point to a fatal

¹³ Butterwege et al., *Kritik des Neoliberalismus*, cit.; Gabriele Michalitsch, *Die neoliberale Domestizierung des Subjekts. Von den Leidenschaften zum Kalkül*, Campus, Frankfurt am Main and New York, 2006.

¹⁴ Tina Wallace, “NGO Dilemmas: Trojan Horses for Global Neoliberalism?”, *Socialist Register*, 40, 2004, pp. 202-219.

¹⁵ James Petras et al., *Globalization Unmasked. Imperialism in the 21st Century*, Fernwood Pub., London, 2001; Joachim Hirsch, “The State’s New Clothes. NGO’s and the Internationalization of States”, *Rethinking Marxism*, 2, 2003, pp. 237-262.

¹⁶ Kirsten Ghodsee, “Feminism-by-Design. Emerging Capitalism, Cultural Feminism, and Women’s Nongovernmental Organizations in Postsocialist Eastern Europe”, *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 3, 2004, pp. 727-753, p. 728.

¹⁷ Nancy Fraser, “Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History”, *New Left Review*, 2, 2009, pp. 97-117, p. 113. See also Hester Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced. How Global Elites Use Women’s Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World*, Paradigm Publ., Boulder, Coll., 2009; in critical response to Fraser: Nanette Funk, “Contra Fraser on Feminism and Neoliberalism”, *Hypathia*, 1, 2013, pp. 179-196.

¹⁸ Luc Boltanski et al., *Le nouvel esprit de capitalisme*, Gallimard, Paris, 1999.

discursive process within social criticism, sparked by culturalist theories on social movements and their revolutionary moment in May 1968. From their perspective, a transformed notion of social justice is the fatal result for emancipative politics, as we don't speak of exploitations anymore but of exclusions. Referring to Boltanski and Chiapello, Nancy Fraser also stresses that leftist and feminist "critique of state-organized capitalism" enabled the breakthrough of "'project' capitalism" and its "flexible networks".¹⁹ In addition, the change in anti-capitalist critique weakened structural and critical analysis of social injustice while individual discrimination prevailed in social and gender theories.²⁰

The feminist argument on the complicity of women's NGOs with new global inequalities points to a fundamental dilemma of current democratic and also emancipative politics. Furthermore, the absence of the political articulation of sustained inequalities is connected to a loss of national political deliberation processes on the one hand, while on the other, national inequalities are inevitably entangled with global inequalities. The imagination of a universal feminist goal to fight for a more just and less violent future, not only addressing women but everyone who has to suffer from discrimination and suppression, has lost an obvious political subject in current 'post-identitarian' times. At the same time, through the integration of feminist claims and tools of gender mainstreaming European policies have also fostered feminist strategies and thus a further complicity with informal politics and the assurance of privileges.²¹ These considerations lead to the following questions: how can feminism deal with these complicities in unjust conditions? Which concepts does feminist theory offer for current and future political agency? Is the constitution of subjectivity crucial for political agency and do alternative concepts exist?

Culturalization and Epistemologization as Grave Diggers of Political Subjectivity

The above outlined current political dilemma is also part of hard-fought debates about the status of feminist theory, its

¹⁹ Fraser, *Feminism, Capitalism*, cit., p. 109.

²⁰ Günter Burkart, "Boltanski/Chiapello: Ein feministischer Geist im neuen Kapitalismus?", in Heike Kahlert et al. (eds.), *Zeitgenössische Gesellschaftstheorien und Genderforschung. Einladung zum Dialog*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2015, pp. 153-178.

²¹ Lisa Disch, "Representation", in Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2016, pp. 781-802.

epistemological foundation and its political implications. The criticism of a dominant culturalization of the political, expressed inside feminist debates, frequently raises claims for overcoming the de-constructivist legacy in feminist theory and practice. Inside German-speaking debates Rita Casale takes up the criticism of a still ongoing culturalization and the related epistemologization of the political in feminist theory.²² Concretely, she tackles Judith Butler's criticism of subject theory and her influence on current feminist knowledge. Her main argument uses Regina Becker-Schmidt's analysis of Foucault, which states him having substituted Freud's unconsciousness through discourse understood as cultural practices in order to explain Western sexuality regimes. She also points to the feminist challenge of representational politics as the turning point for a lost notion of a feminist subject. Both, she suggests, culminated in Butler's writings on gender and has resulted in an equation of subject and identity. I will use Casale's criticism as starting point for my further considerations on political agency for two reasons: first, since she summarizes current feminist debates and elaborates them in her criticism of Judith Butler as many other authors do; second, she puts the subject as politically relevant term forward, which made me curious about her criticism and her notion of future feminism. This chapter takes a closer look at the point of the culturalization of the political and searches for further links to describe present social and political developments. Following the above outlined

²² Rita Casale, "Subjekt feministisch gedacht. Zur Verwechslung von Subjekt und Identität in den Gender Studies", in Anne Fleig (ed.), *Die Zukunft von Gender. Begriffe und Zeitdiagnose*, Campus, Frankfurt am Main and New York, 2014, pp. 76-96; "Epistemologisierung und Kulturalisierung feministischer Theorien", in Barbara Rendtorff et al. (eds.), *40 Jahre Feministische Debatten. Resümee und Ausblick*, Beltz Juventa, Weinheim and Basel, 2014, pp. 150-161. Referring to an Italian analysis by Rosanna Rossanda and Antonio Negri, Casale sees 1968 as the crucial turning point for both, the political and theoretical developments. She juxtaposes Rossanda's diagnosis of the social movement's inability to build new forms of political representations with Antonio Negri's positive interpretation of the new political practices as centered on the multitude. But for Casale, the multitude stands also for the replacement of the idea of equality with a prevalence for the idea of difference. While drawing that historical line, she comes to the conclusion that the generation of 68 must be held responsible for fostering neoliberal individualized and flexible practices and thus, for the erosion of solidarity. Moreover, in her perspective, feminism played a double role in furthering these political changes, first, as part of the new social movements and second, as a supporter of postmodern theoretical thinking. According to her, Judith Butler's theoretical intervention in the feminist debates in the late 1980s has to be severely criticized for causing a shift from the philosophy of the subject and the question "how to become a subject" to identity as the fundamental source of the gender notion.

delineation of a history of changed concepts of a universal subject and its political implications, I will refer to newer sociological approaches to stress the relation between discourse, economy, social practice and their political results for subjects.

Casale states that second-wave feminist theory interpreted representation as an “authoritarian system” embedded in institutions like state, church, family, etc. and for this reason refused it.²³ This refusal joined forces with a new notion of the political that challenged the liberal separation between private and public under the slogan ‘the private is political’. She identifies this process as a de-institutionalization of politics that led to its culturalization and the domination of difference as political term.²⁴ In reference to Angela McRobbie she advocates a de-culturalization of feminist theory and a revival of political and social processes in feminist analysis. From her point of view, not a complete refusal of poststructuralism is necessary, but a critical analysis of terms like difference and gender; terms that were disseminated mainly if not exclusively through the popularity of Judith Butler’s writings. Casale closes her statement by asserting that these terms do not have the power to deconstruct the symbolical order anymore, rather they represent a current self-image of a “unrepresentable society”.²⁵ And thus, as a side effect, the ubiquity of these terms supports neoliberal politics of informalization as they foster a fundamental invisibility of political and social structures.

Casale’s intervention into current feminist debates aims to highlight the shortcomings of feminist alternatives while she objects to Butler’s stressing the discourse as a core concept of the construction of social reality. She interprets Butler’s *Gender Trouble* as an implicit disconfirmation of classical feminist subject theories. At the same time, she brings forward Carla Lonzi and Luce Irigaray as central representatives of classical feminism. Casale asserts that Lonzi’s and Irigaray’s aim was not to question the subject as foundation of modern politics but rather to claim a new understanding of the subject. In contrast, because of her de-constructivist and linguistic approach to the subject, Casale insinuates that Butler is ignorant of the need for a transcendental notion of the subject. Therefore, as she argues, Butler misinterprets the question of the constitution of the subject with the question of the construction of identity. And thus, subjectivation is no

²³ Rendtorff et al. (eds.), *40 Jahre Feministische Debatten*, cit., p. 156.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 159.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 161.

longer understood as a process of individualization, but as one of identification. Casale sees this as leading to the predominant dismissal of structural aspects in feminist analysis, to the rejection of the symbolical order of sexes/genders and the notion of patriarchy in feminist theory.

Although Butler criticizes the exclusions of liberal representational politics, from Casale's perspective the result of Butler's linguistic concept of 'iteration' is a perpetuated connection of the subject to the same criticized representational logic. In addition, she notes a dangerous conditionality between subjectivation and the construction of identities, as it offers only multiplication of identities for a political strategy. Casale sees the origin of these processes in a poststructural error, that is, the transferral of difference – seen as epistemological principle – to social relations.²⁶ She states that changing the social structures is no more the objective of political initiatives or parties. Social movements have rather shifted their focus on the fight for political and cultural autonomy. Therefore, the central political objective now seems to focus on the acknowledgment of several ways of life in political and cultural practices. In the end, her statements point to a necessary rethinking of feminist theory, as she asserts a reemergence of injustice and patriarchy and the need to return to a utopian feminist goal, including a re-adoption of the concept of women's subjectivity.

Although I will not relay Casale's accusations against Butler with the detailed apology of her writings, I think it is important to recall briefly the vehement debates that have accompanied Butler's publications since *Gender Trouble*. First criticisms mostly concentrated on the missing link to material corporality – perceived as linguistic monism – and the vanishing of a philosophical ground for feminist agency.²⁷ Not only *Bodies that Matter*²⁸ but also her following works have to be read as answers to this debate. Casale's point continues these criticisms in large parts. But she also interprets Butler's work in a not always comprehensible manner, for example when she insinuates that Butler ignores the constitution of subjects while focusing on

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ E.g. Barbara Duden, *Disembodying Women*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1993; Seyla Benhabib et al. (eds.), *Der Streit um Differenz. Feminismus und Postmoderne in der Gegenwart*, Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1994.

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Routledge, New York and London, 1993.

constructions.²⁹ Especially in this context, Casale seems rather to reflect the reception of a constructivist (German-speaking) 'Butlerian' discourse among feminists, than Butler's own arguments. Undoubtedly, especially *Gender Trouble* includes problematic elements, for although Butler aims to uncover that the notion of a modern subject is historically determined and thus points to the notion's transformability, her own discourse at the same time leaves the impression to be unhistorical, as her linguistic approach opens an abstract horizon for the constitution of social structures.³⁰ This criticism is a substantial point, not only if we are looking for opportunities for resistance but also for the transformations of current power relations.

Resistance to power relations is also a central topic in Isabell Lorey's theoretical considerations about gender, the constitution of the subject and political agency. Her acknowledgment of Butler's deconstruction of the subject as a universalist term includes at the same time a profound as well as continued criticism on the lack of distinction between power relations and authority: while Butler relies on Michel Foucault's concept of power as productive and constitutive for subjects, Lorey's criticism points to Butler's reinterpretation of power as normative relations and thus to a preference of authority in her analysis. In opposition to Foucault, who dissociates himself from juridical power models, Butler stresses that precisely these specific social mechanisms have a "universal effectiveness"³¹ and this fact, Lorey points out, leads to a paradoxical result, i.e. the construction of a symbolic 'outside' that creates a constitutional function for modern social relations and their system, which at the same time she criticizes. Another crucial effect of Butler's juridical model is the unintended reaffirmation of the traditional subject³² as well as a missing distinction between legal and symbolic laws.³³ While Butler is concerned not to reproduce the modernist autonomous and voluntarist subject, she eliminates the conception of self-relations. Thereby, her concept

²⁹ Casale, *Subjekt*, cit., p. 83.

³⁰ Paula-Irene Villa, *Judith Butler*, Campus, Frankfurt am Main and New York 2003, p. 149; Hanna Meißner, *Jenseits des autonomen Subjekts. Zur gesellschaftlichen Konstitution von Handlungsfähigkeit im Anschluss an Butler, Foucault und Marx*, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2011.

³¹ Isabell Lorey, *Immer Ärger mit dem Subjekt. Theoretische und politische Konsequenzen eines juristischen Machtmodells: Judith Butler*, edition diskord, Tübingen, 1996, p. 69.

³² From this point of view, Casale rightly criticizes Butler to reproduce the criticized logic of representation.

³³ Ivi, pp. 105 and 107.

of subjectivation stresses the coercion of normative structures but does not allow resistant practices, that affirm non-intelligible subject positions.

Hence, the core problem of *Gender Trouble* is not an implicit abandonment of 'women' as political subject – as Butler clearly argues for an open and transformative notion of both, women and subject, as discursive terms – but the narrowing of power relations to hegemonic normative laws and thus to institutionalized authority. Lorey's own concept of subjectivation combines Butler and Foucault but broadens them. She speaks for a more complex model of subjectivation as "individual interconnection of discourses", combining not only local and hegemonic power relations but simultaneously individual practices.³⁴ In this manner, the individual is the origin for resistance and its practices while at the same time being defined as constituted through its peculiarity and universality. The feminist debate about equality and difference, which is closely connected to arguments on subject positions, loses its agonistic character in Lorey's concept of an ambivalent subject as she contends both aspects.³⁵

Lorey's concept of subjectivation enables us to clear the above outlined current feminist debate about a lost notion of an emancipative subject from two perspectives, without totally discarding poststructuralism. Firstly, Lorey's explanations show the productive but also problematic parts in Butler's theory while her own definition of subjectivation and agency questions its critical range. Secondly, she makes clear that Butler's performative pluralization of identities as answer to normative invocations of the subject remains limited in offering new options for transformative politics because of her juridical model. Concurrently, the central position of identities in subjectivation processes should not be read as universal and determining for the individual but rather as a current historical condition for subjectivation. While Butler's options for transformative practices – capable to shift the normative framework of subjectivations – remains confined to resignification and performative iteration and its dismissal, Lorey opens up the horizon for individual agency. Thus, Lorey makes it clear that blaming Butler for fostering culturalization, epistemologization and the loss of a universal notion of subjectivity does not lead to a deeper comprehension of current political developments. Casale is right

³⁴ Ivi, p. 151.

³⁵ In accordance to Lorey, the self has to be read as interconnection, produced by power relations constituted as actions on actions of others. Ivi, p. 153.

when she points to the problematic influences of identity politics on current culturalized justifications of political differentiations. Moreover, the phenomenon of culturalization and its social and political meaning has to be scrutinized through a wider lens. At the same time, one must be aware of the fact that the history of feminist critical theory is closely bound up with the analysis of cultural representations and practices as part of power relations.

From Culturalization to Representation: Power Relations in Post-Industrial Times

The aforementioned arguments on current culturalizations have to be seriously taken into account when we are looking for a transformed notion of the political, its origins and its results for political agency; but we also have to sharpen and widen our view at these phenomena. While I see the juxtaposing of terms without explaining their history and current meaning as a specific problem in Casale's argumentation, another point in the whole discussion seems to me more striking: and that is the general absence of a more complex attempt to find social, economic and political reasons for the current crisis of a feminist – or more general – a democratic and emancipatory utopia. From my point of view, filling this heuristic gap is necessary, all the more as many current critical voices like Casale's advocate a return to structures. Hence there can be no doubt that we have to face our own complicities with current social and political structures, as feminists as well as Western and/or Northern citizens in a post-socialist and globalized world. Confronted with rising social injustice and new affirmations of authoritarian political attitudes, parties and states, we are obligated to reconsider our feminist discourses, terms, theories as well as our practices. However, arguments based only on the feminist discourse can be misleading insofar as they overestimate the influence of feminism or of particular scientific theories like poststructuralism on society. Even if we look closer at the development of feminism since the 1980s, we have to admit that the poststructuralist approach to social reality is only one of several tendencies that have emerged since then. Especially in Germany – but in other European countries, too – constructivism has been dominating the humanities for the last twenty years while radical feminism closed ranks with conservative attitudes.³⁶ According to these insights, blaming one

³⁶ Ilse Lenz, "Die unendliche Geschichte?", in *Die Neue Frauenbewegung in Deutschland. Abschied vom kleinen Unterschied. Ausgewählte Quellen*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, pp. 11-28.

intellectual tendency for a social and political development falls short of explaining political circumstances in present times. From a sociological perspective it seems more plausible that we are confronted with a fundamental shift in a social logic as effect of a radicalized modernist political process.

While Isabell Lorey finds a balanced approach to the modernist division into a universal and a particular social logic allowing her to foster a transformative concept of a resistant and emancipative subjectivity, sociological analyses from the last two decades testify a pushing back against universality as central idea to organize social and political collectivities. In his latest book *The Society of Singularities* sociologist Andreas Reckwitz summarizes multiple insights into the social transformations we are confronted with since the 1970s.³⁷ There he seeks to formulate a far reaching social theory, to explain the processes of culturalization through the lens of cultural sociology. From this perspective, feminism and its political output is just one brick among many in the wall that is a post-industrial social reality in which we reside. As Reckwitz convincingly shows, the politicization of cultural identities, the central argument not only in Rita Casale's polemic, is only one aspect in an ongoing process of culturalization. Whilst Ulrich Beck fostered the idea of a progressive modernist individualization in the 1990s, Reckwitz pleads for 'singularization' as a more appropriate term to characterize present societies. His core argument is a reversion of the modernist logic from universality to particularity while he is also stressing that both concepts are inherent parts of modernist thinking.³⁸ Thus, universality still plays an important role in the organization of modern societies although we are witnessing that it is put on the defensive. Historically, social principles like universalism, justice and equality and their political rise are closely bound to the era of industrial modernism and its statehood. The socialist state not only took part in this modernist principle but radicalized the concept of universality still more, claiming the accordance of representatives and represented alike.

Whereas others blame new social movements for this development from universalism to singularization, Reckwitz detects post-industrial economy and technology as the main sources for the deep structural cut we are confronted with. In accordance to him, a new 'cultural capitalism' appreciates

³⁷ Andreas Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten. Zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 2017.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 11.

cultural goods while industrial goods are devaluated. In addition, this process is linked up with a profound conversion of labor and markets as well as accompanied by the digital revolution, producing a ubiquitous cultural machine.³⁹ The acceleration perceived in the culturalization of sociality and its political consequences have thus to be analyzed through social structures, and here I agree with Casale. If we turn her claim sociologically and look at current culturalization processes under the lens of singularizations, an image of an inner revolution emerges, which points to culture as a system of valorizations. These valorization processes produce a relentless regime of permanent visibility. We should also be aware, as Reckwitz keeps insisting, that these structural processes of culturalization and valorization are not phenomena that represent a universal principle but are supported by a new transnational and academically educated middle class. At the same time, these changes affect society as a whole. In the end, there has emerged a new cultural class structure that replaced the leveled middle class, which shaped western fordistic as well as true socialist societies after World War II.⁴⁰ An adjunct as 'cultural class society' suggests that now cultural and not coercively economic capital causes an appreciation or depreciation of subjects, life styles and its class representatives. Additionally, neoliberal state governmentality supports this logic of 'singularization' as valorization of the cultural particular by urbanization and public policy management tools.⁴¹ Therefore, political conflicts inside the nation state appear as cultural conflicts: the struggle for the right to represent society is now going to be crucial, especially in times that are experienced as crises of democracy and that in fact comprise a crisis of universality.

After these insights into present transformations of social structures, it seems naïve to claim simply for a de-culturalization of feminism, all the more as we are bound to the same social logic we are criticizing: we, as socially and politically involved academics, are inevitably part of a new cultural middle class, whether our parents were of bourgeoisie, proletarian or rural origin, whether we have personal histories of migration or not, whether we have much or little economic capital; and that is because we can play the card of cultural capital. At this point, let me turn to Maria Pía Lara's discussion of current feminist debates about the

³⁹ Ivi, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Ivi, pp. 273-285.

⁴¹ Ivi, pp. 371-393.

culturalization of the political, as she adds an important aspect when putting forward the topic of representation. Her analysis clearly states that the problem of feminist epistemologizations of the political through subject theory is mainly connected with the question 'who is allowed to speak for whom'. By giving this epistemic topic a prominent place in feminist debates, the necessary reconsideration of the question "whose voice from where and why should be heard" loses its political notion.⁴² Instead, we have to face now that especially representation as political topic underwent a culturalization and cultural essentialism overthrows the master: personal or collective identities are not pluralized and flexible for everyone, as Judith Butler postulates, but only for a culturally privileged middle class. This does not mean that hegemonic culturalized and post-industrial subjectivations stop at class borders. Rather, the individual social and psychosomatic effect of neoliberal subjectivations differs in accordance with the capital which subjects are able to reactivate. As a result, symbolic representations signify whether or not an individual or a group is able to take up valuable subject-positions: While in this symbolic order the yoga-shaped body of the academic middle class ranks highly, the body-building man has got depreciated as representative of a dull underclass masculinity. Heroic, working-class masculinity has vanished as desirable social and political subjectivation together with the working class as a political vanguard.⁴³ While it seems doubtful if mourning for working class heroism is in accordance with emancipative feminist politics, it should not be doubted that the devaluation of subjectivities does not agree with the aim of a just society.

Thus, through his cultural sociological perspective Reckwitz offers a comprehension of subjectivation as practice, understood as constituted through "implicit, mostly unknown, systematically diffuse ... cultural codes resp. semantics and symbolical orders".⁴⁴

⁴² María Pía Lara, "Das feministische Imaginäre", in Brigitte Bargetz et al. (eds.), *Kritik und Widerstand. Feministische Praktiken in androzentrischen Zeiten*, Verlag Barbara Budrich, Opladen, Berlin, Toronto, 2015, pp. 151-167, p. 163.

⁴³ See Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft*, cit., pp. 359-363. Thus, fixed collective identities offer a resistant practice to these depreciations. Although the rise of right-wing parties cannot be explained only through this analytic lens.

⁴⁴ Paula-Irene Villa, "Subjekte und ihre Körper. Kulturosoziologische Überlegungen", in Julia Graf et al. (eds.), *Geschlecht zwischen Struktur und Subjekt. Theorie, Praxis, Perspektiven*, Verlag Barbara Budrich, Opladen and Berlin and Toronto, 2013, pp. 59-78, p. 59. Villa refers here to this book: Andreas Reckwitz, *Unscharfe Grenzen. Perspektiven der Kulturosoziologie*, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2008.

At the same time, practice is situated in an individual situation but always related to discourses and their codes. According to Paula-Irene Villa the 'practical turn' in cultural sociology allows an analysis of subjectivation as a simultaneous process of constitution and construction.⁴⁵ This approach has the advantage to situate the constitution of subjects in social interactions that (re)produce necessary social as well as individual conditions for individual and collective agency. As I see it, political subjectivity can be understood as part of an intertwined social logic of producing individual and collective subjectivity. Hence, political theory is one of many discourses that offer semantics and narratives for the constitution of political subjectivity in particular historical circumstances. Collective semantics thus play a crucial role for political agency as they offer a language and narratives to produce and to express shared ideas of political orders. In his theory of recognition, Axel Honneth emphasizes that the relation between individual experiences of injury and collective resistance has to be constituted through an "intersubjective framework for interpretations".⁴⁶

Similar to Honneth, Lara's intervention in the debate about culturalizations in feminist theory points precisely to the importance of cultural representations not only for critical feminist analysis but also for emancipative political agency. Her theoretical and methodological approach to grasping the relation between the individual and the collective, as well as between social experience and political agency, is conceptual history in the sense of Reinhart Koselleck. From her point of view, the analysis of the "imprints, the modification and the position of particular concepts in the symbolic imaginary" leads to a comprehension of political revolutions.⁴⁷ Thus, the revaluation of political semantics is a practical key to open new horizons for political agency. Therefore, feminist critical readings of cultural representations of women were crucial for dismantling masculinist images of society and their universalist interpretations but also for opening a wide-ranging feminist imagination of political agency. Successfully redefined concepts like universality and democracy are important milestones on a feminist pathway to equality and emancipative political practices: "In symbolic actions [in the 1970s] fights for freedom were enacted as drama".⁴⁸ Obviously, Lara's semiotic understanding of culture

⁴⁵ Villa, *Subjekte*, cit., p. 60.

⁴⁶ Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte. Mit einem neuen Nachwort*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1994, p. 262.

⁴⁷ Lara, *Das feministische Imaginäre*, cit., p. 159.

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 161.

neither supports the above outlined sociological perspective on singularities nor a political one that focuses on identity politics. Instead, Lara offers a comprehension of political subjectivity that cannot be established through epistemology but through collective agency. A transcendental notion of the subject, like the one Casale is promoting, cannot be deemed a fertile ground for the political. Furthermore, the subject is the result of social and political agency, on the one hand. On the other, agency itself and the constituted subject are linked to a modern social imaginary and its normative symbolic frame. Lara's position retains the importance of cultural representation of social semantics. The public space therefore still plays the predominant role for political struggles since that is the place where concepts like democracy and equal rights have to be overthrown and rearranged.⁴⁹

Feminized Representations of Neoliberal Power in Neo-Colonial Times

In the last part of this article, I would like to focus on the question of how women's agency and their subjectivity is represented in current critical cultural practices as part of a public space, where imaginations of the political in general and of political subjectivity in particular are defined. In a wider spectrum of modern forms of cultural representations, theater has a specific place in representing the political. Plays are able to tell stories and arguments in a concentrated manner, as they offer narratives, explanations and argumentations on political conflicts. Especially since the bourgeois state-supportive and nation building theater mirrors the political discourse by representations of individual relationships and their conflicts. Canonically, Jürgen Habermas defined its role as being one of the central media in the development of a modern, bourgeois and political, public space.⁵⁰ The immediate presence of the audience and its responsiveness offers a public space for the creation of an esthetic, social or political community. Performativity and narrativity, bound together and presented on the scene, offer collective imaginations of a universal moral ground of the community. At the same time, Hegel's concept of an indispensable and previously bourgeois subjectivity is also a necessary part of Habermas' new concept of public space: for only the modern autonomous subject allows the division of public and

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 165.

⁵⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Luchterhand, Neuwied, 1962.

private space, of state and society, of family and state. From the 19th century onwards, theater with its canon and reinterpretations is a central media of bourgeois self-reassurance.

Theater also offers the opportunity to react directly to political conflicts, however, and thus has the power to change perceptions, narrations and languages by its articulation of current complex social and political relations. From this perspective, Milo Rau's theater play *Compassion. The History of the Machine Gun* seems to perfectly illustrate the connection between neoliberal colonialism and NGOs. *Compassion* was premiered at Berlin's Schaubühne in 2015 and continues Rau's work on traumatic or highly debated political experiences. Rau uses the concept of reenactment as a performative device for the theater stage, confronting the audience with its own involvement in the emergence of political violence. Already in 2011, his staging of the Rwandan genocide of the Tutsi by the Hutu (1994) in the play *Hate Radio* at Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) in Berlin attracted interest among theater people and critics. The play presented the call to systematic genocidal violence through the popular radio shows of the Kigali radio station RTLM, which functioned like an agitator for the genocide, while transmitting its mixture of pop-music, denunciation of hidden Tutsi, political pamphlets and incitements to murder.⁵¹ Political violence, a central motif in Rau's work, soaks in by stage-managing documentary methods, that confront the audience with fragments from the real incident. Using a collage of testimonies and real locations combined with fictive characters and esthetic elements, the play does not simply re-enact an incomprehensible historical situation but compresses a historical experience into its fictionalization. Rau uses Sergej Eisenstein's vanguard notion of truth as result of fiction, a truth that is not identical with scientific truth. With this reference to the Russian avant-garde he also distances himself from postmodern concepts of art and its political relativizations.⁵²

In his play *Compassion. The History of the Machine gun*, the war in Rwanda serves again as point of departure. But looking through the lens of European involvement in NGOs in Congo, deciphered as cynical humanism, the play points at European entanglements and their violent consequences for the whole region. At the beginning of the play, Consolate Sipérius, a Belgian actress, tells the audience her story and talks about her memories of the murder

⁵¹ Milo Rau, *Hate Radio. Materialien, Dokumente, Theorie*, Verbrecher Verlag, Berlin, 2014.

⁵² Ivi, pp. 159, 228, 243.

of her parents in Burundi in 1993, which the murderers forced her to watch, and about her adoption in Belgium as a child. Her sheer existence references a European ignorance about the massacres in the neighborhood of Rwanda. While she talks about herself and her experience of discriminations in Europe, the audience discovers that she is worried to be engaged as actress only because of her blackness, and her fear comes true in the shape of Swiss actress Ursina Lardi, while Sipérius is sitting silently during the whole play in the shadow behind the white main character. Sipérius is reduced to her own story as European unconscious, while Lardi talks cynically about Syrian refugees as ‘hipster boys in Greek camps’ and her former engagement in a NGO called *Teachers in Conflict* in Congo. Intertwining several European biographical experiences with the Congolese violence, Milo Rau has the main character commit her own entanglement in the violence.

Hence, European humanitarian actions in Africa seem to be not only inefficient but they even make things worse as in the case of the perpetrators of the Tutsi genocide. NGOs not only helped Hutu to find an exile in the neighboring Congo but were also passively watching the massacre, when the Tutsi-Army came across the border from Rwanda to take revenge for the murders. In the end, telling this story and admitting that she felt satisfaction, Lardi states with tears in her eyes and a machine gun in the hand, that the question of life or death is decided by the fact, who owns the machine gun. The upsetting result is that after all these centuries of Imperialism and still ongoing economic exploitation of resources, Europeans are not capable to do anything helpful. Thus, Lardi visualizes through her tears the cynical humanism of Western politics as self-referred emotions. At this point there is no way out of this dilemma. When the play ends with Sipérius oversized smiling face at the video screen, talking about her Tarantinian revenge-phantasy, it seems that this reflexive moment does not lead anywhere, as we who are meant to confront ourselves with our responsibility are sitting in the audience and applauding. We have come full circle.

Milo Rau’s Brechtian interventions in our European wellness-consciousness evoke Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s claim for acknowledgement of our own complicities.⁵³ Spivak’s post-colonial contribution to poststructuralist debates has made the

⁵³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999.

potentiality of an emancipative subject much more complicated in present times. On one hand, she points at the complicities of Western leftist intellectuals with colonializing knowledges and their lack of reflection of their own dominant position when supporting agency but not representations of the suppressed. On the other hand, she also demonstrates how colonized societies themselves cannot read the signs of the subaltern, especially of subaltern women. Hence and most vitally, her de-constructivist approach hints at the necessity of “acknowledgment of complicity” as well as at the relationship between conceptual, aesthetic and political representation.⁵⁴ Her radical notion of criticism, which at a first glance seems to miss a political or ethical ground to constitute a powerful subject, leads us to the core of recent debates about a missing utopia and thus a missing subject of change. To acknowledge complicity means to acknowledge that every critical agency has to take the risk of failure because we are always bound to the same structures we are criticizing.

In his essay “What to Do? A Critique of the Postmodern Reason”, Rau calls into question the auto-reflexive mechanism of the postmodern *critique automatique*, well-practiced in western cultural institutions.⁵⁵ His polemic conclusion is that de-construction has replaced confrontation, improvement has replaced change and that our comprehension of the ungovernable global neo-liberal power fits our pseudo-criticism.⁵⁶ From this point of view, it seems that post-modernity is everywhere at work since the decline and fall of communism and its claim for universalism: not only in post-politics and their PR-strategies, in the big and small global economies or in the topsy-turvy logic of right-wing or conservative populism but mostly in our leftist consumer critique and our self-satisfied reflective self-criticism.⁵⁷ Finally, there is a striking moment when Rau puts his finger on our complicity with political and economic power and with neoliberal globalization against the backdrop that we are lacking an answer on new right-

⁵⁴ Disch, *Representation*, cit., p. 794.

⁵⁵ Milo Rau, *Was tun? Kritik der Postmodernen Vernunft*, Kein and Aber, Zürich, 2013, pp. 40, 50-51.

⁵⁶ Ivi, pp. 54-55.

⁵⁷ Two years later, in an interview Milo Rau relativized his obsession with the “postmodern” critique as outdated and too excessive. Instead he put forward the term “cynical humanism” in order to describe present political circumstances with their double-edged and in the end disastrous outcomes. Rolf Bossart, “Was ist zynischer Humanismus?”, 2015, <<https://www.hundertvierzehn.de/artikel/was-ist-zynischer-humanismus-ein-gespraech-ueber-macht-und-ohnmacht-der-zukunft-von-milo-rau>>.

wing populism. But what would be an appropriate answer to the Leninian question “What to do?” and its de-construction of the current critique-culture, particularly after poststructuralist criticisms of the modernist subject and of identity-politics? What can we do against global injustice and exploitation combined with our neoliberal self-subjection? Milo Rau’s answer remains Hegelian and Leninian when claiming a “utopian dialectics”⁵⁸ that unites “revolt and social justice”⁵⁹ by constructing a new sociality, a new global realism. His play *Compassion* continues this furiousness, pointing at us, the bourgeois audience.

But why does Milo Rau choose two women to represent our European complicity and failed subjectivity through our gaze on African grievances? It is easy to draw a connection between Rau’s play and the above-mentioned feminist debate about women’s complicities with current political neo-colonizations: women seem to perfectly represent hypercritical humanitarianism, neoliberal complexities in power relations, failed political agency after one century of emancipation and at the same time, women represent the new emancipative claims, now coming from Africa. Isn’t Milo Rau just right because Western women *are* simply the easiest prey for capitalist complicities and neoliberal technics of self-guidance while still breaking their back to be recognized as serious subjects? Is *our* mis-agency simply the result of ‘second postmodernism’ and European ‘cynical humanism’, embedded in feminist NGOs? Is the only way out a renewed sense of dialectics and, in addition, a Hegelian subjectivity as Rau seems to suggest?⁶⁰

From a feminist stance, one answer could be to accuse Milo Rau of evoking a masculinist action program for a new leftist utopian heroism, while relying on Lenin as totalitarian humanist and utopist as well as anarcho-voluntarist revolutionizer. Rau’s apology of modernist voluntarism must be suspected to mask the androcentric ground that nourishes the modernist tradition of thought and its masculine autonomous and active subjectivity. Subsequently, illustrations of women as agents of NGOs, who embody the “cynical humanism” of our days, can be read as being caught in the old trap of gendered representations. Why do women in post-socialist times have to represent the post-modern death of the subject as well as the neoliberal entanglement in a net of invisible

⁵⁸ Rau, *Was tun?*, cit., p. 66.

⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 64.

⁶⁰ Bossart, *Humanismus*, cit. The accusation of a de-politicization of global politics and its replacement through humanism, i.e. in other words NGOs, is a central argument in Boltanski’s and Chiapello’s above cited book.

power relations? Are we confronted with a renewed burden of representation that gives the immateriality of social reproduction a female body? We should also ask – in view of women carrying images of sociality and collectivity since the ancient cultures, especially in nation-building processes⁶¹ – whether the neoliberal disciplined and self-responsible still fit this logic of representation? What do these images tell us about gendered subjectivities? Is it not fallacious to point to gendered representation again – and thus to cultural formations of a toothless current criticism and its hypocritical compassion with the victims of global violence and poverty? Would this suspicious interpretation last if we used the heuristic tool of making the author unknown?

Again, María Pía Lara's methodological lens can help us out: according to her, political anticipation is necessary to enable political agency; this approach offers an interpretation of humanitarian work as substitute for an emptied social imaginary, caused by a leftist welfare policy. Her conclusion, in accordance to Boltanski and Chiapello, is that these kinds of politics have led to a loss of consciousness of the significance of social movements as necessary agents for social transformations.⁶² This conversion of the political imaginary results in a shift of perception towards the underprivileged, who were imagined as passive subjects while neoliberal subjects are perceived as flexible, performance-orientated, and thus as active and successful. The relation between Sipérius as Europe's backyard and Lardi as humanist missionary in Africa mirrors these subject positions. The gendered dimension of this relationship can be found on a metonymic level, as Sipérius represents the effeminate Africa and Lardi a masculinized Europe, while the racist colonial discourse of hyper-masculinized African masculinity as well as the universal European androcentrism is replaced by neoliberal valorizations of active and passive. This difference makes solidarity between these two women unlivable. There seems to be no collective or shared imaginary that would lead to a prospective common agency.

Instead, urinating Lardi remains lonesome in the moment of watching helpless atrocities while revanche promising Sipérius has become the representative of the exploited African continent. By changing the position of active and passive of these two characters their subjectivation was not simply turned around but a historical, nostalgic shift from neoliberalism to vanguard modernity was

⁶¹ Nira Yuval Davis, *Gender and Nation*, Sage, London and Thousand Oaks, 1998.

⁶² Lara, *Das feministische Imaginäre*, cit., pp. 156-157.

achieved. This shift imagines a modernist subject as described above; but there is still no collective visible. It's the lonely heroine who anticipates rebellion and resistance but whilst the resistance of Sipérius aims at an autonomous subjectivity, Lardi's emotional convulsion indicates also resistance to the situation. Lardi's leaking tears and urine can be read as bodily resistance against the power relations and her own complicity. Her resistance is not a result of a preceding subjectivity but of her body as a self-willed part of the individual. The derailment of the body thus can be read as starting point for a new political subjectivity, as it has the power to actuate changes and shifts within a representational system. This bodily resistance must be combined with a change of our social imaginary through a struggle with meanings of political concepts and collective subjects. We have to face the question of how the concept of universality as a motor for democratic processes can be renewed under current social and political conditions which are fostered by economies and technology. How can we begin to be resistant against a government of singularized individuals, produced in an ongoing implementation of the particular as a hegemonic social logic, while we are part of the same cultural machine that produces exactly these singularized subjects and collectives? Lorey calls attention to the fact that the struggle for enlarged identity concepts is a struggle about the position of the individual, fought as struggle for the right to be different and as critique against those conditions that separate her from others.⁶³ "We do have the opportunity to reject the modes of subjectifications that govern us".⁶⁴ Finally, the individual resistance opens the horizon for new collective practices of resistance, identified in a renewed importance of assemblies, as Judith Butler puts forward⁶⁵ or Lorey calls to attention, a new notion of a democracy as presentist.⁶⁶ We, as feminists, have the duty to support emancipative practices through our own practice and writing, and thus to rearticulate political subjectivity as the feminist utopian horizon.

⁶³ Ivi, p. 157.

⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 158.

⁶⁵ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2015.

⁶⁶ Isabell Lorey, "Non-representationist, Presentist Democracy", 2011, <<http://transversal.at/transversal/1011/lorey/en>> (04/2018); I. Lorey, *State of Insecurity. Government of the Precarious*, Verso, London, 2015; idem, "Die Wiederkehr revolutionärer Praxen in der infinitiven Gegenwart", in I. Lorey et al., *Foucaults Gegenwart. Sexualität – Sorge – Revolution*, transversal texts, Wien and Linz, 2016, pp. 77-111.

Thoughts on *Being Late*: (Re)presentational Case Study of Rijeka's Center for Women's Studies

Brigita Miloš

Summary

In my proposal I address one of the numerous dilemmas that have arisen during the process of setting up of the Center for Women's Studies (CWS) at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, the dilemma of representation. In the context of this paper the word 'representation' needs to be understood in terms of voicing, promoting or standing for and my approach to it consists of two lines of argumentation. First, positioning of the CWS as an academic unit in the actuality of post-feminism or the problem of late beginning. Second, positioning of the CWS in the local context or the problem of beginning late. Concluding remarks point towards the slippery ground of proxy-situations, but likewise, to the position of new *figural* possibility.

On Motivations

The most frequent remark I have heard after missing the conference on the feminist future I intended to participate in, and on which this volume of proceedings is based, was: "It could have happened to anyone". By all means that is true, but not a bit comforting. After my more or less successful dealing with not at all flattering thoughts about my scheduling (and other) skills, the fact of being out of time (and space) – of being late – started to reveal itself as a core metaphor and the primary incentive of my paper.

The primary intention regarding my paper consisted in summing up a plethora of conversations, suggestions, thoughts, dilemmas, considerations and decisions related to the process

of establishing the Center for Women's Studies of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, Croatia.¹

Although not entirely without thoughts on the concept of 'being late', the presentation was to be made without much attention (or at least with an unwillingness of admission) to the fact that setting up the Center was done within (in spite of?) some unfavourable preconditions. The condition of time, in its linear sense of succession, irreversibility and progress(ion), begs particular emphasis. Put more concretely: the fact of being some half a century late in building the Centre had not initially been one of my main concerns. Since the intent has by chance (and in an irony of life, to be sure) been changed, I have found myself in an atmosphere of 'being late' in more than just one sense of the word. Various forms of 'being late' just fit into each other smoothly, opening up a new angle of approaching the topic. This newly discovered perspective shifted the initial idea of collecting and sorting out all the different argumentations regarding the aims, goals or purposes of the Centre, subsumed under the question of "how was it done?", into an essay on "when (and where) was it done?". The fact of 'being late' opened up the possibility of thinking through the circumstantial features of Rijeka's Centre for Women's Studies by asking questions such as: what is it that an academic unit such as Rijeka's Centre

¹ The specificity of Rijeka's Center is the fact that it is the only centre of this kind within the academic institutions of the Republic of Croatia. It has been founded three years ago and primarily functions as a research unit. It has no legal personality; and it is an integral part of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, just as all other scientific and research centres in this institution. The professional and research projects that Rijeka's Centre is implementing to date are the core of its activity. Eventual opening of the Rijeka Centre's educational program will largely depend on the University's budget policy, the Centre's (successful) involvement in infrastructure management and lobbying for its activities within the administrative and managerial levels of the institution(s) of which it is an integral part (the Faculty of Humanities and the University of Rijeka). Although there have been courses in the Croatian higher education curricula that include themes and issues from the field of women's or gender studies, it must be stressed out that there is no separate, academic verified programme in the mentioned scientific area in the present moment. But there are legitimate Gender studies as one of the segments of the Croatian scientific classification system, as one of the results of the long-standing (institutionalising) efforts form the part of the gender/woman studies researchers in Croatia. In that sense, it must be highlighted in this article the Centre for Women's Studies in Zagreb. Although not a part of the academic setting, the Zagreb Centre not only successfully fulfils the emptiness of the above mentioned educational segment, offering the only educational programme in the field of women's studies in the Republic of Croatia at the moment but is also recognised as a leading institution regarding feminist or gender issues in the local context.

represents in the (local) academic milieu as well as in the (local) social surrounding at the beginning of the 21st century? Are today's centres for women's studies a sort of pale versions of (progressive academic) units of the (mid) 20th century? Or are they maybe just helplessly passé? What does it mean to come to a certain end (the Centre) on the (many times proclaimed) end of a certain matter (the death of feminism(s))? What is it that the Centre stands for today? Is the term 'proxy' a plausible notion to describe various representative phenomena encompassing an academic women's studies unit at the beginning of the 21st century? Is it too late to indicate the future using the feminist pointer?

There are many ways to address the proposed dilemmas, and I have chosen to focus on the notion of 'standing for' or 'representing'. My choice is heavily grounded in the belief that academic endeavours are never deprived of or dissociated from the broader public and political realm. They constitute a functional and vital part of those fields, and as a public speaking/acting subject, the academy traditionally occupies a place of power and authority, engaging respective areas of problems or interests together with numerous other social factors. Therefore, my stake here is in the representational as political or at least publicly recognised as proactive/prosocial.

The notion of standing for or representing within the frame of feminist theory in general, exceeds the limits and purposes of this paper. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the usual conceptual/epistemological divergence of the term representation consists of its understanding as an aesthetic feature and/or as one belonging to the discourse of politics.² As Lisa Disch stresses in her entry "Representation", the complexity of relations between political and aesthetic/semiotic/cultural representation opens up a new space of their mutual and intertwined investigations.³ Those inquiries emphasised the importance of contextual correlations consistent with and constituted for various types of representative practices. In that regard, she compares three approaches: "feminist discussion on vamps (cultural representation) with visibility (historical

² See for example Ray Chow, "Gender and Representation", in Misha Kavka and Elisabeth Bronfen (eds.), *Feminist Consequences. Theory for the New Century*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2001, pp. 38-57.

³ Lisa Disch, "Representation", in Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2016, pp. 781-802.

representation) and voice (political representation)".⁴ In the case of cultural and historical representations Disch writes:

[f]eminist historians have made important contributions to theorizing representation both by representing women through writing "women's history" and also by historicizing the categories (such as "woman" and "lesbian") through which women have been represented. They have analyzed sexual difference not as a basis for men's and women's different roles but as a force that helps to stabilize hierarchies of class and race. Such insights, like those of feminist film theorists, were pathbreaking not only for scholars who work on women and gender but beyond.⁵

The part I find closest to my agenda is the third one, i.e. the voice (political representation), so I shall focus on presenting the third part of Disch's analyses.

Even though they might be seen as a sort of rhetorical deciphering or the 'confessing animal' in action, the following lines are an attempt to clarify the 'opt for political' of this paper. Although a form of an explanation of the political aspect of my paper shall, hopefully, arise from my proposed analyses, I nevertheless would like to highlight a somewhat broader perspective which, in a way, potentiates my analysis. When speaking about 'politics' and feminism, Linda Zerilli reflects on the notion of politics understood as a "(mere) means to an end" or the instrumentalist conception of the politics (the concept close and connected to identity politics), and writes:

... to think about feminist politics outside a means-ends instrumental idioms is not to relinquish the idea that political activity can strive for and achieve certain goals. it is to question the view, first, that the attainment of the goals exhausts the meaning of feminist politics and, second, that to act politically we must be able to control the outcome of our actions, foretell in advance what their consequences will be. This view of politics as excluding unpredictability forgets that whenever we act, we do so into a context of other human wills and intentions that we can never fully know in advance. We can never know in certainty how other political actors will take up our actions; political action always exceeds political actors' predictions and control.⁶

⁴ Ivi, p. 782.

⁵ Ivi, pp. 790-791.

⁶ Linda Zerilli, "Politics", in Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, cit., p. 644.

On the Insights into the *Voice*⁷

Disch opens up the third part of her analysis by discussing the case of Sojourner Truth and (her famous) call of being a woman. The question of who *rightly* represents, is reformulated as follows: “The concern is not to ask who speaks for a ‘we’ but to interrogate how that ‘we’ is pictured and to analyse the possibilities and constraints on action that produces such picturing”.⁸ Further, she distinguishes three different approaches upheld by feminist theories of political representation in research or in relation to aesthetic representation. The first and often unavoidable author when representation is in question is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Disch elaborates on her essays in “History” as a rethinking and repackaging of two earlier essays, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives”, which parse the problem of representation into its historical, aesthetic, and political elements. Spivak maintains that, first, *vertreten* (political representation as speaking for) and *darstellen* (material or constitutive representation as picturing, depicting, portraying)⁹ are complicit. Second, she affirms that this “complicity” or “identity-in-difference” is the “place of practice”. The “complicity” of political and aesthetic representation is that acts of political representation follow the more or less explicit constitution-by-picturing of the subject to be represented:

This picturing might take place figuratively, by means of rhetoric; cartographically, by mapping a terrain; or symbolically, by way of identifying with a hero from the present or past. Regardless of the medium, the intersection of picturing and speaking for is the “place of practice” because it is in and through *Darstellungen* (competing representations of the represented) that *Vertreter* (would-be representatives) vie for political authority, and it is by proposing counter representations that intellectuals and activists challenge hegemonic subject formations.¹⁰

There might be a considerable ethical burden on those intellectuals who claim that “(t)here is no more representation (*vertreten*); there’s nothing but action”.¹¹ Disch’s second and third of proposed

⁷ The second section of my paper is an at length presentation of Disch’s argument, which serves as the background for developing my own thesis.

⁸ Disch, *Representation*, cit., p. 792.

⁹ Spivak refers to the two possibilities as “proxy” and “portrait”.

¹⁰ Disch, *Representation*, cit., pp. 793-794.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 794. Spivak argues that the left-wing intellectuals’ attitude towards the non-representation of subalterns, which comes as a result of the post-structuralist

approaches have been developed from a theoretical focus on contemporary political institutions and policy-making, and the author names them the “descriptive” representation and the “constitutive” representation. The descriptive theories are characterised by a political imperative of merging aesthetic and political representation (unlike Spivak who insist on keeping the two distinct, but recognises their relationships). The term symptomatic of this approach is “a politics of presence”, i.e. “the notion that representation will be legitimate as long as it makes present the “social characteristics” of the represented, together with its preferences and interest in the body of representative”.¹² The main criticism of this approach is the so-called “dilemma of difference” or “no-win situation in which differential benefits in an attempt to remedy discrimination that is already based on (naturalized) difference risk reinforcing “negative stereotypes”; but “refusing to acknowledge these differences may make them continue to matter in a world constructed with some groups, but not others, in mind”.¹³ Among supporters of a “politics of presence,” two innovations have occurred:

... first, to break with the liberal principle of individual representation and argue, rather, for the representation of marginalized groups. A second innovation specifies precisely in what contexts and for what functions descriptive representation is useful. Whereas the debates over descriptive representation have focused on representation by formal institutions of government, scholars of political representation have recently turned their attention to the contributions made by extraparlimentary representation ...¹⁴

The author here pays special attention to the notion of the “velvet triangle” as a mode of governance that “links ‘feminist bureaucrats, trusted academics and organized voices in the women’s movement’ together in developing policy on women and gender” and falls within the EU’s speciality/feature.¹⁵ As Disch

critique of the Subject, is problematic on several levels. The first level relates to the implicit nomination of the “subaltern” as politically cunning or “self-knowing”. The other deals with the proclaimed act of renouncing the need for representation as the one that seizes the position claimed to be denounced. The third level of the problem that Spivak sees is the insufficiency of such theoretical will or attitude in the face of malicious modern ideological subject-formations. In that sense, Spivak cites an example of the microcredits for women in underdeveloped countries, offered by the World Bank as a version of the creation of a financialised, gendered subject.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Ivi, pp. 794-795.

¹⁴ Ivi, pp. 795-796.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 796. The internal quotation is from Alison Woodward, “Building Velvet Triangles: Gender and Informal Governance”, in Thomas Christiansen and Simona

points out quoting Sabine Lang, it “suggests a more fluid, less rigidly shielded exercise of power among feminist institutional and non-institutional political actors” but at the same time it also tends to privilege the participation of “specific formalized kinds of women’s movement actors: those formally organized as NGOs”¹⁶

who are both able and willing to compete for EU funding to pursue agendas that the EU defines. The consequence is that the EU has not simply presented a forum that is hospitable to the representation of women’s interests; it has shaped both the organizational structure and priorities of feminist politics in ways that are strikingly at odds with the decentralization, informality, loose coordination, and spontaneity of grassroots feminist organizations.¹⁷

The third approach Disch presents is the “constitutive” approach. She stresses that it appears as an elaboration of the already mentioned criticism of the descriptive approach. It builds on political theorist Michael Saward’s notion of the “representative claim,” a provocative theorization of the “*aesthetic* moment in political representation” that emphasizes how both elected and nonelected representatives “construct verbal and visual images” of their constituencies. Saward’s conceptualization does not merge the aesthetic and political as in descriptive representation; rather, it seeks to foreground the work that aesthetic representation does for political representation. Constituency images or depictions are significant in two ways. First, they form constituencies by soliciting their identification with a portrait that accords with a specific political project or initiative. Second, they put forth a bid to define what is at stake in a political contest. That is, claiming makes constituencies visible *as* something that is implicitly being juxtaposed against something else.¹⁸

Transported into the field of global governance, as done by Judith Squires, operating under the notion of “constitutive representation of gender” (CGR),¹⁹ it aims to capture “another

Piattoni (eds.), *Informal Governance in the European Union*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, 2004, pp. 77-78.

¹⁶ Disch, *Representation*, cit., p. 796. The quotations are from Sabine Lang, “Women’s Advocacy Networks. The European Union, Women’s NGOs, and the Velvet Triangle”, in Victoria Bernal and Inderpal Grewel (eds.), *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminism, and Neoliberalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2014, pp. 267, 268.

¹⁷ Disch, *Representation*, cit., p. 796.

¹⁸ Ivi, pp. 976-977.

¹⁹ CRG has been made to complement the notion of the substantive

significant facet of [the] representative process” in which “female politicians and femocrats each engage in representative claims-making ... constructing the group that they claim to represent and articulating their interests in ways that are both enabling and constraining”.²⁰ In CRG analyses, claims regarding interests are understood to solicit gendered subjectivities rather than to follow from them, and the analyst focuses not on how well institutions serve women’s interests, but rather on how a particular construction of women’s interests affects who is empowered and who excluded.²¹ Disch finds that the

constitutive representation, which emphasizes that acts of representation help to engender that for which they purport merely to stand, is an important breakthrough in linking the politics of representation (cultural, historical, and political) to the politics of knowledge and strategies for social justice. It destroys once and for all the alibi that cultural production and knowledge production in academic disciplines are innocent with respect to the creation and reproduction of racial, sexual, and gender (and other) group identities. And it sheds light on the complicity between such acts of representation and the social relations of inequality.²²

On Voicing the Scene: Framings

What of the three described invariants would best fit as a conceptual and terminological frame (toolkit?) for setting the accurate scene for (making sound of) an academic feminist unit at the beginning of the 21st century in Croatia?

Starting with the last, constitutive approach, I have to emphasise Disch’s observation regarding the qualitative novum of this mode of thinking about representation, expressed in her words on the importance of the “breakthrough in linking the politics of representation ... to the politics of knowledge”.²³ Although the term “the politics of knowledge” is much broader than academia or scientific community, the fact that extraparliamentary representation (as a form of gender representation much appreciated within the constitutive representational approach) does not include or even mention any form of academic endeavour within the field

representation of women (SRW). SRW analysis has focused on the question of whether female parliamentarians represent women’s interests.

²⁰ Judith Squires, “The Constitutive Representation of Gender: Extra-Parliamentary Re-presentation of Gender Relations”, *Representation*, 44, 2, 2008, p. 188.

²¹ Disch, *Representation*, cit., p. 797.

²² Ivi, p. 799.

²³ *Ibid.*

of women's or gender issues, is a bit discouraging. In Squires's paper (extensively quoted by Disch), one can find the precise list of possible agents of nonparliamentary representation and they are:

'women's policy agencies', 'national machineries for the advancement of women', or the 'gender machinery' within state bureaucracies that deal with women's policy issues or gender equality. These agencies take many forms, including stand-alone government ministries, offices within the head of a state's department, quasi-autonomous state agencies. The growing significance of these extra-parliamentary institutions is framed by wider processes of state reconfiguration in which the formal powers and policy responsibilities of the state have been 'reshaped, relocated and rearticulated' ... This reconfiguration entails both the up-loading and down-loading associated with multilevel governance and the lateral-loading and off-loading entailed in the shift in power across states spheres, from elected bodies to the courts or executive agencies of government, and from state spheres to civil society organisations, including the market, family and community.²⁴

Is, therefore, Disch's observation on "the breakthrough in linking the politics of representation to politics of knowledge production"²⁵ to be understood as invoking (for subjects such as newly established centers for women's studies)? Is it also to be understood as a call for more precise or situated analyses of the constitutive linkage between university, politics and gender? Or is it, on the other hand, simply the case that academic units somehow do not count as policy-makers at all in this approach? Alternatively, and in theoretical dialogue with the descriptive approaches, are those units already embedded into the "velvet triangle" under the name of 'trusted academics' and by that fact just inserted into some or other invariant of substantive representation? Disch's analysis does not provide a definite answer to these questions and the discontent of not fitting into the (re)presented picture remains. It would be interesting to think over how it is that one of the most noticeable knowledge production units – such as academia – is not a constitutive part of the process of constitutive representation.

²⁴ Squires, *The Constitutive Representation of Gender*, cit., pp. 192-193. The internal quotation 'reshaped, relocated and rearticulated' is from Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith, Dieter Rucht, "When Power Relocates: Interactive changes in Women's Movements and States", in Lee Ann Banaszak et al. (eds.), *Women's Movements Facing the Reconfigured State*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 2003, p. 2.

²⁵ Disch, *Representation*, cit., p. 799.

Could it be that the area of academic endeavours is perceived as having some particular stance toward power and politics, as in the sense of being 'out' of the field? As unusual as it may sound, this notion might be shown plausible not only by the mere fact of being left out of the list of possible representative agents, but also from the perspective of the constitutive representation argument itself. According to Squires, the core of the constitutive representation argument consists of "the analyst [focusing] not on how well institutions serve women's interests but, rather, on how a particular construction of women's interests affects who is empowered and who excluded".²⁶ Formulated like this, the argument/claim reveals at least three notions that might direct the trajectory of thoughts regarding academia, power and polity-making processes.

The first one emphasises a disinterested analyst, capable of objective or at least accurate grasp of interest or interests of the other/others or the construction of (those and other) interest(s), as well as of the fact of who is in or out of the process. Such tacit requirements imposed on an analyst are in a way similar to the generally presumed position of a scientist as an impartial and objective observer – a position shown to be dubious many times over. The second notion arises from the fact that the analyst's attention is focused on the process of (representational) power impact (on how a particular construction of women's interests affects who is empowered and who excluded), making the institution's (political and ethical) structure secondary to the analytic interest. What captures my attention in such a setting is the fact that what constitutes the outcome value of the constitutive approach is an effect of power shaped as the insight into being included or excluded from a specific situation. In that respect, the question of why the power effect would be the issue of concern here (and the ultimate arbiter of effective action), and not, for example, the morphology of the agent(s) providing (for) the action, seems to be an important one. Thus, the focus on the (power) effect (efficiency) blurs even more, the structure of power/structural power as a relevant (and responsible) agent of social or policy-making dynamics. In that regard, if the focus is not on how well institutions serve women's interest, but on how they shape some kind of political arena, then it seems that the question of moral and political stance (as well as the one of policy-making power) might be posed. For if the main goal is to denote how some traits are constructed and how this kind of

²⁶ Squires, *The Constitutive Representation of Gender*, cit., p. 188.

construction influences the surroundings, then the question of institutional responsibility is somehow left unaddressed. If the focus is on how the construction of interests includes or excludes, it seems that the most praised fact extracted from such a position is the detailed knowledge about *modus operandi* of some sort of (representative) entity (or the know-how). The 'know-how' and the political-of-representation are hardly evenly equated, if for no other reason than because of the fact of being merged into various, often contradictory and competitive, social fluxes, influences and interests.²⁷ Furthermore, if institution/organization is a proxy, as a device of representation, and if a proxy is revocable, then the institution is revocable. But for such an account, one would need to think about the productive structure, not just the effect the structure eventually produces. Taken otherwise – with the (mind) settings based on non-focality towards institutional 'identity claims', my analysis holds no weight whatsoever.

The constitutive and descriptive²⁸ representation are akin in their being tool-like theories mostly used (*in strictu sensu*) in political theory of representation, and unlike Spivak's account, they tend to merge the 'portrait' and the 'proxy' of representation.

My inquiry into Rijeka's Centre for Women's studies with Spivak's account of representation in agenda starts from the premise that Rijeka's Centre for Women's studies is a local representation/proxy of feminism within the local academic (and non-academic) setting.

What would the account to support this claim be like? I propose the following: The Centre's establishment as an academic unit, as well as Centre's activities are *Darstellungen* "in and through which the *Vertreter* (the would-be representative – or the Centre qua Centre) vie for political authority by proposing counter representations that challenge hegemonic subject formations".²⁹

Even if the proposal stands on a descriptive level, problems arise on several different strata. First, establishing and naming a particular academic unit as Women's Studies at the beginning of the 21st century probably evokes and provokes different thoughts and emotions. One of them, probably, the sense of hopeless and

²⁷ When, for example, Pope Francis speaks up on the problem of violence against women, this does not make him a feminist, although it definitively places him onto the rich and lively field of women's rights debates.

²⁸ As mentioned before, one theory (constitutive) stems from the other (descriptive), as an enhanced version. Therefore, the general presented remarks are interrelated.

²⁹ Disch, *Representation*, cit., pp. 793-794.

sad outdatedness for there have been so many turbulences and changes on the (feminist theory) scene in the last decades that such an act may not be other than obsolete. The name 'gender studies', for example, is more up to date, a bit more politically correct and, last but not least, more promising of funding and budgeting (given that there is a European gender mainstreaming policy,³⁰ but there is no European 'feminist policy'). And it would have needed the same theoretical explanatory effort for letting the gender topics enter feminism (Centre for Women's Studies), as would have been required for the feminization of gender issues. However, it seems that the principle of 'genderization' is a more acceptable option than any representational 'substantialization'.³¹ On the other hand, as noted in various places, the term 'gender' often functions as a proxy of 'female'.³² Maybe an analysis of *gendering* academic centres for women's studies from the initial point of constitutive theory of representation would have been an interesting project (and, just as a curiosity, note the easy, 'naturalised' and prolific proxy of the term 'gender'-as-female/woman in all of the cited texts of constitutive theory). Of course, there are more 'cohabitant' ways which strive to define the above mentioned difference. So, for example, Maria do Mar Pereira in her writing on the academic institutionalisation of gender studies (mostly in Europe) gathers three distinct names (feminist studies, women's studies, gender studies) under the highly functional (and especially so for the main purpose of her study) acronym WGFS.³³ Milica Antić Gaber³⁴ suggests another analytic approach. The author is drawing the possible (but not firm or defined) line between women's and gender studies by emphasising the divergence between their focuses of epistemological, scientific attention. In the case of women's studies, Gaber highlights the generic masculinity as a norm and alledged neuter (epistemological) position, while, on

³⁰ Cf. <<http://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/gender-equality-strategy>>.

³¹ For a recent expression of the 'name and content' debate between women's/feminist and gender scholars, see: "Feminist resistance and resistance to feminism in gender equality planning in Finland"; <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1350506817693868>>.

³² See for example Judith D. Auerbach, "Gender as Proxy", *Gender and Society*, 13, 5, 1999, pp. 581-583.

³³ See Maria do Mar Pereira, "The Institutionalisation of Gender Studies and the New Academic Governance: Longstanding Patterns and Emerging Paradoxes", in Heike Kahlert (ed.), *Gender Studies and the New Academic Governance*, Springer VS, Wiesbaden, 2018, pp. 179-200.

³⁴ Milica Antić Gaber, "Mapping women's and gender's studies in the academic field in Slovenia", *CEPS Journal*, 7, 2, pp. 9-27.

the other side, there is a vast and not gender neutral area of female experiences, interest, knowledge and perspectives that functions as the core substance of women's studies. Gender studies, on the other hand, research in a slightly different surrounding. They emphasise the relational character between man and women in some specific (social) context, as well as various power relations outcomes that might result from some gender settings. Except for the proposed difference, the mentioned part is indicative for another reason. Namely, there is an authorial footnote after the explanation denoting the author's awareness regarding the existence of more than two genders, and the fact that "this awareness has entered WGS with transgender studies. The focus of this paper is, however, only on WGS".³⁵

Except for the tensions between representation and nomination, there has been (at least) one more sticking point within my premise. I will try to ex-pose it in the form of 'ifs'. If the CWS is an academic proxy of feminism, and if feminism is an epistemological, cognitive, emotional and effective stance/action that is 'for everybody', and if it is a fact that in feminism's definiendum is always already inscribed in the receptiveness to a range of fields and sensitivities of/to otherness, and if the intellectual-cultural heritage (and contemporariness) of feminism consists of polyphony, multipositionality, or at least binarity – "post-Kantian and anti-Cartesian, liberal and socialist, pro-porn and anti-porn"³⁶ – decentralised to the point of no single feminism even existing, but only feminisms, even post-feminism or post-feminisms – and if it is the case that CWS has the responsibility – understood in Spivak's terms where it signifies not only the act of response that completes the transaction of speaker and listener, but also the ethical stance of making discursive room for the Other to exist – and so, if this is a plausible description of the state of affairs, then one has to ask what actually is it that CWS are proxying? What would be these centres for which they would stand? All of them, including Rijeka's.

Even at the level of bare information-provider (if we dethrone the term 'proxy' and descale its meaning from, let us say, the one it procures from Spivak's understanding of the *vertretung*, and instrumentalised it on the level of the technological proxy - server

³⁵ Ivi, p. 14.

³⁶ Mieke Bal, "Unfolding Feminism", in Misha Kavka and Elisabeth Bronfen (eds.), *Feminist Consequences. Theory for the New Century*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2001, pp. 321-353.

(making posthuman feminists rejoice), that is, a technological circuit that mediates between the client and the host server, which is 'faster' and better protective of the final user – even then it would be difficult or impossible to do the laundry list of 'requested' contents. So, if CWS proxy feminism, and if feminism is (or even exceeds) all that is mentioned, then the centres are supposed to proxy 'all-that-is-mentioned' (and then some). This may be achieved at the level of some sort of theoretical possibility or necessary academic abstraction/categorization. But at the level of concrete political representation or of lived experience, I do not think that being a proxy for feminism(s) (today) is possible. In other words, it is possible that the centres for women's studies are doomed to metonymical concubinage, a *pars pro toto liaison* with the signifier 'feminism'. If naming serves "a policing function",³⁷ then the name 'feminism', within the context of the actual academic women's studies unit, proliferates all the more confusion and uncertainties.

Furthermore, as Nancy Fraser puts it, "as the discourse becomes independent of the movement, the latter is increasingly confronted with a strange shadowy version of itself, an uncanny double that it can neither simply embrace nor wholly disavow".³⁸ It goes without saying that Fraser hereby opens a perhaps not yet sufficiently highlighted problem – the old / new field of duality between feminist activism and feminist theory; the problem particularly resonant within the mostly theory-clad walls of the Academy.

In other words, Fraser's notion opens up a whole new aspect of the problem(s) CWS Rijeka faces. A little media anecdote will bring my paper to its second part, dealing with positioning of the CWS in the local context, i.e. how and where to 'posit' Rijeka within the narrative of feminist (and not just feminist) activism in the Republic of Croatia or the surrounding region. For if the academic form of feminist endeavours arrives in Rijeka (too) late, what about the non-academic ones, those less theory-oriented, directing necessary social need towards all? If the focus of the first part of this writing was on the word *beginning*, notwithstanding various obstacles this beginning faces at the moment (and it is quite certain the moment will be prolonged), then the second one

³⁷ Camilla Griegers, *Becoming-Woman*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 4.

³⁸ Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History", *New Left Review*, 56, 2009, pp. 97-117.

tries to highlight more contextual, and in a way, more situational issues. The two mentioned situations/parts are by no means separated or independent one of the other. Just the opposite, they are intertwined and related textures of meaning, purposes, operations, agents, contexts. Their separation in this manner here is more a necessity of text as succession than 'representation' of particularly conceived reality.

The famous answer offered by Canada's Prime Minister, when asked on the ratio regarding the number of women and men in his cabinet, was "because ... it's 2016". Short, 'catchy' and definitively not applicable globally (despite the fact that the 'matter of chronological time' should associate/highlight in this very case some notions of emancipation; globally achieved women's rights, even 'common sense' gender mainstreaming accomplishments). Such mentioned (presupposed) indicators of gender equilibrium, when required at the level(s) of political (substantive?) representation as in the case of Canada, serve here as a 'memento of the future'.

Anecdotal frivolity aside, the example serves as illustration of the contextual surroundings of the Centre. Neither is Trudeau a feminist *par excellence*, nor are the immediate surroundings of the Centre anti-feminist, yet the fact of feminist-affirmative politics makes it easier to pursue various (academic) feminist agendas within a particular society. The social (and political) climate regarding feminism in the Republic of Croatia is rather more cold than mild, and when considered within the more narrow focus – Rijeka and its region – burdened with the absence of any organised and goal-oriented manner of feminist political/public activism.

A kind of disconnectedness (peripherality) from what we might call the socio-political centres or scenes (even taking a historical perspective, since Rijeka was not an example of a 'feminist' city even in former Yugoslavia; in fact, the centre locations have not changed much in the last 25 years), resulted, to some extent, in overcautious approach to the various 'new' possibilities. On the other hand, the currently known / proclaimed local milieu of tolerance and diversity might well be the consequence of the reticence towards various forms of engagement or the depoliticisation of the context at work. Of course, all of this is true not only for Rijeka, but the immediate Centre's surroundings, manifesting as 'novelties', both constitutive and constraining for the novum. (And not just non-academic ones.) Still, going back to the media anecdote, Gordana Bosanac's words best encompass

the situation in light of these conditions of the Centre's agency. In her writing about the reasons for feminism, she states:

Almost every public speech, accidental or intentional, incidental or deliberate, humorous or serious, uses the word "feminism" as if it were something clear as day to just anyone. As if it were the word whose perfectly clear meaning comes to everyone who speaks, absolutely everyone who speaks, by the mere fact the word is uttered.³⁹

And even if this is the unfortunate common way of comportment (though distinguishable in degrees), in the milieu with some more or less formal women's or gender, theoretical or activism oriented, but by all means established and recognizable agencies/formations, by the mere fact of such established entities (being proxies), there is also a greater possibility of re-acting and even of en-acting and therefore the fact of becoming institutionalized is, as far as I am concerned, highly important and necessary.

My intention here is not to claim that establishing formal, especially academic, units leads to more just life situations, or that some kind of 'inserted' field of knowledge could in one swoop erase layers of suspicion, ignorance or uninterest. Still, if for no other reasons than academic etiquette or customs, i.e. forms of social interaction, women's studies issues could become those taken into consideration, those that skip another dismissal or labelling as 'inadequate'. The position of 'inadequate' or peripheral/liminal-knowledge, and added to it the position of proxy for such knowledge, is functional on several levels. For example, the marginality of feminist theory within the academic system; marginality of Rijeka in the geo-political or social sense, marginality understood in terms of novelty, overall unimportance-as-commodification in the context of a neo-liberal (academic) stance towards knowledge with its market-oriented sustainability preferences (what to do with a dubiously 'lucrative' academic unit in times of fewer and fewer funds for gender research?).

The contextual cacophony in the case of Rijeka's Centre, as any other of its kind, in the sense of an academic unit, is further complicated by the notion of perceiving women-studies issues as an academic field. In that respect, there lies not just the policy of actual, present-oriented proxying or voice-making of one's

³⁹ Gordana Bosanac, *Visoko čelo. Ogled o humanističkim perspektivama feminizma*, Centar za ženske studije Zagreb, Zagreb, 2010, p. 36. Translation mine.

own, but also a necessary grounding and contextualizing into the so-called history of the field. (As a member of the Department of Cultural Studies in Rijeka I could say that the heritage of anti-disciplinarity, famously proclaimed by Stuart Hall, is not always a notion or situation that is easy to deal with, nor that this kind of scientific (anti-)commitment is per force a notion that guarantees all too necessary cohesive upholding outputs within a certain scientific field. In a word, I believe that a careful handling of the consensus about what the field consists of is also a proxy situation.)

If Disch is right when she writes that the problem of voicing or proxying is always something that is most powerfully posed from the margins, and this is the concluding remark of my paper, then in addition to celebrating a rather good starting position of Rijeka's Centre, a northern Adriatic *novum* could contribute to the formation of some sort of ardently caring devices of knowledge or, as Spivak would say, places of practice. Because there is always the possibility that too much love can bring about fatal changes.

For, if time is a category in which humans learn, then to begin at the 'end', that is, now, always means considering all that has already come, all that is known thus far. And this request is not important here for reasons of adhering to the notion of the so-called scientific ethos or Eros of totality of knowledge, nor due to a compulsive urge to neatly sort facets of thoughts, facts or ideas, nor is the point even the genealogical picturing of new scientific dwarfs sitting on mother-giant's scientific shoulders; the main reason for careful (maternal!) handling and approach to this field of human knowledge in Rijeka's specific case, is the simple fact of being let into the strong and rigid field of scientific legitimation very late or through the back door.

Virginity Stories: From Virgin Martyrs to Virginal Heroines in Nineteenth-Century Croatian Literature

Dubravka Dulibić-Paljar

The question of chastity, both of mind and body,
is of the greatest interest and complexity.
(Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*)

Summary

This essay aims to explore female virginity by tracing its changes and modifications as well as by analyzing a variety of its successive forms and types through their typical and specific manifestations. Precisely, it will trace different versions of female virginity, starting with the High Middle Ages and virgin martyrs legends, up until the creation of the figure of the virginal female heroine in the late 19th century romantic novel. Therefore, the main intention of this presentation is to trace along the well known paths of studies on virginity topics, while putting the following question on the agenda: how does virginity – as a changeable and socially constructed category rather than an anatomical category or the fact of intact body – in all those various situations, become capable to disrupt as well as confirm the culturally conventional gender roles and stable meanings of gender (femininity and masculinity)?

Above All, Be Pure: Virginity as a Narrative of Female Autonomy

In her speech “Professions for Women”, delivered before the London branch of the National Society for Women’s Service on January 21, 1931, Virginia Woolf gave a description of the Victorian ideal of women and female perfection which would later become famous. In a deeply ironic way, Woolf portrays the well-known figure of ‘angel in the house’ (named after the Coventry Patmore’s narrative poem): the image shows an ‘angel’ as a lovely, almost childishly charming wife, who commits

herself fully and with pleasure to the care of the family. Woolf describes her in the following manner:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all – I need not say it – she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her blushes, her great grace.¹

Before a woman can write, argued Woolf, she must symbolically 'kill' the 'angel in the house'; that angelic 'phantom' who always appears whisperingly while she is writing: "Be sympathetic, be tender; flatter, deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Above all, be pure".² For Woolf, these metaphorical murderous musings were a way to construct a space for female artistic autonomy. As Elaine Showalter said, it was a "fight for one's emotional independence against the smothering embrace of the Angel",³ which will remain a key theme of women's literature and feminist literary study of the 19th and early 20th century. At the same time, the nature and origin of 'the angel in the house', which is in spirit and name a typical formulation of middle-class ideology of the 19th century, have a much longer tradition. The innocent virgin-woman, who is always capable of remaining chaste and modest, gentle and docile, but also strong and persistent in her internal humility and piety, is a well-known figure in Western literature. What is also known is the idea of a particular social and moral value which was commonly attributed to female sexual chastity and purity. Therefore, Gilbert and Gubar's valuable comments on Victorian angel allude to it with specific clarity when they summarize the literary history of 'the angel in the house': "Nevertheless, there is a clear line of literary descent from divine Virgin to domestic angel, passing through (among many others) Dante, Milton, and Goethe".⁴ However, this does not mean that this notion

¹ Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women", in Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, vol. II, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1967, pp. 284-289.

² Ivi, p. 285.

³ Elaine Showalter, "Killing the Angel in the House. The Autonomy of Women Writers", *The Antioch Review*, 32, 3, 1972, pp. 353-339.

⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman*

of certain stability, seemingly maintained by those topics of female perfection over time, should be simply understood as an expression of some sort of assurance of universal and timeless experience of the female 'angelic' nature or 'eternal feminine' virtues (of modesty, chastity, purity, gracefulness, gentleness, compassion or complaisance). On the contrary, this complex of female virtue undoubtedly evokes not only different historical, moral and fictional structures of Western society but it also takes on distinct significance and position within them. As Gilbert and Gubar remind us:

In the Middle Ages, of course, mankind's great teacher of purity was the Virgin Mary, a mother goddess who perfectly fitted the female role Ortner defines as merciful dispenser of salvation. For the more secular nineteenth century, however, the eternal type of female purity was represented not by a madonna in heaven but by the angel in the house.⁵

But at the same time, this complex of female virtue permits the possibility of the continued existence of certain interrelated elements on the basis of which – and always again in accordance with different and variable patterns – the figure of the angelic woman has been constantly reformulated as a highly spiritualized and beautiful woman who was perennially and unavoidably completely "self-less, with all the moral and psychological implications that word suggests".⁶

Therefore, if we conceive the figures of 'angels in the house' as phenomena that far exceed the Victorian 'angelology' boundaries, it might seem appropriate to classify other literary practices besides its characterization. Hence, one could notice that the Croatian novel by the 19th century had developed a "literary repertoire of characters and types"⁷ where an 'angel' became the central figure. In novel after novel, the presence of the 'angel' highlights the cultural obsession with the fantasy of 'pure womanhood' (while excluding any concretization of female sexuality from all romantic scenes) and highly sentimentalized idea of 'home as a sanctuary'. As a famous

Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1984, p. 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ivi, p. 21.

⁷ Krešimir Nemec, *Tragom tradicije*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 1995, p. 58. All the translations from the Croatian language into English are by Ivan Missoni, who has also carefully edited this paper, for which I thank him wholeheartedly.

romance novel by August Šenoa, *Zlatarevo zlato* (*The Goldsmith's Treasure*), describes its heroine: "Anyone would be tempted to say that she was a saint who had come down from an altar among the common folk and to bring joy to the hearts of her sad people".⁸ Furthermore, Eugen Kumičić's *Olga i Lina* (*Olga and Lina*) and Josip Eugen Tomić's *Melita*, among others, offer similarly compelling examples of the figure of the "household saint".⁹ In the deeply moralized structure of these characters, one could thus doubtlessly trace all those characteristic features of the angelic women of nineteenth-century Western literature to which woman only as a faithful and obedient wife and devoted and self-sacrificing mother possessed a unquestionably high moral value for society. Moreover, one might claim that this expression of 'pure womanhood' seems to indicate that woman could behave ethically only by adopting those virtues which were conceived as exclusively feminine. Or, as Gilbert & Gubar famously synthesized such established beliefs concerning suitably modest female behaviour, "women who reject the submissive silences of domesticity (could only) have been seen as terrible object":¹⁰ as a 'monster woman' (or 'demonic woman' or 'femme fatale'). In other words, they constituted a highly stylized type of female character with whom literary angels were often ambiguously juxtaposed in the nineteenth-century literature.¹¹

Yet, in spite of this prominence of the angel/demon dichotomy in literature, there was also another significant type of female character; not so common and broadly present, and far less conventional and predictable in its articulation of literary femininity. The character in question was inaugurated by Ivan Perkovac's short story *Stankovačka učiteljica* (*A Teacher in Stankovac*),¹² and continued to develop throughout August Šenoa's novel *Branka*,¹³ and Ksaver Šandor Gjalski's novel *Đurđica Agićeva*.¹⁴ As we shall see later in more detail, all these narratives,

⁸ August Šenoa, *The Goldsmith's Treasure*, translated by Neven Divjakinja, Spiritoso, Zagreb, 2015, pp. 26-27.

⁹ Kremljir Nemec, "Čuvarica ognjišta, svetica, vamp. Slika žene u hrvatskoj književnosti 19. stoljeća", in Stipe Botica et al. (eds.), *Zbornik zagrebačke slavističke škole*, FF Press, Zagreb, 2002, pp. 100-109.

¹⁰ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, cit., p. 79.

¹¹ For a detailed explanation, see Nemec, *Čuvarica ognjišta, svetica, vamp*, cit., pp. 102-104.

¹² Ivan Perkovac, *Djela*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 1968.

¹³ August Šenoa, *Branka*, Alfa, Zagreb, 2008.

¹⁴ Ksaver Šandor Gjalski, *Đurđica Agićeva*, Branko Đovanović, Beograd, 1964.

in predominantly didactic manner, focus on ordinary daily life of a young, modest woman – a teacher – whose intention was to contribute with her work to the enlightenment of the neglected common people living in the Croatian countryside. Such agenda-driven narratives also reflected social and political problems that preoccupied Croatian society during the last decades of the nineteenth-century. Namely, their central focus was on the issue of teachers' celibacy, which had been legally implemented in the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia in 1888. By prescribing a school act, the Austro-Hungarian Empire's legislation, in accordance with prevailing Western legal regulation, prohibited married female teachers from being employed, while imposing a choice between marriage and vocation on already employed female teachers.¹⁵ At the same time, legal celibacy had already during its preparation, as well as throughout its implementation, stirred numerous public debates. Supporters of the Act directed their attention to several questions: firstly, can women's professionalisation even be synchronized with the so-called innate female tendencies towards the household sphere; secondly, can one talk about any positive social effects of married women's work; thirdly, what were the moral implications of introducing female sexuality to the public domain (eg. the question of decency of pregnant teachers in girls' classrooms). If we summarize them, it is not difficult to discern from their background those prevailing beliefs about the 'sensitive and delicate' feminine nature which had ushered the women of the time so 'naturally' to a home and family leaving public action out of reach of women's abilities.

Bearing in mind that Ivan Perkovac, as enthusiastic reader of John Stuart Mills's *The Subjection of Women*, was known among the domestic cultural milieu as a staunch opponent of legal celibacy, it would centrally not be difficult to recognize in *A Teacher in Stankovac* (in the character of a young selfless teacher, "an idealist") the hallmark of his political engagement.¹⁶ This becomes even more evident by acknowledging the power of conviction with which Perkovac championed for literature to be socially engaged and directed towards the goal, which was essentially inseparable from the central ideological

¹⁵ For a fine discussion of female teacher celibacy, see Dinko Župan, *Mentalni korzet. Spolna politika obrazovanja žena u Banskjoj Hrvatskoj (1868-1918)*, Osijek and Slavonski Brod, 2013 and Jasna Šego, "O ženama u 'Viencu' i o liku učiteljice u trima književnim tekstovima 19. stoljeća", *Kroatologija* 2, 2011, pp. 141-160.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion on Ivan Perkovac political engagement, see Šego, *O ženama u Viencu*, cit., pp. 141-160.

preoccupation of the generation of Croatian writers emerging in the mid-19th century – the idea of creating a modern civil nation. On the other hand, such a notion of socially engaged function of literature will also be fundamental to Šenoa's ideological and literary programme of 'tendentious' literature (where his principle acceptance of 'emancipation' and the wider social benefit of that 'novelty' gained its place),¹⁷ which is probably where his motivation stemmed forth, ten years after *A Teacher in Stankovac* (1871), to deliberately rewrite the same story into *Branka* (1881), in the center of which, as expected, lies the question of choice between marriage and teacher's vocation.

Even though they seek different resolutions to their respective plots, which will in Šenoa's novel in fact take on the shape of an "ideal romance",¹⁸ both texts (as well as partly a third one, a novel by Gjalski) had developed convictions that women can and should independently and directly (not only indirectly through the 'head of the family') participate in the development of society; that the chosen method of female public activity is the professionalisation of female intrinsic maternal characteristics; and that it is a necessary prerequisite for achieving a woman's self-fulfilment in private as well as in public sphere is her (as greater as possible) separation from the area of sexuality. Consequently, we are presented with heroines in whose biographies there is room for their intellectual and social autonomy. Heroines who are educated and are striving to be self-sufficient (at least before marriage!) and who in that process can be inclined to overcome passive and submissive positions of stereotypical 'angelic' femininity, which is in turn made possible by their role as 'modern' (employed!) women. However, such effects of 'modernity' and 'emancipation' are not constructed by typical means of contemporary narrative discourse. Moreover, it would be difficult to look for characteristics of a new structural model of fictional female characters to which domestic literary criticism when writing about late nineteenth-century literature referred to as "women on the path to self-consciousness, a subversive woman who breaks through patriarchal, moral and class barriers,"¹⁹ while the Anglo-Saxon tradition would know

¹⁷ For a discussion on Šenoa's views on the 'woman question', see also Šego, op. cit., pp. 141-160.

¹⁸ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*, The University of North Carolina Press, North Carolina, 1991, pp. 133-134.

¹⁹ Nemec, *Čuvarica ognjišta, svetica, vamp*, cit., p. 101.

them as “new women”.²⁰ This was a type of female character which will thus, by moving away from the inevitable presence of the literary conventions of either idealisation or demonisation of womanhood which had permeated the 19th-century literature, represent a fairly rare and radical new literary occurrence of the “emancipated, intellectually superior woman” which opposes “the conventions which the puritanic sociality imposed on a married woman, in society and in everyday life”.²¹ Instead, it would appear that in the text which we are to scrutinize more closely not only can these new literary strategies be discerned, but also certain old and inherited yet still vital elements pertaining to the literary discourse which had traditionally been utilized to express heroic female agency, and was distinct for its chaste female heroine full of audacity. In such a heroine, virginity, courage, and beauty were tightly bound together. Such were for example the Renaissance and Baroque noble armed maiden of romance epic poems, not to mention early Christian virgin martyrs and their exceptional heroic virginity, recounted by numerous legends that have widely circulated in premodern and early modern Europe. In other words, the female figures whose virginity has always been closely connected with the possibility of transgressing the conventionally accepted norms of female behaviour.

This significant characteristic of such type of archaic discourse is also used by the heroines of the 19th century novels. Of course, the frame of narrative situations is now positioned in the everyday life, far from the world of mythical fantasy, Amazonian womanhood and Christian miracles. Nonetheless, one could observe the persistence of certain themes and certain types of images, as well as the constant presence of a particular type of narrative strategies whose purpose was to enable virginity to perform a certain type of female behaviour, different from the one that requires modesty and humility, obedience and passiveness as a virtue, and yet again such that excludes any possibility that this type of behaviour could be assessed as morally negative. Therefore, if we accept the existence of such shared characteristics (which would not be constant but historically changeable) one could pose a question (that should serve as the guiding principle of this discussion): in which ways can virginity in all those different situations become

²⁰ See Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Women. Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain 1870-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015.

²¹ Nemeč, *Čuvarica ognjišta, svetica, vamp*, cit., p. 107.

the form that disrupts as well as conforms to the culturally conventional women's gender role and stable meanings of gender (femininity and masculinity)?

The situations that I am about to analyse are shaped by literary texts stemming from different historical epochs. I will commence with a virginal hagiography and medieval drama entitled *Muka svete Margarite* (*The Passion of Saint Margaret*),²² continue towards Renaissance pastoral drama and Mavro Vetranović's play *Lovac i vila* (*The Hunter and the Fairy*),²³ and conclude with August Šenoa's nineteenth-century romance novel *Branka*. These texts are part of the corpus of national literature, even though the legend of Saint Margaret of Antioch, like other virgin martyr's legends, was highly popular throughout the medieval Christian world, as well as pastoral is a classical genre of Renaissance literature, while Šenoa's romance novel adopts some typical characteristic of the 19th century romance fiction and discourse of romantic love. There are also other types of literary virginity in this time frame, but I have chosen these three because they are each distinct but also mutually related. Namely, the chosen texts faithfully represent genres traditionally thought to be 'female literature', since apart from other established genres they were meant for the female audience, their main characters were females, and the plot confirmed the importance of issues which society commonly associated with women, referring to female virginity, marriage and marital morality. Yet, there is more to this. Since those genres allowed for the expansion of female characters, they opened space for various scripts of female agency, be it conventional ones, which implied feminine agency characterized by the accentuated feminine traits that were quite peculiar to the already familiar occurrences such as the 'angels of the house' of the 19th century, be it unconventional scripts which experimented with various forms of female behaviour and where sometimes appeared virgins who "can do things that others can't do".²⁴

²² *Muke svete Margarite*, in *Hrvatsko srednjovjekovno pjesništvo. Pjesme, plačevi i prikazanja na starohrvatskom jeziku* [texts critically prepared and reviews written by Amir Kapetanović, Dragica Malić and Kristina Štrkalj Despot, the author of the concept and preparatory studies Amir Kapetanović], Institut za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje, Zagreb, 2010, pp. 792-865.

²³ Mavro Vetranović, *Lovac i vila* = *Drugo prikazanje također složeno po neznanu piscu. Govoru lovac i vila*, in Antun Djamić (ed.), *Dva pastirska prizora Mavra Vetranovića*, Građa za povijest književnosti hrvatske, 29, JAZU, Zagreb, 1968, pp. 212-229.

²⁴ Michael Dolzani (ed.), *Northrop Frye's Notebooks on Romance*, vol. 15, University of Toronto Press, Toronto and Buffalo and London, 2004, p. 236.

For this reason, I have chosen these texts.²⁵ Such a choice has however determined the further course of this paper. Namely, the intent to follow these phenomena from the relatively contemporary 19th century reaching as far back as the Middle Ages necessarily involves a certain amount of generalization and deliberate neglect of particular (whether historical, genre-related or biographical) closer determinants of these phenomena. Besides that, this intent also requires a step further into the past: in order to understand the foundations of virginity characteristic of medieval legends about virginal martyrs, with the aim to demonstrate that it can be traced in succeeding texts, it is necessary, at least briefly, to reflect on the patristic exegesis of virginity, which has laid the foundation for later Christian comprehension of virginity, both religious and secular.

"So that virginity may be lost even by a thought":²⁶ Patristic Commentary on Virginity

I will say it boldly, though God can do all things He cannot raise up a virgin when once she has fallen. ... Let us fear lest in us also the prophecy be fulfilled, "Good virgins shall faint". Notice that

²⁵ Such a choice also implies a deep inspiration by numerous studies dedicated to the examination of various either historical or fictional situations which show what 'women out of their place' can do. Most of those studies were concerned with late antique and medieval period, such as Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and spiritual power in the patristic age, AD 350–450*, Routledge, London 1995; Elizabeth A. Castelli, "'I Will Make Mary Male'. Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (eds.), *Body Guards. The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, Routledge, New York and London, 1991, pp. 29–49; Salih Sarah, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England*, D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2001; Natalie Zemon Davies, "Women on Top", in Lorna Hutson (ed.), *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 156–186. Some of them offered highly compelling interpretations of Renaissance women, like Margaret L. King, "Virgo et Virago. Women and High Culture", in *Women of the Renaissance. Women in Culture and Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1991, pp. 157–214; Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman. The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1992, and especially Thelma S. Fenster, "The Defences of Eve by Isotta Nogarola and Christine de Pizan, Who Found Themselves in Simone de Beauvoir's Situation", in Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham (eds.), *Strong Voices, Weak History. Early Women Writers and Canons in England, France, and Italy*, The University of Michigan Press, 2005, pp. 58–78, and Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc. The Image of Female Heroism*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999. In the effort for my own study, focused on merely a few chosen literary texts belonging to different time periods, to draw on (at least to a certain extent) those vast experiences of previously conducted research, I sincerely hope that it will prove to be a modest, but useful contribution to them.

²⁶ Jerome, *Ad Eustochium*, translated by W. H. Fremantle, in *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, NPNF 6 Second Series, Hendrickson Publishing, Peabody MA, 1893, reprinted 1994 – Ep. 22 ad Eust. 5.

it is good virgins who are spoken of, for there are bad ones as well. "Whosoever looks on a woman," the Lord says, "to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart". So that virginity may be lost even by a thought. Such are evil virgins, virgins in the flesh, not in the spirit; foolish virgins, who, having no oil, are shut out by the Bridegroom.²⁷

In his famous letter Jerome cautions the virgin Eustochium that virginity might be lost even by the libidinous thoughts, bearing in mind Mathew's words: "Do not commit adultery" (Mt 5.28). That letter, which came to be known in Middle Ages under the general title *De virginitate*,²⁸ while Humanism, together with other Jerome's ascetic writings, will read it as a conduct book for young girls,²⁹ was addressed towards the Roman Christian community, especially to its consecrated virgins.³⁰ The letter contains certain clarifications on the values of Christian virginity as well as various practical guidelines, advice and opinions on ascetic living. Jerome instructs Christian Roman virgins that virginity is not only a condition of the intact body, but also of the purity of spirit. Moreover, virginity is, he states, primarily a matter of the spirit, not of the body. "A virgin is defined as one that is holy in body and in spirit, for it is no good to have virgin flesh if a woman be married in mind", stressed Jerome.³¹

Similar thinking about virginity originating from Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 on sexual renunciation and the necessity of both bodily and spiritual integrity ("the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit", 1 Cor 7.34) is also found in other patristic writers. As was expounded by scholars such as Katheleen

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See Jane Barr, "The Influence of Saint Jerome on Medieval Attitudes to Women", in Janet Soskice (ed.), *After Eve. Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition*, Collins Marshall Pickering, 1990, pp. 89-102.

²⁹ See, for example, Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman. A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, Charles Fantazzi (ed. and trans.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000.

³⁰ Just like other patristic writers, Jerome wrote letters that were not only read by their recipients but also copied and widely circulated as religiously instructive writings. As Susanna Elm had noticed, "[those] letters were written with the solo and clearly stated intention of regulating and 'normalizing', and were understood as such by their addressees to women are in fact educational devices for Scriptural instruction". Susanna Elm, 'Virgins of God'. *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, pp. 14-15.

³¹ Jerome, *Adv. Helvidium de Perpetua Virginitate B. Mariae*, translated by W. H. Fremantle, in *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, NPNF 6 Second Series, Hendrickson Publishing, Peabody MA, 1893, reprinted 1994 – Adv. Helv. 20.

C. Kelly in *Performing Virginit*y and *Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, “although the writings of Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and others do not furnish us with an ideologically uniform, internally consistent body of thought on the subject of virginity” and there was not a singular and monolithic interpretation of virginity in the early Church, in general there was little disagreement and certain notions on the nature of virginity were common to all orthodox ascetic authors.³² Moreover, these notions prompted Kelly to assert that by comprehending virginity as primarily a spiritual, not a physical category, the Church Fathers “reconfigured the limits of the physical body”;³³ by placing virginity between the constructed, immutable chastity (which will be established by means of strictly prescribed rules of virginal behaviour) and equally constructed, mutable body, virginity was in fact defined as a process which occurs both *outside* the body and *within* the body. Furthermore, as was frequently emphasized by scholars of early Christianity, despite the fact that fighting temptations of the flesh was in the center of Christian asceticism, for Orthodox Christian writers asceticism was never a mainly dualistic phenomenon, which undermines the body as evil in an antagonism towards the soul which is good.³⁴ Instead, early Christian ascetics commonly claimed that soul and body were closely related and that “this effect was not just in the direction of the soul reigning in the body”.³⁵ Rather, what would in fact prove decisive in determining Christian asceticism was the acceleration of the conviction that the exaltation of the soul could only be reached through the purity of the body. Or in Peter Brown’s words, it was “the belief that abstinence from sex was the most effective technique with which to achieve the clarity of the soul”.³⁶ This brings us back to the premise which is constantly being under examination when discussing virginity: if it was primarily placed in the spirit (or inner self or in will), then virginity can by the same be disrupted by the weakness of the alienated spirit (self or will). That is to say, if a

³² Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginit*y and *Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 4. See also Elizabeth A. Castelli, “Virginity and its Meaning for Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 2, 1, 1986, pp. 61-88; and Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation. Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1999.

³³ Kelly, *Performing Virginit*y, cit., p. 7.

³⁴ Elm, *Virgins of God*, cit., p. 14.

³⁵ Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, cit., p. 33.

³⁶ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, p. 78.

virgin behaves in a way unbefitting a virgin, then her intact body would become nullified, and she would be deprived of virginity. This raises the following questions: what kind of virgin (and a virgin is always an embodiment *par excellence* of female virgin) did the patristic authors consider a *true* virgin of God? What kind of demeanour did they consider appropriate for a virgin? And how were they able to recognize a virgin of God at all?

Some of the answers to these questions are proposed by early Christianity historian Elizabeth A. Castelli, noticing that the Greek Church Fathers of the fourth century, such as Gregory of Nyssa, Methodius, and Chrysostom often used the notion of *andreia* (spiritual courage) to describe the spiritual skills of extraordinary Christian women or to indicate that a woman who possesses *andreia* is like a man (masculine), implying that *andreia* is not a virtue inherent to women, but can be acquired by ascetic training. Therefore, Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, commences the *vita* of his sister Macrina, later known as Saint Macrina, by stating: "A woman is the starting-point of the narrative, if indeed a woman; for I do not know if it is proper to name her who is above nature out of [the terms] of nature".³⁷ Furthermore, we can find very similar claims in the *vita* of the virgin Olympia where John Chrysostom marvels how this Constantinopolitan virgin surpasses many men in virtue: "Don't say 'woman' but 'what a man!' because this is a man, despite her physical appearance".³⁸

Such a constitution of female virginity, which entails the process of 'becoming male' is a compound result of several phenomena. In the first place, virginity was accordingly seen as an ability of overcoming the boundaries of the body, as the liberation from the 'world', from the constraints of the existing human nature, since virginity in particular, and ascetic life in general, was understood and signified as a state of freedom.³⁹ In other words, the ability of a person to become to self-improved, to be transformed into "a pure vessel of divine will, and so create the possibility for communication with the divine through some form of *unio mystica*".⁴⁰ As Elizabeth A. Castelli has shown in her inspiring study " 'I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," this also concerns the manner in which early Christian writers interpreted

³⁷ Vita Mac. I: 14–17. Quoted in Castelli, *Virginity and its Meaning*, cit., p. 75.

³⁸ Vita Olymp. 3. Quoted in *ibid.*

³⁹ For more detailed examinations of the issues encapsulated here, see Castelli, *Virginity and its Meaning*, cit., pp. 65–78.

⁴⁰ Elm, *Virgins of God*, cit., p. 14.

Paul's *New Testament* proclamation of the new standards of social behaviour ("there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus", Gal 3.28), as given opportunity for all human beings (both men and women) to reach the state of perfect maleness, or to 'become male'.⁴¹ So, the process of 'becoming male' in the interpretation of early Christian ascetic writers denoted an opportunity to 'improve the self' in order to attain a higher spiritual state. Namely, the fact that 'maleness', as a designation of generic humanity, was used as a standard measure of wholeness and finality, also entails the belief that 'femaleness' is closely linked with imperfection and incompleteness, as well as with sin, sexuality, sexual difference; all the phenomena which were from the aspect of early Christian authors seen as consequences of the original sin, with which women were inextricably linked. To put it differently, all of the above mentioned explanations underline not only the link between female virility and freedom, but also the repercussions of that link: the fact that ascetic renunciation incorporates virility as its pivotal feature implies that ascetic women, primarily virgins, stand apart by their difference from women (as 'women'), in the same manner as for Christian authors a woman was perceived as a human being who unlike 'men' (but also unlike 'virgin') was inherently 'weak': she was associated with the Fall and sin, whereas the 'virgin' was released from the role intended for the 'woman' through the Fall: sexuality, marriage and childbirth (Gn 3).

Something else is also quite important. When Christian writers of the fourth century, like Jerome, Ambrose, or John Chrysostom, in their moral education of Christian virgins emphasize the difference between the 'woman' and the 'virgin', they equally imply that such a difference must have a certain form of subordination to a specific set of codes of conduct. A true virgin (virgin not only in body but also in mind), instructs Ambrose his ascetics female readers, must stand out for her reticence, modesty, shyness, and above all, quietness,⁴² while other patristic writers, as John Chrysostom, in his afterwards much quoted epistle *On Necessity of Guarding Virginity*, also strictly warn their female readers that

⁴¹ Castelli, *I Will Make Mary Male*, cit., p. 30. See also Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to Womanchrist. Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1995; Elizabeth A. Clark, "Ideology, History and the Construction of 'Woman' in Late Antique Christianity", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 1994, pp. 155–184; Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, cit., pp. 34–42.

⁴² Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, translated by Mons. Jozo Marenić, in Sv. Ambrozije, *Spisi o djevičanstvu*, Sympoision, Split, 2001, pp. 129–130.

talkative a virgin unavoidably will become a lustful and sinful woman. "When a virgin learns to discuss things frankly with man, to sit by him, to laugh in his presence, to disgrace herself in many other ways, the veil of virginity is destroyed, the flower trampled underfoot",⁴³ stressed John Chrysostom. Nevertheless, it would be completely inaccurate to understand this stress on virginal behaviour, which at its center contains the appropriate ways of action with a propensity for forming conventionally characteristic female virtues (obedience and submission, self-effacing modesty and persevering chastity) as something opposed to the virile structure of virginity. On the contrary, we are quite far from that. As a matter of fact, commitment to the idea that spiritual weakness is associated with femininity, and strength with masculinity, that overcoming one's passion is a characteristic of men, and exceptionally rare for women, that virginity is ultimately a state of liberty and liberation from all the conditionalities of this world are all features in accordance with which occurs the general acceptance of the virile nature of virginity in the early Christian exegesis of the *New Testament* teachings on virginity.

On the other hand, those general features of early Christian thought have found their expression in hagiographic literature of the time. Within it two types of virginity can quite commonly be discerned: *virago* and *virgo*. *Virago*, *femina virilis*, *miles* (woman acting like a man), a female hero distinguished by self-control, strong will, moral strength – all virtues which have traditionally been considered as male virtues, have already been included in the earliest hagiographic literature on martyrdom of early Christians. The masculinity of those Christian heroines was manifested in direct conflict with the traditional understanding of sexuality, marriage, and family, and constituted an expression of a culture which was aimed at breaking away from all the old Roman values, modes of behaving, and forms of living incompatible with Christian teachings.⁴⁴ The *virgo* type is chronologically younger and appears in post-Constantine Christianity along with the rise of Mary's cult and the spread of asceticism in the Christian world which was manifested in various treatises on virginity (*de virginitate*), some of which were mentioned on the previous pages. Hence *virgo* entails that virginity in order to attain both spiritual and moral progress

⁴³ Quoted in Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, cit., p. 11.

⁴⁴ See Stephanie L. Cobb, *Dying to be Men. Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, pp. 92-116; and Brent D. Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua", *Past and Present*, 139, 1993, pp. 3-45.

must be achieved by dedicated efforts in perfecting those virtues which were commonly considered to be essentially feminine, and modelled on Mary's sublime virginity. As Barbara Newman remarks, "The virago was an honorary male, aspiring to the unisex ideal, while the virgin aspired to the highly gendered ideal embodied in the Virgin Mary".⁴⁵ However, in spite of this need for sharp contrast of these two types of female virginity, it also becomes apparent that some of the essential characteristics of virility had not only appeared earlier but also remained constant in the stylization of the female virginity. Namely, in order for a 'woman' to become a 'virgin' – modest, self-effacing, obedient, silent, shy – she must possess the ability to control herself which was irrevocably denied to a woman and naturally attributed to a 'man'. Therefore, virginity – both *virago* and *virgo* – is inevitably essentially connected with virility. And yet, it is another matter that this profoundly virile structure, when it comes to *virgo* stylisation of virginity, was often veiled by distinctively female virtues and morality.⁴⁶

On the other hand, if based on the paradigm of this two types of virginity we tried to capture the various forms of virginity, from virgin martyrs to virginal heroines of the 19th century novel, we can notice that over time an increasing feminisation of virginity occurred, both religious and secular. This process will be particularly noticeable in late-medieval female religious texts and practices, in view of their accentuated appropriation of the Virgin Mary cult and the mystical forms of spirituality, and especially in the subsequent Renaissance interest in elaborate arranging of the secular sphere of life which places emphasis on gender differentiation and the establishment of strictly regulated categories of manhood and womanhood, together with the cult of highly aestheticised angelic femininity that will come later to be increasingly recognized as an 'angel in the house'.⁴⁷ In that respect, the use of virility as a virtue will gradually disappear from discourse remaining related only with 'extraordinary women', those which have been regarded as 'exceptions to their sex' and

⁴⁵ Newman, *From Virile Woman to Womanchrist*, cit., p. 5. For a comprehensive overview of the literature on the thesis about the *virago* (masculine) and *virgo* (feminine) concept of virginity (with extensive bibliography), see Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, cit., pp. 9-15; 41-46.

⁴⁶ Cf. Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, cit., p. 15. Salih's observations are so penetrating that they are worth quoting: "It is easy to recognise the militant virgins are evincing the instability and constructedness of gender, but I would suggest the bridal virgins, though less dramatically, have a similar effect. They do not, after all, collapse back into undifferentiated femaleness, but enact a particular inflection of femaleness".

⁴⁷ Especially relevant here is King, *Virgo et Virago*, cit., pp. 157-214

also, as Margaret L. King points out, “aroused admiration as well: precisely because their achievements were manly!”.⁴⁸

Virginal Hagiography: *The Passion of St. Margaret*

Hagiographic legends of early Christian virgins-martyrs were mainly formed in the early medieval period, from the fifth to the eighth century. Transmitted over the centuries by means of Latin language and various vernaculars, versified, and sometimes dramatised, like the Croatian drama about the virgin-martyr Margaret of Antioch, they received intensive reception in the West during late Middle Ages. Their popularity was often associated with the literary habits of late-medieval audiences, shaped by chivalric romance, which might have resonated well with the dynamic plots of such Christian stories of virginity, brimming with various spectacular and fantastic elements, although the deeper reason for their well-likeness could be sought in their evoking the symbolism of essential Christian mysteries. As Karen Anne Windstead notes: “As women who transcended their gender to become manly, the virgin martyrs evoke the mystery of God made men. Their bodies, torn and made whole, replicate the mystery of God made man. The paradox of the virgins’ triumph is distilled in their emblems, where instruments of torture designed to erase identity are used to proclaim identity”.⁴⁹

The symbolism of virgin birth, incarnation and the Eucharist, the tree of life and death, just as the powerful antithesis of Eve – New Eve: the redemption of Woman by the Virgin, strongly pervades the hagiographic legend of Margaret of Antioch.⁵⁰ Although extensively expanded in the West, this legend was originally formed within the Greek hagiographic context, sometime in the fifth century.⁵¹ In Croatian medieval literature it can be traced back to the 13th century, while the protograph of that Croatian Catholic play probably emerged in the 14th century.⁵² These chronological data may not have been so important had it not been noticed that late-medieval editions of this legend in relation to the older Latin

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 191.

⁴⁹ Karen Anne Windstead, *Virgin Martyrs. Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1997, p. 12.

⁵⁰ See Eduard Hercigonja, “Latiničko prikazanje Muka svete Margarite i hrvatskoglagoljska hagiografskolegendarna tradicija”, in *Na temeljima hrvatske književne kulture*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 2004, pp. 234-281.

⁵¹ See Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 7-24; 24-41.

⁵² See Hercigonja, *Latiničko prikazanje*, cit., pp. 234-281; Dragica Malić, “Zašto Margarita nije Marulićeva?”, *Colloquia Maruliana*, 19, 2010, pp. 185-218.

and the original Greek context do not emphasize the feminisation of the young virgin's character. Namely, the tale has the conventional plot structure of virgin martyrs' legends. As in the case of many legendary lives, a young noble virgin defies marriage in order to preserve virginity and Christianity. The character is depicted as mostly *virago* type: Margaret is eloquent, brave and fearless. She is also characterized by prudence, stability, strength and self-restraint. She is exceptionally assertive and highly aggressive. And yet, these components of physical aggressiveness are suppressed in later redactions of the legend, while the Latin hagiographic context, dominated by a submissive character of Marian virginity, does not know the components of physical activity of the martyrological protagonist that is typical for original Greek context.⁵³

On the other hand, in the Croatian dramatised legend *The Passion of Saint Margaret* a further feminisation of already feminised Margaret's character is under way. This point can be illustrated in fine detail. As in various other narratives of Christian virgin-martyrs (from the apocryphal Thecla to Barbara and Juliana of Nicomedia), in this account of the aforesaid Antiochian virgin virginity was shaped in direct conflict with the traditional Roman conception of sexuality, marriage, and family. Moreover, the actions of Christian heroines who, despite their pagan fathers' or betrothed's objection, decide to renounce marriage and childbirth, entailed a complete rejection of the authority of the Roman *pater familias* and all established social norms and values based on the daughter's position and female subordination.⁵⁴ This situation was, however, not equally highlighted nor developed in all such stories. Thereby the narrative of Margaret of Antioch belongs to the ones where her father was not given a more active role, even though the virgin's antagonistic relationship with her father was implied. This phenomenon is generally significant for the literary canon of Margaret's legend, so this line is maintained in the *Passion* where the father does not get any more significant role than the canon of legend prescribes. Nevertheless, the character of the father in the *Passion* has, to a certain extent, been changed and does not represent solely the sinful pagan community, but rather becomes an epitome of fatherly negligence. Here, on the other hand, the virgin also undergoes transformation: while in the

⁵³ Wendy R. Larson, "The Role of Patronage and Audience in the Cults of Sts. Margaret and Marina of Antioch", in Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (eds.), *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 23–35.

⁵⁴ See Shaw, *The Passion of Perpetua*, cit., pp. 3–4.

literary canon of legend fathers violent fury caused by Margaret's decision to reject affiliation with her family and community by accepting Christianity was clearly indicated, the *Passion* seems to have interpreted this situation by indicating that Margaret did not object to her father's will, but to the devil's, and that she not only came into conflict with him by authoritatively, even violently refusing marriage and paganism, and she also fight for virginity in radically different way: by patience and persistence in staying faithful to her vows. To put it differently, virgin behaviour, when it comes to the decision of virginity, does not arise more from the socially unusual possibility that a woman decides independently of herself and her life, which in those Christian stories thus emerged from the "radical critique of Graeco-roman gender discourses and sexual dimorphism *tout court*",⁵⁵ but instead of that, now the virgin's behaviour is forced to fit in the ever socially more common image of female patience, humility and submissiveness. And such an image of a tamed virgin obviously did not suit the medieval dramatist any more.

If, on the other hand, we were to try to fathom what prompted an unknown dramatist to such an interpretation of the ancient legend, somehow it seems appropriate to think that this was actually an instance of oblivion of time erasing the memory of what meant for the early Christians to be different from the others. Certainly, there is also an understanding of the relationship between 'Christianity' and 'paganism' as a struggle between Good and Evil. It would therefore not be amiss to assume that this involved adjusting family relations (even if they were pagan!) to their then-contemporary viewpoint, which obviously thought an image of a docile daughter more convenient than the rebellious virgin. Moreover, this assumption might find a sort of justification in the fact that even in the early martyrologies Christian heroines were not portrayed as unambiguously masculine. As an early Christianity historian Stephanie Cobb remarks us, on the contrary, readers were faced with an irresistible "sexual dilemma": these narratives encourage masculinisation of women (outside the Christian textual community) and entice their femininity (within the Christian textual community).⁵⁶ In other words, against pagan men heroine has to prove as a 'better man', and against Christian men as a 'weak woman'.

⁵⁵ Daniel Boyarin, "Virgins in Brothels. Gender and Religious Ecotypification", *ELO*, 5, 1999, pp. 195-217, p. 211.

⁵⁶ Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, cit., p. 92.

Concurrently, virginity in the *Passion* remains predominantly virilely organised, although this virility is derived from a summation of various activities. As a virilised woman, the virgin martyr reflected an early tradition in which Christian criticism of 'paganism' was largely being levelled "through 'gender-bending' attacks on female subordination". Hence the radical independence and freedom of action quite characteristic for early Christian female martyrs whose prominent strength and agency were thus signs of absolute Christian superiority over 'paganism'. On the other hand, the power of Christian collective was also built on the ability of the virgin to overcome her 'female nature' through using pious asceticism. By that understanding, the virgin's inherent weakness was established as evidence of her strength, and her supernatural ability to gain that strength through pure faith would be used as an example of moral action. In this sense, Margaret of Antioch, as well as other female Christian saints of the same type, could have functioned as a highly charged symbol capable of expressing different meanings attributed to female virginity.

Renaissance Pastoral Virginity: *The Hunter and the Fairy*

This play by the renowned Benedictine monk from Dubrovnik belongs to the tradition of the Dubrovnik pastoral, which connected with concept of 'liberty', as one the fundamental concepts of the political culture of the early modern Republic of Ragusa,⁵⁷ with the conventional pastoral tensions between the urban and rural spaces, culture and nature, historical and non-historical timeframe. This habitual set of allegorical images and motifs are however somewhat modified in Vetranović's play by bringing into the very heart of the pastoral elements of the religious concept of virginity. In that regard, the pastoral is using the religious concept of virginity as freedom and liberation and engages it in the service of mythologizing of pastoral space that represents Dubrovnik as a Happy City ruled by liberty, harmony and reason.⁵⁸ Therefore, such a perception of the pastoral space emphasizes the particular usage of that genre which was always inclined to creating an image of the restored original harmony, lost human integrity,

⁵⁷ See Lovro Kunčević, "On Ragusan Libertas in the Late Middle Ages", *Dubrovnik annals*, 14, 2010, pp. 25-69.

⁵⁸ For an overview of political conceptualization of early modern Dubrovnik as a Happy City, see Zdenka Janeković-Römer, "Grad trgovaca koji nose naslov plemića. Filip de Diversis i njegova pohvala Dubrovniku", in Filip de Diversis, *Opis slavnoga grada Dubrovnika*, Zdenka Janeković-Römer (ed. and trans.), Dom i svijet, Zagreb, 2002, pp. 9-31.

the dispossessed world of eternal youth and beauty, innocent eroticism before the Fall.⁵⁹ Images which will, in a special way, in Vetranović's pastoral be produced by dramatising the difference between virginity and marriage; the difference which represents a part of those carefully codified relationship between virginity and marriage, virginity and freedom, virgins and women which we have earlier found in patristic argumentation.

Hence, the simple plot of Vetranović's play can entirely be reduced to the dialogue between the captured Diana's fairy and the hunter (in the presence of a silent rector) who will capture the fairy, try to sell her to the rector, and finally release her. The fairy understood as part of the pastoral represents an idealised Arcadian image of the geographical city of Dubrovnik, the hunter is part of the lowly rural world, while the rector (knez) is power over the City, which does not only represent a place of happiness and prosperity but also of the moral-ethical and political problems of the then-contemporary Dubrovnik's reality. Shaped in such a way, the pastoral space implies an opposition between nature and civilisation; criticism of the moral deviations of Dubrovnik's society (greed and avarice) which is embodied in the figure of the taciturn Ragusan rector who does not want to set the fairy free by paying the ransom which the hunter asks for her. The symbolism of such conceptualised space is obvious: between the real and fantastic world there is a clear relation of the lower hierarchy towards the higher, whereas the balance between those different worlds at the end of the play becomes re-established when the hunter decides to give the fairy to the rector as a gift, and the fairy bestows a panegyric upon the City.

But if we turn to the opposition of virginity (freedom/nature) – marriage (captivity/culture), the meaning which these pastoral patterns acquire becomes unsuitable for interpretations that do not doubt. What is clear is that in this drama virginity functions as a sign of integrity, strength and independence; in short, of virility. The fairy virgin has for a woman a thoroughly socially unusual opportunity to make decisions for herself, to choose or dismiss marriage, to negotiate for her destiny; and yet the fairy virgin belongs to a different world order from the one in which a woman is measured by her success on the market of marital policy. And again, does this imply that the virgin is a woman at all? On the other hand, does this include a possible glimpse at a critical corrective of

⁵⁹ See Laurence Lerner, *The Uses of Nostalgia. Studies in Pastoral Poetry*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1972; and Richard Andrews, "Pastoral drama", in Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, 1996, pp. 292-298.

the moral drainage of the urban world which views this captive fairy as a 'pretty thing' that can be substantially marketable? And to enlarge upon this thought, can we even discern a hint of criticism of Dubrovnik's marital policy which works through the system of dowries and arranged marriages?⁶⁰ Maybe. But not for certain. For even if we exclude the fact that the pastoral allows greater space for the development of female characters than some other realistic genres such as comedy,⁶¹ there still remains an important way in which this unconventional freedom of the fairy's conduct is framed. Thereby it is significant that the fairy's choice, her refusal to marry a hunter who belongs to an entirely different, lower world – within the context of Dubrovnik's marriage policy, which was extremely endogamous and did not permit marrying outside the Republic's patrician class, while the only destiny awaiting unmarried patrician girls was becoming a nun – it was actually twice as culturally desirable: fairy dismisses marrying the hunter because of her choosing devoted virginity, and besides, it was a case of an illicit marital bond between a noble fairy and a mere rustic. Nevertheless, it is precisely because of this that Diana's pastoral warriors could perfectly carry ambiguous demands of virginity that have in the past of the Western literature been carried by martyrological virgins.

Romance and Virginity: *Branka*

In Šenoa's novel we find, as mentioned above, highly stylized patterns of sentimental romance. Description of the young heroine is a clear indication of this. Absolute chastity of the heroine, expressed through the appropriate rhetoric devices, is typically associated with a complete lack of awareness of one's own beauty and sexuality. She is guided by the idea of pure love and a lofty sense of marriage, which is as such incompatible with the acquisition of goods and respectable social status serving as a purpose for entering into wedlock. Nevertheless, happy ending, which is essential for this type of storytelling, is subjected to the same social rules, and Branka consequently becomes a bride of a young nobleman.

⁶⁰ See Zdenka Janeković Römer, "Nasilje zakona. Gradska vlast i privatni život kasnosrednjovjekovnom i ranonovovjekovnom Dubrovniku", *Analiza Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku*, 41, 2003, pp. 9-44.

⁶¹ See Richard Andrews, *Pastoral drama*, cit., pp. 292-298; and Sue P. Starke, *The Heroines of English Pastoral Romance*, D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 1-41. See also Virginia Cox and Lisa Simpson, "Volume Editors' Introduction", in Maddalena Campiglia, *Flori, A Pastoral Drama*, Virginia Cox and Lisa Simpson (eds.), Virginia Cox (trans.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2004, pp. 1-37.

Therefore, tightly organised by criteria of stereotyping, inherent to the narrative structure of romance, the novel is filled with generalising moral and social commentary. Šenoa believed in ethical and political potential of literature and advocated for writing that “has to be nationally functional, i.e., reflect the national spirit and serve for enlightenment and raising awareness of the people”.⁶² Thus, the distinguishing feature of the main female character of his novel is that she has been entrusted to convey the author’s convictions about the necessity of social and moral reform in the course of which the woman was expected to play a huge role. In this vision of modern nation, motherhood is established as an essential element of society, equally emphasizing the belief that a woman should be allowed an opportunity to participate in the realisation of the common good and the appropriate manner of achieving that is professionalisation of intrinsic philanthropic role of ‘woman-mother’ or ‘women-nurses’.⁶³

All this makes Šenoa’s heroic young teacher the pillar of ‘idealism’. Although marriage is established as an ideal inextricably linked with the idea of romantic love and patriotic enthusiasm, most of the novel follows the adventures of a young idealist woman. Fearless, brave and daring – a modern Joan D’Arc – Šenoa’s Branka is a character akin to archetypal virile virgins. Thus, virginity is closely associated with a particular vision of freedom. It allows her to overcome the limits of socially acceptable female behaviour; it is a measure of heroine’s independence, her ‘masculine’ force. Described as enthusiastic, intellectually curious, exceptionally eloquent, witty, self-disciplined, Branka as a character does not live the life of a stereotypical social perception and experience of the literary structure of her time – that is what sets her apart from the typical domestic ‘angel in the house’.

On the other hand, the novel carefully keeps clear from explaining the heroine’s behaviour as woman’s quest for independence. The heroine’s ‘modernity’ and ‘emancipation’ is exemplified by her idealism, her patriotic ideas, and her passionate enthusiasm for the teaching profession. But it is quite far from understanding that such a lifestyle choice is a valid and permanent alternative to marriage and motherhood, even if the relationship

⁶² Krešimir Nemec, *Povijest hrvatskog romana od početka do kraja 19. stoljeća*, Znanje, Zagreb, 1994, p. 81.

⁶³ Slavica Jakobović Fribec, “Feministička epistemologija objašnjena djevojčici. Ženski spoznajni subjekt u epistolarnom romanu Jagode Truhelke *U carstvu duše*. Listovi svojoj učenici (Osijek, 1910.)”, *Filozofska istraživanja*, 105, 27/1, 2007, pp. 83-94, p. 86.

between spouses should allow the heroine to maintain a certain level of independence which she previously held. Nonetheless, the point is that only as a wife and mother can a woman participate in the well-being of the community because that is the mode which best suits her female nature. Harmonious end of the novel therefore unquestionably links Branka with submissive angelic iconography.

Conclusion

This entire situation concerning the plot, as we have seen, has its rationale in the historical and political context of these early Christian stories. However, something else here is of the essence: that same narrative situation, with modifications of course, can be found in other texts which we have discussed. This is so because in all of them there is a virgin figure who tests out behavioural scripts which enable her to disrupt the culturally conventional women's gender role and stable meanings of gender. On the other hand, such transgressive effects do not necessarily entail emancipatory potential. Moreover, the differentiation of a 'virgin' from a 'woman', as well as underlining virility as a prerequisite for every woman's progress definitely confirms in various ways the strict social control over women's positions. And yet... would it be overly sentimental to conclude together with Zemon Davies that such figures which she called were were 'unruly women' despite confirming the culturally dominant assumptions of womanhood, could even so become inspirational examples of women's agency manifested by disrupting the 'natural' female positions? If it were not overly sentimental, then in that sense, and only in that sense, virginity could be called a narrative of female autonomy.

Between Romanticization and De-historization of History: The ‘Unveiling’ of Gender in Witchcraft Trials

Nataša Polgar

Summary

In this article the author gives an overview of the paradoxical and problematic place of gender both in the historiography of witchcraft and feminist studies in the second half of the twentieth century. Namely, the issue of sex and gender in the construction of witches and in witch-hunts has long been its most visible and at the same time most ‘unseen’ feature in historiography. Up until the late twentieth century it was considered quite marginal and often counterproductive for in ‘depth’ studies of the phenomenon, while gender as an analytical category simply did not exist. Gender as an analytical category entered historiography only with (often justified) critiques of feminist works from the 1970s and 1980s, emerging as part of the political movement for the struggle for women’s rights. Here the author reviews the works that contributed most to the debate between historiography and feminist criticism, and which in the very least had divided and ambiguous results. On the one hand, this contributed to tempering the strict discipline of historiography and the introduction of a feminist critical apparatus at the end of the 2000s, but on the other, this created new myths about witches still circulating in popular culture and forming a part of the “general” knowledge on witch persecution, which were relying on the political use of witches during the first and second feminist waves.

The text also discusses the possibility of the further expansion of historiographic disciplinary boundaries by introducing psychoanalytic criticism in research on the phenomenon of witch-hunts on the basis of a brief overview of a case study by the author regarding the interpretation of Croatian records and testimonies from trials at the end of the seventeenth century up to the mid-eighteenth century and which relies on the Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition.

Even though there is data indicating that witch-hunts in Europe were primarily the persecution of women – who made up almost two thirds of the 60.000 persons convicted of witchcraft¹ – the issue of gender has for a surprisingly long time been neglected in historiography, aside from the romanticist approach in the tradition of Jules Michelet's study² that influenced the widely held notion in popular culture of witches as being exclusively powerful, strong, wise and socially 'eccentric' women whose behavior was the object of normalization and sanction on the part of patriarchal society. Gender was simultaneously the most visible and the most invisible feature of the persecutions, thus occupying a paradoxical place, and managed to enter into mainstream historiography during the late 1980s primarily by criticizing feminist theory. The relationship between feminism and historicism in the context of the study of persecution of witches has been marked by controversies, and many political and ideological agendas are inscribed in interpretations of the constructions of witches.³

¹ Witch-hunts were an early modern phenomenon that lasted from the late fourteenth to the late seventeenth and even mid-eighteenth century in some parts of Europe (for example Poland, Croatia, parts of Russia). "Geographically, they occurred most often in some parts of the Holy Roman Empire that were extremely fragmented legally: Franconian ecclesiastical territories; the Saar and Mosel regions; the electorates of Trier and Cologne, including the duchy of Westphalia; the duchies of Luxembourg and Lorraine; the prince-bishopric of Münster; Schleswig-Holstein; and Mecklenburg. Elsewhere, they occurred on the peripheries of France (for example, Navarre and Languedoc), in the Swiss Confederation, the Spanish Netherlands, the Austrian Habsburg patrimonial lands, and western Poland. Witch-hunting was generally less intense in both Mediterranean and northern Europe, with Catalonia from 1618 to 1620 as a notable exception in the former area and lowland Scotland, eastern England, in 1645, and northern Sweden from 1668 to 1674 as exceptions in the latter area". Rita Voltmer, "Witch Hunts", in Richard Golden (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*, ABC Clio, Santa Barbara, pp. 1209-1241.

² Jules Michelet's book, *La Sorcière*, published in 1862, promoted the idea that witchcraft was an act of popular rebellion against the oppression of feudalism and the Roman Catholic Church. According to Michelet, this rebellion took the form of a secret religion inspired by paganism and fairy beliefs, organized by a woman who became its leader. This book, combining archival work with poetical and romanticist interpretations of witchcraft as a peasants' rebellion, has significantly influenced some of the 20th-century historiographic and feminist approaches to witch-hunts.

³ Although not related to the scientific approaches in question, one of the most radical examples of the use of witch-hunting for ideological and political purposes was the project of Heinrich Himmler. He organized a special unit within the SS called the "Hexen-Sonderkommando" which searched through court records and archives for confirmation of the thesis of that persecution of the witches as firstly a Christian, then Jewish attempt to destroy "Aryan women". This thesis was put forth in 1935 by Nazi 'feminist' Friedrike Müller-Reimerdes in a pamphlet entitled

While gender studies and feminist criticism have nevertheless left a significant impact on the historiographic research of witch-hunts with a time lag of a few decades of fierce debates and which I write about in the first part of the text, psychoanalytic criticism along with a whole slew of key terms such as the unconscious, desire, subjectivization, Otherness, etc. which are important for consideration of the cultural and individual dynamics during the time of persecution remains controversial for mainstream historiography. Thus in order to ascertain how much analyzing the psychic structures of earlier century subjects can help in our in-depth understanding of the persecution of witches and the witch imaginary, in the second part of the text I summarize my own research and interpretation of witch persecutions on the basis of court records from continental Croatia in the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century.

Historians and the Witch: 'Invisible' Gender

The rise of interest in 'microhistory', 'history from below' and history of mentalities in the 1960s also provoked interest in the mass persecutions of witches, previously held as a less relevant or unimportant part of much larger, usually *military* historical narratives. Since the phenomenon of the witch-hunt is a long-lasting one, more than three centuries long, historiographic approaches in the second half of the twentieth century have been varied, covering almost all social, ideological, political and economic aspects that gave impetus to the persecutions: from the tense relation between theological discourse and popular culture with its belief system, the development of modern nation states, reformation and counterreformation, urbanization, economic crises, extreme weather conditions resulting in poverty and migrations for which societies/communities needed scapegoats who could be blamed for all misfortune, etc.,⁴ but without

"Der christliche Hexenwahn" ("The Christian Witch-Craze"). More in Barbara Schier, "Hexenwahn und Hexenverfolgung. Rezeption und politische Zurichtung eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Themes im Dritten Reich", *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, 1990, pp. 45-46; Michael D. Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe. A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, 2007, pp. 236-238.

⁴ A clear overview of the various disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to the persecution of witches as an extremely complex phenomenon is presented on the website The Witchcraft Bibliography Project Online with bibliographic data published from the 1960s up to 2010, and which focuses on the different aspects of social, cultural, ideological, economic and other changes that have opened space for persecutions. However, precisely due to the many approaches and works, it

taking into consideration the simple and obvious fact that the persecutions were largely pointed at the feminine sex and as such are also a part of the early modern history of women.

Or, as stated by Elspeth Whitney, “[t]he extent to which gender has ‘fallen out’ as a category of analysis among the majority of historians of the witch-hunts is quite startling. Despite the use of elaborated methodologies borrowed from anthropology, sociology and folklore studies, the main lines of interpretation of the hunts have been constructed largely outside of work in women’s history or gender studies. ... nevertheless, the bulk of published research on the European hunts at the present time either ignores gender or, even while taking note of the relevance of women’s history and feminist analysis, tends to minimize its importance”.⁵

When the previously ‘hidden’ gender of witches finally managed to reach the interpretative models of mainstream historiography of the 1970s and 1980s, all while the intense work of historians in archives across Europe inevitably showed that it was mainly women who were accused of witchcraft, explanations denying misogyny as either a cultural constant or as a specificity of the early modern period soon followed.

During the 1970s and 1980s (but even today) the studies of Keith Thomas⁶ and Alan Macfarlane⁷ were rather influential in historiography. Their research shifted the focus towards community dynamics in the course of economic and religious changes in England primarily. They both concluded, on the basis of archival material, that it was in fact women who were more frequently accused of witchcraft than men, but not because society as a whole was misogynous, but because these accusations had the goal of relieving the society of its poorest members, which were more often elderly, widowed women seeking financial help from their neighbors.⁸ Thomas argues that it could not have been

has become impossible to administrate the site, but the systematized bibliography is still available at <witchcraftbib.co.uk>.

⁵ Elspeth Whitney, “The Witch ‘She’/The Historian ‘He’”. Gender and the Historiography of the European Witch-Hunts”, *Journal of Women’s History*, 1995, 7, 3, pp. 77-101.

⁶ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1971.

⁷ Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England. A Regional Comparative Study*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970 [1991].

⁸ The phenomenon in question here is in fact the ‘feminization of poverty’, the origins of which are placed in the early modern age by many authors (cf. Marianne Hester, “Patriarchal Reconstruction and Witch Hunting”, in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe. Studies in Culture and Belief*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,

a matter of a sex war, because in most cases women were both prosecutors and witnesses.⁹ This claim is still sometimes utilized in attempts to overturn feminist studies directed at unveiling the unequal power relations that shape, among other things, gender identities where one, almost exclusively feminine, is constructed as evil.¹⁰

Feminist Approaches: Discovery of Gender and Birth of a New Myth

Simultaneously to denying or ignoring the role of gender in the construction of the witch-craze within the scientific, mostly historiographic community, outside of it and connected to the second wave of feminism, the use of witches for political purposes was getting stronger.

As Katharine Hodgkin stated, “[a]nd though some researchers into witchcraft in Europe were more concerned with gender, their analyses seldom went beyond a few general remarks about stereotypes. Meanwhile, however, outside the academic context, a very different and highly politicized version of witch persecution was taking shape. The feminist movement of the early 1970s made from the witch its’ own heroine – assertive woman crushed by patriarchy”.¹¹

In this period the myth of witches as healers and midwives was born. They allegedly were the ones who helped the community but who, due to their knowledge and power, represented a threat, most of all to physicians, a profession in the making at the time. This concept was introduced in 1973 in the book by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, and it became widespread common ‘knowledge’, deeply rooted even up to today, although completely unfounded on historical sources as no correlation could be established between witchcraft accusations and midwifery.¹² The

1996, pp. 301-303, but also Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, New York, 2004).

⁹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, cit., pp. 568, 679.

¹⁰ Hester, *Patriarchal Reconstruction and Witch Hunting*, cit., pp. 289-290.

¹¹ Katharine Hodgkin, “Gender, Mind and Body. Feminism and Psychoanalysis”, in Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (eds.), *Witchcraft Historiography*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire and New York, 2007, p. 184.

¹² Despite the criticism their book had suffered, English and Ehrenreich published a second edited and completed edition in 2010 in which they still did not refer to archival sources, but where they additionally elaborated the consequences of the political and economic monopolization of medicine from the early modern ages to contemporary times.

discourse of radical feminism in the 1970s has often completely neglected primary sources for promoting its own theses, insisting on the ahistoricity of history, which resulted in many works that have contributed to the politicization and dogmatization of the topic, rather than analyzing the position of women as witches or scapegoats in the early modern period, a position that stemmed out of complex cultural and ideological power relations, among others. This approach is visible in Mary Daly's 1978 book, *Gyn/Ecology*, which, apart from *Malleus Maleficarum*, cites no other sources as the foundation for its often fictional reconstruction of the witch as a popular heroine or protofeminist. Her representation of the witch is thus very close to the romanticist narrative of persecution (which she terms "gynocide") as a reflection of primitivism and barbarism directed against strong and independent women, who were mostly followers of the pagan feminocentric fertility cult. In addition to discrediting Daly's work, it also served as her uncritical takeover of Margaret Murray's theory on witches as followers of the pagan fertility cult or feminocentric religion.¹³

Thus, the scientific study of witchcraft during the 1970s and 1980s found itself in a double bind: 'official historiography' had no room for a serious analysis of the role of feminine gender, and on the other hand, feminist criticism was reluctantly if even at all interested in primary sources and deep historical analysis. Therefore the early modern ages and its witches double-sidedly disturbed the historicity of history: feminist critique by negating the witch-hunt timeframe, seeing it only as continuous misogyny, and official, 'male' historiography by negating the ideological and cultural constructions of femininity.

The development of feminist theory throughout the 1980s introduced new conceptual and analytical tools necessary for a different approach to the witch persecution phenomenon. The most influential among the studies published in this period were Christina Larner's *Enemies of God* (1981) and especially *Witchcraft and Religion* (1984).¹⁴ Although the main focus of her research was the role of the state and the state apparatus in witch persecution, she was also interested in the question of how witches were

¹³ The book in question, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), is possibly the most criticized book about witches of all time. However, this book generated an entire following, and influenced not only the creation of wicca, popular culture *imaginarium*, but also the first wave of feminism.

¹⁴ Christina Larner, *Enemies of God. The Witch Hunt in Scotland*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1981; *Witchcraft and Religion. The Politics of Popular Belief*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1984.

identified at the local level, and in the part gender played in this process. The key question for Larner was, “[w]hy women appeared particularly threatening to patriarchal order at this time and why they ceased to be so threatening about 1700”.¹⁵

According to Larner, witches were often in the position of victims due to their age and poverty, i.e. social status, but also partly due to the fact that they were sometimes perceived as difficult, aggressive neighbors: in situations in which it was completely normal for a man to exert physical force and solve a conflict, the only weapon at a woman’s disposal were words, curses. In the early modern age the legal system was changing rapidly, seriously intervening in private lives, especially that of women, proscribing desirable models of feminine behavior. From this perspective, quarrelsome women who cursed, as well as those whose behavior was deemed overly ‘liberal’, began to be perceived as a threat to the patriarchal order, not only from the perspective of men, but of other women as well. Larner states, “[t]he stereotype witch is an independent adult woman who does not conform to the male idea of proper female behavior”, she disturbs the social order and becomes the symbol of disorder and chaos.¹⁶ Her thesis is that persecutions of witches were “sex-related but not sex-specific”, meaning that witches were not persecuted because they were women but because they were witches.¹⁷

In the late 1980s and in the 1990s several studies stressed the role of patriarchal societies in the construction of witches. In her book *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1987), Carol Karlsen analyzes the accusations of witchcraft in colonial America and, drawing from archival material, describes in detail the social, economic and ideological circumstances of trials, emphasizing the rooted Puritanism of the culture.¹⁸ Unlike English (and, of course, not only English) witches, as claimed by previously mentioned male historians Macfarlane and Thomas, women in New England were not old, alone and poor; rather quite the opposite. Karlsen established that the accused were more often than not financially independent women and that tensions related to family inheritance lurked behind witchcraft accusations, along with sexual misconduct and aggressiveness in interpersonal relations. Unfortunately, her interpretation is reduced to the construction of

¹⁵ Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion*, cit., p. 87.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Ivi, pp. 87-89.

¹⁸ Carol Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman. Witchcraft in Colonial New England*, Norton, New York and London, 1987.

the witch as a protofeminist heroine, whose financial and sexual independence irritated the puritan society and for which she had to be punished. The position of the witch is what makes it part of a long history of oppression and violence against women, concludes Karlsen.

Like Karlsen, Elizabeth Reis investigated witch trials in New England and found a connection between witchcraft accusations and the Protestant construction of women as passive and therefore more subject to paranormal influences.¹⁹ Thus, in some periods woman was shaped as a saint, and in the context of the witch-craze, the inhabitants of New England were directed towards 'the dark side of womanhood', highlighting the susceptibility of the female body and soul to the Devil. Sarah Farber also found this construction of woman as passive and submissive in the works by Catholic reformers, who modeled her as a medieval saint or an early modern witch.²⁰ Marianne Hester emphasized the threatening aspect of womanhood as the main motive for accusations, which served the patriarchal system as a means to control and subordinate it.²¹ In the early modern ages societies underwent different changes – demographic, ideological, economic, religious and political, which triggered insecurity, tensions and conflicts, also manifested, according to Hester, in the relations between the sexes. She sees the witch-hunt as the re-creation of the patriarchal system under new circumstances, holding that women are construed as different than and inferior to men, and in this construction sexualization or eroticization play an important part. In the age of the witch-hunt, it was sexuality that provided the foundation for an especially negative representation of women as witches, and this is the reason why it was more common to sanction them for 'sexual' transgressions, such as giving birth to children out of wedlock or living out of wedlock. The patriarchal ideal in the age of persecutions was a quiet and passive woman but who, according to Hester, was portrayed in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century demonological literature, in different pamphlets and sermons, as insatiable, sinful and morally inferior to men, therefore in a way

¹⁹ Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women. Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1997.

²⁰ Sarah Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004.

²¹ The reference points mainly to her book from 1992, entitled *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches. A Study in the Dynamics of Male Domination*, Routledge, London and New York, but also the chapter "Patriarchal Reconstruction and Witch Hunting", in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, cit.

frightening. For her thesis that witch-hunts actually represented an attempt to control women sexually and economically, Hester finds confirmation in the prevalently English literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which women were portrayed as quiet and submissive. Although Hester's professed interest is the social construction of witches in the age of the most intense persecutions, Katharine Hodgkin points out that her conclusions are ahistorical, and that she does not explain why the early modern era is the time when the threatening femininity takes on the attributes of the witch.²²

Over the last several decades feminist criticism has undoubtedly influenced new perspectives in studying witch-hunts, emphasized the role of gender/sex in the construction of the witch and the influence of patriarchal norms on the construction of the female and witch identity. Most feminist authors noticed a heightened anxiety in relation to women and their sexuality in early modern texts and trial records, a sexuality which the patriarchal society attempted to control and subdue to the religiously constructed ideal of femininity of the time. Also, feminist criticism encouraged the serious questioning of women's history in the early modern ages, the relationship between the public and private sphere and drew attention to the 'androcentric methods of analysis' in previous works. Unfortunately, however, the feminist approach has occasionally contributed to the invention of new myths in the vein of the romanticist ones – witches were depicted in various ways, ranging from healers and midwives to strong, often financially independent women, appropriating the figure of the witch for political ends. But these theses were not based on historical evidence nor verifiable at the microhistoric level and were frequent targets of historicists' criticism, which served as justification for the outright dismissal of feminist criticism as a valid analytical framework and resulting in not making (historiographic) disciplinary boundaries more permeable and inclusive of other disciplinary insights and methodology.

However, the third shift in the study of the mass persecution of witches (which occurred in the 1990s) – and included an understanding of gender relations, but also the relationship between the mind (primarily unconscious), body and language in the construction and representations of witches – appeared as extremely important for the dissolution of images of the witch that ranged from 'an evil woman' and disenfranchised victim

²² Hodgkin, *Gender, Mind and Body*, cit., pp. 182-202.

to the superhero of the early modern period. This shift included psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic criticism in the readings of different archival materials and trial records, but also literary texts which led research to a more complex understanding of the testimonies of the accused, the accusers but also of the entire witchcraft imaginary.²³

A Psychoanalytic Reading of Croatian Witch Trials

When it comes to Croatian witch trials, with the focus of my interest being Zagreb and its surroundings,²⁴ it was easy to notice an overarching misogyny – the number of accused men was negligible, as almost 95% of those convicted of witchcraft were women, which puts Croatia at the very top in the European context. However, misogyny itself, traceable even in statutes written in Croatian from the thirteenth century onwards which sanction women as witches²⁵ (unlike those in Latin that include both sexes as possible perpetrators of maleficium), did not seem a satisfying answer to the question of what made women in the late seventeenth century, marked as the beginning of mass witch-hunts in continental Croatia, so terrifying. In my opinion, to keep insisting solely on misogyny as the key element of persecution is to lose sight of the specific historicity of the phenomenon. Somewhat paradoxically, or even cynically, it was the persecution of witches that made women visible participants in urban life in Croatia, inscribing them in the *male written* history of the early modern age, *disturbing* the thus far predominantly male history.

Reading the court records, I expected to find the very culmination of sexual antagonism between men and women

²³ Two of the best studies using the psychoanalytical approach are: Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil. Witchcraft, Religion and Sexuality in Early Modern Europe*, Routledge, London, 1994; and Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History. Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*, Routledge, London, 1994. Roper is a historian who dealt mainly with court records, while Purkiss dealt more with literary works, mostly that of Shakespeare.

²⁴ Here I have analyzed the court records exclusively from the period from 1699 to 1758, the time of mass witch-hunts in the north-western part of Croatia, and in this text I will quote those collected and published in the book by law professor Vladimir Bayer, *Ugovor s đavlom / A pact with the Devil*, Zora, Zagreb, 1952, third edition 1982. The choice of north-western Croatia (which used to be a part of the Habsburg Monarchy), moreover of Zagreb court records, was the only possible choice: for the rest of Croatia, which had at the time been under either Osman Empire rule or Venetian Republic which led to having no preserved court records, but more importantly no evidence of any mass witch-hunts.

²⁵ These included the Vinodol Law, the Statute of the Island of Krk, the Statute of Poljice, and the Statute of Trsat (acc. to Bayer 1982).

there, as could be suggested by the witchcraft imaginary: flying a broom or an animal, intercourse with the devil, orgies at Sabbath, signing a pact with the devil, etc. However, an analysis of the records indicated that sexually-driven anxiety does not play a primary role, but instead the underlying concerns connected with the body and corporeality came to the fore.

Therefore, although understanding the power dynamics in society at the time, and that gender relations and identities were important, it was pertinent to draw on psychoanalytic theory due to what, from the contemporary perspective, appeared as fantastic, irrational parts of the witch imaginary, perpetuated in demonological treatises, trial records, witness testimonies, but also in the confessions of the accused. Lacanian psychoanalysis was chosen as an adequate interpretative model for several reasons: first, because of the historization of its procedures, and also because of the prominent position that the notion of the Other occupies within, which was crucial for understanding the persecutions.²⁶

Also, unlike feminist critics from the 1980s who saw women's testimonies only as voices of the patriarchal order, I found them to be legitimate women's narratives of their own lives, fears, projections and fantasies told through the adopted or imposed discourse about witches, although written in the third person by a man, likely after a longer period of torture. It seemed possible that

²⁶ In this text I will continue to use the term the Other relying on Lacan's theory of the structure of subjectivity, under which is implied that the Other is a part of the symbolic register, by which the subject acquires / builds its own identity, while the other is part of the imaginary and, according to Lacan, a 'by-product' of the formation of the ego in the mirror stage. Lacan in his theory of subjectivity relocated the ego in the area of the imaginary, and merged the subject with the unconscious as a primary feature. Its subject then becomes the subject of the unconscious. The consciousness or self-awareness of the subject is, for Lacan, mere delusion, an illusion of the ego. Structuring the ego rests on the inability to distinguish the 'original' from the copy at the mirror stage or identifying itself with the reflection in the mirror, which alienates the subject from itself and develops narcissistic binding, but also aggressive impulses that are primarily focused on the subject's biggest rival – itself. Lacan names that reflection or projection of the ego *the little other* and refers to it as *a* (according to the French *autre*), which is "the other who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the Ego in the relation which is always mirrored, interchangeable" (Lacan 1978). In Seminar II Lacan joins the concept of *the little other*, or rather opposes, with the concept of *the big Other*, *A* (*Autre*). That Other is the second subject, in the primarily symbolic area i.e. of language and the unconscious, the order "in which the subject different from the ego comes to life, in such a way that it is always split and discontinuous". Malcom Bowie, *Lacan*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 92. Or for Lacan the unconscious is the discourse of the Other. Jacques Lacan. *Écrits I*, Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 16.

this could provide at least a partial insight into the psychological structures of the subjects involved in the persecutions of witches at the time, bypassing the widely held notion that the records were a mere reflection of the patriarchal system and dominant ideology, and those women nothing but 'spokeswomen' of patriarchy.

Similarly, with the inclusion of testimonies from the trials as a corpus belonging to the oral tradition in which beliefs and legends mirror themselves, personally and collectively immersed in a specific cultural, social and political context, the boundaries of the corpus – which folkloristics traditionally discerns as memorates and fabulates – were expanded.

Thus, the focus of my research was on the influence of the unconscious on the construction of witches in the early modern period as extremely dangerous to individuals and society as a whole, which can be read from the trial records and some social and penal practices of the period.

Such psychoanalytic interpretation of the material aims to find or point out the mechanisms of the structuring of subjectivity and the effects of the unconscious as the key to creation or projection of witchcraft imagery, which partly puts aside the usual, traditional interpretation of persecution such as misogyny, the effects of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, social and cultural conflicts, bad neighbor relations, elimination of business competition, etc.

Of course, this in no way tries to diminish or deny the influence of counterreformation on the construction of witches in Zagreb and the continental part of Croatia, and of scaremongering: the return of the Jesuits in Zagreb in the early seventeenth century marked the long process of correcting and disciplining the behavior and beliefs of the population, as witnessed by Jesuit chronicles and the texts of certain writers and preachers, such as Juraj Habelić, whose works provide enough material to reconstruct different aspects of the everyday lives of artisans, merchants, soldiers and the occasional aristocrat in Gradec in the late seventeenth century.²⁷ This period,

²⁷ In his literary works, especially with his grand, more than thousand-page long book *Pervoi otca nassega Adama greh* from 1674, Habelić depicted interesting minutiae of the folk culture of Zagreb at the time (see Zrinka Nikolić, "Gradska kultura u djelima Jurja Habelića", *Zbornik Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za povijesne i društvene znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti*, 19, 2001, pp. 183-213). This book was later used as a secondary source in interpretation of some of the events of the 1573 Peasants' Revolt, the great fire in Zagreb in 1645, the Magnate conspiracy, etc. However, this book, which was mostly read out loud, was written with the intention of being a didactic handbook on morality, used as a source for both spiritual, religious and physical betterment of the people.

among other things, saw a change in the image of the body, and criticism of sensuality and sexuality, especially when it comes to women, as the body's exclusive purpose should be reproductive from then onwards: the usage of women's bodies for pleasure is proscribed as especially sinful, and the image of the Virgin Mary as an ideal woman and mother becomes more prominent. These processes were bound to cause anxiety, frustration and resistance, as witnessed by Habelić himself.

An analysis of the records brought to the fore something less expected – the fear of the witch as fear of the mother, that is, it pointed to an anxiety related to the position of the mother in the process of the structuring of subjectivity. According to the trial records, the fear of women in the early modern ages manifested itself in several key images which have been perpetuated in personal narratives, subsuming the concept of witch as anti-mother, while always occupying the position of the subject's Other.

Narratives or fragments of narratives dominated by images of dismembered bodies of children killed so that their body parts could be used to make witch ointment, slaughtered animals and destroyed crops, the banquet at which the served food causes disgust or breaks taboos – all these being traditionally parts of the *female domain*, hence the birth or destruction of life, care for the home or its destruction, nature... The position of women is the one between nature and culture, the imaginary and the symbolic. She is the one with the power which intimidates as it is comprehensive and the subject can hardly escape it. Woman as mother and as witch should be conquered so that the subject could reach the symbolic space, in language and in society.

Psychoanalytic criticism would not be the first choice in analyzing the relationship to the body and physicality if Lacan had not devoted considerable attention to the body through its association with mental registers, especially with the imaginary and symbolic. For interpretation of the statements, and then of certain parts of the witchcraft imagery, the mirror as a central point of formation of the ego is its crucial stage, but it is important also for identification of the accused. Although Lacan used the word stage, we are talking of, as Roudinesco emphasized, the psychological or ontological operation and not a passing phase of a child's / subject's development.²⁸ It is because of 'premature

²⁸ Elisabeth Roudinesco, "The Mirror Stage. An Obliterated Archive", in Jean-Michel Rabaté (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 29.

birth', while the child has not yet mastered the motoric system and fragmentarily reflects on his body, who wrongfully sees his own reflection / image (image) as himself, while his own body is foreign and frightening to him, almost as a rival. Then the ego is structured on the basis of the ideas generated by others and asks for confirmation of the Other (initially that of the mother) to maintain a semblance of integrity.²⁹

The mother becomes the first guarantee of the child's identity and corporal wholeness, but also the one who has power over the subject's life: she is the one who gives life and takes it away; the threat of destruction that the mother embodies never disappears. As the Other, she is part of the symbolic, but the relationship the child has with her is dyadic, belonging to the imaginary: according to Lacan, the mother occupies a marginal position between the two registers, the imaginary and the symbolic, nature and culture.

The images of dismembered bodies, castration, emasculation, mutilation, removal of the entrails, heart, blood vessels, devouring the bodies and orgies over the bodies – these are all phantasms which have their origins in the mirror stage,³⁰ accompanying the subject all through life: they can often be found in children's games, sometimes they appear in dreams, as nightmares, the subject goes through them in a certain phase of the psychoanalytical treatment, and they are also the integral part of the images of witches. The descriptions of witches' threats and their excesses concerning the helpless bodies of the victims are abundant and eerie in records, and appear equally in the images of witches as cannibals, especially in the images of the witch as the threatening mother.

Descriptions of atrocities by witches exercised over numerous bodies or parts of bodies – children, adults, animals – are gruesome: the "pulling out of the heart" is often mentioned, gutting, even extracting blood vessels and such. Thus, in 1699, accused Jela Škvarić said while being questioned, that when witches get together they "eat human flesh";³¹ one of the suspects, Margareta Dumbović-Boljanec said "that Jalžunka, Ključarić's wife, is a witch and that she cooked and served a child's head, ... but also stated that she had not eaten children's heads",³² while accused Kata Dolenc gave a detailed recipe for various diseases that witches can cause, even "to return from the dead": "When

²⁹ Anthony Elliot, *Uvod u psihoanalitičku teoriju*, AGM, Zagreb, 2012, p. 65.

³⁰ Lacan, *Écrits I*, cit., p. 104.

³¹ Vladimir Bayer, *Ugovor s đavlom. Procesi protiv čarobnjaka u Evropi, a napose u Hrvatskoj*. Zora, Zagreb, 1982 [1953], p. 595.

³² Bayer, *Ugovor s đavlom*, cit., p. 598.

witches take someone, they can cure him. A bloody place on the body should be looked for, then rinsed and given to drink, he will soon gain strength, and quickly so. Even though half of his heart will be burnt, he should recover".³³

All these examples, which could be interpreted as projections or phantasms of the subject, seem to show that those who accused women of witchcraft were in a way stuck in the imaginary; i.e. almost the entire witch imaginary points to the dominant and threatening mother and the lack of or a weak father figure. Although there is not much preserved data on the structure of the population of Gradec at the time, even less so for the wider Zagreb region, these structures of subjects who were witnesses in the witch trials imply that women had real power in the families – whether due to wars which took their toll primarily on the male population, to men's absence as merchants and artisans who frequently traveled to other cities, or due to other reasons. However, it is precisely because of the asymmetrical relations of power in families, reflected in the formation of subjectivity intimidated by the image of the devouring mother, that it is possible to talk about the early modern period as the age of matriarchy, and about witch persecutions as a rebellion against the mother who impedes the subject's entry into the symbolic.

A very similar process of structuring the subject can be traced in cases of women who admitted to being witches: they accepted, or rather internalized the dominant image of women as evil, sinful, dangerous and given to bodily pleasures as their own mirror reflection, the image of the Other became one's own image for porous subjects. In a world in which the image of the Virgin Mary was imposed as the ideal self, frustration and fears relating to motherhood and one's own sexuality had to be particularly strong – therefore identification with one's own 'witch-like' Otherness was much more probable than identification with the unattainable ideal of the Virgin Mother.

Thus the witches slipped from the private sphere into becoming the collective Other - whether one's own identity was constructed in opposition and fear towards them, or in identification with them. However, utilization of the constructed Otherness of the witch was recognized and supported by authorities – witches' bodies served for channeling anxieties, conflicts and violence in the community, as well as becoming a medium for constructing society by means of torture and public burnings. The once powerful bodies marked by

³³ Ivi, p. 600.

the devil (as a possible father) were by means of torture attempted to be 'unmarked' and then enslaved, humiliated, destroyed: disciplining and public punishment served as a warning, but also as a means to establish the dialectical relationship between master and slave. The accused, tortured and burnt women came primarily from the ranks of artisans, merchants and servants in nobility estates, although the law permitted accusation of the nobility as well.

Evidence of the utilization of witches as a collective Other is the fact that persecutions never occurred during wars or political crises: almost no witches were on trial during the sixteenth century in Zagreb because the role of the Other was transferred, it belonged to the real Other, the Ottomans who attacked the city and its surroundings, while mass persecutions started in 1699, a month after the signing of the peace treaty in Srijemski Karlovci, which marked the end of the war against the Ottoman Empire.

Thus the phantasms and projections transferred from the individual sphere of the clergy that participated in their construction (such as Institoris and his phantasmatic diary and the most popular handbook of the inquisitors, *Malleus maleficarum*) and the 'common people' to the sphere of the political and the ideological, became the place of relieving tensions and redirecting violence.

The persecutions of witches in Zagreb and its surroundings represent an important contribution to the history of women, a history which to this day *disturbs* the important, 'grand' history, but also to the history of the unconscious, being a cautionary tale of the manner of constructing Otherness and its almost timeless usage in political and ideological purposes.

Foremothers

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Feminism in Disguise: Isotta Nogarola's Defense of Eve (1451)¹

Francesca Maria Gabrielli

Summary

The humanist scholar Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466) contributed to the philogynist side of the Renaissance debate on women (*querelle des femmes*) both in her early and in her mature production. After discussing a *defensio mulierum* passage from Nogarola's letterbook (1436 or 1437), this essay presents a reading of the carefully orchestrated defense of the first woman that the Veronese humanist scholar crafted in her major work commonly known as the *Dialogue on Adam and Eve* (1451). The Latin dialogue in question can be read as a sophisticated revision of the scriptural representation of humankind's mother, one that simultaneously accepts and resists the stereotype of female inferiority, ultimately serving as an avenue both for Nogarola's self-authorization and for her feminist advocacy. The aim of this essay is to show the subtle ways in which Isotta Nogarola legitimated her own intellectual and spiritual pursuits, as well as womankind's desire for knowledge and spiritual perfection, by way of reinterpreting the biblical figure of Eve.

¹ This essay is a revised and further elaborated version of a chapter from my doctoral thesis "Protofeminističke reinterpretacije ženskih biblijskih figura u djelima šest autorica između 15. i 17. stoljeća" (Protofeminist Reinterpretations of Female Biblical Figures in the Works of Six Women Authors from the XVth to the XVIIth Century), which I defended under the supervision of Professor Morana Čale at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb in May 2015. A version in Croatian of this essay is forthcoming in Francesca Maria Gabrielli, *Evine kćeri. Žene o biblijskim ženama u talijanskoj renesansi* (Daughters of Eve. Women on Biblical Women in the Italian Renaissance), Disput, Zagreb.

Do you not know that every one of you is an Eve?
The sentence of God on your sex lives on in this age; the guilt, of
necessity, lives on too.
(Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum*, I, 12)²

... she had surpassed the limits of her sex and taken on a mentality
that was manly or rather angelic ...
(Gerontius, *Vita Melaniae Iunioris*)³

The reclaiming of a feminist future is necessarily grounded in and informed by the investigation of a feminist past. This essay presents a reading of the oeuvre of the Veronese humanist scholar Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466)⁴ in light of its importance for the development of feminist thought. In her study on the birth of feminism, Sarah Gwyneth Ross points out that “the historical significance of Renaissance women writers lies in their collective argument (by word and by example) for the intellectual equality of the sexes, which was the precondition for thinking about the political equality of the sexes”.⁵ The cultural discourse of the period at issue was, indeed, predominantly androcentric, drawing its justifications for considering women inferior – physically, intellectually, and morally – from classical and Judeo-Christian authoritative sources. At the same time, however, a philogynist cultural imaginarium was gradually gaining momentum. As Virginia Cox maintains, it was precisely the emergence of a discourse supportive of women from the thematization of illustrious women in the works of the fourteenth-century humanism’s founders Petrarch and Boccaccio onward that enabled the unprecedented phenomenon of the secular learned women’s active and extensive participation in the Italian culture

² As quoted in Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, Vintage Books, New York, 1989, p. 63.

³ As quoted in Gillian Cloke, ‘This Female Man of God’. *Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 214.

⁴ For Isotta Nogarola’s life and literary production, see Margaret L. King, “The Religious Retreat of Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466). Sexism and Its Consequences in the Fifteenth Century”, *Signs*, 3, 4, 1978, pp. 807-822; Margaret L. King and Diana Robin, “Volume Editors’ Introduction”, in Isotta Nogarola, *Complete Writings. Letterbook, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, Orations*, Margaret L. King and Diana Robin (eds. and trans.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2004, pp. 1-19 (see also the introductions to the single chapters of King and Robin’s modern edition of Nogarola’s oeuvre; Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., *passim*).

⁵ Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism. Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2009, p. 314.

of the Renaissance.⁶ Some of the Italian learned women who took up their pen in the period in question explicitly engaged in what is generally considered as one of its most important disputes: the debate on women (*querelle des femmes*).⁷ The early manifestations of feminism articulated therein were not only characterized by a general anti-misogyny stance, often articulated by way of pro-woman readings of authoritative texts, but conveyed the “sense that the sexes are culturally, not just biologically, formed”.⁸ On the other hand, the authors who endorsed the misogynous side of the *querelle* insisted on adducing *auctoritates*, both classical and Judeo-Christian, and most notably the second biblical account of creation, i.e. the story of Adam and Eve (Gn 2-3.24), to validate women’s subordinate position to men as natural and divinely-ordained.⁹ Isotta Nogarola not only contributed to the discussion, but dared to venture into the thorny arena of biblical exegesis.¹⁰ Both in her early and in her mature writings, from the *defensio mulierum* passages in her epistolary production to the astute defense of the biblical first woman in her major work commonly known as the *Dialogue on Adam and Eve*,¹¹ the Veronese

⁶ The works at issue are Petrarch’s epistle *Familiares* 21.8 and Boccaccio’s treatise *De claris mulieribus*. See Virginia Cox, *Women’s Writing in Italy, 1400-1650*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2008, pp. xi-xxii, 18-20. Cox remarks that “the Renaissance ‘defense of women’ is continuous in certain respects with previous traditions of prowoman argument”, i.e. with the philogynist side of the “debate in general on the merits and demerits of women, as it may be traced from classical antiquity through patristic, medieval, and early modern culture down to the present day”, yet “it is also quite distinct in its methods and emphases”, *ivi*, p. xviii.

⁷ For the *querelle des femmes*, see Joan Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789”, in *Women, History, and Theory. The Essays of Joan Kelly*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1984, pp. 65-109. The beginning of the Renaissance debate on women is usually identified with Christine de Pizan’s reaction to the misogynous views expressed in certain male-authored works (such as the portion of the *Roman de la Rose* authored by Jean de Meung). The debate permeated the Renaissance episteme, lasting for a period of about four centuries, during which various authors thematized misogynist or philogynist views.

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 67.

⁹ See for instance *ivi*, p. 73.

¹⁰ For a history of women’s cultural presence as readers and interpreters of the Bible from the beginning of the Christian tradition, see Adriana Valerio (ed.), *Donne e Bibbia. Storia ed esegesi*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 2006.

¹¹ For the *Dialogue on Adam and Eve*, which constitutes one of the “inaugural texts in the history of the European controversy over gender and nature”, see King and Robin’s general introduction to their modern edition of Nogarola’s *opus* (*Volume Editors’ Introduction*, *cit.*, *passim*) and the introduction to chapter seven in particular (“The Great Gender Debate (1451)”, in Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, *cit.*, pp. 138-145; quotation at p. 142). See also Prudence Allen, “Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466) and Ludovico Foscarini”, in *The Concept of Woman. Volume II, Part II. The*

scholar pondered women's worth.¹² Following a discussion of the peculiar lifestyle choices to which Isotta Nogarola committed, this essay will briefly analyze a celebratory list of women contained in one of her letters (1436 or 1437), and thereafter offer a reading of her carefully orchestrated dialogue on the primal couple (1451) so as to show the subtle rhetorical ways in which Nogarola legitimated her own intellectual and spiritual pursuits, as well as womankind's desire for knowledge and spiritual perfection, by way of reinterpreting the biblical figure of Eve.

Isotta Nogarola and the Angelic Life

At the early age of twenty, the Veronese noblewoman Isotta Nogarola – whose ambition to acquire a high level of erudition in the field of humanist studies, a prerogative of the male elites, was wholeheartedly supported by her unlettered mother Bianca Borromeo¹³ – already figured as a well-known literary presence

Early Humanist Reformation, 1250-1500, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, England, 2002, pp. 944-969; Janet Levarie Smarr, "Dialogue and Letter Writing. Laura Cereta, Isotta Nogarola, Helisenne de Crenne, Chiara Matraini", in *Joining the Conversation. Dialogues by Renaissance Women*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2005, pp. 129-153; Thelma S. Fenster, "Strong Voices. Weak Minds? The Defenses of Eve by Isotta Nogarola and Christine de Pizan, Who Found Themselves in Simone de Beauvoir's Situation", in Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham (eds.), *Strong Voices, Weak History. Early Women Writers and Canons in England, France and Italy*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2005, pp. 58-77.

¹² Margaret King points out that, "[a]lthough a few women had previously resisted the message about Eve, Nogarola's work is historic: it is the first known major defense of Eve by a woman author" (Margaret L. King, "Nogarola, Isotta (1418-1466)", in Marion Ann Taylor (ed.), *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2012, p. 390). Significant female-authored reinterpretations of the figure of Eve previous to Nogarola's can be found in the oeuvre of the German visionary mystic Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) and the French writer Christine de Pizan (1365-ca. 1430), see Gerda Lerner, "One Thousand Years of Feminist Bible Criticism", in *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness. From the Middle Ages to Eighteenth-century*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1993, pp. 138-146. For a reading of the 1451 *Dialogue on Adam and Eve* of Isotta Nogarola within the history of female-authored biblical exegesis as crucial for the development of feminist thought, see *ivi*, pp. 146-147. For the life and production of Isotta Nogarola within a study that extensively deals with early feminist thought in Italy and England (1400-1680), see Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, *cit.*, pp. 30-40; pp. 143-151.

¹³ King and Robin point out that the merit of Nogarola's education goes to her mother, Bianca Borromeo, a widow who recruited the humanist scholar Martino Rizzoni, a student of Guarino Guarini, as a tutor for Isotta and her sister Ginevra. See King and Robin, *Volume Editors' Introduction*, *cit.*, p. 3. Notwithstanding the possibility that "Bianca acted in accordance with her late husband's wishes" (Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, *cit.*, p. 31), her continuous support of Nogarola's intellectual and spiritual urge bears witness to the productive impact of a benevolent mother-daughter dynamic.

within the northeastern Italian humanist circle on account of her Latin epistolary production.¹⁴ The increasing acclaim this woman author enjoyed throughout her life thanks to her talent and dedication is evinced in the letters of her correspondents. Apart from addressing her scholarly pursuits, however, the laudatory discourse with which she was lavished also incorporated the exaltation of the specific lifestyle to which Isotta Nogarola at a certain point committed. Indeed, notwithstanding the fact that, in the period under consideration, women from the upper strata of society were generally presented with two mutually excluding life paths, the marital and the conventual (as per the maxim *aut maritum aut murum*)¹⁵ – in 1441 she decided to eschew both possibilities. At the age of twenty-three, and nurtured by her mother's approval, Nogarola chose to live in her family's home "in the anomalous condition of a permanently unmarried woman", and dedicate herself to a life of study and perpetual virginity.¹⁶ What is more, Nogarola temporarily retreated from the humanistic public arena of epistolary exchange, withdrawing into a long literary silence in order to devote herself primarily to sacred studies.¹⁷ Indeed, as Margaret King and Diana Robin conclude on account of their

¹⁴ Eugenius Abel edited Nogarola's complete production towards the end of the nineteenth century. See Isotta Nogarola, *Isotæ Nogarolæ Veronensis opera quæ supersunt omnia; accedunt Angelæ et Zenevræ Nogarolæ epistolæ et carmina*, 2 vols., Eugenius Abel (ed.), apud Gerold et socios, Vienna, apud Fridericum Kilian, Budapest, 1886. In subsequent references: *Opera*. As already pointed out, Margaret L. King and Diana Robin in recent years edited Nogarola's production and translated it into English, see Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit. All English translations of works by and to Isotta Nogarola in this essay are taken from King and Robin's modern edition. On the very early renown (by 1438) of the humanist scholar and her sister Ginevra (who at that time married and thereafter abandoned her literary career), see King and Robin, *Volume Editors' Introduction*, cit., p. 4. As one of the most prominent female authors in the Italian humanist production, Nogarola was among the first secular women who wrote in Latin. For female-authored humanist production, see the anthology edited by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr. (eds.), *Her Immaculate Hand. Selected Works by and about the Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy*, Pegasus Press, Asheville, 2000. See also Lisa Jardine, "O decus Italiae Virgo, or The Myth of the Learned Lady in the Renaissance", *The Historical Journal*, 28, 4, 1985, pp. 799-819; Margaret L. King, "Book-Lined Cells. Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance", in Patricia H. Labalme (ed.), *Beyond Their Sex. Learned Women of the European Past*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1984, pp. 66-90; Margaret L. King, "Petrarch, the Self-Conscious Self, and the First Women Humanists", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 35, 3, 2005, pp. 537-558.

¹⁵ See King and Robin, *Volume Editors' Introduction*, cit., p. 5.

¹⁶ King and Robin, "The Book-Lined Cell (1441 to early 1450s)", in Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 101.

¹⁷ For Nogarola's 1441 decision, see King and Robin, *Volume Editors' Introduction*, cit., pp. 5-9; King and Robin, *The Book-Lined Cell (1441 to early 1450s)*, cit., pp. 101-107.

analysis of the citational elements in Nogarola's oeuvre, while the humanist scholar had, up to that time, for the most part (while not exclusively) been interested in the classics, from then on she concentrated her intellectual efforts upon the field of sacred studies, without renouncing her interest in classical literature.¹⁸ After a decade of literary invisibility, Nogarola resurfaced as an author who felt entitled to confront the age-long tradition of misogynous interpretations of the Genesis account. Indeed, in 1451 she circulated her revision of the second creation story in her work commonly known as the *Dialogue on Adam and Eve*, where the character "Isota" transfers to the first man the greater guilt for the original sin and the consequent Fall of humankind, undermining thus the deeply rooted cultural prejudices against the female sex.

It is not clear whether Nogarola's decision in 1441 was influenced, at least to some extent, by an invective addressed against her and her family two years earlier¹⁹ by an anonymous humanist author:²⁰

... the saying of many wise men I hold to be true: that an eloquent woman is never chaste; and the behavior of many learned women also confirms its truth. ... before she made her body generally

¹⁸ The only extant work by Nogarola from the period before 1451 that contains references to biblical and patristic texts is a 1438 letter to Damiano Dal Borgo, see King and Robin, *Volume Editors' Introduction*, cit., p. 11; see also King and Robin, "Damiano (1438-1441)", in Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., pp. 89-92. The following brief periodization of Nogarola's work is based on King and Robin's *Volume Editors' Introduction*, cit., esp. pp. 9-17; as well as on King's article *Petrarch, the Self-Conscious Self*, cit., pp. 541-546. In the period from 1434 to 1441, Isotta Nogarola engaged in correspondence with humanist scholars (she authored twenty-four letters and received twenty-seven). The year 1441 marked the beginnings of a decade-long literary silence, during which she also devoted herself to sacred studies. Indeed, the works Nogarola authored from the year 1451 display profusely her erudition in the sacred tradition. Nogarola's extant works from the year 1451 to the year 1466 comprise one dialogue (the *Dialogue on Adam and Eve*, the most important female-authored contribution to Italian humanist culture), three orations (of which one is an encomium of Jerome), and a consolatory letter. Of her epistolary production in this phase, only one letter is extant (1451, to Ludovico Foscarini).

¹⁹ King and Robin date the invective in the year 1439 (*Volume Editors' Introduction*, cit., p. 6). For the invective, see also Arnaldo Segarizzi, "Niccolò Barbo patrizio veneziano del sec. XV e le accuse contro Isotta Nogarola", *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 43, 1904, p. 53. For Segarizzi's transcription of the Latin original, see pp. 50-54.

²⁰ Jane Stevenson argues that, despite the fact that it did not trigger a debate among contemporaries, the invective impacted Nogarola's life, upon which she "retreated from her relatively public position as a scholar and intellectual into a more private mode of life". See Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets. Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 162.

available for promiscuous intercourse, she had first permitted – and indeed even earnestly desired – that the seal of her virginity be broken by none other than her brother ... Alas for God in whom men trust ... when she, who sets herself no limit in this filthy lust, dares to engage so deeply in the finest literary studies.²¹

Notwithstanding the fact whether the choice of uncloistered perpetual virginity was triggered or not by the accusations of sexual impropriety brought against her in this vituperative text (“an example of the humanist ‘war of words’” that in this particular instance capitalized on the widespread misogynous bias according to which “an eloquent woman is never chaste”),²² the lifestyle to which Nogarola committed in 1441, her “private practice of the vow of celibacy”,²³ authorized her to live, unmarried, with her mother in her brother’s house, and to devote herself to both intellectual and spiritual pursuits.

In their discussion of Nogarola’s lifestyle, Margaret King and Diana Robin raise the crucial question of whether her commitment to celibacy was a role “imposed upon her by cultural expectations”, in line with “a female type familiar in the era: the holy woman”, or was it perhaps something she intimately desired?²⁴

²¹ Translated by Margaret L. King and Diana Robin. Quoted from King and Robin, “Venice and Beyond (1438-39)”, in Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., pp. 68-69.

²² Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, cit., p. 162. According to Sarah Gwyneth Ross, “the literary attack on Isotta Nogarola should be understood as one instance of a widespread practice: sexual invective constituted the preferred weapon of defamation in literary exchange. Jealous vituperation from rivals, however unpleasant, demonstrated one’s entrance on the public stage no less than elegant praise from colleagues and patrons did” (Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, cit., pp. 38-39). As Ross points out, the impact of the invective was weakened by the reactions of male humanist scholars, such as Niccolò Barbo, who “dismissed the accusations out of hand, emphasizing that Nogarola was a paragon of chastity” (ivi, p. 39). On this matter see Segarizzi, *Niccolò Barbo*, cit.

²³ Allen, *Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466) and Ludovico Foscarini*, cit., p. 944, note 26.

²⁴ King and Robin, “The Book-Lined Cell (1441 to early 1450s)”, in Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 102. King and Robin define the type of the holy woman, “much revered in Italy in the period 1300-1600”, as “a living saint who combined mystical experience with personal asceticism and sacrificial service to the poor and the ill” and remark that “Isotta Nogarola did none of these things”, apart from “the self-discipline she imposed upon herself by renouncing marriage and retiring to the household of her male kin” (*Volume Editors’ Introduction*, cit., pp. 7-8). See also King’s observation that “Nogarola, in effect, won permission for her studies by defining herself as a holy woman, a hermit in her own house and her own city. In this guise, she was admired” (King, *Petrarch, the Self-Conscious Self*, cit., p. 545). In her entry on Isotta Nogarola in Taylor (ed.), *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, cit., Margaret King remarks that the humanist scholar adopted “the lifestyle of a *pinzochera*, an uncloistered ‘holy woman’, a social category not uncommon in urban Italy” (ivi, p. 388).

Did Nogarola enter into a religious, as well as a scholarly retreat, in 1441? Did she do so willingly, or was that role imposed upon her by cultural expectations? Or was the construction of Nogarola as a holy woman the fantasy of male observers ... who could not otherwise understand the circumstances in which an unmarried woman, alone, studied and wrote? The written record cannot yield certainty on these issues ...²⁵

While the question must necessarily be left unanswered, this essay suggests that – rather than interpreting the humanist author's lifestyle (only) as a strategic negotiation with the restrictions of patriarchy to pursue a life of study, or, to put it in the words of Gerda Lerner, as "[t]he price paid by Isotta Nogarola for being a thinking woman"²⁶ – it may be productive (especially with regard to her re-vision of Eve) to read her dedication to virginity as a self-empowering choice stemming from her own spiritual and intellectual inclinations and convictions, without posing hermeneutic resistance to the indications offered in some of the letters addressed to Nogarola, wherein we may find, for instance, a depiction of the unmarried learned woman as a "holy and venerable sister in the Lord", wholeheartedly engaged in spiritual and intellectual pursuits in a room – a "book-lined cell" – of her family's house.²⁷ As Jane Stevenson puts it, it is "seriously to be asked whether the male humanist response to Isotta was actually reinforcing and validating a choice she was already known to have made: it cannot have been an attempt to force her into a pre-existing mould, since no such mould existed" for the life choices of the first humanist women.²⁸ In any case, even if the specificities of Nogarola's situation were unusual for the time,²⁹ her correspondents seem to make sense of them with ease. For instance, the humanist

²⁵ King and Robin, "The Book-Lined Cell (1441 to early 1450s)", in Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 102.

²⁶ Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, cit., p. 31. Gerda Lerner remarks that "[t]his role for a woman intellectual was approved by society because it continued the tradition of learned women religious" (*ibid.*).

²⁷ The two quotations from a letter that Matteo Bosso addressed to Isotta Nogarola after 1451 are taken from King and Robin, *The Book-Lined Cell (1441 to early 1450s)*, cit., p. 105, notes 13 and 14. As King and Robin point out, even if Isotta mainly lived in isolation, she circulated freely in her hometown, where she delivered at least two public orations. Moreover, her most influential work, the *Dialogue on Adam and Eve*, is possibly the product of a public debate in which she engaged with Ludovico Foscarini. See *ivi*, pp. 6-7.

²⁸ Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, cit., p. 164.

²⁹ Jane Stevenson describes Nogarola's choice of uncloistered celibacy as "a 'third way' also followed by a number of later Italian women scholars", see *ivi*, p. 162.

and statesman Ludovico Foscarini – who appears in the *Dialogue on Adam and Eve* as the character “Lodovicus” – did not hesitate to insist, in one of the many letters he sent her in 1453, that Isotta Nogarola, a consecrated virgin and scholar living austere in the domestic space, was following a precise model:

You follow the examples of the holy fathers, I do nothing of the sort. Those who struggle to pursue your kind of saintly life have progressed by hunger, thirst, cold, nudity, labors, vigils, fasts, and prayers, serving God in the hermitage, in the cloister, and in the home; forgetful of themselves they have disdained honors, wealth, patrons and clients, duties. You follow these models, you imitate them.³⁰

The expression “holy fathers” (*sancti patres*),³¹ even if broad, in the context of the aforementioned passage evokes the ascetic founders of Christianity. As Eugene Rice reminds us, the humanists’ rediscovery of ancient culture included the “reevaluation of Christian antiquity”,³² and in particular of the works of patristic thinkers, exalted for their “union of wisdom and piety with eloquence”, which perfectly resonated with the humanistic notion of *virtus*.³³ The appeal of the Fathers of the Church, and in particular of the ascetic Jerome – acclaimed in the humanistic period, and especially so for his exaltation of perpetual virginity³⁴ – is evident in Isotta Nogarola’s early and mature writings. Indeed, in an early letter to Giorgio Bevilacqua (1436 or 1437), she claimed an increase in wisdom each time she took in her hands the devotional book on the death of Jerome her correspondent had presented her with.³⁵ In her first work with extensive biblical references, a letter to Damiano dal Borgo (1438), she corroborated her consolatory discourse by mentioning a point made by Jerome in one of his epistles.³⁶ Finally, of the six works she composed in her mature years, one is an oration in praise of the church Father (1453), in which she quoted a considerable

³⁰ Quoted from King and Robin, “Foscarini (1451-1466)”, in Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 124.

³¹ For the Latin original, see *Opera* II, pp. 103-104.

³² Eugene F. Rice, *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1985, p. 85.

³³ Ivi, p. 93. Rice remarks that “all humanistic reading programs and the curricula of every humanistic school included works by the fathers, grouped now with the classical writers rather than with the medieval theologians”, ivi, p. 90.

³⁴ See ivi, pp. 84-115.

³⁵ See Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 38.

³⁶ See ivi, p. 90.

portion from his renowned letter to the consecrated virgin Eustochium, thematizing the extreme hardships of his ascetic experience in the desert.³⁷ As is well known, Jerome's works, and in particular his letters, are a fundamental testimony to the intense female spiritual and intellectual participation in early Christian culture.³⁸ Indeed, given the exceedingly scant female-authored writings we possess from the first centuries of Christianity, the contribution of Western women, especially manifest from the fourth century onward, is mostly tackled from the viewpoint of patristic writers, and in particular Jerome, who, as mentor to a circle of women that supported him, repeatedly extolled their ascetic and scholarly feats, defining them as exceptional, a point to which I will return. Rice asserts that Nogarola's lifestyle is modelled on the "devotional practices" of the women advised by the church father, and specifically on the ascetic path thematized in his epistle to Eustochium: a life of perpetual virginity intensely invested in sacred studies, practiced in a room of her home as a form of only partial withdrawal from the world.³⁹ The 'angelic life'⁴⁰ Jerome recommended to consecrated virgins closely resembles, indeed, Isotta Nogarola's lifestyle: when approached from this perspective, the peculiarities of her circumstances make perfect sense, becoming as easily intelligible as they were, as it seems, to her contemporaries. In point of fact, Ludovico Foscarini exalted Isotta Nogarola's dedication to both spiritual and intellectual pursuits – the "enterprise of letters and Christian life" of this "most worthy virgin" who leads her "life and spirit amid hard work and long hours devoted to study", cherishing "not gold or embroidered robes, but Cicero, Virgil, Jerome, Augustine", i.e. both the classical and the late-ancient patristic tradition – as a perfect embodiment of the angelic ideal.⁴¹

³⁷ See *ivi*, pp. 167-174. According to Rice, "Jerome's *Ep. 22* to Eustochium, *De virginitate servanda*, was the most frequently copied of his letters". Rice, *Saint Jerome*, cit., p. 92.

³⁸ For early Christian women, see at least Elizabeth Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, Michael Glazier Inc., Wilmington, Delaware, 1983; Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, cit.

³⁹ See Rice, *Saint Jerome*, cit., p. 97.

⁴⁰ In the Christian discourse, the lifestyle of consecrated celibacy is represented as the angelic life, as for instance in Jerome's letter to Eustochium, where he defines perpetual virginity as "the life that angels enjoy" ("angelorum vitam"). Jerome, *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, translated by F. A Wright, William Heinemann and G. P. Putnam's Sons, London and New York, 1933, pp. 96-97.

⁴¹ For Ludovico Foscarini's early 1453 letter, see Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., pp. 131-137. For the quotations from King and Robin's English translation see *ivi*, pp. 133, 131, 133, 135.

... although placed on earth, you are like the angels, speaking or thinking nothing except what pertains to the glory of God.⁴²

Humanistic epistolography is, of course, highly conventional, and the “inescapable models for the Renaissance Latin letters sent from scholarly men to virginal women are those of Jerome, which praise celibacy”,⁴³ still, in this specific case, the praise of Nogarola closely corresponds to the peculiarities of the lifestyle to which she pledged herself, moved, as it seems, by a combination of both intellectual and spiritual urges, and, perhaps, by a desire for greater freedom. Indeed, as Elizabeth Clark deftly notes, the “chief route to the acquisition of greater freedom for Christian women in the patristic era was asceticism”.⁴⁴ Isotta Nogarola seems to have chosen the path of her late-ancient foremothers to live a life less encumbered by social impositions and aligned with her deepest aspirations.

Another aspect of the laudatory discourse addressed to the Veronese scholar is the adoption of a rhetoric of exceptionality. A number of Nogarola’s correspondents thematized her accomplishments as prodigious, insisting that she managed to exceed the constrictions posed upon her by her sex. As is well-known, the roots of the misogynous topos at issue lie in the hierarchical gender divide that characterized the Western cultural imaginarius from classical antiquity through the patristic and scholastic era, down to the Renaissance (not to mention its legacy in the present day), at the heart of which is the notion of the superiority of masculinity. Indeed, Nogarola’s correspondents, as is the case with the Venetian nobleman Lauro Quirini, often depicted her excellence in both eloquence and Christian virtue as a product of a virile spirit, which is in consonance with the enduring trope of the *virago*, the woman who transcended her sex.⁴⁵

Rightly, therefore, should you also, famous Isotta, receive the highest praises, since you have indeed, if I may so speak, overcome your own nature. For that true virtue that is proper to men you have pursued with remarkable zeal – not the mediocre virtue that many

⁴² Ivi, p. 132.

⁴³ Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, cit., p. 164.

⁴⁴ Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, cit., p. 17. As Elizabeth Clark points out, “Christian women of the patristic era who renounced traditional sexual and domestic roles did indeed find new worlds open to them, worlds of scholarship and contemplation, pilgrimage and charitable endeavor” (ivi, p. 16).

⁴⁵ Quirini’s letter is approximately dated to 1445-1448 or 1451-1452. See *Opera* II, p. 9.

men seek, but that which would befit a man of the most flawless and perfect wisdom. Thus Cicero rightly said, “You young men have a womanly spirit, but that woman has a man’s spirit”.⁴⁶

The *virago* trope is a by-product of the age-long cultural imbrication of the mind(soul)-body and male-female hierarchies, i.e. of the repeated association, from classical antiquity onward, of masculinity with the realm of mind/soul and femininity with the realm of the body, considered, needless to say, as the inferior pole of the binary opposition.⁴⁷ In the words of Mathew Kuefler, “[t]hrough such a strategy, virtuous qualities could be praised in women while leaving the intellectual equation of virtue and masculinity intact”.⁴⁸ In his study on “the collapse of the ancient or classical ideal for men in the western Mediterranean in late antiquity and the establishment of a new Christian masculinity”, Kuefler argues that the late-ancient patristic writers, operating in the historical moment when Christianity had turned from dissenting sect to official religion of the Roman empire, supported the ancient equation of masculinity with perfection and aptly re-appropriated it by way of a paradoxical rhetorical strategy, i.e. by insisting “that Christian men were manliest when they abandoned the pursuits that Roman tradition had long considered manly – participation in war and politics, in sex, marriage, and family life – and pursued divergent paths to manliness. But manliness remained the end to which they strove, even if it might be delineated in different ways – as interior warfare, as ecclesiastical politics, as sexual and marital renunciation – and even if it might be redefined as Christian virtue”.⁴⁹ Therefore, in spite of the egalitarian “genderless ideal” that emerged in at least some traditions of earliest Christianity – clearly evinced, for instance, in the pre-Pauline baptismal formula of Galatians⁵⁰ (“As

⁴⁶ Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 108. King and Robin note that the quotation is from Cicero, *De officiis*, 1.18.61, see *ivi*.

⁴⁷ For identification of woman with the body in classical antiquity, see Elizabeth V. Spelman, “Woman as Body. Ancient and Contemporary Views”, *Feminist Studies*, 8, 1, 1982, pp. 109-131. For the “assimilation of male-female dualism into soul-body dualism in patristic theology”, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism”, in Rosemary Radford Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism. Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, 1998 (originally published in 1974), pp. 150-183, quotation at p. 156.

⁴⁸ Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch. Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2001, p. 31.

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 6, 206; on the issue see *ivi*, *passim*.

⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 221 (for Kuefler’s take on the “genderless ideal” in earliest Christianity, see *ivi*, pp. 221-226). In Kuefler’s words, “it seems as though at least some of the

many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”⁵¹ – the Fathers of the Church, including Jerome and Augustine, subscribed to the classical cultural association of *virtus* with *vir*, endorsing the corollary of female inferiority, and extolling those Christian women who excelled in virtue and biblical scholarship as praiseworthy and virile anomalies. It goes without saying that the ideal of virginity, present in Christianity from its origins and dominant from the fourth century, practiced by both men and women and considered the earthly imitation of the ‘life of the angels’ (a “harmonious” life “in a society no longer formed by bonds of marriage, family, kinship”),⁵² was reformulated in late-ancient Christianity as an angelic yet masculine endeavor. In other words, notwithstanding its gender-ambiguous formulation in earliest Christianity (such is, indeed, Jesus’ well-known exaltation of Christian celibate men and women as “eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” Mt 19.12), the late-ancient ideal of celibacy was believed to entail, in a man’s case, the realization of the perfection inherent in his

earliest Christians seriously challenged the customary social roles of men and women”. On the “egalitarian, countercultural, multifaceted movement” of earliest Christianity, before “a patriarchalization of the Christian community, offices and theology took place, as the early Christians adopted the institutional forms of the surrounding patriarchal culture”, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Word, Spirit, and Power. Women in Early Christian Communities”, in E. McLaughlin and Rosemary Ruether (eds.), *Women of Spirit. Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1979, pp. 30-70, at p. 31.

⁵¹ Gal 3-27.28. Biblical references appearing in this essay are taken from Michael D. Coogan (ed.), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2001.

⁵² See Peter Brown, “The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church”, in Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (eds.), *Christian Spirituality. Origins to the Twelfth Century*, Crossroad, New York, 1989, p. 427. The scholar explains that such was “the interpretation given to the promise of Christ” in Mk 12.25 (“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven; cf. Mt 22.29-30 and Lk 20.34-36), *ivi*, pp. 429-430. (Jesus’ words in Lk 20.34-36 are the following: “Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels, and are children of God, being children of the resurrection”). According to Brown, to live the virginal life meant to have “withdrawn the body as a whole from society”, i.e. to “assert, instead, the right of the individual to seek for himself or herself different forms of solidarity, more consonant with the high destiny of free persons, able to enter into a freely chosen harmony of wills, which, so Christians of late antiquity believed, was the particular joy of the undivided life of the ‘angels of heaven’”. *Ivi*, p. 436.

masculine nature, while in a woman's case it was understood as the transcendence of her own imperfect and carnal feminine nature; in Jerome's words: "A virgin is no longer called a woman".⁵³ As Rosemary Radford Ruether remarks, for the Church Fathers, who linked femininity with the intertwined realms of sinfulness and the bodily, only as virgin "woman rises to spirituality, personhood and equality with the male"; yet, her ascetic spiritual endeavor was repeatedly thematized as unnatural, as alien to female nature, and such a representation clearly served androcentric interests.⁵⁴ As evinced in Nogarola's correspondence, the cultural heritage of the *virago* ideal – a constitutive element of the patristic revision of the angelic ideal according to which, as it seems, Nogarola modelled her life – was still vital in the Renaissance.

While Nogarola's contemporaries frequently deployed the rhetoric of exceptionality and depicted her humanistic competence and her continent lifestyle as a transcendence of her sex, the woman writer recurrently resorted to a deprecativ self-fashioning. Namely, Isotta Nogarola made extensive use of modesty tropes throughout her production, making excuses for the fact that she, a woman, dared to enter the male-dominated arena of literary writing. As Patricia Pender notes, expressions of modesty in the period in question were conventional among both male and female writers, who imitated "classical strategies of modesty propounded by Cicero, Quintilian, and the anonymous author of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*"; yet, as the scholar remarks, "women's modesty tropes *do* need to be understood differently from those of their male contemporaries ... because their *historical* position placed women in profoundly different relationships to discourses of authorship and modesty in the early modern period".⁵⁵ The specificity of Nogarola's strategic disavowal of her own authorial competence hinges on the fact that she insistently represented her purported ineptitude as strictly dependent on her inferior female nature. For instance, in a 1436 letter to Guarino Veronese she wrote:

The weakness of my mind and my sex limit my ability to express what I have to say; and I do not myself seek, most learned man,

⁵³ See Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch*, cit., pp. 230-231. Jerome, *De perpetua virginitate beatae Mariae adv. Helvidium*, 22, as quoted by Kuefler, op. cit., p. 231.

⁵⁴ Radford Ruether, *Misogynism and Virginal Feminism*, cit., p. 163; on this issue see *ivi*, *passim*.

⁵⁵ Patricia Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2012, p. 12 (emphasis in the original).

nor do I wish to be believed to be one of those most famous women whom antiquity so extols, such as were Cornificia, Nicaula from Ethiopia, Faunia the sister of Faunus, Cornelia, Portia, and others.⁵⁶

The fact that Nogarola's thematization of a gender-specific intellectual inferiority is blatantly contradicted not only by the rhetorical prowess of her writing, but also by the examples of illustrious women she offers in her oeuvre, alerts the reader to the rhetorically astute and convolute ways of the humanist scholar's self-promotion and feminist intervention.

On Disguised Seekers of Knowledge, a Late-Ancient Christian Woman Who Retold the Bible, and the Ghost of Eve

The following passage from a letter Isotta Nogarola addressed in 1436 or 1437 to her maternal uncle Antonio Borromeo is a celebratory list of carefully chosen exemplary female figures that defends women's intellectual abilities, and, at the same time, conjures up a sense of gender ambiguity. What is more, the *exempla* can be read as means of self-authorization:

Certainly in Plato's circle women were not unoccupied with divine philosophy: for example, Lasthenia of Mantinea and Axiothea of Phlius, and she, they say, wore men's clothing in order to study with him. In how many poems has Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi been honored! Our ancestors have rightly preserved for later ages the memory of that remarkable woman Proba, the wife of Adelphus, a Christian by religion, who was so learned that they say she knew Virgil by heart and composed a clear and beautiful version of the New Testament. And so, does not learning exist among women – although woman is considered the origin and source of evil? Does not their learning letters warrant respect for women? Has it not made them more worthy of admiration that these women have surpassed not only other women in learning, but men as well?⁵⁷

The characteristics of the illustrious women in this laudatory catalog – from Cornelia, through Lasthenia and Axiothea, to Proba – can be interpreted as hinting to Nogarola herself, signalling her aspirations. First of all, the figure of the widow Cornelia, mother of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus, renowned for devoting her life to the education of her sons, easily recalls the humanist scholar's mother Bianca Borromeo, who hired Martino Rizzoni as a tutor

⁵⁶ Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 52.

⁵⁷ Ivi, pp. 38-39.

for her two daughters, Isotta and Ginevra.⁵⁸ With the complicity of a reader capable of perceiving the allusion, two learned and influential men of the classical past are being displaced by two learned women. The maternal reference enables Nogarola to allude to the equal potential for intellectual prowess of men and women, while conveying to the reader a sense of her ambitions.

Lasthenia of Mantinea and Axiothea of Phlius, who match the Nogarola sisters in number and intellectual aspirations, epitomize women's desire to acquire knowledge in the male-dominated field of philosophy.⁵⁹ In particular, Axiothea represents the figure of the disguised seeker of knowledge. She put on male clothes in order to access Plato's lectures or, in other words, wore a mask crafted from gender stereotypes so as to accomplish her quest for intellectual assuagement, eluding the prejudice of learning as a male prerogative. The textual presence of the figure of the crossdresser – whose liminality "not only blurs boundaries between male and female but also undermines the whole attempt to construct stable binary categories of oppositional difference" – opens up a space of ambiguity whose subversive potential has to be carefully assessed.⁶⁰ According to Robert Clark and

⁵⁸ In a 1436 letter, Giorgio Bevilacqua made use of the same comparison with Cornelia to exalt Nogarola's mother, see Margaret King and Diana Robin, "Kin, Friends, and Books (1434-37)", in Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 32. King and Robin point out that Rizzoni may have been the tutor to all six of the Nogarola sisters, but Isotta and Ginevra were the two who stood out. See *ivi*, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁹ The rarely thematized story of Lasthenia of Mantinea and Axiothea of Phlius is found in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*; see King and Robin, *Volume Editors' Introduction*, cit., pp. 10-11, note 22. King and Robin remark that no other fifteenth-century woman writer mentions the story of Lasthenia and Axiothea; in the sixteenth century the story emerges in the opus of Lucrezia Marinelli. See *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Robert A. Clark and Claire Sponsler, "Queer Play. The Cultural Work of Crossdressing in Medieval Drama", *New Literary History*, 28, 2, 1997, p. 321. Clark and Sponsler share Marjorie Garber's view of the transvestite as "a potential figure of category crisis" (*ibid.*). In her study that investigates the historical significance and "cultural politics of transvestism", Garber defines "category crisis" as "a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another" (Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests. Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Routledge, New York, 1992, pp. 3, 16). As the scholar remarks, "[t]he appeal of cross-dressing is clearly related to its status as a sign of the constructedness of gender categories. But the tendency on the part of many critics has been to look *through* rather than *at* the cross-dresser, to turn away from a close encounter with the transvestite, and to want instead to subsume that figure within one of the two traditional genders" (*ivi*, p. 9; see also Clark and Sponsler, *Queer Play*, cit., p. 320). Garber maintains that "one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of 'female' and 'male'", and emphasizes that the "disruptive act of putting in question

Claire Sponsler, "crossdressing always has the *potential* for being transgressive, but the nature and degree of transgression is determined and perhaps controlled by the immediate framing".⁶¹ The female-to-male transvestism of Axiothea is here represented as a temporary means to an end. However, the very fact that Nogarola – a humanist scholar who in the name of her desire for knowledge negotiates with the patriarchal horizon of expectations, wearing the conventional mask of female inferiority in response to the equally conventional mask of female virility imposed on her in the light of her excellence – thematizes an act of cross-dressing aimed at women's acquisition of knowledge on an equal footing with men, necessarily spurs to reflect both on the constructedness of gender and on the discrimination of women. On that account, Nogarola's reference to the cross-dressing episode can be read as a subtle form of feminist resistance, aimed at eroding the established order and unsettling the gender divide.

That the story of Axiothea is of considerable significance to Nogarola's discourse on the intertwined issues of gender and knowledge, is corroborated within her opus by the resurfacing of an analogous anecdote, this time featuring a man who dressed as a woman. Indeed, as Margaret King and Diana Robin note, Nogarola mentions three times the story of the philosopher Euclides of Megara, who travelled from his home to Athens in woman's attire so that he could listen to Socrates's words, notwithstanding the law that condemned to death every inhabitant of the city of Megara spotted in Athens.⁶² The subtle intratextual dialogue recreated in Nogarola's production between the two cross-dressings – Axiothea's on the one hand, Euclides's on the other – can be read as implicitly conveying once again the claim for an equal access to (and urge for) learning. By means of the liminal evasiveness of the female-to-male and male-to-female figure of the transvestite seeker of wisdom, gender hierarchy is momentarily destabilized, binaries are temporarily blurred, and

is ... precisely the place, and the role, of the transvestite" (Garber, *Vested Interests*, cit., pp. 10, 13).

⁶¹ Clark and Sponsler, *Queer Play*, cit., p. 340; emphasis in the original. The two scholars assert that "representations, even when framed in ways that limit their transgressiveness, must leave behind a residue" (*ibid.*).

⁶² On the threefold recurrence and thematic importance of the anecdote of Euclides of Megara, see King and Robin, *Volume Editors' Introduction*, cit., pp. 15-16 ("The themes it foregrounds – those of disguise, gender itself as a role or mask, travel across forbidden borders, and the primacy, even at the risk of one's life, of the quest for wisdom ... are dominant in her writings", *ivi*, p. 16). The anecdote is fairly rare, and based on Aulus Gellius's *Attic nights* (see *ivi*, p. 74, note 36).

the quest for knowledge as a universally human need is strongly reasserted across the boundaries of gender.

The next woman evoked in Nogarola's *defensio* is Proba, a fourth-century Christian woman, author of a poem on biblical material composed from Virgilian verses. Proba's *Cento* is one of the rare female-authored works extant from the period of the early church.⁶³ After having celebrated female figures from both Greek and Roman classical antiquity, Nogarola directs the reader's attention to the cultural contribution of Christian women in the late-ancient period, extolling the syncretic work of a woman who reinterpreted in the words of Virgil portions of the Bible, namely the Old Testament Genesis account, including the story of Adam and Eve, and the New Testament life of Jesus. While the obvious reason of Proba's appeal to Nogarola is her extensive knowledge of both classical and Christian materials, there may be a more complex rationale behind this *exemplum*. Firstly, the literary source the humanist scholar is drawing upon in her depiction of the late-ancient poet is Boccaccio's treatise *De mulieribus claris*.⁶⁴ As Pamela Joseph Benson maintains, Boccaccio's rendering of the figure of Proba stands out with respect to the majority of female portraits in the work at issue, inasmuch as it represents one of the rare occasions in which the *virago* trope is not employed.⁶⁵ By way of alluding to Boccaccio's Proba, Nogarola evokes the story of a woman who, thanks to her intellectual efforts, reached the desired acclaim without undergoing a process of rhetorical de-feminization, which makes the late-ancient Christian poet a particularly desirable role-model of female intellectual endeavor. Furthermore, the blanks in the text open up another consideration regarding Nogarola's fascination with Proba. The excerpt in question ends with an allusion to the patriarchal view of woman as "the origin and source of evil". The rhetorical question ("And so, does not learning exist among women – although woman is considered the origin and source of evil?") evokes centuries of misogynous interpretations of the second creation account,⁶⁶ whose

⁶³ See Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, cit., p. 165; Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, cit., pp. 13-14.

⁶⁴ See Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 39, note 41. For the section on Proba in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (XCVII), see Giovanni Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris*, Vittorio Zaccaria (ed.), in idem, *Tutte le opere*, vol. X, Vittore Branca (ed.), Mondadori, Milan, 1967, pp. 392-396.

⁶⁵ See Pamela Joseph Benson, "Boccaccio's 'De mulieribus claris'. An Ambiguous Beginning", in *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman. The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England*, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, 1992, pp. 19-20.

⁶⁶ According to Margaret King and Diana Robin, the topos of woman as "the

concerted efforts managed to narrativize the first woman as an inferior creature, burdening her – and with her all womankind – with guilty responsibility for the Fall.⁶⁷ However, Nogarola avoids mentioning the name of Eve *expressis verbis*. Eve is left hanging in midair, as a sort of incorporeal threat. The intentionality of the omission is somehow confirmed by another reticence of the text: Nogarola only mentions Proba's poetic rendering of the New Testament, leaving out her retelling of the Old Testament, one explicitly mentioned in the Boccaccian subtext.⁶⁸ The lacunary reference uses silence to produce meaning. What comes to the fore is the acute impression that the figure of Eve is already, surreptitiously but powerfully, haunting the humanist writer.

Towards the end of the epistle, Nogarola declares her programmatic desire to imitate the exemplary women she has named:

... at the moment I lack only money⁶⁹ to be able, even if I am not worthy to be numbered in the circle of those women whom I have named above, at least to run in their footsteps.⁷⁰

Some fifteen years later, in 1451, the humanist author will circulate her own Latin revision of the figure of Eve in her “most learned and at the same time ... most syncretic writing to date”,⁷¹ running in the footsteps of her late-ancient foremother Proba. The central argument of Nogarola's defense of Eve hinges on the natural desire for knowledge of all human beings, aligning thus the impulse of the primal woman with the aspirations and accomplishments of the four learned women featured in this brief *defensio mulierum*, not to mention Isotta Nogarola herself.

Adam, Eve, and the Angel

In 1451, the humanist scholar composed the *Dialogue on the Equal or Unequal Sin of Adam and Eve* (*Isotæ Nogarolæ de pari aut*

origin and source of evil” evokes both the biblical Eve and the mythological Pandora, see Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 39, note 42.

⁶⁷ Apart from the *Dialogue on Adam and Eve*, this is the only recognizable allusion to Eve in Nogarola's oeuvre.

⁶⁸ Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris*, cit., p. 392 (“omnem Testamenti Veteris hystoriam et Novi”; i.e. “the whole history of the Old and New Testament”).

⁶⁹ In the letter under consideration, Nogarola asks her uncle money to buy a book by Livy.

⁷⁰ Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 39.

⁷¹ King and Robin, *The Great Gender Debate (1451)*, cit., p. 142.

impari Evæ atque Adæ peccato dialogus),⁷² perhaps on the basis of a learned debate (*viva voce* or epistolary)⁷³ between herself and the statesman and humanist Ludovico Foscarini.⁷⁴ The text thematizes the question whether the greater responsibility for the original sin should be carried by the first man or the first woman. As Margaret King and Diana Robin point out, even if the formal structure of the work commonly known as the *Dialogue on Adam and Eve* is that of a “disputation”, in which two characters, “Isota” and “Lodovicus”, articulate their respective stances as a series of arguments and counterarguments, the work is a “humanist dialogue”, a “work of fiction, an experiment in form developed from Nogarola’s craft as a humanist epistolographer, in which the two speakers are fully developed literary characters”.⁷⁵ In the dialogue, the interlocutors “Isota Nogarola” and “Lodovicus Foscarenus” discuss Augustine’s doctrine on the primal couple’s sin, as per the subtitle of the work:

An honorable debate between the illustrious lord Ludovico Foscarini, Venetian doctor of the arts and civil and canon law, and the noble and learned and divine lady Isotta Nogarola of Verona, regarding the judgement of Aurelius Augustine: They sinned unequally according to their sexes, but equally in pride.⁷⁶

⁷² *Opera* II, p. 185.

⁷³ See King and Robin, *Volume Editors’ Introduction*, cit., p. 12. Margaret King and Diana Robin remark that, as stated by “her correspondent Matteo Bosso, in 1451 Nogarola engaged in a public debate with Foscarini, which she later recorded as a *Dialogue on the Equal or Unequal Sin of Eve and Adam: A Debate Over Saint Augustine’s Dictum, Namely That Adam and Eve Sinned Unequally by Sex, but Equally in Pride*”; *ibid.* In his letter addressed to Isotta Nogarola, Matteo Bosso claimed that he “read” the “debate” she had with Ludovico Foscarini. See King and Robin, *The Great Gender Debate (1451)*, cit., p. 138. Margaret King and Diana Robin argue that, despite the fact that Nogarola “unquestionably wrote” the dialogue, the “work is both more and less than her own work” (ivi, p. 12), and maintain that if the debate between a man and woman, although “wholly unprecedented”, “actually occurred, or if it was staged in a salon setting, or if it emerged from an exchange of letters, then Foscarini’s intellectual contribution ... to the final product must be acknowledged” (ivi, p. 140). According to the two scholars, however, two arguments “point to Nogarola’s final authorship”. First of all, the interlocutor Isota is the “driving force” of the argumentation, and second of all, the interlocutor Lodovicus in the end invites Isota to compose a work based on their exchange. See *ibid.*

⁷⁴ The friendship and epistolary exchange between the married statesman Ludovico Foscarini and Isotta Nogarola began in 1451. A considerable number of Foscarini’s letters is extant (from 1451 to Isotta’s death in 1466), but only the first epistle by Nogarola. After her mother’s death in 1461, Isotta most likely moved to Foscarini’s household, where she lived till her final days. See King and Robin, *Foscarini (1451-1466)*, cit., pp. 114-128.

⁷⁵ King and Robin, *The Great Gender Debate (1451)*, cit., pp. 140-141.

⁷⁶ Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 145. *Opera* II, p. 187: “præclara inter clarissimum D. D. Lodovicum Foscarenum Venetum artium et utriusque iuris

Indeed, in the eleventh chapter of the fourteenth book of *The City of God*, Augustine claims that only the woman – “the weaker part of that human alliance” – was deceived.⁷⁷ “Although they were not both deceived by credulity”, Augustine maintains, “yet both were entangled in the snares of the devil, and taken by sin”.⁷⁸ As William Mann points out, according to the late-ancient theologian “sin entered the created world through pride”: indeed, both the disobedience of the angels and that of the first humans were motivated by a prideful impulse; Adam and Eve, in particular, “voluntarily succumbed to the temptation because of their prideful fascination with the thought that they would become like God”.⁷⁹ Augustine’s doctrine of original sin embraces therefore both the idea of man’s and woman’s equal culpability and an understanding of woman as inferior to man. The following is an excerpt from the *Confessions*:

And just as in man’s soul there are two forces, one which is dominant because it deliberates and one which obeys because it is subject to such guidance, in the same way, in the physical sense, woman has been made for man. In her mind and her rational intelligence she has a nature the equal of man’s, but in sex she is physically subject to him in the same way as our natural impulses need to be subjected to the reasoning power of the mind, in order that the actions to which they lead may be inspired by the principles of good conduct.⁸⁰

On Augustine’s view, as Rosemary Radford Ruether remarks, even if equal to man as far as her rational soul is concerned, “[q]ua female, woman was created subordinate to man for the purposes of sex and procreation”.⁸¹ Therefore, male/female hierarchy –

doctorem et generosam ac doctissimam divinamque dominam Isotam Nogarolam Veronensem contentio super Aureli Augustini sententiam videlicet: peccaverunt impari sexu sed pari fastu”.

⁷⁷ Aurelius Augustine, *The City of God*, vol. II, translated by Marcus Dids, T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1871, pp. 22-25; p. 24. *De Civitate Dei* 14.11.

⁷⁸ Ivi, p. 25.

⁷⁹ William E. Mann, “Augustine on Evil and Original Sin”, in Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 47.

⁸⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.32.47. Translated by R. Pine-Coffin. Quoted from Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch*, cit., p. 134.

⁸¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption. A Theological History*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1998, p. 4. See also pp. 75-76, where Radford Ruether explains that, according to Augustine, “production of children was the original purpose of the creation of the male-female pair in paradise, for if it was primarily a matter of companionship, another male would have been a better companion than the female”. On Augustine’s view, if Adam and Eve had not disobeyed, “Adam

“woman’s natural inferiority as body to mind in the right ordering of nature” – was God’s original intention.⁸² After the Fall, women’s God-given subordination was worsened into “coercive servitude, which women must accept as their special punishment for sin”.⁸³

In Nogarola’s dialogue, both Lodovicus and Isota articulate the thesis of Eve’s inferiority. While Lodovicus, however, defends Adam insisting on the first woman’s inferiority and greater responsibility for the Fall, Isota strategically accepts the notion of Eve’s lesser nature so as to relieve her, at Adam’s disadvantage, from the burden of greater culpability.⁸⁴ If the dialogue, at the level of content, thematizes male/female gender inequality both from the perspective of the male character and from the perspective of the female character, on the other hand it represents in its formal structure the first “intergender dialogue” about issues of gender identity in which a woman and a man debate on the same footing theological matters of paramount significance.⁸⁵ In other words,

would have sown his seed in Eve without lust as a rational act fully under the control of his mind”, and “Eve would have remained virginal in intercourse and parturition” (see *ivi*, p. 73).

⁸² Radford Ruether, *Misogynism and Virginal Feminism*, cit., p. 157. Radford Ruether points out that precisely for this reason Augustine “is somewhat temperate in his polemics against Eve as the original cause of the Fall. For him, the Fall could only occur, not when the body tempts, but when the male ruling principle agrees to ‘go along’”. (*Ibid.*).

⁸³ *Ibid.* See also Genevieve Lloyd, “Augustine and Aquinas”, in Ann Loades (ed.), *Feminist Theology. A Reader*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1990, especially pp. 90-94. Lloyd explains how Augustine “attempted to articulate sexual equality with respect to Reason, while yet finding interpretative content for the Genesis subordination of woman to man. What woman is as a rational spirit must, he insists, be distinguished from what she symbolizes in her bodily difference from man”. (*Ivi*, p. 91; emphasis in the original). Therefore, “despite his professed commitment to spiritual equality, Augustine’s symbolism leaves femininity precariously placed in relation to Reason”. (*Ivi*, p. 93). In other words, “[w]oman remains associated with bodily perturbation, in opposition to Reason. And her ‘natural’ subordination to man represents rational control, the subjection of flesh to spirit in the right ordering of things”. (*Ivi*, p. 94).

⁸⁴ Gerda Lerner notices the similar strategy adopted by the medieval German mystic Hildegard of Bingen and Isotta Nogarola in their defenses of Eve. The humanist scholar, “like Hildegard before her, accepted Eve’s greater weakness as a fact”. Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, cit., p. 146. According to Fenster, Christine de Pizan defended Eve in similar terms in one of her writings (*Letter of the God of Love*, 1399), linking Eve’s lesser intellect with the “admired concept” of simplicity. See Fenster, *The Defences of Eve by Isotta Nogarola and Christine de Pizan*, cit., p. 64. For Pizan’s “logical advance over Hildegard’s acceptance of female weakness” in *The Book of the City of the Ladies* (1405), where she asserts that Eve was made from the “noblest substance”, i.e. the body of man, see Lerner, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.

⁸⁵ According to Prudence Allen, “Isotta is significant for being the first person in western history to portray an intergender dialogue about gender that contains real disagreements about gender identity defended by a man and a woman, and

“the structure of this text in itself announced intellectual equality between the sexes”.⁸⁶ However, the feminist implications of the dialogue are not limited to the dialectics of mutual intellectual respect between the male and female speaker, nor to the strategic defense of Eve articulated by the female speaker. The complex texture of Isotta’s argumentation can be read as surreptitiously building up a space of empowerment for the first woman, destabilizing the very claim of female lesser nature.

The dialogue begins with the male interlocutor’s opening statement that Eve holds greater culpability for the original sin.⁸⁷ Lodovicus briefly lists a set of reasons to support his stance, among which is the woman’s desire to become similar to God (“she believed she could become like God”).⁸⁸ Isotta’s counterargument is, on the other hand, grounded on the assertion that Eve’s God-ordained intellectual inferiority accounts for her lesser culpability: “for where there is less intellect and less constancy, there there is less sin”.⁸⁹ Indeed, it was precisely the woman’s weakness that prompted the serpent to address her first:

Knowing her weakness, that crafty serpent began by tempting the woman, thinking the man perhaps invulnerable because of his constancy. ... the ancient foe did not boldly persuade but approached her with a question: “Why did God bid you not to eat of the tree of paradise?” She responded, “Lest we should die”. But seeing that she doubted the words of the Lord, the devil said, “You shall not die”, but “you will be like gods, knowing good and evil”.⁹⁰

Isotta’s full quotation of the serpent’s utterance readjusts Lodovicus’s assertion regarding the motive behind woman’s sin by adding the element of the desire for knowledge: the reader is reminded that the promise of the serpent was not limited to the words “you will be like gods”, but included the specification “knowing good and evil” (Gn 3.5). From Isotta’s perspective, even if the first woman was aware of God’s command, she did not transgress an order directed

that demonstrates a genuine complementarity of interaction”. Allen, *Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466) and Ludovico Foscari*, cit., p. 955. See also King and Robin, *The Great Gender Debate (1451)*, cit., p. 143: the dialogue “showcases ... the potential for a real equality of man and woman in the relationship between the characters Ludovico and Isotta”.

⁸⁶ Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, cit., p. 145.

⁸⁷ For a detailed synopsis of the dialogue, see King and Robin, *The Great Gender Debate (1451)*, cit., pp. 143-145.

⁸⁸ Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 146.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* The biblical quotations are from Gn 3.4, 3.5.

to her ("For in Genesis 2 it appears that the Lord commanded Adam, not Eve"),⁹¹ a crucial point to which she will insistently return. The female speaker remarks thereafter that the divine command was addressed only to Adam "because he esteemed the man more highly than the woman".⁹² Isota's just quoted statement invokes a further consideration. The learned reader of this Latin dialogue is most likely aware of the fact that in the creation account Eve was not yet created at the time when God uttered his prohibitive speech.⁹³ Isota's assertion, therefore, induces in the reader a skeptical attitude directed precisely toward the claim that God "esteemed the man more highly than the woman". In other words, it is in the process of textual reception that Isotta Nogarola's rhetorical strategy is revealed and accomplished: with the cooperation of the reader, fissures are being opened in the very proclamation of woman's God-given inferiority.

In the passage that follows, the female speaker begins addressing the motive of Eve's actions following the serpent's temptation:

Moreover, the woman did not eat from the forbidden tree because she believed she would become like God, but rather because she was weak and inclined to pleasure. It is written "Now the woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes ... She took of its fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband and he ate", and it does not say that she did so in order to be like God.⁹⁴

Both at the beginning and at the end of the aforementioned excerpt, Isota explicitly states that Eve's deeds were not motivated by the desire to become like God. Her actions were, rather, prompted by her very nature, a nature depicted as weak and highly susceptible to the realm of the senses ("she was weak and inclined to pleasure"), as per the age-long misogynous topos of woman as body. Significantly, Isota does not incorporate in this passage any reference to the desire to know good and evil. The omission enables the female speaker to build her defense on the argument that Eve did not take from the forbidden tree to become similar to God, i.e. out of a desire for power, without at the same time denying the first woman's desire for knowledge. The latter, given Isota's initial assertion

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ See Gn 2.16-17 "And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'"

⁹⁴ Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 146. The biblical quotation is from Gn 3.6.

of Eve's intellectual inferiority ("less intellect"), must remain untackled for the time being.

Towards the end of her reply, Isota analyzes the punishments inflicted to the first humans, and aptly corroborates her former conclusion that Eve did not transgress an edict directed to her:

But to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I have commanded you (singular) not to eat (notice what is said, that God commanded Adam alone, and not Eve), cursed be the ground because of you ...".⁹⁵

The female character concludes her first intervention with a modesty trope, undermining her own voice on the grounds of the inferiority of her sex, which is, as earlier noted, a recurrent strategy in Nogarola's writings:

I have written this because you wished me to. Yet I have done so with trepidation, since this is not a woman's task.⁹⁶

The deployment of a modesty trope mobilizing the notion of female inferiority in the context of a defense of the primal woman hinging on that very notion can be read as once again alerting the reader not to take the paradoxical argumentation of the female interlocutor at face value: as is the case with Isota's self-fashioning, her belittling representation of Eve may as well be the product of a calculated rhetorical posturing.

In his reply, Lodovicus shifts the focus of Isota's argumentation relating to Eve's "less intellect and less constancy", and addresses Eve's "ignorance and inconstancy" ("Eve sinned from ignorance and inconstancy").⁹⁷ According to the male speaker, the ignorance of Eve is not natural but "born of arrogance" ("For the woman's ignorance, born of arrogance, does not excuse her").⁹⁸ Indeed, Isota should not find fault with Eve's "intellect", considering that it was God who created it.⁹⁹ The problem, in other words, cannot lie in woman's divinely ordained nature.¹⁰⁰ It is rather her prideful desire that led her to sin:

⁹⁵ Ivi, p. 147.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Ivi, p. 148.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ In his next and last reply, Lodovicus will claim that Eve's nature is perfectly appropriate to her reason, sex, and adequate for preserving her soul's well-being. "Actually, Eve's nature was excellent and concordant with reason, her sex, and her age. For just as teeth were given to wild beasts, horns to oxen, feathers to

For the woman's frailty was not the cause of sin, as you write, but her pride, since the demon promised her knowledge, which leads to arrogance and inflates with pride, according to the apostle. The first impulse of sin, therefore, was an inordinate appetite for seeking that which was not suited to its own nature ... For that adversary said to Eve: "Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil". Nor would the woman have believed the demon's persuasive words ... unless a love of her own power had overcome her, which love is a stream sprung from the well of pride.¹⁰¹

Nogarola's subtle orchestration of the dialogue is becoming more and more apparent. Namely, Lodovicus reveals the omission in Isota's argumentation and reminds the reader that the demon promised the first woman knowledge. Moreover, he represents Eve's desire for knowledge as prideful, while implying that the female nature is not suitable for intellectual endeavors. On account of the claims of her interlocutor, Isota is now finally in the position to center her counterargument precisely on such unsuitability, subtly (yet radically) undermining it.

Instead of arguing against his insistence on Eve's ignorance by going back to her own initial thesis, i.e. that of Eve's lesser intellect, Isota resumes her reasoning from Lodovicus's statement and astutely adds, to counter his arrogance argument, that "Eve's ignorance was implanted by nature, of which nature God himself is the author and founder".¹⁰² In other words, the female speaker makes use of elements pertaining to her interlocutor's argumentation to rectify her own initial statement regarding female intellectual inferiority. This strategy enables her to finally counter – at the very center of the dialogue – the misogynous view of woman's ineptness for the feats of the intellect:

You argue further that "the fragility of the woman was not the cause of sin, but rather her inordinate appetite for seeking that which was not suited to her nature", which appetite is the consequence, as you write, of pride. Yet it is clearly less a sin to desire the knowledge of good and evil than to transgress against a divine commandment, since the desire for knowledge is a natural thing and all men by nature desire to know.¹⁰³

birds for their survival, to the woman mental capacity was given sufficient for the preservation and pursuit of the health of her soul". Ivi, p. 156.

¹⁰¹ Ivi, p. 148. The biblical quotation is from Gn 3.5.

¹⁰² Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 151.

¹⁰³ Ivi, p. 152.

Isota defuses her opponent's argumentation by partially agreeing with his words: indeed, it was not woman's (alleged) inferiority that motivated her actions, but her desire. The desire at issue was not, however, a prideful urge "not suited to her nature". While Adam transgressed God's commandment, Eve simply wanted to know, which is the expression of a natural urge shared by all of humanity. Indeed, as Margaret King and Diana Robin remark,¹⁰⁴ the aforementioned passage contains a reference to the *incipit* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, reminding the reader of the epistemic value the ancient philosopher placed on the senses, and especially the sense of sight:

All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing to almost everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.¹⁰⁵

To the reader who recalls the biblical passage quoted in Isota's first reply, ("Now the woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes ... She took of its fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband and he ate"), it becomes manifest that Eve, in Nogarola's feminist revision, ate from the forbidden tree only because she employed her sensory faculty to gain knowledge, and not because, as Isota had firstly said, "she was weak and inclined to pleasure". Eve "saw" and "took", satisfying her natural and universally human intellectual curiosity, and not her alleged carnal nature. Her desire was sinful, because it incontrovertibly led her to sin, yet her sin was a lesser violation than Adam's direct disobedience to God's command. What is more, her actions were not motivated by pride, as Isota explains in the passage that immediately follows:

And even if the first impulse of sin were this inordinate appetite, which cannot be without sin, yet it is more tolerable than the sin of transgression, for the observance of the commandments is the road that leads to the homeland of salvation. It is written, "But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments"; and likewise,

¹⁰⁴ See *ivi*, note 47.

¹⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Met.* I.1, 980a22-980a27. For the translation by W. D. Ross, see Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. II, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984.

"What shall I do to gain eternal life? Keep the commandments". And transgression is particularly born of pride, because pride is nothing other than rebellion against divine rule, exalting oneself above what is permitted according to divine rule or disdaining the will of God and displacing it with one's own. Thus Augustine writes in *On Nature and Grace*, "Sin is the will to pursue or retain what justice forbids, that is, to deny what God wishes". Ambrose agrees with him in his *On Paradise*: "Sin is the transgression against divine law and disobedience to the heavenly commandments". Behold! It is clear that the greatest sin is the transgression against and disobedience to the heavenly commandments; whereas you have thus defined sin: "Sin is the inordinate desire to know". But it is evident that the sin of transgression against a command is greater than the sin of desiring the knowledge of good and evil. So even if inordinate desire be a sin, as with Eve, yet she did not desire to be like God in power but only in the knowledge of good and evil, which by nature she was actually inclined to desire.¹⁰⁶

Adam directly disobeyed God's edict out of a prideful impulse, while Eve's actions were motivated by a desire for knowledge, natural to the first woman. Now that the desire for power, as far as woman is concerned, is out of the equation, Isota can revise her former claim that Eve had no aspiration to become godlike, and explain that her desire to be similar to God was limited to her natural urge to know. The female speaker not only relieves Eve of greater culpability, insisting on the slowness of her sin, but authorizes women's intellectual aspirations as natural and therefore God-ordained. However, the textual texture of this passage emphatically positioned around the center of the dialogue seems pregnant with a further message. Indeed, the fivefold occurrence of the word commandment (*mandatum*) in such a brief space can be read as signalling something to the reader.¹⁰⁷ A possible clue to the textual *locus* to which Nogarola is drawing the reader's attention is the twofold repetition of the syntagm *serva mandata*, which in both cases evokes the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 19.17).¹⁰⁸ Given the subject-matter of the dialogue, the reference can be interpreted as surreptitiously including in Nogarola's argumentation the wider intertext of the nineteenth Matthean chapter, which contains, indeed, Jesus' only allusion to the biblical creation account (Mt 19.4-6):¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., pp. 152-153. For the biblical and patristic references in this passage see *ivi*, p. 152, notes 48-51.

¹⁰⁷ For the Latin original, see *Opera* II, pp. 201-203.

¹⁰⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 201-202.

¹⁰⁹ See Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent*, Vintage Books, New York, 1989,

He answered, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate".¹¹⁰

While answering a question regarding the legitimacy of divorce in the broader context of a chapter that offers "a series of instructions ... to intensify the ethics of discipleship",¹¹¹ Jesus merges the two biblical creation accounts: namely, he quotes both from the egalitarian version of creation in the first chapter of Genesis ('made them male and female', Gn 1.27), and from the story of Adam and Eve in the second and third chapters, one traditionally co-opted for misogynous purposes ('For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh', Gn 2.24). By virtue of this conflation, Jesus offers his own revision of the Genesis story. His subversive reading unsettles gender hierarchies by reminding the reader of the simultaneity of man and woman's creation ("Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female'") and undermines the very binary notion of gender by alluding to a significant verse from the story of Adam and Eve ("and the two shall become one flesh"). It goes without saying that the intertextual allusion to Jesus' nondualistic reinterpretation of the Genesis account can be read as authorizing and potentiating the feminist edge of Isota's revision. What is more, the Matthean chapter at issue contains verses that have been traditionally interpreted as Jesus' promotion of celibacy as superior to marriage. Indeed, after the disciples say to Jesus that, if divorce is a sin, then "it is better not to marry" (Mt 19.10), Jesus responds:

But he said to them, "Not everyone can accept this teaching but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can".¹¹²

pp. xxii, 8. See also Mk 10.6-9.

¹¹⁰ Mt 19.4-6.

¹¹¹ J. David Hester, "Eunuchs and the Postgender Jesus. Matthew 19.2 and Transgressive Sexualities", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 28, 13, 2005, p. 25.

¹¹² Mt 19.12.

It seems plausible to read the intertextual evocation of Matthew 19 within the textual tissue of the dialogue as offering the reader a key to better understand Nogarola's unconventional lifestyle. If my contention is right, it follows that even if Nogarola modelled her celibate lifestyle on patristic advice to female consecrated virgins, she resisted the concomitant misogynous understanding of the angelic path as a masculine feat, aligning herself instead with Jesus' subversive discourse on gender. Indeed, if the figure of the transvestite, recurrent in Nogarola's oeuvre, temporarily disrupts the internal coherence of the sex/gender system in the name of the quest for knowledge, the figure of the eunuch (intertextually evoked within a discussion of the first woman's natural and universally human aspiration to know) implies a permanent queering of the bipolar understanding of gender: male and female are blurred in the fluid instability of "in-betweenness".¹¹³ The kingdom of heaven can be read, as David Hester suggests, as a realm beyond gender dichotomies, beyond dualistic thought, as a place where the gender permeability of the eunuch, "a figure that is neither male nor female", becomes a desirable identity model, disrupting "male privilege".¹¹⁴

The hypothesis that Nogarola adhered to the patristic model of the angelic path for women on her own terms, reclaiming the radical gender ideas in Jesus' message and earliest Christianity (cf. Mt 19.10, Gal 3-27.28), is further corroborated by her 1453 encomium to Jerome.¹¹⁵ The Church Father is represented in the oration at issue as embodying both the desire for knowledge and the urge for spiritual perfection. To thematize the latter, Nogarola quotes a passage from his letter of advice to the female consecrated virgin Eustochium that describes his ascetic experience in the desert; to thematize the former, the humanist scholar deploys the Euclides of Megara anecdote, i.e. the figure of the transvestite seeker of knowledge.¹¹⁶ However, given that in his epistle to Eustochium Jerome explicitly attacks transvestism among holy

¹¹³ Megan K. DeFranza, "Virtuous Eunuchs. Troubling Conservative and Queer Readings of Intersex and the Bible", in Susannah Cornwall (ed.), *Intersex, Theology, and the Bible. Troubling Bodies in Church, Text, and Society*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015, p. 58.

¹¹⁴ See J. David Hester, *Eunuchs and the Postgender Jesus*, cit., pp. 37-40 (quotations at pp. 37, 40).

¹¹⁵ For the oration in praise of Jerome, see Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., pp. 167-174.

¹¹⁶ See *ivi*, pp. 172-173; p. 171.

women,¹¹⁷ the fact that Nogarola depicts him as the cross-dresser Euclides, ready to embrace gender ambiguity to realize his deepest urges, can be read as subtly pointing to the misogynous pitfalls of his teaching. Indeed, in his letter to Eustochium Jerome defines himself as a eunuch by choice,¹¹⁸ yet presents in a negative light those spiritual women who use cross-dressing to align themselves with the genderless ideal, therefore deterring Eustochium – and all female consecrated virgins – from espousing the impulses toward a radical destabilization of the gender divide that emerged in earliest Christianity:

Other women change their garb and put on men's dress; they cut their hair short and lift up their chins in shameless fashion; they blush to be what they were born to be – women, and prefer to look like eunuchs.¹¹⁹

Jerome's advice to Eustochium exhorts her to be devoted, as himself, to both asceticism and learning,¹²⁰ yet to be also very careful not to transgress the binaries of gender. If my deciphering of the astute rhetorical strategies and subtle intertextual evocations of Nogarola's works is correct, then the humanist author's pledge to a life of virginity and intellectual pursuits reveals itself as a self-empowering choice that, revising the misogynous aspects of the patristic notion of female virginity in the name of the emancipatory gender blurring discernible in earliest Christianity, offers freedom from binary constrictions of gender and from the imposition of the masculinity ideal. Nogarola's reclaiming of consecrated virginity appears to be teeming with feminist implications. But how does all this relate to her representation of Eve?

In the continuation of her counterargumentation, Isota addresses Lodovicus's jokey comment that "Eve may have so sinned that, like the demons, she did not merit redemption", and claims on the contrary that she was redeemed with Adam. If, on

¹¹⁷ See Elizabeth Castelli, "I Will Make Mary Male. Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Early Antiquity", in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (eds.), *Body Guards. The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, Routledge, New York and London, 1991, p. 44; Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch*, cit., p. 232.

¹¹⁸ "Some men may be eunuchs of necessity: I am one by choice". *Ep.* 22.19. Jerome, *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, cit., p. 93.

¹¹⁹ *Ep.* 22.27. Ivi, p. 117.

¹²⁰ As far as learning is concerned, Jerome exhorts Eustochium to "read often and learn all you can. Let sleep steal upon you with a book in your hand, and let the sacred page catch your drooping head". *Ep.* 22.17. Ivi, p. 87.

the other hand, she was not redeemed with Adam, this was, Isota maintains, “because God held her sin as negligible”.¹²¹ Lodovicus’s reference to the fallen angels allows Isota to articulate what is, in my opinion, the crucial point of her defense of Eve:

For the rebellious angel cannot claim to be excused by ignorance, as can Eve. For the angel understands without investigation or discussion and has an intellect more in the likeness of God’s – to which it seems Eve desired to be similar – than does man. Hence the angel is called intellectual and the man rational. So where Eve sinned from her desire for knowledge, the angel sinned from a desire for power.¹²²

To distinguish the sin of the fallen angel from that of the fallen woman, and to come to grips with the paramount question of Eve’s motive, Nogarola alludes to the epistemological question of how the angels know. Namely, the female speaker argues that the angel, a superior cognizer, necessarily sinned out of a desire for power, while the ignorant woman sinned out of her natural desire for knowledge. The passage under consideration evokes the “complex angelological systems” developed by the scholastics, and in particular by Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century.¹²³ Indeed, the distinction between the angelic creature as intellectual and the human creature as rational refers to a passage from the *Summa Theologiae*.¹²⁴ According to Aquinas’ doctrine, while the cognition of a human being involves sensation, the angel, who has no natural body, cognizes “through intelligible forms provided at its creation”.¹²⁵ Angels are, indeed, “absolutely immaterial cognizers, without corporeal senses”.¹²⁶ After having clarified the fundamental role of bodily sensation in human cognition by quoting the *incipit* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, the female speaker

¹²¹ Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 153.

¹²² Ivi, p. 153.

¹²³ On medieval angelology see David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1998 (the quotation is on p. 3).

¹²⁴ The distinction is made in *Summa Theologica* I, question 58, article 3: “Therefore they are called ‘intellectual beings’: because even with ourselves the things which are instantly grasped by the mind are said to be understood [intelligi]; hence ‘intellect’ is defined as the habit of first principles. But human souls which acquire knowledge of truth by the discursive method are called ‘rational’; and this comes of the feebleness of their intellectual light”. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1947), see <<https://dhsprory.org/thomas/summa/>>.

¹²⁵ Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas*, Routledge, London and New York, p. 167.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

articulates Eve's deepest aspiration: to cognize beyond the senses. Thus, in Isota's argumentation the age-long – classical, patristic and scholastic – disparaging identification of woman with body is first destabilized and later transcended in the name of the first woman's natural urge to know. Isota implants in Eve, i.e. in the woman that is traditionally perceived as representing the very essence of the female sex, a desire to rise beyond the body and its sensory apparatus, beyond gender, beyond marriage, beyond the subordinate procreative function of helpmeet to which both Augustine and Aquinas confine her.¹²⁷ Therefore, in Nogarola's revision of the biblical figure of Eve, the desire to become like the angels, which is both an intellectual and a spiritual aspiration, does not imply, contrary to tradition, a transcendence of female nature. The consideration that spurred Eve's (sinful) actions, even if ill-founded since it was triggered by the deceitful words of the serpent, magnifies the defense's emancipatory potential, defining the desire for knowledge and asceticism as natural to women: in other words, Nogarola's defense legitimates women (as well as the author herself) to embrace the angelic path of intellectual and spiritual realization qua women, and not despite being women. What is more, Eve's yearning to become like the angels – spiritual creatures beyond gender – can be interpreted as a further evocation of the egalitarian genderless ideal of earliest Christianity.

In the subsequent portion of her reply, Isota continues along the lines of her defense of Eve as inferior and imperfect, a strategy once again indirectly belied by the similar calculated pose deployed in the modesty topos that concludes her intervention: "Let these words be enough for me, an unarmed and poor little woman".¹²⁸ Lodovicus, on the other hand, ends his counterargumentation by exalting Isota and attacking womankind as such, thus aligning his stance with the misogynous implications of the rhetoric of exceptionality. However, the fact that Lodovicus, toward the end of the dialogue, desists from arguing against the female speaker with regard to the "distinction between the sin of angel and of man",¹²⁹ emphasizes the significance of Isota's discourse on Eve's, and womankind's, angelic urge.

¹²⁷ For Augustine's and Aquinas' view of Eve as created for the function of procreation see Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption*, cit., p. 94; see also note 81 in this essay.

¹²⁸ Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, cit., p. 156.

¹²⁹ "As to your distinction between the sin of angel and of man, that is a huge issue, and although it provides worthy fruit for your brilliant mind, it is too abundant to consider in this brief space". Ivi, p. 157.

After the astute rhetorical work of reclaiming women's potential she strategically carried out, more or less explicitly, in her writings, the humanist scholar in her last extant work (1461) articulates the following statement: "Ah yes, but I, who am not ashamed to be a woman, speak as a woman",¹³⁰ one last compelling testimony to her feminist commitment.

Conclusion

Isotta Nogarola's production can be read as articulating – in a somewhat convoluted and often disguised fashion, for the purposes of authorial legitimation on the one hand, and of feminist advocacy on the other – a discourse on gender that resonates with the porosity discernible in the beginnings of the Christian movement, as well as promoting the desire for knowledge and spiritual perfection as two interdependent urges, natural to women from the very first intellectual and angelic impulses embodied by Eve.

¹³⁰ Ivi, p. 194. For Nogarola's self-assertive statement, see also Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, cit., pp. 150-151.

Feminist Epistemology Outside the Academy: Jane Addams' *The Long Road of Women's Memory*

Katherine Borland

Summary

Recovering the intellectual contributions of early women activists remains an important task for feminist scholars, because the deeply androcentric processes of academic canon-making continue to obscure women's activism and erase them as thinking subjects even when documentary and archival evidence of their actions, reflections and motivations exists. To begin this project, I recover Jane Addams' practice of sympathetic knowledge as an early form of feminist standpoint epistemology. Both identify the basis for new knowledge and social progress in the subjective, lived truths of the least empowered.

A Memory

In 1978, I was an undergraduate at a college with few female professors or students, but with a very active Women's Union. It was in that group among my peers that I eagerly consumed the new and exciting scholarship on women that was just coming out: Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere's *Women, Culture and Society* (1974), Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1975); Berenice Carroll's *Liberating Women's History* (1976); Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1979); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's *For Her Own Good* (1979).¹ Those were heady times for me of

¹ Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture and Society*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1974; Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will. Men, Women and Rape*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1975; Berenice A. Carroll (ed.), *Liberating Women's History. Theoretical and Critical Essay*, University of

ongoing discovery and questioning, as old certainties were overturned. Meanwhile, back in the classroom, I was studying the intellectual history of the Italian Renaissance. I have a very sharp and poignant memory of an incident that occurred about halfway through the term. Bolstered by my outside reading with the Women's Union, I finally ventured to inquire of my professor why we hadn't yet encountered any texts by or about women in the course. My professor froze, glowered at me, and pronounced, "Miss Borland, women as we understand them today did not exist in the Renaissance". In effect he was telling me that the intellectual tradition I was lucky enough to inherit was entirely masculine, because women as thinking subjects were an historical novelty of the very recent past. This erasure of a whole class of subjects was a very effective exercise of power. It wasn't until class was dismissed, and I was on my way out the door that it occurred to me that *men* as we know them today hadn't existed during the Renaissance either.

Teaching and writing history was and remains political project, for historical legacies shape our understanding of the possible and impossible. Women's history in the 1970s responded to that project, recognizing that the stories we tell ourselves about the past do have consequences in the most basic sense of who counts as a knowing subject. Mary Louise Pratt's² exemplary study of the development of the European bourgeois subject through close readings of 18th and 19th century travel narratives demonstrates that the travel narrative readership participated in a new planetary consciousness that both described and possessed far-flung places, subjugating their inhabitants or eliminating them altogether, and ultimately producing among the survivors uncertainty about their own ability to describe and define reality.

My colleague, Sabra Webber, warns against "colonizing the past" by which she means the scholar's tendency to view past actors as always "less evolved" in their thinking than we are.³ Webber joins Homi Bhabha and others in recuperating the "subtle

Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1976; Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology. The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1979; Alan Dundes, "The Psychology of Legend", in Wayland Hand (ed.) *American Folk Legend. A Symposium*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971, pp. 21-36; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good. 150 Years of the Experts Advice to Women*, Anchor Books, Garden City, New York, 1979.

² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edition, Routledge, New York, 2008 [1992].

³ Sabra Webber, *Folklore Unbound. A Concise Introduction*, Waveland Press, Longrove IL, 2015, p. 25.

insights of earlier thinkers” and in recognizing early formulations of ideas and perspectives that resonate strongly with our thinking today. One might argue that the decolonizing stance leads to overly celebratory recuperations of historical actors that foreclose critique. However, recuperating voices that have been erased, marginalized or simply forgotten offers its own critique, and can be useful to building an alternative intellectual tradition that supports the social change one desires. Today, I review the work of a North American feminist who made significant advances in both social and intellectual arenas from outside the academy.

Jane Addams was regarded as the most influential North American woman of the Progressive Era (roughly 1890 to 1920), a time of rapid social upheaval that confronted many of the social justice issues that plague us today. U.S. immigration was at an all-time peak. Capitalism had wreaked worldwide havoc particularly on poor people, flooding local markets and cultivating new desires for cash in places like Modruš-Fiume county in Croatia, uprooting settled populations and sending them around the world. In her 1910 study *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens*, for example, Emily Green Balch mentions a town from this area she calls “Lipa” where 1800 of 3400 residents had migrated to Calumet Michigan by 1910, because those who had once earned supplemental income carrying goods and people across Croatia’s mountainous terrain had been rendered redundant after the construction of a railroad.⁴

In the U.S. rampant corruption and the growing gap between the rich and the poor threatened democracy. The burgeoning cities championed progress while propagating enormous slums. Prostitution, addiction, and domestic violence threatened families. In addition to these domestic issues, militarism engulfed Europe, ultimately leading to a disastrous world war, and the U.S. embraced Imperialism, embarking on police actions and territorial conquests in the Pacific, the Caribbean and Central America, actions that left in their wake a continuing legacy of racism, dictatorship, and economic and social dysfunction. Addams and her colleagues worked tirelessly to address all of these issues, always from the woman’s perspective.

Best known and celebrated as the founder of the Chicago Hull House, Addams was also a prolific writer and social theorist. As a social justice activist, she practiced a form of solidarity that consisted in immersing oneself in the environment one wishes

⁴ Emily Greene Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens*, Charities Publication Committee, New York, 1910, pp. 175-76.

to transform, consulting people at the grassroots, conducting research on the problems besetting that environment, and using that research to develop policy and change unjust laws. Though not tied to any specific religious tradition, her approach resonates with Latin American liberation theology, particularly as elaborated by the murdered Jesuits of San Salvador.⁵ Almost a century before these men lost their lives working to harness the resources of their university to solving the problems of the poor, Addams and her friend Ellen Gates Starr moved into a large home surrounded by an immigrant slum in the near west side of Chicago. As with other communities in the Settlement movement, Hull House provided a temporary home for young, mostly female, college-educated reformers and various kinds of services to residents of the surrounding community: childcare, after school programs, adult education, emergency aid, meeting space for immigrant and labor organizations, as well as a multitude of rotating projects. In spite of the fact that US women did not yet have the vote, the Hull House volunteers succeeded in contributing to the passage of significant reform legislation that transformed Chicago, including the Factory Law that closed down sweatshops, the Child Labor Law, and the establishment of a Juvenile Court. In 1910, Addams published a memoir, *20 Years at Hull House*, which quickly went into reprint, selling over 80,000 copies by the time of her death in 1935.⁶ Rediscovered during the 1970s, this text became a mainstay in women's history and social work classes. More recently, feminist philosophers have reevaluated Addams' influence on theory, correcting the standard view that she was a mere implementer of the ideas of the American Pragmatist School.⁷ Since 2002, the University of Illinois Press has republished much of her work, but early editions are also available online.

Addams' voluminous writings show a robust interplay of experience and reflection in the American pragmatist tradition. Maurice Hamington argues that as a Public Philosopher she in fact "carried pragmatism to its logical conclusion, developing an

⁵ John J. Hassett and Hugh Lacey (eds.), *Towards a Society that Serves its People. The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits*, Georgetown University Press, Washington, 1991.

⁶ Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, Victoria Bissell Brown (ed.), Bedford and St. Martins, New York, 1999 [1910], pp. 122-36.

⁷ Maurice Hamington, "Jane Addams", in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/addams-jane/>>; Maurice Hamington (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 2010.

applied philosophy immersed in social action”.⁸ Her Hull House experiments are epistemologically focused but replete with a faith in the humanity of her neighbors and the possibility of collective progress through increased public discourse. She believed strongly in democracy and viewed the widening economic and cultural gap between the rich and the poor as its greatest threat.⁹

Although she remained a resident of Hull House her entire life, Addams did not restrict her activism to the local sphere. In 1915, with her colleagues, the Wellesley Economics professor, Emily Greene Balch, and Alice Hamilton, she drew on preexisting women’s suffrage networks, uniting women from warring and neutral countries, to lobby world leaders for a negotiated peace to World War I. Their report, *Women at the Hague*,¹⁰ details their travels through Europe to both collect evidence in favor of and to urge political leaders to adopt a negotiated peace. Though unsuccessful, this utopian project resulted in the creation of the still extant Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom, which continued after the first world war to work towards an international system of governance and to fight U.S. Imperialism in the Americas.¹¹ With the advance of WWII the organization then headed by Balch worked to address the needs of refugees. Their staunch opposition to war during wartime made Addams and Balch the object of suspicion by the U.S. government. In fact, Balch lost her job as an Economics Professor at Wellesley in 1918 as a consequence of her anti-war activities.¹² However, their work earned each a Nobel Peace Prize, Addams in 1931 and Balch in 1946.

Addams’ has received international recognition for her peace activism. Her social work has been recuperated; her contributions to social theory are currently being assessed. In this essay I explore what she might contribute to our understanding of folklore, oral history and life review. In 1916, at a moment when her public reputation had suffered a reversal as a consequence of her antiwar stance, Addams compiled a set of essays in *The Long Road of*

⁸ Hamington, *Jane Addams*, cit.

⁹ Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, cit., p. 95.

¹⁰ Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch and Alice Hamilton, *Women at the Hague*, Macmillan, New York, 1915.

¹¹ See for example Emily Greene Balch (ed.), *Occupied Haiti. Being a Report by a Committee of Six Disinterested Citizens*, The Writers’ Publishing Company, New York, 1927.

¹² Judy D. Whipps, “The Feminist Pacifism of Emily Greene Balch, Nobel Prize Laureate”, *NWSA Journal*, 18, 3, 2016, pp. 122-32.

Woman's Memory. By examining this text seriously, I hope to show how it might disrupt historicity in oral narrative research. The text is composed of three sets of disparate materials, which had each been published in periodical form prior to this publication.¹³

Addams begins her text by affirming classical scholars' notions that among the elderly memory exercises a conservative function, refashioning the past to eliminate the hardships endured and recall only what is valuable and beautiful. However, social intercourse rather than classical authority provides her with an additional insight, as she reflects on a six-week flurry of visits to Hull House, provoked by reports that the settlement was harboring a 'Devil Baby'. Among the curiosity seekers who descended on the settlement were several older women anxious to advise in the matter of what to do about this supernatural visitation. Having arrived and been disappointed, for there was no devil baby, they unburdened themselves to Addams, spontaneously performing what today we would call life review. These life stories accentuate what Addams calls the "monstruous" social injustices that had formed and deformed them.

The three chapters that follow focus on the combined import of the urban legend and the elderly women's life review narratives it provoked. Chapter Five moves to a consideration of women's war narratives and the final chapter relates a series of Addams' own childhood memories of death, provoked by a visit to Egypt. Putting aside for the moment the question of how these disparate materials form a unity, I will explore Addams' epistemological approach, focusing on the Devil Baby chapters.

Unfortunately, Addams is no folklorist. She reports only two of the innumerable versions of the urban legend at the center of the hubbub. In the Italian version an atheist father savagely trashes a holy picture; when his believing wife delivers soon after, the baby has horns, cloven hooves and immediately blasphemes. The father delivers the creature to Hull House, where the good ladies take it to the chapel for baptism. When they open the shawl the baby has disappeared and is seen leaping across the far pews. In the Jewish version, a father of six girls tells his wife he'd rather have the devil than a seventh. Addams concludes, "Save for a red automobile which occasionally figured in the story and a stray cigar, which in some versions the newborn child had snatched from his father's

¹³ Marilyn Fischer, "Trojan Women and Devil Baby Tales. Addams on Domestic Violence", in Hammington, *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, cit., pp. 81-106.

lips, the tale might have been fashioned a thousand years ago".¹⁴ This assessment is in line with the understanding of contemporary legend scholars¹⁵ as is Addams' subsequent location of the story's meaning in the tellers' attempts to manage social change.

In her narrative framing of the ensuing life review narratives, Addams positions herself as a rational thinker who gradually begins to question her own attitude, partially adopting the perspective of the tellers. This receptivity to their experience allows her do a number of things significant for oral narrative researchers: she recognizes the power of narrative to affirm and enrich the teller, she affirms subjective over rational meanings, and she identifies the narratives as pushing toward abstract, shared, subjective truths.¹⁶

Addams begins by confiding that the curious crowds' expectations to pay to see the child shocked her, and she quickly tired of their eager insistence that she show it to them. Here she positions herself as morally and intellectually superior to her coarse and inhumane immigrant and working class visitors.¹⁷ But she is intrigued and touched by the elderly women in the crowds, who appear to have gained some authority as a result of the rumor. Responding to this quickening among a group whom she has known before only as downtrodden, disregarded and silenced, she observes that the legend provokes in them recollections of supernatural experiences and powers which seem to provide them with a profounder, more meaningful sense of self. (She does not share these stories, however, moving instead to the life review material that focuses on the lived experience of poverty.) As she grapples with the question of how to feed the imaginations of the elderly, she compares the self-satisfying "goodness" of reading a book to an invalid with her own struggle over whether to transmit or deny the urban legend. This comparison points to and gently critiques the tendency of the privileged classes to elevate the

¹⁴ Jane Addams, *The Long Road of Women's Memory*, Macmillan, New York, 1916, p. 4.

¹⁵ See for example Alan Dundes, "The Psychology of Legend", in Wayland Hand (ed.), *American Folk Legend. A Symposium*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971, pp. 21-36.

¹⁶ See Carl Lindahl, "Legends of Hurricane Katrina. The Right to Be Wrong, Survivor to Survivor Storytelling and Healing", *Journal of American Folklore*, 125, 496, 2012, pp. 139-176; Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?", in Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories. Form and Meaning in Oral History*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1991, pp. 45-58.

¹⁷ Michael Bamberg, "Positioning between structure and performance", *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 1997, pp. 335-342.

redeeming value of their own written cultural materials over the oral tales of impoverished communities. While visiting an Irish storyteller, Addams reports, “She could only live a few months at best, I argued to myself; why not give her this vivid interest and through it awake those earliest recollections of long-accumulated folklore with its magic power to transfigure and eclipse the sordid and unsatisfactory surroundings in which life is actually spent?”¹⁸ Addams thus suggests a move from strict rationality (there is no Devil Baby) to an understanding of how such tales might provide confirmation to the believer that invests her with the authority to tell her subjective truths.

Although she does not ultimately join the legend transmission chain, Addams turns to a consideration of the subjective truths encoded in the legend, arguing that it works as a strategic abstraction of the older women’s lived oppression and offers them a defensive tool, a warning to overbearing husbands dressed up in an exciting narrative. The next two chapters draw on her elderly visitors’ life review stories divided by content as well as by Addams’ identification of the conflicting functions of memory (what we would call life review) to either reconcile with life or to offer a means of rethinking and discarding tired conventions.

Chapter two features stories of domestic violence. And yet, Addams insists, no matter how brutalized a woman has been in her life, she remains human, capable of identifying moments of human connection without bitterness. In one vignette, a mother recounts her love and appreciation for a son, currently imprisoned for murdering his own wife. Addams quotes the woman recalling that after a night of scrubbing floors, “I’d never get home much before twelve o’clock, but Joe would open the door for me just as pleasant as if he hadn’t been waked out of a sound sleep”. Addams in her turn notes, “She was so triumphantly unconscious of the incongruity of a sturdy son in bed while his mother earned his food, that her auditors said never a word, and in silence we saw a hero arise before our eyes, a defender of the oppressed...”.¹⁹ Here, she surfaces the double-knowing of receptive listeners, who even as they confirm the narrator’s sense-making, maintain their own interpretations of her story. In contemporary oral history research, auditor/interpreters most often work to eliminate the gap between a narrator’s intended meaning and the auditor’s interpretation most often through methods of collaborative review, discussion

¹⁸ Addams, *The Long Road of Women’s Memory*, cit., p. 18.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 51.

and consensus-building.²⁰ However, intersubjectivity also allows for interpretive dissonance of the kind Addams surfaces here.

With regard to contemporary theories of life review, on the one hand Addams' focus on subjective as opposed to literal truths conforms to current values and practices. On the other, she treats her material with a relatively free hand, sometimes providing direct quotations, often simply reporting in her own words what her interlocutor told her. She provides no reliable transcriptions, and her narrative style suggests that the stories included in the text are representative of a larger body of narratives that remain undocumented.

Addams is also silent with regard to the inter-subjective management of the interview, that is, the recognition that even life reviews are co-created through dialog, questions and answers, and the assumptions and expectations narrator and auditor bring with them to the communicative exchange.²¹ Addams ignores these features, portraying the life reviews as spontaneous and unprompted (as they may have been), and the listeners as having refrained from intervening in the free flow of self-disclosure. Moreover, the fact that the ethic of care she models in her attentive listening is mirrored by the ethic of care the narrators produce in their stories goes unremarked and untheorized.

In chapter three Addams offers another set of stories that rather than reconciling women to an unjust world act as social disturbers. She asserts, "when these reminiscences, based upon the diverse experiences of many people unknown to each other, point to one inevitable conclusion, they accumulate into a social protest, although not necessarily an effective one, against existing conventions, even against those which are most valuable and those securely founded on cumulative human wisdom".²² Here Addams focuses specifically on the problem of "fallen women" and their offspring, capitalizing on an implicit link between an unwanted pregnancy and a devil baby. Though she paints a sympathetic picture of "respectable" women, whose marital happiness is threatened or whose own respectability can be compromised by their association with the "fallen ones," the older women visitors' life reviews produce two kinds of tales: ones that

²⁰ See for example Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, Routledge, New York, 2010; Peter Friedlander, "Theory, Method and Oral History", in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, New York, 1998, pp. 311-319.

²¹ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, cit., pp. 54-77; see also Goffman, 1959.

²² Addams, *The Long Road of Women's Memory*, cit., p. 53.

catalog the heartrending consequences of maintaining a narrow moralism or ones in which the protagonist expressed an ultimate satisfaction with defying propriety and protecting unwed mothers and their children from a hostile world. She concludes, "Maternal affection and solicitude in women's remembering heart, may at length coalesce into a chivalric protection for all that is young and unguarded".²³ As an example of this new moral stance, she points to Hungarian women's protest against a military regulation that would have required weekly medical examinations of all servant women living close to army barracks in order to protect the soldiers from disease. In this case, she points out, the least protected class of women is exposed to great insult. And, she continues, legal reforms in Scandinavia and Germany that defend unwed mothers and their children have led to greater legal rights for all women.

In this chapter, then, Addams explicitly argues that social transformation occurs not as the consequence of a few great thinkers but is the result of a gradual shift in the thinking of multitudes. Simultaneously, she introduces a concept of women's morality that is less categorical than are patriarchal norms, allowing for a consideration of individual actors and circumstances. She states, "Each case has been quietly judged by reference to an altered moral standard, for while the ethical code like the legal code stands in need of constant revision, the remodeling of the former is always private, tacit, and informal".²⁴

In Chapter Five, Addams shifts her focus to the changing nature of women's lives as a factor that must necessarily lead to changes in social thinking and behavior. The stories in the chapter highlight women's shifting attitudes and loyalties as their lives are impacted by the great industrial changes of the early 20th century. In addition to freeing working women from the isolation and dependency of domestic work (including piecework which had been banned recently in Chicago, partly as a result of Hull House reformers efforts), Addams argues that the constant association of industrial life has cultivated desires for liberty and a larger participation in the public world among women. For Addams, human communication and interaction contribute to self-cultivation and social justice. Once again she conflates upper and working class cultures by comparing the impact the 18th century French salons had on intellectual progress with that of immigrant women's workers associations. She concludes, "We may predict

²³ Ivi, pp. 82-83.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 79.

that to control old impulses so that they may be put to social uses, to serve the present through memories hoarding woman's genuine experiences, may liberate energies hitherto unused and may result in a notable enrichment of the patterns of human culture".²⁵ In other words, Addams believes social conditions have allowed working women greater liberty to live and express themselves independently of men. Their inherited wisdom, their special perspective, what we might call their standpoint, is now available to transform public institutions and ways of thinking in ways that will advance the larger culture.

The next chapter, *Women's Memories: Challenging War*, draws from two-months of European travel in 1915, recording the wartime narratives of women, to support the Peace Party's argument for a negotiated settlement. In this case, Addams claims that memory acts to blur nonessential details in order to more sharply focus on common, shared human experience. Her refashioning of other people's stories to make a specific point, latent in the earlier chapters, is quite plainly evident here. At the beginning of the chapter she provides the following footnote:

The following conversation is a composite made up from several talks held with each of two women representing both sides of the conflict. Their opinions and observations are merged into one because in so many particulars they were either identical or overlapping. Both women called themselves patriots, but each had become convinced of the folly of war.²⁶

What follows is a quoted account of a social reformer colleague and a third person report of the account of a woman who represents for Addams the perspective of 'humble' internationalists, people who, by virtue of family immigration, have rejected Europe's hyper-nationalism in favor of a community of nations, for which an idealized America forms the model. In this way the report not only compares perspectives from women on two sides of the conflict (the sides are not identified), but also from two social positions, the intellectual and the common woman. In both cases, a woman's instinct to protect the life of her children and by extension, life in general, opposes the duty men feel to serve their country, no matter how destructive the mission.

Both the material and its treatment mark an abrupt shift from the previous focus, raising the question of why this chapter forms

²⁵ Ivi, p. 114.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 115.

part of the study. One explanation has to do with the moment of publication, 1916, and Addams' own investment in a negotiated peace to WWI. The similarities in the workings of memory offer another. In the composite stories, Addams identifies the dynamic evident in the Devil Baby stories: the narrator moves from a commitment to conventional morality (in this case, defense of one's country) to a growing sense of conflict with received wisdom derived from women's distinctive experience of motherhood, to a rejection of the status quo in favor of a new moral code, pacifism. Addams and her two interlocutors perceive warfare as a primitive means of solving conflicts that world progress, which rests on government reform, immigration and scientific advances, has rendered obsolete. She perceives women's special experience with nurturing the young and defenseless as an unvoiced or unheard historical imperative. By gathering these stories that illustrate "a selective groping to another standard", she hopes that "a sufficient number of similar variations might even, in Memory's leisurely fashion of upbuilding tradition, in the end establish a new norm",²⁷ the rejection of war.

The final chapter marks another abrupt shift. Here Addams shares an account of how a visit to the monuments of ancient Egypt, provokes a series of childhood memories concerning death. Pegging civilizational change to the stages of a human life, she betrays her embeddedness in 19th century notions of social evolution. Yet her aim is to show how, "a sincere portrayal of a widespread and basic emotional experience, however remote in point of time it may be, has the power to overwhelmingly evoke memories of like moods in the individual".²⁸ This point is important to Addams, because she wants to show something essentially human across historical time periods, nations, and social classes: a shared subjectivity that is a valid form of knowledge different from the rational. We might argue that she privileges questions of humanity over those of historicity. She interprets the Egyptian monuments and paintings as mirroring her childhood desires to shut out death with strong walls, to ward it off with magical formulas, to resist the destruction of the corporeal self, to quell a guilty conscience and to embrace notions of reincarnation, concluding "such ghosts of reminiscence, coming to the individual as he visits one after another of the marvellous human documents on the banks of the Nile, may be merely manifestations of that

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. xii.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 141.

new humanism which is perhaps the most precious possession of this generation, the belief that no altar at which living men have once devoutly worshipped, no oracle to whom a nation long ago appealed in its moments of dire confusion, no gentle myth in which former generations have found solace, can lose all significance for us, the survivors".²⁹

Why end this way? How does this final chapter connect with the Devil Baby legend with which she began her inquiry? In the first chapters Addams portrays herself as reaching towards the humanity of older women who, being mostly disregarded, have heretofore not revealed themselves as animated, thinking subjects. Stirred to recollection and life review, they reformulate worn out notions of morality, privileging an ethic of care. She then moves to a younger generation of women, who, as they enter the public realm as wage earners, begin to transfer these values from their private lives to society as a whole. War interrupts social progress and compels both privileged and ordinary women to engage in the process of reflective life review that leads to a rejection of patriotic morality in favor of the life-sustaining ethic of pacifism. Addams' turn to a consideration of Pharoanic conceptions of death and the afterlife displays the same receptivity now across time and civilizational difference. In its universalizing scope, it offers perhaps an alternate "planetary consciousness" to the one Pratt surfaced in travel narratives authored by European men.

Ultimately, *The Long Road of Women's Memory* contributes a number of early methodological formulations to our understanding of oral narrative research. First, Addams upholds the power and importance of subjective truths. Second, she recognizes the epistemological value of adopting the standpoint of the least privileged to uncover new knowledge that can transform society. In general, her approach aligns very well with contemporary scholars and practitioners of oral history performance, a branch of oral history scholarship that seeks to harness life review to projects of individual and social transformation or healing.³⁰ These projects identify the value of collecting life reviews in the immediate impact of the reflexive process on the narrating self and on translating elements of the resulting narrative into performances that can impact others to reject existing attitudes that blame the victim. *Leaves of Magnolia*, Alicia Rouverol's collaboration

²⁹ Ivi, p. 167.

³⁰ See for instance Della Pollock (ed.), *Remembering. Oral History Performance*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005.

with male prison inmates, for instance, deploys life review to encourage prisoner-actors to come to terms with their pasts.³¹ As these men fashion a performance for an audience of at-risk-youth, they also gain a sense of personal agency in an otherwise power-laden environment, and hopefully, help their audience chart a different future. Restaging stories of domestic violence³² or training disaster survivors to document the experiences of their fellow survivors³³ are other contemporary projects that provide platforms to routinely silenced groups to express their subjective truths and diversify sense-making in the public sphere.

To conclude, Addams' insistence that the road of women's memory is indeed long, resists the kind of historical erasure of women's subjectivity that my Renaissance History professor attempted so long ago. Recuperating her legacy reminds us of the "subtle insights of earlier thinkers" and of what we can imagine as possible. What would it take for us to advance her vision of a civilization that has evolved beyond war?

³¹ See Alicia Rouverol, "Trying To Be Good. Lessons in Oral History and Performance", in Pollock, *Remembering*, cit., pp. 19-44.

³² M. Heather Carver and Elaine Lawless, *Troubling Violence. A Performance Project*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2010.

³³ Pat Jasper and Carl Lindahl, "The Houston Survivor Project. An Introduction", *Callaloo*, 29, 4, 2006, pp. 1504-05. See also Lindahl, *Legends of Hurricane Katrina*, cit.

“I wanted to be somebody”: Learning from the Past and Making Women’s Life Stories Matter

Marija Ott Franolić

Summary

The article describes a feminist oral history project researching the lives of several Croatian intellectual women, aiming to enrich women’s history with accounts of their subjective experience. The article outlines the necessity of conducting such a project, its practical challenges and conclusions that were drawn from the interviews. Croatia and the rest of Europe are facing retraditionalization, which has disrupted women’s lives and women’s history. The younger generations of women often embrace conservative trends uncritically, while at the same time taking feminism’s outcomes for granted, unaware of the fact that women’s rights once gained are not irreversible but depend on fragile socio-political circumstances. This can be challenged by the use of oral history. Younger women could feel empowered by the older women’s struggle for equality and more fulfilled lives. The private struggles – especially those of educated women outsiders – have the capacity to overcome the generational differences and make real changes.

Introduction: Analyzing Women’s Lives from Different Sources

One of the dangers of traditional scholarship is the false notion that what is your idea cannot be my idea too; it leads to the ridiculous assumption that ideas spring from a single mind as if the mind existed in a vacuum, and was not necessarily affected by the insights of others.¹

¹ Christine Mason Sutherland, “Feminist Historiography. Research Methods in Rhetoric”, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 32, 1, 2002, p. 112.

Woman's Memory. By examining this text seriously, I hope to show how it might disrupt historicity in oral narrative research. The text is composed of three sets of disparate materials, which had each been published in periodical form prior to this publication.¹³

Addams begins her text by affirming classical scholars' notions that among the elderly memory exercises a conservative function, refashioning the past to eliminate the hardships endured and recall only what is valuable and beautiful. However, social intercourse rather than classical authority provides her with an additional insight, as she reflects on a six-week flurry of visits to Hull House, provoked by reports that the settlement was harboring a 'Devil Baby'. Among the curiosity seekers who descended on the settlement were several older women anxious to advise in the matter of what to do about this supernatural visitation. Having arrived and been disappointed, for there was no devil baby, they unburdened themselves to Addams, spontaneously performing what today we would call life review. These life stories accentuate what Addams calls the "monstruous" social injustices that had formed and deformed them.

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lips, the tale might have been fashioned a thousand years ago".¹⁴ This assessment is in line with the understanding of contemporary legend scholars¹⁵ as is Addams' subsequent location of the story's meaning in the tellers' attempts to manage social change.

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¹⁴ Jane Addams, *The Long Road of Women's Memory*, Macmillan, New York, 1916, p. 4.

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¹⁷ Michael Bamberg, "Positioning between structure and performance", *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 1997, pp. 335-342.

redeeming value of their own written cultural materials over the oral tales of impoverished communities. While visiting an Irish storyteller, Addams reports, “She could only live a few months at best, I argued to myself; why not give her this vivid interest and through it awake those earliest recollections of long-accumulated folklore with its magic power to transfigure and eclipse the sordid and unsatisfactory surroundings in which life is actually spent?”¹⁸ Addams thus suggests a move from strict rationality (there is no Devil Baby) to an understanding of how such tales might provide confirmation to the believer that invests her with the authority to tell her subjective truths.

Although she does not ultimately join the legend transmission chain, Addams turns to a consideration of the subjective truths encoded in the legend, arguing that it works as a strategic abstraction of the older women’s lived oppression and offers them a defensive tool, a warning to overbearing husbands dressed up in an exciting narrative. The next two chapters draw on her elderly visitors’ life review stories divided by content as well as by Addams’ identification of the conflicting functions of memory (what we would call life review) to either reconcile with life or to offer a means of rethinking and discarding tired conventions.

Chapter two features stories of domestic violence. And yet, Addams insists, no matter how brutalized a woman has been in her life, she remains human, capable of identifying moments of human connection without bitterness. In one vignette, a mother recounts her love and appreciation for a son, currently imprisoned for murdering his own wife. Addams quotes the woman recalling that after a night of scrubbing floors, “I’d never get home much before twelve o’clock, but Joe would open the door for me just as pleasant as if he hadn’t been waked out of a sound sleep”. Addams in her turn notes, “She was so triumphantly unconscious of the incongruity of a sturdy son in bed while his mother earned his food, that her auditors said never a word, and in silence we saw a hero arise before our eyes, a defender of the oppressed...”.¹⁹ Here, she surfaces the double-knowing of receptive listeners, who even as they confirm the narrator’s sense-making, maintain their own interpretations of her story. In contemporary oral history research, auditor/interpreters most often work to eliminate the gap between a narrator’s intended meaning and the auditor’s interpretation most often through methods of collaborative review, discussion

¹⁸ Addams, *The Long Road of Women’s Memory*, cit., p. 18.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 51.

and consensus-building.²⁰ However, intersubjectivity also allows for interpretive dissonance of the kind Addams surfaces here.

With regard to contemporary theories of life review, on the one hand Addams' focus on subjective as opposed to literal truths conforms to current values and practices. On the other, she treats her material with a relatively free hand, sometimes providing direct quotations, often simply reporting in her own words what her interlocutor told her. She provides no reliable transcriptions, and her narrative style suggests that the stories included in the text are representative of a larger body of narratives that remain undocumented.

Addams is also silent with regard to the inter-subjective management of the interview, that is, the recognition that even life reviews are co-created through dialog, questions and answers, and the assumptions and expectations narrator and auditor bring with them to the communicative exchange.²¹ Addams ignores these features, portraying the life reviews as spontaneous and unprompted (as they may have been), and the listeners as having refrained from intervening in the free flow of self-disclosure. Moreover, the fact that the ethic of care she models in her attentive listening is mirrored by the ethic of care the narrators produce in their stories goes unremarked and untheorized.

In chapter three Addams offers another set of stories that rather than reconciling women to an unjust world act as social disturbers. She asserts, "when these reminiscences, based upon the diverse experiences of many people unknown to each other, point to one inevitable conclusion, they accumulate into a social protest, although not necessarily an effective one, against existing conventions, even against those which are most valuable and those securely founded on cumulative human wisdom".²² Here Addams focuses specifically on the problem of "fallen women" and their offspring, capitalizing on an implicit link between an unwanted pregnancy and a devil baby. Though she paints a sympathetic picture of "respectable" women, whose marital happiness is threatened or whose own respectability can be compromised by their association with the "fallen ones," the older women visitors' life reviews produce two kinds of tales: ones that

²⁰ See for example Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, Routledge, New York, 2010; Peter Friedlander, "Theory, Method and Oral History", in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, New York, 1998, pp. 311-319.

²¹ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, cit., pp. 54-77; see also Goffman, 1959.

²² Addams, *The Long Road of Women's Memory*, cit., p. 53.

catalog the heartrending consequences of maintaining a narrow moralism or ones in which the protagonist expressed an ultimate satisfaction with defying propriety and protecting unwed mothers and their children from a hostile world. She concludes, "Maternal affection and solicitude in women's remembering heart, may at length coalesce into a chivalric protection for all that is young and unguarded".²³ As an example of this new moral stance, she points to Hungarian women's protest against a military regulation that would have required weekly medical examinations of all servant women living close to army barracks in order to protect the soldiers from disease. In this case, she points out, the least protected class of women is exposed to great insult. And, she continues, legal reforms in Scandinavia and Germany that defend unwed mothers and their children have led to greater legal rights for all women.

In this chapter, then, Addams explicitly argues that social transformation occurs not as the consequence of a few great thinkers but is the result of a gradual shift in the thinking of multitudes. Simultaneously, she introduces a concept of women's morality that is less categorical than are patriarchal norms, allowing for a consideration of individual actors and circumstances. She states, "Each case has been quietly judged by reference to an altered moral standard, for while the ethical code like the legal code stands in need of constant revision, the remodeling of the former is always private, tacit, and informal".²⁴

In Chapter Five, Addams shifts her focus to the changing nature of women's lives as a factor that must necessarily lead to changes in social thinking and behavior. The stories in the chapter highlight women's shifting attitudes and loyalties as their lives are impacted by the great industrial changes of the early 20th century. In addition to freeing working women from the isolation and dependency of domestic work (including piecework which had been banned recently in Chicago, partly as a result of Hull House reformers efforts), Addams argues that the constant association of industrial life has cultivated desires for liberty and a larger participation in the public world among women. For Addams, human communication and interaction contribute to self-cultivation and social justice. Once again she conflates upper and working class cultures by comparing the impact the 18th century French salons had on intellectual progress with that of immigrant women's workers associations. She concludes, "We may predict

²³ Ivi, pp. 82-83.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 79.

that to control old impulses so that they may be put to social uses, to serve the present through memories hoarding woman's genuine experiences, may liberate energies hitherto unused and may result in a notable enrichment of the patterns of human culture".²⁵ In other words, Addams believes social conditions have allowed working women greater liberty to live and express themselves independently of men. Their inherited wisdom, their special perspective, what we might call their standpoint, is now available to transform public institutions and ways of thinking in ways that will advance the larger culture.

The next chapter, *Women's Memories: Challenging War*, draws from two-months of European travel in 1915, recording the wartime narratives of women, to support the Peace Party's argument for a negotiated settlement. In this case, Addams claims that memory acts to blur nonessential details in order to more sharply focus on common, shared human experience. Her refashioning of other people's stories to make a specific point, latent in the earlier chapters, is quite plainly evident here. At the beginning of the chapter she provides the following footnote:

The following conversation is a composite made up from several talks held with each of two women representing both sides of the conflict. Their opinions and observations are merged into one because in so many particulars they were either identical or overlapping. Both women called themselves patriots, but each had become convinced of the folly of war.²⁶

What follows is a quoted account of a social reformer colleague and a third person report of the account of a woman who represents for Addams the perspective of 'humble' internationalists, people who, by virtue of family immigration, have rejected Europe's hyper-nationalism in favor of a community of nations, for which an idealized America forms the model. In this way the report not only compares perspectives from women on two sides of the conflict (the sides are not identified), but also from two social positions, the intellectual and the common woman. In both cases, a woman's instinct to protect the life of her children and by extension, life in general, opposes the duty men feel to serve their country, no matter how destructive the mission.

Both the material and its treatment mark an abrupt shift from the previous focus, raising the question of why this chapter forms

²⁵ Ivi, p. 114.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 115.

part of the study. One explanation has to do with the moment of publication, 1916, and Addams' own investment in a negotiated peace to WWI. The similarities in the workings of memory offer another. In the composite stories, Addams identifies the dynamic evident in the Devil Baby stories: the narrator moves from a commitment to conventional morality (in this case, defense of one's country) to a growing sense of conflict with received wisdom derived from women's distinctive experience of motherhood, to a rejection of the status quo in favor of a new moral code, pacifism. Addams and her two interlocutors perceive warfare as a primitive means of solving conflicts that world progress, which rests on government reform, immigration and scientific advances, has rendered obsolete. She perceives women's special experience with nurturing the young and defenseless as an unvoiced or unheard historical imperative. By gathering these stories that illustrate "a selective groping to another standard", she hopes that "a sufficient number of similar variations might even, in Memory's leisurely fashion of upbuilding tradition, in the end establish a new norm",²⁷ the rejection of war.

The final chapter marks another abrupt shift. Here Addams shares an account of how a visit to the monuments of ancient Egypt, provokes a series of childhood memories concerning death. Pegging civilizational change to the stages of a human life, she betrays her embeddedness in 19th century notions of social evolution. Yet her aim is to show how, "a sincere portrayal of a widespread and basic emotional experience, however remote in point of time it may be, has the power to overwhelmingly evoke memories of like moods in the individual".²⁸ This point is important to Addams, because she wants to show something essentially human across historical time periods, nations, and social classes: a shared subjectivity that is a valid form of knowledge different from the rational. We might argue that she privileges questions of humanity over those of historicity. She interprets the Egyptian monuments and paintings as mirroring her childhood desires to shut out death with strong walls, to ward it off with magical formulas, to resist the destruction of the corporeal self, to quell a guilty conscience and to embrace notions of reincarnation, concluding "such ghosts of reminiscence, coming to the individual as he visits one after another of the marvellous human documents on the banks of the Nile, may be merely manifestations of that

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. xii.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 141.

new humanism which is perhaps the most precious possession of this generation, the belief that no altar at which living men have once devoutly worshipped, no oracle to whom a nation long ago appealed in its moments of dire confusion, no gentle myth in which former generations have found solace, can lose all significance for us, the survivors".²⁹

Why end this way? How does this final chapter connect with the Devil Baby legend with which she began her inquiry? In the first chapters Addams portrays herself as reaching towards the humanity of older women who, being mostly disregarded, have heretofore not revealed themselves as animated, thinking subjects. Stirred to recollection and life review, they reformulate worn out notions of morality, privileging an ethic of care. She then moves to a younger generation of women, who, as they enter the public realm as wage earners, begin to transfer these values from their private lives to society as a whole. War interrupts social progress and compels both privileged and ordinary women to engage in the process of reflective life review that leads to a rejection of patriotic morality in favor of the life-sustaining ethic of pacifism. Addams' turn to a consideration of Pharoanic conceptions of death and the afterlife displays the same receptivity now across time and civilizational difference. In its universalizing scope, it offers perhaps an alternate "planetary consciousness" to the one Pratt surfaced in travel narratives authored by European men.

Ultimately, *The Long Road of Women's Memory* contributes a number of early methodological formulations to our understanding of oral narrative research. First, Addams upholds the power and importance of subjective truths. Second, she recognizes the epistemological value of adopting the standpoint of the least privileged to uncover new knowledge that can transform society. In general, her approach aligns very well with contemporary scholars and practitioners of oral history performance, a branch of oral history scholarship that seeks to harness life review to projects of individual and social transformation or healing.³⁰ These projects identify the value of collecting life reviews in the immediate impact of the reflexive process on the narrating self and on translating elements of the resulting narrative into performances that can impact others to reject existing attitudes that blame the victim. *Leaves of Magnolia*, Alicia Rouverol's collaboration

²⁹ Ivi, p. 167.

³⁰ See for instance Della Pollock (ed.), *Remembering. Oral History Performance*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005.

with male prison inmates, for instance, deploys life review to encourage prisoner-actors to come to terms with their pasts.³¹ As these men fashion a performance for an audience of at-risk-youth, they also gain a sense of personal agency in an otherwise power-laden environment, and hopefully, help their audience chart a different future. Restaging stories of domestic violence³² or training disaster survivors to document the experiences of their fellow survivors³³ are other contemporary projects that provide platforms to routinely silenced groups to express their subjective truths and diversify sense-making in the public sphere.

To conclude, Addams' insistence that the road of women's memory is indeed long, resists the kind of historical erasure of women's subjectivity that my Renaissance History professor attempted so long ago. Recuperating her legacy reminds us of the "subtle insights of earlier thinkers" and of what we can imagine as possible. What would it take for us to advance her vision of a civilization that has evolved beyond war?

³¹ See Alicia Rouverol, "Trying To Be Good. Lessons in Oral History and Performance", in Pollock, *Remembering*, cit., pp. 19-44.

³² M. Heather Carver and Elaine Lawless, *Troubling Violence. A Performance Project*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2010.

³³ Pat Jasper and Carl Lindahl, "The Houston Survivor Project. An Introduction", *Callaloo*, 29, 4, 2006, pp. 1504-05. See also Lindahl, *Legends of Hurricane Katrina*, cit.

“I wanted to be somebody”: Learning from the Past and Making Women’s Life Stories Matter

Marija Ott Franolić

Summary

The article describes a feminist oral history project researching the lives of several Croatian intellectual women, aiming to enrich women’s history with accounts of their subjective experience. The article outlines the necessity of conducting such a project, its practical challenges and conclusions that were drawn from the interviews. Croatia and the rest of Europe are facing retraditionalization, which has disrupted women’s lives and women’s history. The younger generations of women often embrace conservative trends uncritically, while at the same time taking feminism’s outcomes for granted, unaware of the fact that women’s rights once gained are not irreversible but depend on fragile socio-political circumstances. This can be challenged by the use of oral history. Younger women could feel empowered by the older women’s struggle for equality and more fulfilled lives. The private struggles – especially those of educated women outsiders – have the capacity to overcome the generational differences and make real changes.

Introduction: Analyzing Women’s Lives from Different Sources

One of the dangers of traditional scholarship is the false notion that what is your idea cannot be my idea too; it leads to the ridiculous assumption that ideas spring from a single mind as if the mind existed in a vacuum, and was not necessarily affected by the insights of others.¹

¹ Christine Mason Sutherland, “Feminist Historiography. Research Methods in Rhetoric”, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 32, 1, 2002, p. 112.

In order to further develop knowledge and raise consciousness about past women's lives, which constitute the body of women's history, women's stories have to be told, kept, analyzed and properly valued. Since the 1970s it has been acknowledged that women's lives were "hidden from history",² because historians were primarily interested in public and political history. Today, in an era of insecurity and growing threats to women's rights all over the world, and especially in post-socialist countries like Croatia, it is essential to repeat over and over again that stories about women's past lives are important and that they deserve analytical treatment. The importance of women's life stories was particularly acknowledged by the methodology of feminist anthropology and ethnography³ as well by the vast field of women's history. Standpoint theory recognized women's lives as research-worthy, claiming that one has to start exploring from the outside, from marginal lives, to get the most objective view of the prevailing structures and practices.⁴ Croatian researchers have reclaimed women's lives through oral history⁵ and studies on women's history.⁶ However, as a small country burdened by a difficult past in contemporary political life, the lingering impact of the 1991-

² Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History. 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, Pluto Press, London, 1973.

³ See Gloria Bowles, Renate Duelli Klein (eds.), *Theories of Women's Studies*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983; Ann Oakley, *Taking it Like a Woman. A Personal History*, Random House, New York, 1984; Judith Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11, 1, 1988, pp. 21-27; Lila Abu-Lughod, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?", *Women and Performance*, 5, 1, 1990, pp. 7-27; Katherine Borland, "Decolonizing Approaches to Feminist Research. The Case of Feminist Ethnography", in Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (ed.), *Handbook of Feminist Research. Theory and Praxis*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2007, pp. 621-627.

⁴ See Sandra Harding, "After the Neutrality Ideal. Science, Politics, and 'Strong Objectivity'", *Social research*, 59, 3, 1992, pp. 567-587.

⁵ See Vesna Barilar et al. (eds.), *Aktivistkinje. Kako "opismeniti" teoriju*, Centar za ženske studije, Zagreb, 2000; Dijana Dijanić et al., *Ženski biografski leksikon. Sjećanje žena na život u socijalizmu*, Centar za ženske studije, Zagreb, 2004; Ana Bogdanić (ed.), *Usmene povijesti starijih Romkinja iz grada Rijeke*, Udruga žena Romkinja Bolji život, Rijeka, 2005.

⁶ See Andrea Feldman, *Žene u Hrvatskoj. Ženska i kulturna povijest*, Institut "Vlado Gotovac", Ženska infoteka, Zagreb, 2004; Zdenka Janeković-Römer, *Maruša ili suđenje ljubavi. Bračno-ljubavna priča iz srednjovjekovnog Dubrovnika*, Algoritam, Zagreb, 2007; Renata Jambrešić Kirin, *Dom i svijet. O ženskoj kulturi pamćenja*, Centar za ženske studije, Zagreb, 2008; Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Sandra Prlenda (eds.), *Women Narrating their Lives and Actions*, Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku, Centar za ženske studije, Zagreb, 2013; Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, *Opasne iluzije. Rodni stereotipi u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji*, Srednja Europa, Zagreb, 2015; Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik usremljen nedostižnom. Svakodnevnica u ženskim zapisima*, Disput, Zagreb, 2016.

1995 war of independence and constant repatriarchalization since the 1990s, Croatia has a long way to go in terms of ethnographic research on women's lives.

One of the goals of researching women's lives is to empower younger women and make them more conscious of how their lives are affected by gender inequality. Many women born in the early 1990s are only vaguely aware of what feminism is, even if their lives benefit from the achievements of feminism.⁷ This is the phenomenon of *double entanglement*, "the coexistence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life ... with processes of liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations".⁸ Retraditionalization and the deterioration of women's rights are now taking place all over the world, as modern history repeatedly reminds us that the battles for women's basic human rights are never won completely: "We find ourselves having to repeat and relearn the same old lessons over and over that our mothers did because we do not pass on what we have learned, or because we are unable to listen".⁹

I have spent the last decade doing interdisciplinary research on various published and unpublished female autobiographical texts. I read various autobiographies and diaries using the methodological tools of historiography, feminist criticism and women's history, and ended up writing a book based on my PhD thesis on what female autobiographical texts tell us about the lives of women in the past.¹⁰ In the second phase I started an oral history

⁷ The Facebook page *Women against feminism* is a world-wide phenomenon that started in 2013. It is a place where people, mostly women, post their reasons for not being feminists. It is very interesting that most of their reasons spring from not understanding what the movement is or what it stands for, such as "I don't need feminism because I am not a victim", or "I don't need feminism because I don't hate men". See more at <<https://www.facebook.com/WomenAgainstFeminism/>> or <[womenagainstfeminism.tumblr.com](https://www.facebook.com/WomenAgainstFeminism/)>.

⁸ Angela McRobbie, "Post-feminism and Popular Culture. Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime", in James Curran and David Morley (eds.), *Media and Cultural Theory*, Routledge, New York and London, 2006, p. 60.

⁹ Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class and Sex. Women Redefining Difference", in *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches*, Crossing Press, Berkeley, 2007, pp. 114-123, p. 117.

¹⁰ My book-length study *Dnevnik usmjeren nedostižnom. Svakodnevica u ženskim zapisima* (A Diary of the Unattainable. Everyday Life in Women's Autobiographical Writing) was primarily based on the extensive unpublished personal diary of Croatian scholar and poet Divna Zečević (1937–2006), written from 1961 to 2006 (Marija Ott Franolić, *Dnevnik usmjeren nedostižnom. Svakodnevica u ženskim zapisima*, Disput, Zagreb, 2014). Selected entries of her diary were published in 2017 under the title *Život kao voda hlapi* (Life Just Fades Away). See Divna Zečević,

project, interviewing older women and analyzing their life stories, told in their own voices. The interviews in this project complement women's history, give a face to women's time, and provide an insight into the relationship between personal and public memory. The history of the everyday is a field within which women's history can be useful to historiography.¹¹ I wanted to especially explore the possibilities of juggling intellectual endeavors with motherhood and family. While most women in the West today can and do fully participate in the public sphere, this participation is still largely affected by societal expectations placed on the biological functions of the female body. The question posed by Simone de Beauvoir in *Second Sex* is in my opinion still relevant: "How, in the feminine condition, can a human being accomplish herself? What paths are open to her? Which ones lead to dead ends? How can she find independence within dependence? What circumstances limit women's freedom and can she overcome them?"¹²

Until recently, women were mostly excluded from official historical documents,¹³ but it is precisely women's texts or texts about women's lives that can enrich the universal, 'neutral' view of history, which too often served the interests of the privileged male-oriented world. Personal texts were recognized as valuable historical sources for microhistory and tracing the everyday in the 1970s, but since the 1980s there has been a debate about the epistemological legitimacy of historical narrations. Doubt was cast upon historiography with respect to the 'truth' of the past, since historians are always subjective and immersed into their historical moment,¹⁴ and the self is seen as heterogeneous, fragile and decentered¹⁵ and language as a construct.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, personal accounts of women's lives cannot be completely reliable

Život kao voda hlapi. Izbor iz dnevnika 1961-2006, Marija Ott Franolić (ed.), Disput, Zagreb, 2017.

¹¹ See Dorothee Wierling, "The History of Everyday Life and Gender Relations. On Historical and Historiographical Relationships", in Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1995, pp. 149-168, p. 153.

¹² Simone de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, Vintage Books, New York, 2011 [1949], p. 37.

¹³ See Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999.

¹⁴ See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1978.

¹⁵ See Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir*, Les éditions de minuit, Paris, 1979.

¹⁶ See Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History", in *The Rustle of Language*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, pp. 127-140.

because of an author's need to exaggerate some events or emotions and leave others out, due to the instability of the author's memory, or her awareness of possible readers of her text. However, it is easy to agree with psychologist Mark Freeman who notes that:

In relegating autobiographical texts to the status of mere fictions, we not only cut ourselves off from the possibility of attaining those insights that can accrue from the process of rewriting the self; we cut ourselves off from the possibility of thinking about historical truth in a deeper and a more comprehensive way than is often allowed.¹⁷

Stories are essential to human existence and an important part of conveying feminist experiences and agendas for the future. Telling different stories, imagining alternative lifestyles, can open up our future: "Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with the narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell".¹⁸

Starting a Feminist Oral History Project

In my efforts to identify new women's stories, I took my research one step further and started interviewing highly educated Croatian women born between the 1920s and the early 1940s.¹⁹ The focus of the interviews was on how the respondents combined their personal lives with intellectual or artistic endeavors. The respondents in my research – translators, teachers, historians, university professors – were women who had, for the better part of their lives, lived in a socialist regime. As a socialist state, Yugoslavia had a somewhat contradictory relationship to women's lives and rights. On the one hand, emancipatory law was built into the communist system, guaranteeing all basic rights to women – from voting to property ownership, from education to divorce, equal pay for equal work to the right to control their bodies. But these proclamations of gender equality never corresponded to

¹⁷ Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self. History, Memory, Narrative*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, pp. 32-33.

¹⁸ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot. Design and Intention in Narrative*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and London, 1992, p. 3.

¹⁹ Twelve interviews were conducted from 2013 to 2015 and are kept in my private collection. Hopefully one day Croatia will form a national women's archive and the interviews will be deposited there, together with the female autobiographical texts I collected while writing my PhD thesis. In the meantime, these interviews could be aired as radio broadcasts or made into a documentary film.

social reality, as women faced a triple burden of jobs, childcare and housework. Reproduction and housework “transformed into a natural attribute”,²⁰ making women practically subordinate and economically exploited. Jambrešić Kirin observes that:

“To women on the left, the socialist framework of society opened up multifarious opportunities for successful professional and political careers. However, the conflict between revolutionary and traditional values generated various antagonisms and compromises ..., particularly in the private sphere where the patriarchal *sexual contract* (C. Pateman) with its “natural” division between men’s and women’s roles was still retained”.²¹

Talking about working and raising her son in the early 1950s, at a time with no diapers, hot running water or washing machines, one of the respondents, Micheline Popović, a translator born in 1924, concluded: “When you got home [from work], this was a full-time job all-right!”

Women’s personal choices and decisions are always framed by their time, their class, the circumstances and narratives they belong to. The personal is always political. The respondents provided a lot of evidence that during socialism the private sphere was mostly dominated by a patriarchal attitude to women, and that the traditional, patriarchal family was very much alive in socialism. Most of the respondents were born at a time when women were supposed to fulfill their motherly and caretaking roles, and put others before their own wishes. Even educated women often internalized these societal demands. The respondent Desa Janjatović, born in 1934 in a small town, talked about servility being seen as a woman’s natural attribute: “we were a family of women, expected to do anything for anyone who asked”. Avenka Žurić, born in 1938, talked about how she failed to fulfill the expectation to be a good housewife. She said: “We are still enslaved by old patterns of behavior, created not by this generation, but by those that came before. So, when a clumsy person is born like myself,

²⁰ Silvia Federici, “Women Against Housework”, in *Revolution at Point Zero. Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, PM Press, Oakland, CA, Common Notions, Autonomedia, Brooklyn, NY, 2012 [1973], pp. 15-22, p. 16.

²¹ Renata Jambrešić Kirin, “Intelektualke nakon revolucije. Od partijske do zatvorske ćelije”, in Drago Roksandić and Ivana Cvijović Javorina (eds.), *Intelektualci i rat. 1939.–1947. Zbornik radova s Desničinih susreta 2011*, Filozofski fakultet u Zagrebu, Plejada, Zagreb, 2012, pp. 199-216, p. 215. Translation mine. The internal reference is to Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1988.

ha, of course that is hard to please – even today, I did not make the bed and I had this small thought, I have to close the door on that mess. But why should the mess not be seen?”. The interviews also reflected a strong divide between male and female duties. For example, Micheline Popović talked about her husband, a doctor, “a little spoiled, only child, he might have been an exception”. On the rare occasions when he went to the market or shop during the 1950s or the beginning of the 1960s, he would carry everything that he bought in his briefcase, to avoid being seen with the groceries.

Reading the Other, Understanding Myself

I employed the feminist methodology of collaboration between researcher and researched as the most valuable part of a feminist approach, because I was aware that in the process of exploring women’s lives I was also searching for answers about my own life. Nancy Miller named this stance *personal criticism*,²² invoking more engaged ways of reading women’s lives and writing about them. There were women before us who struggled juggling professional and personal lives. Why not use already tested strategies, together with inventing new ones? Today, more than ever before, women are expected to do it all – to get an education, to work, to get married and have children, and too often to take care of them and the household. This issue was problematized by Sandberg²³ who was rightly but perhaps too harshly criticized²⁴ for addressing only privileged white women. Nevertheless, Sandberg tackled an issue still important for women: juggling a job, children and a family can be a taxing journey full of uncertainties, and most women still struggle to find a balance on a daily basis.

Even when immersed in patriarchal patterns, some women in the past were innovative in their strategies of survival in a world where the rules were made by others. We have to understand and recognize women’s life strategies in order to make female genealogy more open to an exchange of knowledge and solidarity. I understand female genealogy as a mutual space consisting of

²² Nancy K. Miller, “Getting Personal. Autobiography as Cultural Criticism”, in idem, *Getting Personal. Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*, Routledge, New York and London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 1-30.

²³ See Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In. Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2013.

²⁴ See Susan Faludi, “Facebook Feminism, Like It or Not”, *The Baffler*, 23, 2013, <<http://thebaffler.com/salvos/facebook-feminism-like-it-or-not>>; bell hooks, “Dig Deep. Beyond Lean In”, *The Feminist Wire*, October 28, 2013, <<http://www.thefeministwire.com/2013/10/17973/>>.

women listening to other women telling their stories.²⁵ Carolyn G. Heilbrun believed in the need to tell the stories of women's lives in order for them to become "stories other women can use",²⁶ and Felman urged women to "read autobiographically",²⁷ believing that women have been deprived of genuine narratives – "we do not know our stories".²⁸

In my oral history project I focused on well-educated women, "feminist heroines," who transcended societal pressures and were consequently, to a lesser or greater extent, considered outsiders. I was especially eager to understand the extent to which even the most emancipated and liberated women had internalized certain societal rules. As noted by Marso, "feminist heroines, in reflecting on their personal choices, express radical self-doubt while simultaneously criticizing the limited choices they were offered".²⁹ This was also evident in the interviews I conducted: Micheline Popović whose husband carried the groceries in a briefcase and had no relationship with their son until he was older also declared that she and her husband were equals in their marriage. She later explained "I don't see it as a contradiction, probably that was how I was raised and life was just like that, I don't think either of us was more worthy than the other, those were completely separated spheres of life, and it functioned very well, this was a matter of organization".

One of the goals of this research is to show contemporary women "that we already have a history, that certain women, despite all the cultural obstacles, have made their mark upon their history".³⁰ Ljerka Auferber, a teacher and translator born in 1922, talked about the joy of balancing her personal and professional life: "I felt no guilt for leaving my small daughter to my parents, I wanted to go studying, I was so happy, so happy ... I wanted to be somebody, to study, to have a job, to be qualified for doing something. Even with a child I gave English lessons, even managed to translate some stories, there is a book in which you

²⁵ See Zuzana Kiczková (ed.), *Women's Memory. The Experience of Self-Shaping in Biographical Interviews*, Iris, Bratislava, 2006, p. 7.

²⁶ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York and London, 2008 [1988], p. xvi.

²⁷ Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1993, p. 14.

²⁸ Ivi, p. 156.

²⁹ Lori Jo Marso, *Feminist Thinkers and the Demands of Femininity. The Lives and Work of Intellectual Women*, Routledge, New York and London, 2006, p. 16.

³⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, Columbia University Press, New York and Chichester, 1993, p. 19.

can see, I am officially the translator, nothing was hard". Oral historian Alistair Thomson wrote a book *Moving Stories* on four British women moving from the United Kingdom to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s in search of a better life. He mentions the story of Dorothy Wright, born in 1928, who enrolled at university at the age of 53. Her university experience was "excellent – it was marvelous, I thoroughly enjoyed it. ... Oh, goodness me! Yes, yes, yes! I started to think more and I thought, 'Well, I haven't been thinking for years!'"³¹ There is great geographical and cultural distance between these women's lives, yet life under patriarchy has made many women strive for the same goal: more personal freedom, a chance for individual growth and self-development in a society that only goes so far in recognizing gender equality and women's empowerment.

In the process of interviewing, I became aware that women's oral history interviews carry great emancipatory potential. After writing down the stories of four women migrants, Thomson wrote:

Taken together, these four women's life histories highlight significant historical patterns. Though the sample of four is by no means representative, they do share what Italian oral historian Alessandro Portelli calls 'the horizon of possibilities', a set of common circumstances and expectations, which each woman managed in distinctive ways.³²

The goals of feminist ethnography and oral history are closer in approach to the "horizons of possibilities" than they are to women's lives "as they were really lived," for it is precisely these possibilities of change that carry emancipatory potential. This was also recognized in Thomson's oral history project, when he gave all interviewees other women's stories to read: "When they read all four stories, each of them recognized aspects of her own life in the others' stories including both opportunities and constraints for women of their generation, and this recognition was enlightening and affirming".³³

In light of the affective turn³⁴ in contemporary humanities and social sciences, it is acceptable for respondents to share

³¹ Alistair Thomson, *Moving Stories. An Intimate History of Four Women Across Two Countries*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2011, p. 90.

³² Thomson, *Moving Stories*, cit., p. 183. The internal quotation is from Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1997, p. 276.

³³ Ivi, p. 323.

³⁴ See Patricia Ticineto Clough (ed.), *The Affective Turn. Theorizing the Social*, Duke University Press, Durham 2007.

their *subjective thoughts and reasons*. Alison Jaggar holds that emotions are more than necessary in order to explain the world, understand it and make efforts for change, even though “we have no access either to our own emotions or to those of others independent of or unmediated by the discourse of our culture”.³⁵ Even though every experience is unique and should not be used to exclude those that are different, life stories can be full of motivation and hope. This idea is close to that of Svetlana Alexievich who uses a method of oral history in order to understand the past and preserve the history of emotions by “reading the voice”.³⁶

The Course of the Interviews and the Challenges Encountered

Before an interview, I would visit a potential interviewee and clarify my research. We would talk about her life and I would make detailed notes. I made an outline of the semi-structured interview. When we met for the recording in her home, I would ask her about her childhood and her intellectual interests: were they encouraged or was she meant to be concerned with traditional ‘women’s chores’? We would talk about her education and personal life: did she desire to marry and have children or was it something that had to be done? Did she feel like an outsider, and did she experience any consequences of being outside the norm?

I would then listen to the interview and take notes. If I needed certain parts of the interview to be elaborated, I would schedule another meeting with the respondent. The second interview would usually be more relaxed, full of details and laughter, small talk, as if we were already friends. The respondents would show me photographs, we would discuss the latest books we had read, there would be cake and tea, the atmosphere was domestic and the confiding could begin. I felt right at home in many conversations, as their lives and dilemmas mirrored mine in many ways. Intersubjectivity was taking place – I shared and compared my experiences as a woman and an academic with the respondents. But I wondered, as Patai aptly put it: “should we do research only when we choose to make friends with people

³⁵ Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge. Emotion in Feminist Epistemology”, in Christina Hughes (ed.), *Researching Gender. Vol. 4. Feminist Futures*, Sage, Los Angeles and London, 2013 [1989], pp. 262-292, p. 271.

³⁶ Svetlana Alexievich, *War’s Unwomanly Face. An Oral History of Women in World War II*, Random House, New York, 2017, p. xix.

we are interviewing? Is it an improvement of the old model, or another form of manipulation?"³⁷

I conducted twelve interviews with intellectual women born between the 1920s and early 1940s, and spoke to ten more about their lives and the possibility of an interview. The interviews I conducted were not life stories in the strict sense of a more or less coherent retelling of the course of one's life; they were thematically focused on intellectual efforts and motherhood, even if some women chose to share more detailed accounts of their lives.

Two main challenges arose in the course of the project: finding women willing to be recorded, and learning to listen to them. Firstly, it turned out that not all women I contacted were willing to talk about their lives. They were mostly willing to participate in the research for the book composed of my findings, or for the interview to be stored in the future national women's archive, but almost all were intimidated by the notion of their interview being used for a documentary film or for radio broadcasts. This may have been a consequence of my decision not to choose public figures, because I wanted to explore the lives of women whose life stories were not 'extraordinary'. It was important to me that the interviewees should feel untroubled by the interview. I did not want them to feel constrained by the possibility of their words being heard by the general public, or – since Croatia is a small country with an even smaller intellectual circle – by people who might know them personally. It almost seemed to me that the most educated, eloquent and impressive individuals were also the most guarded when it came to their intimacy and personal life. Generally, women who were willing to talk openly were the ones recommended to me by somebody I knew personally.

Another problem I encountered was how to listen. Firstly, I had to make sure I was not reading my point of view into an interviewee's answers. I was aware of the generational, occupational, ideological and other differences between us. The questions had to be posed in an open and neutral way, so as not to channel the answers I would want to hear.³⁸ I had to strike a

³⁷ Daphne Patai, "U.S. Academics and Third World Women. Is Ethical Research Possible?", in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds.), *Women's Words. The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, Routledge, New York and London, 1991, pp. 137-153, p. 144.

³⁸ For an example of a feminist researcher reading herself into her respondents' worldview, see Katherine Borland, "'That's not what I said'. Interpretative conflict in oral narrative research", in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *Oral History Reader*, Routledge, New York, 1998, pp. 310-321.

balance between getting close to the interviewee, getting her to trust me, and not restraining her responses with my worldview. Secondly, I wondered whether I should engage in a conversation with my respondents or just let them speak. Generally, the women felt more comfortable and relaxed when I spoke freely and asked spontaneous questions. I was encouraged by a project in which students who engaged in conversation with respondents created a rapport and elicited more lively storytelling than those who confined themselves to non-verbal responses.³⁹

Finally, there was the question of how to present these stories to women who could 'read autobiographically', identifying facets of their lives in the story of another? I openly discussed various possibilities with my respondents. My interviews could be a solid base for an oral history women's archive, but this would not make them widely available. The interviews would reach more people if they were aired as radio broadcasts. I have discussed the idea of transforming the recorded material into a documentary film with several documentary directors, but they found the theme too ordinary (they would prefer making a film about famous Croatian women), and most of my respondents did not feel comfortable with the idea of being shown on screen. I even considered the possibility of making a film without their names, to enable my respondents to be anonymous, but how would that reflect on the feminist approach of my project? To hide their names, professions, and achievements – the precise reasons I wanted to talk to them? I also considered the possibility of introducing oral history projects to schools, giving students the opportunity to interview their grandmothers, aunts, to connect to their female genealogy.

"I talked a lot and said nothing": The Power of Adaptability

Even though this is just the first part of my project, and more interviews are needed to create a solid base for a more thorough analysis of intellectual women's everyday life, I have been able to draw some symptomatic conclusions so far.

First of all, after the interview was over (and sometimes unrecorded), almost all of the respondents concluded that what they said was banal, mundane, and that they were sorry it could be of no use to me. Micheline Popović even said: "I talked a lot and said nothing". The same phenomenon was noted by Kiczková,

³⁹ See Ann Green, "The Exhibition that Speaks for Itself. Oral History and Museums", in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *Oral History Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, pp. 448-456, p. 453.

Ryan, Thomson and others.⁴⁰ This may not be surprising, since the respondents were raised at a time when all the topics discussed were looked upon as too trivial, even 'too female', something emotional and therefore not important. Ever since Aristotle, women's occupations in the West were mostly seen as belonging to life instead of art, to emotions and nature instead of intellect, and it is no wonder women have internalized these postulates. But there is more than meets the eye. After conducting an oral history project with women who served in the military in the Second World War, Ryan found that almost all of them claimed to have done nothing important, even though some of them participated in major historical and military events.⁴¹ Ryan sees it as a rhetorical move with which these women wanted to acknowledge society's expectations (in the words of Diana Tietjens Meyers "lip syncing the ominous baritone of patriarchy"),⁴² while at the same time affirming the importance of their wartime work. Even women who wanted to remain anonymous in Ryan's project still asked for their interviews to be deposited in a public archive. Secondly, all the respondents in my project mentioned their adaptability, albeit in different contexts – some describing the hardships or prejudices they encountered, or listing their main characteristics.

What is the connection between these two self-attributed traits of intellectual women's lives, banality and adaptability? They are female life strategies that simultaneously represent the main problem of women intellectuals in Western society and its possible solution. If we could look at the banality and unimportance of women's lives as being at the core of Western patriarchal society, something that may just be the biggest problem for women, then adaptability could be the solution that they have come up with on their own, using their strength, courage, emotions and intelligence. Writing about ways of finding a female voice and self-imagery, Diana Tietjens Meyers enlists the skills women need to become autonomous in the articulation and the enactment of their lives, naming them "skills that make self-determination possible".⁴³ These skills, according to Meyers, are: introspection skills that allow women

⁴⁰ See Kiczková, *Women's Memory*, cit; Kathleen M. Ryan, "'I Didn't Do Anything Important'. A Pragmatist Analysis of the Oral History Interview", *Oral History Review*, 36, 1, 2009, pp. 25-44; Thomson, *Moving stories*, cit.

⁴¹ See Ryan, *I Didn't Do Anything Important*, cit.

⁴² Diana Tietjens Meyers, *Gender in the Mirror. Cultural Imagery and Women's Agency*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2002, p. 16.

⁴³ Ivi, p. 9.

to understand themselves; communication skills that enable them to benefit from others' perceptions; memory skills for recalling their own experiences; imagination skills that facilitate envisaging alternative life plots; analytical and reasoning skills that enable them to assess the relative merits of different visions; self-nurturing skills that secure their physical and psychological equilibrium despite missteps and setbacks; volitional skills for them to resist capitulating to convention; interpersonal skills that enable them to join forces to challenge and change cultural regimes.⁴⁴ The result of having these skills, as Meyers explains, will be a woman finding her own voice.

As Simone de Beauvoir rightly observed: "if a caste is maintained in an inferior position, it remains inferior", but she ended the sentence optimistically, concluding that "freedom can break the circle", perhaps the very freedom gained by exercising the above-mentioned skills.⁴⁵ The circle can indeed be broken because 'adaptable' has a double meaning. Firstly, it means that a person can endure procedures and behaviors marked as usual and expected, and even make herself believe that they are what she wanted all along. But it can also lead women to search for a path of their own. And this *other* adaptability – a flexibility which could easily transform into resistance to the patriarchal order – could be an opening towards a more equal society. It is precisely the Others, the ones living in a world in which they did not make the rules but only strategies to survive, who are interested in change: they have a fuller understanding of the world.

Croatian poet and literature scholar Divna Zečević left behind a very extensive diary. She wrote about how to succeed in a male dominated society, but she also asked herself what it means to be a woman and whether she should call herself a feminist and what does it mean to be one. As an outsider in more ways than one, she could not fit in any group, so feminism was not an exception. Her diary is a remarkable egodocument, a testimony to her everyday life and women's history in socialism. It is also a powerful reminder of how important it is for women to leave traces of their thoughts and actions which defy patriarchal and autocrat societal limitations. Divna Zečević herself was aware of the fact that intellectual women have to lead the way in order for all other women to become aware of the constraints of patriarchy:

⁴⁴ Ivi, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁵ Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, cit., p. 860.

19 April 1982, Monday

It is questionable whether it is even possible to achieve women's equality to men. When considering, ostensibly, only women intellectual workers – and in that case – the question of improving their position affects the life and position of women in the most godforsaken, backward places, who at this point in time have no idea that the resolution of some vague faraway issues has a direct impact on their lives, too. Besides, when writing about the position of women – one ought to focus not on women, but above all on men and their privileged position. Some speak of their patriarchy as if it were a question of genetics and inheritance, and not interest; “I am patriarchal,” he says, for God's sake, as if it were the color of his eyes. Who amongst us would not be patriarchal if it meant food on their table when they got home, a clean pair of underwear and a shirt ironed after washing, lying and lazing about and so on [go to bloody hell]. It's good to be patriarchal over the backs of women. It is a position as pleasant for men as it is humiliating for the women workhorses.⁴⁶

As long as we only analyze official traditional sources, this type of women's agency always stays hidden and unacknowledged.

⁴⁶ Zečević, *Život kao voda hlapi*, cit., p. 300.

Yugoslav Women Intellectuals: From a Party Cell to a Prison Cell¹

Renata Jambrešić Kirin

Summary

The Yugoslav socialist framework enabled big advances as concerns the legal, economic and social equality of women that radically changed their traditionally subordinated family and social position. However, the postwar period of revolutionary enthusiasm, female political activism and the access of women intellectuals to the male-dominated spheres of journalism, diplomacy, administration and governmental offices did not exist long. Taking into account memoirs and oral histories of five distinguished women the article reveals the reasons for Party's antifeminist attitudes: a) the political fear of ambitious female 'quality staff'; b) the ideological fear of the women guardians of the traditional and religious foundations of collective identity; c) a cultural mistrust toward the mobile woman who easily transcends family, social and ethnic boundaries. These biographical sources show that any attempts at free thought and autonomous action outside of the party line was severely punished.

Among numerous antagonisms, paradoxes, possible "contradictions of modernity"² or "conflicting complementarities"³ relating to Yugoslav society in the socialist period, the antifeminist

¹ This article has been financed by The Croatian Science Foundation ("Narrating Fear: From Old Records to New Orality", Project No. IP-06-2016-2463).

² John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, Hurst and Company, London, 2000.

³ G. W. Creed, *Domesticating Revolution. From Socialist Reform to Ambivalent Transition in a Bulgarian Village*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park PA, 1998.

treatment of women intellectuals has been the least studied. Indeed, in the entire spectrum of retrospective approaches – from serious academic studies to revisionist daily political discussions – it seems that gender and social egalitarianism was recognized as a civilizational achievement of the communist authorities. Not denying the truth of this principal remark, my starting point is that state sponsored egalitarianism should not overshadow key failures in Yugoslav state feminism, its democratic deficit and many shortcomings pertaining to its emancipatory claims.

As noted by authors with more or less sympathy for feminist scholarship one of the main reasons for the ‘perverted tragedy’ of communism as an “emancipatory project going awry”⁴ is the resistant patriarchal sexual contract that treats women as an object of political projection and manipulation.⁵

Paradoxically or not, by establishing a modern political patriarchy Yugoslav communist authorities confirmed their affinity for Western political and popular culture as well as its debt to the autocracy, or perhaps rather gerontocracy of other communist regimes. Political patriarchy, whilst a seemingly marginal issue for researchers of communism and post-communism, the Cold War, or the welfare state, is an essential component of feminist scholarship and memory studies. Namely, if the problem of reflecting nodal dates in the East-Central Europe such as 1948, 1956, 1968 and 1989 confronts feminist scholars with the need for inventing a new conceptual apparatus in order to step out of defined historical periods/categories,⁶ the issue of the gendered corporality of social agents is unavoidable when the hegemony of official historical narratives and the parochialism of malestream paradigms are questioned. As Marianne Hirsch noted

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief. Thinking in Action*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001.

⁵ Carole Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988. See also Mihaela Mudure, “Zeugmatic spaces. East/Central European Feminisms”, in Jelisaveta Blagojević, Katerina Kolozova and Svetlana Slapšak (eds.), *Gender and identity. Theories from and/or on Southeastern Europe*, Women’s Studies and Gender Research Center, Belgrade, 2006, pp. 407-433.

⁶ Cf. Rada Iveković, “Women, Nationalism and War. ‘Make Love not War’”, *Hypatia*, 8/4, 1993, pp. 113-126; Andrea Pető, “Stories of Women’s Lives. Feminist Genealogies in Hungary”, in M. Jovanović and S. Naumović (eds.), *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe*, Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, Beograd and Zur Kunde Südosteuropas, Graz, 2002, pp. 211-218; Renata Jambrešić Kirin, “The Retraumatization of the 1948 Communist Purges in the Yugoslav Literary Culture”, in Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (eds.), *A Comparative History of the Literary Cultures of East Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam and Philadelphia 2004, pp. 124-132.

in connection with Holocaust studies, gender and sexuality have been used “to create a lens through which we can understand the particularities found in women’s testimonies and memoirs, and to shape a platform that has enabled those stories to emerge and be heard in a context in which masculine and heteronormative stories had for the most part dominated”.⁷

My intention is to illuminate the fate of Yugoslav women intellectuals in the period of (counter) Stalinist purges (1945-1953) from the perspective of gender history and a feminist approach to women’s political and intimate citizenship⁸ in an autocratic, hierarchical, and fundamentally homosocial regime of power characterized by antagonism towards women (intellectuals and rebels) as “the first form of attack on the ‘Other’”.⁹ Because of the strong communist power structures animating forgetting, oblivion and the erasure of the system’s ‘constitutive violence’, women’s traumatic historical experiences in post/socialism function as a kind of counter-history or finally verbalized trauma. They were not a part of Yugoslav inner dissidents’ or political victims’ narratives and thus not exaggerated or re-used in symbolic nation building processes during the 1990s. Official communist denial of ‘rebellious women’ as equal political prisoners has its echo in the recent rejection to understand those women as ‘survivors of totalitarianism’ or to incorporate them within a specifically female discourse of victimization during and after the war in the nineties.

Combining an interest in the politics of memory and the transmission of women’s historical experiences with a new reading of archival sources and a biographical method I am looking for the answers to the questions of how and why many distinguished professional women and former revolutionaries disappeared from the historical stage in the early 1950s, that is, why they were violently interrupted in their intellectual, public and personal self-realization. The impetus for this study comes from a recent discussion over the role of gender policy in the Cold War¹⁰ and, on the other hand, from local studies concerning the

⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, p. 17.

⁸ Cf. Carole Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988; Ken Plummer, *Intimate citizenship. Private decisions and public dialogues*, University of Washington Press, Baltimore, 2011.

⁹ Iveković, *Women, Nationalism and War*, cit, p. 114.

¹⁰ Francisca de Haan et al., “Aspasia Forum. Gendering the Cold War in the Region. An Email Conversation between Malgorzata (Gosia) Fidelis, Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Jill Massino, and Libora Oates-Indruchova”, *Aspasia*, 8, 2014, pp. 162-190.

unsolved 'woman question' as a generator of permanent crisis in Yugoslav socialist society.

However, even studies with a feminist orientation, such as the work of Lydia Sklevicky, Neda Božinović, Sabrina P. Ramet, and Ivana Pantelić¹¹ have not provided a satisfactory answer to the question of to what extent intolerant, suspicious and paternalistic attitudes towards women intellectuals reflected the traditionalism and conservatism of the communist gerontocracy, or whether the situation was the other way around, i.e. whether the modern "patriarchal contract" was a kind of concession to old mentalities, cultural beliefs and attitudes or a part of an empty rhetorical moral condemnation of 'deviant phenomena' in the fast developing socialist society. The reason why I relied on biographical sources (women's memoirs, interviews, documentaries) lies in the fact that only they can provide answers to my research questions: What messages did Yugoslav communists send to women - not only through legal, normative, and propaganda discourses, but also through their daily encounters with female colleagues and collaborators? Did they encourage them in their efforts to use their newly acquired rights and win over the new areas of professional and social affirmation? Did they respect them as equal partners, associates, public figures and politicians or just relied on them as devoted, responsible and less ambitious partners in building a socialist society?¹² Autobiographical discourse is of particularly importance for feminist analysis because it brings together the internal and external experience, social and personal history, and uncovers "a person's place in the social order of things in addition to the social background,

¹¹ Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, Ženska infoteka, Zagreb, 1996; Neda Božinović, *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u 19. i 20. veku*, Žene u crnom, Belgrade, 1996; Sabrina P. Ramet, "In Tito's Time", in Sabrina P. Ramet (ed.), *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park PA, 1999, pp. 89-105; Ivana Pantelić, *Partizanke kao građanke*, Institut za savremenu istoriju, Beograd, 2011.

¹² A similar set of questions was already articulated by Barbara Wolfe Jancar but I have discovered it after the article was already completed: "If Communist societies are unique in their pioneering efforts to achieve sexual equality, have women in these societies deliberately refused to take advantage of the opportunities offered them? Has the male leadership presented options to them which make it difficult for women to participate? Is the failure of women to rise to the top of the status pyramid symptomatic of a prevailing disinterest among women in status and power, because they feel they have already achieved equality?" . Wolfe Jancar, *Women under Communism*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1978, p. 3.

structures and processes that are at work in a particular context".¹³

The Yugoslav socialist framework enabled big advances as concerns the legal, economic and social equality of women that radically changed their traditionally subordinated family and social position. To educated women on the left the egalitarian system opened up opportunities for successful professional careers. They were better positioned than former partisan women largely engaged in voluntary reconstruction work, propaganda work, the social care of orphans and war victims. The fact that women's share in leadership bodies in 1948 (with women deputies numbering 4 percent in the federal Assembly and 4.8 percent women in the CPY's Central Committee) was not proportional to their participation in the partisan combat units (12.5 percent) is the best indicator of their poor integration into communist political life and power-sharing.¹⁴ The postwar period of revolutionary enthusiasm and the open access of women intellectuals to the male-dominated spheres of journalism, diplomacy, administration and governmental offices did not exist long. One of the reasons for women's professional stagnation in the period from 1948-1952, which is the focus of this paper, was an inherent contradiction of the Titoist political system that "did make considerable propaganda in favor of gender equality, whether in films or the periodical media or programmatic statements at party forums" but, as Sabrina P. Ramet observed, failed "to take up the task of using the educational system to reshape people's thinking about gender differences"¹⁵, i.e. to radically and consistently fight against patriarchal values and attitudes.

Bare Life at the Bare Island (Goli otok) Stalinist Camp

When in 1948 the Yugoslav revolution began to eat its children, the daughters, sisters, wives and mothers of imprisoned 'enemies' were among its first scapegoats and collateral victims thus discrediting the very idea of revolution for future generations. This short episode of Stalinist purges (1948-1953/56), accompanying the Tito-Stalin split, with some 56.000 administratively penalized citizens and internees¹⁶ (never received its juridical epilogue, nor

¹³ Lynette Šikić-Mićanović, "Using Biographical Research to Understand Experiences of Crisis among Homeless People in Croatia", *Etnološka tribina*, 43, 2013, p. 102.

¹⁴ Cf. Ramet, *In Tito's Time*, cit., p. 93, p. 99.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 95.

¹⁶ Cf. Ivo Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito. Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 1988.

its victims' political rehabilitation.¹⁷ Instead of the large show trials of the time – found in Prague, Budapest and Bucharest – the Yugoslav secret police *Udba* organized many small show trials; provincial Kafkaesque 'inquisitory processes' and home detentions in which the ferocity of prewar communist factional fighting became intertwined with blatant careerism, personal animosity, war traumas, antifeminism, chauvinism, and even anti-Semitism. Instead of a seemingly simple division between those who supported Tito and those who have opted for Stalin, the startup of the Party's 'decision-making and separation machine' have continued with the mass production of 'enemies of the people' to whom the repressive apparatus had to identify and explain "their, for them invisible, violations and sins".¹⁸ This inter party conflict actually created a biopolitical foundation of political community to which sovereign power of the ruler (not constitution and civil rights) provides the criteria of inclusion and exclusion from the communist 'utopian society' and defines the extent of political freedom.¹⁹ According to the Slovenian ethnologist Božidar Jezernik the concentration camp on the Adriatic Goli otok island (meaning the Bare island) lies in the very foundation of Tito's Yugoslavia: "While silenced, it was a hard rock at which the state was grounded. When people started talking about it the state began to disintegrate".²⁰ For our argument it would be more accurate to

¹⁷ In addition to the camp on the Goli Otok island, the Yugoslav authorities developed a whole system of smaller prisons and concentration camps for confining Stalin supporters on the islands of St. Grgur, Ugljan, Rab, Vis and Korčula and in prisons in Bileća, Stolac, Ramski rit, Požarevac, Stara Gradiška, Mamula and others.

¹⁸ Davor Beganović, *Pamćenje traume. Apokaliptička proza Danila Kiša*, Naklada Zoro, Zagreb and Sarajevo, 2006, p. 274.

¹⁹ Scholars writing in the field of post/socialism studies generally agree about a "pure modernity of communist experience" and about some specificities of totalitarian effects "different from earlier forms of dictatorship", Stéphane Courtois et al. (eds.), *The Black Book of Communism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1999, p. 13. For some historians the mass violation of civil rights is an embarrassing reminder of "the ideological connection between Yugoslavia and the Soviet bloc countries", Ivo Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito*, cit., p. 253. There is a broad consensus concerning the legal and socio-psychological meaning of the Stalinist purges, but the ethical and political implications of this 'irrational' violence for Yugoslav society as a whole remains a challenge for (feminist) interpretation.

²⁰ Božidar Jezernik, *On cogito ergo sum: arheologija neke šale*, Društvo za preučevanje zgodovine, literature in antropologije, Ljubljana [Special issue of the journal *Borec*, 533/534], 1994, p. 686. The Croatian Political Establishment does not yet agree about what to do with the 'difficult heritage' of political violence and the 'bare island' as a synonym for the Yugoslav form of 'Prison communism'. The Croatian Alcatraz, as one local agency depicts the island to tourists, is today part

rephrase this claim saying that only the break of the traumatic silence of women detainees at Goli otok gave us a full picture of the ideology driven regime whose biopolitical reality began where the state ended together with its law, rules and humanist rhetoric.

The fact that nearly half of the prisoners in the Goli otok camp belonged to the old 'Bolshevik guard', the Spanish volunteers, prominent communists, and former prisoners of Nazi and Stalinist camps, meant that the newly established Yugoslav Gulag was faced with the most difficult task – to denigrate and disintegrate heroes and 'revolutionary saints', to break the unbreakable, those who do not ask for mercy, nor offer it to anyone. Namely, prisoners and their interrogators or judges were often close friends or former members of the same party cell or partisan unit. The new moment in this horrific but familiar story of the reversal of political power was an attempt to erase written, archival and lived histories of Yugoslav communism embodied in some prominent figures of politicians and intellectuals. In this way the caesura between prewar and postwar societies and cultures was deepened and filled with new ruptures, regressions, censorship and transgenerational traumas. Actual or falsely accused Stalinists, stigmatized as 'political criminals', were deprived of a future but also of their (revolutionary) past; the hardest part of their sentence being the imposed self-destruction of personal biographies. Ženi Lebl named this perfidious method of imposed brainwashing and the reinvention of self 'automortography'²¹ because it referred to self-denial, symbolic death and the loss of the right to testify in public. Contrary to the basic idea of communist emancipation, according to which oppressed people and proletarians for the first time in history began to manage their own time by narrating their history²², former prisoners signed a formal pact of silence in order to regain their freedom but also be written out of the history of Yugoslav communism.

The number of women who served a sentence officially named "socially-useful work and rehabilitation" (cca 860) is perhaps negligible compared to the total number of detained political prisoners (cca 17.000) according to sparse and incomplete data²³

of local grassroots offering of "horror tourism", with visitor figures apparently numbering approximately 50.000.

²¹ Ženi Lebl, *Ljubičica bela. Vic dug dve i po godine*, Dečje novine, Gornji Milanovac, 1990.

²² Alain Badiou, *Stoljeće* [Le Siècle, 2005], Antibarbarus, Zagreb, 2008, p. 122.

²³ Cf. Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito*, cit.; Antun Vujić (ed.), *Hrvatski leksikon*, vol. 2, Zagreb, Naklada leksikon, Zagreb, 1996, p. 392.

but the technology of penal 'auto-correction' hurting women's integrity and self-esteem, as well as destroying their political prospects, had long-term effects on the (minority) status of distinguished women in politics and social life.²⁴ Like the victims of Stalinist purges, Yugoslav women, female relatives of those considered to be 'traitors of the homeland', were blackmailed by imprisonment, as well as the confiscation deprivation of civil rights if they did not sign divorce papers, did not give up their loved ones or additionally charge or 'denounce' them as the enemy of the people. The mere fact that they were wives, sisters or daughters of 'compromised comrades', blocked any career prospects to many women. Communist morality based on a total correspondence between the private and political life of the individual was regarded as superior to a civil morality, although both shared patriarchal values and the authority of the 'law of the father'. In the revolutionary context, the strong homosocial bond between 'brothers in arms' and the hierarchical structure was considered to be a positive achievement, but during the rift in the party-family the 'unfit' members often had to cope with (symbolic) vendettas and fratricide.²⁵

Perhaps the best common denominator for the different experiences of women confined in Soviet gulags,²⁶ Bulgarian camps for "and rehabilitation" and Greek island camps for communists,²⁷ is revealed by the Russian name for one kind of women's camps – ČSIR (*člyen sem'i izmennika Rodini*), Camp for the female family members of the Homeland's traitors – which suggests a metaphorical blending of family and patriotic honor as concerns members of the political community.

²⁴ Cf. Renata Jambrešić Kirin, "Izdajice su uvijek ženskog roda: političke zatvorenice u arhipelagu Goli", *Up and underground* [Special issue *Art Dossier Socijalizam*], 17/18, 2010, pp. 231-242.

²⁵ The close connections between the mentality of the patriarchal family and that of the Communist Party is best witnessed by prewar conspiratorial code names: Čaća (daddy) for the Central Committee, Djed (grandfather) for the Comintern, Familija (family) for the Communist Party and Svadba (wedding party) for the Party congress.

²⁶ Cf. Nanci Adler, *The Gulag Survivor. Beyond the Soviet System*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 2001; Simeon Vilensky, *Till my tale is told. Women's memoirs of the Gulag*, Virago Press, London, 1999.

²⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *Voices from the Gulag. Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria*, Penn State University Press, University Park PA, 1999. See also Polymeris Voglis, "Political Prisoners in the Greek Civil War, 1945-50", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37/4, 2002, pp. 523-540.

Discarded Women Revolutionaries: from a Party Cell to a Prison Cell

My arguments are based on the analysis of four life stories by women who have spoken out publicly – on their own or a scholar's initiative – half a century after the initial trauma. They are a part of a rather small but important corpus of women's narratives concerning their experiences of living, working, acting publicly and being punished in socialist Yugoslavia.²⁸ Miljuša Jovanović (1917–1991) had one of the leading positions in the Yugoslav National Office for War Invalids until she doubted the official explanation of the murder of her brother, General Arsa Jovanović, who had been accused of trying to escape to the USSR via Romania and of his support for the Cominform Resolution. Although she joined the partisan movement in Montenegro in its early days and earned the rank of captain, in addition to being an invalid who could hardly walk after both her feet froze during a march through Mount Igman in January 1942, Miljuša was sentenced to four years at the Goli Otok camp because she chose not to renounce her brother and because she insulted Milovan Djilas, the closest collaborator of Josip Broz Tito and the head of Agitprop, and also a former friend of her family. In 1948 one of her pre-war comrades greeted her on the street in Belgrade, calling "Hello, resistance fighter"²⁹ – knowing that Udba³⁰ had been monitoring her for months and that she was out of favor with the Party. This collegiate-mockery compliment (*resistance fighter*) epitomized her resistance to Bolshevik party loyalty which turned former revolutionaries and movers & shakers into dull, autocratic rulers. Namely, the authority of communists stemmed from long term activity in the underground movement,

²⁸ Cf. Rosanda Dragović-Gašpar, *Let iznad Golog otoka*, Beograd, 1990; Lebl, *Ljubičica bela*, cit.; Eva Grlić, *Sjećanja*, Durieux, Zagreb, 1997; Milka Žicina, *Sve, sve, sve*, Srpsko kulturno društvo Prosvjeta, Zagreb, 2002; Marija-Vica Balen, *Bili smo idealisti... Uspomene jedne revolucionarke*, Disput, Zagreb, 2009; Vera Winter, *The life history interview*, 2012 <<http://www.croatianmemories.org/en/video-archive/verawinter/?search=subtitle&val=vera+winter>>.

²⁹ The original phrase is 'Zdravo ilegalac!'. The transcript of the oral history interview with Miljuša Jovanović was made and publicized by Dragoslav Simić: *Goli otok Miljuše Jovanović I*, Recorded and compiled by D. Simić, Audio arhiv Simić, Beograd, [Edicija za 21. vek, DVD 1, 2], <<http://www.audiofotoarhiv.com/gosti%20sajta/MiljusaJovanovic.html>>.

³⁰ The State Security Service (SDB or SDS), more commonly known by its original name as the State Security Administration (UDBA or UDSA), was the Yugoslav secret police from 1946–1991. It was primarily responsible for internal state security for identifying and obstructing activities conducted by the 'domestic enemy' (i.e. the 'bourgeois rightwing', clericalists, members of the Cominform, nationalists, and separatists).

not simply because they were efficacious and brave, but because they were always prepared for the worst: for spying, privacy, trial and armed action, built on the belief that “they would rather be in jail than be jailers”.³¹ However, the external threat of Soviet intervention, the temptations of political power and the struggle for social benefits resulted in inappropriate behavior and actions typical of Stalinism. In such an environment of real and political paranoia, individualism and critical thought were made possible only through ‘illegal’ activities, at the cost of internal exile or dissidence because *party loyalty* entailed strict adherence to hierarchy, discipline, loyalty, and collectivist consciousness. However, from the mid-1950s reforms, political life was greatly democratized and the critique of social negativities from the pen of ‘entitled critics’ of the system and hotline comedians (Nela Eržišnik, Mija Aleksić) were more than welcome. This was a specific form of channeling “permissible speech of the forbidden”, which included the critique of luxury, political abuse, etc., and functioned as a “necessary outlet to political discipline”.³² Nevertheless, for the women purged, sentenced and imprisoned without formal judgment there was no social or symbolic rehabilitation or return to public life until the 1990s.

During the People's Liberation War of Yugoslavia Marija-Vica Balen (1910-1984) acted as an AFŽ activist and Agitprop journalist on the front line (Lika, Kordun, Banija, Slavonija); the end of the war saw her take a position as a headmistress of a children's home in Buzeta near Glina, and after the liberation she worked as editor for Croatian Radio. As the wife of the Yugoslav press attaché in Washington, her family moved to the United States in late 1948, but as early as 1949 she was taken to the prison on Savska Street in Zagreb, along with her three sisters, as her husband Šime Balen did not want to testify against Andrija Hebrang, the leading Croatian communist reputed as a favorite of Stalin. In her memoirs written in the early 1980s and published in 2009, she recalls the degrading treatment of political delinquents, as they were often dubbed, a term which equated political activists and intellectuals, in a position to co-create the official policy, with women criminals and prostitutes, considered as the greatest threat to both petite bourgeois and communist morality:

³¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Zanimljiva vremena. Život kroz dvadeseto stoljeće* [Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life, 2002], Disput, Zagreb, 2009, p. 124, p. 125.

³² Gordana Bosanac, *Visoko čelo. Ogljed o humanističkim perspektivama feminizma*, Centar za ženske studije, Zagreb, 2010, p. 192.

I kept shaking from the cold and damp and choking from the lack of air. Not only was it impossible to sleep there but also to survive, so I began to protest and shout, demanding that they move me to another room. And - and they did move me. But, among criminals and prostitutes So, fifteen years later when I was treated the same way in the UDBA prison in Zagreb, I realized that all the police were the same!³³

As a distinguished communist and partisan she felt that not a single risk, even bringing her three children into mortal danger, should waver her "sacred duty to her people and her country in the most dramatic lessons of their recent history",³⁴ she was nevertheless amazed, during the set-up process against Hebrang, by the ease with which the new nomenclature, as perfidious Anti-Stalinist dictators, eliminated all undesirable 'elements' and required blind Bolshevik obedience.³⁵ Instead of creatively developing her potential as a journalist and political activist, Marija-Vica Balen, who had been a prominent member of the Communist Party since 1928, and, had met prominent Yugoslav communists during the course of her extensive underground activism, spent the rest of her life working as a proof reader at The *Školska knjiga* publishing house where she laboriously attended to other people's manuscripts, work and careers. There is a striking similarity between Eva Grlić (1920-2008) and Marija-Vica Balen's life stories: both were part of an 'elite' prewar leftist intelligentsia close to Josip Broz, while in the Partisans they could see their children only on the photographs smuggled out of occupied Zagreb by the same comrade. For a while they shared the same cell in the prison in Savska Street in early 1949 and, finally and permanently, both were degraded in jobs far below their professional competence.

Dragica Srzentić-Vitolović (1912-2015) from the region of Istria was a pre-war communist from a circle of respectable Belgrade intellectuals, a regular contributor to the feminist-socialist magazine *Žena danas* (Woman Today) and one of the founders of the magazine *Nin*. Together with her husband she fought with the Montenegrin

³³ Balen, *Bili smo idealisti*, cit., p. 103.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 72.

³⁵ Ivo Banac offered a good explanation on the mentality of Yugoslav anti-Stalinist Bolshevism: "Yet the conflict with Stalin played the same part in the shaping of Yugoslavia's political system that collectivization and the purges of the 1930s played in the history of Soviet communism. The frank accounting for this period which the Yugoslavs will ultimately have to provide is made more difficult by Western analysts who assume that every manifestation on anti-Stalinism or anti-Sovietism within a socialist state is necessarily a sign of emerging political pluralism", Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito*, cit., p. 257.

partisans, and upon the call from the Supreme Headquarters of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOVJ) she departed for Vis and then to London, where she worked as a BBC announcer in the Yugoslav section. After the war, she co-organized the setting-up of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in charge of the diplomatic service and cooperation with non-European countries), and as government commissioner she personally took to Moscow the letter in which Tito famously said "No to Stalin". In the documentary film by Želimir Žilnik *One Woman, One Century* (2011) – her first notable public appearance in sixty years – Dragica Srzentić talks about similar methods of torture in the socialist UDBA prison in Podgorica, in the very same prison that was used by Italian Fascists. This is a constant theme in the memories of pre-war revolutionaries, for instance Ženi Lebl (1927-2009), in her autobiographical book titled *Suddenly Different, Suddenly the Other*³⁶ describes a similar method of 'testing' by Bulgarian interrogators in Niš as well as by UDBA agents in the *Glavnjača* prison in Belgrade. It consisted of physical and mental torture with elements of sexual violence. However, what especially hurt these two successful young women with perfect wartime biographies were backstabbing, insinuations and false accusations by their fellow workers and close party comrades. Namely, at the time of her arrest in May 1952 Srzentić was Deputy Secretary General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the FNRJ, and Lebl worked as a journalist for the newspaper *Politika* and had been promised a position as foreign correspondent in Paris:

I was already working as journalist for the *Politika* when I turned twenty, and two years later I became senior reporter in this newspaper. I was also accepted to attend Journalism and Diplomacy College without being a member of CPY. ... I didn't know that my success would produce envy among my close friends and that I would fall victim to their insidious slander. I did not know that they would decide my fate. But that's another long story, a story of the Yugoslav GULAG, told partly in the book *White Violet* (1991).³⁷

Both women were experienced revolutionaries, educated and talented, with a knowledge of foreign languages, enthusiastically devoted to building a new democratic society, and with respectable war experience – from captivity in the Berlin Gestapo prison (Lebl) through negotiations with the British government about the set-up

³⁶ Ženi Lebl, *Odjednom drukčija, odjednom druga. Sećanja i zaboravi*, Čigoja, Beograd, 2008.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 189.

of the new Yugoslav government (Sržentić) – yet the methods of torture on the islands of Goli Otok and Sveti Grgur, in the women's prison in Stolac, changed permanently not only their life path, but also the way in which they described the world and people.

From a Female Role Model to the 'Queen of the Stalinist Ball'

The threat of further detention resulted in their decades long silence and led to their suppression of experienced trauma. So-called "status degradation ceremonies" had a particularly destructive effect on the psyche and self-esteem of female detainees. These consisted of theatrical forms violating certain individuals' dignity and integrity through the use of derogatory songs and slogans, i.e. short plays that 'staged their guilt' and ridiculed their private life, feminine outlook and professional achievements. According to the sociologist Harold Garfinkel,³⁸ the intention of the status degradation ceremony is to denounce and stigmatize an individual as unworthy of the privileges that go along with his or her former role in society or in an institution. The paradigm of such moral indignation is public denunciation or the ritual destruction of the person denounced "I call upon all men to bear witness that he is not as he appears but is otherwise and *in essence* of a lower species".³⁹

During one of the ceremonies of public humiliation at the Goli otok prison Dragica Sržentić-Vitolović was disguised as 'The Queen of the Stalinist Ball': she was given a crown of thorns and nettles and sneakers that read: 'Made in the USSR'. This theatre of cruelty aimed to ridicule, cause pain and result in a psychological crackdown and the imputation of 'guilt' on those who until yesterday had represented a moral role model for the community. Members of the repressive apparatus willingly and frequently used traditional derogatory practices against women manipulating shame as "the most emotional tone of every personality",⁴⁰ as the

³⁸ Harold Garfinkel, "Conditions of successful degradation ceremonies", *American Journal of Sociology*, 61, pp. 420-424.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 421.

⁴⁰ Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: suverena moć i goli život* [Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life, 1998], Multimedijalni institut and Arkzin, Zagreb, 2006. Harold Garfinkel describes the function of shame: "A prominent function of shame for the person is that of preserving the ego from further onslaughts by withdrawing entirely its contact with the outside. For the collectivity shame is an 'individuator'. One ex-periences shame in his own time. Moral indignation serves to effect the ritual destruction of the person denounced. Unlike shame, which does not bind persons together, moral indignation may reinforce group solidarity", Garfinkel, *Conditions of successful degradation ceremonies*, cit., p. 421.

primary means for the patriarchal devaluation of women based on the premise that women's lives are not worth much and that there is, as historian Michelle Perrot has formulated, a woman's shame that has existed since time immemorial. Such degradation and threats to reproductive health, imposed on women political prisoners arrested according to the law of having violated public peace and order, just as prostitutes, their fellow prisoners, say a great deal about the contradictions of an ideology that fundamentally changed the institutions and social relations, but not the patriarchal premises concerning the natural supremacy of men (in power) over women (without power and influence). This Stalinist 'penal orthopedagogy' directed against the 'Stalinists' suffers from a surplus of ideological signifiers but lacks an ethical aspect, namely one that, according to Foucault⁴¹ constitutes the difference between religious dogmatic self-denial and the modern constitution of subjectivity.

Unlike male prisoners who since the 1960s gradually accomplished the right to appropriate the story of Goli Otok as relevant historical experience, women political prisoners had neither social support, nor a model or framework for the narrative of their own experience of being 'inner dissidents'. Their loss of self-esteem, depression, a sense of helplessness and post-traumatic symptoms resulted in a withdrawal from public life, and sometimes from the world of work. Interviews and memoirs of these remarkable women, written after more than half a century, were partly motivated by the wish of their authors to testify about the collective (Ženi Lebl published several books on the destiny of Jewish communities in the territory of Yugoslavia) or about their 'great husbands' (Rudolf Bičanić, Danko Grlić, Šime Balen, Vojo Srzentić) with whom they accompanied and shared the fate of the oppositional left intellectuals, but most importantly they provided reflections on the experience of morally and politically incriminated and marginalized women intellectuals who through their work and public activities permanently marked a period but were ignored both by socialist and post-socialist historiography.

Paternalism in the Party

The so-called objective difficulties – the negative consequences of rapid industrialization and urbanization, the uneven development of the country and the fight against the 'fifth column' after the

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self", in Michel Foucault, Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Penguin, London, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 223-251.

conflict with Stalin – pushed ‘women’s issues’ into the background. The Party and state leaders controlled the organized activity of women and defined its objectives and tasks. Paternalistically structured ‘socialist feminism’ enabled women to have legal protection and economic equality, but not equal participation in decision-making and political power. I was surprised how the descriptions of bureaucratic measures (instrumentalization, atomization and abolishment) taken by the Czechoslovakian communist government in the 1950s in order to reduce, discipline and control women’s organizations fits the Yugoslav scenario.⁴² In the Yugoslav case, too, as the Croatian feminist historian Lydia Sklevicky pointed out in her study based on meticulous archival research, the communist government was literally afraid of an autonomous, strong mass women’s movement. Thus, the Yugoslav communists abolished the AFŽ (Antifascist Women’s Front) in 1953 and abruptly closed down the onward progress of the social revolution and emancipatory women’s activism.

In his speech at the last Congress of the AFŽ (the Antifascist Front of Women) in 1953 Milovan Djilas said that one of the reasons for the abolition of the AFŽ was the strengthening of democracy and women’s equality in Yugoslavia, and that the time had come for society as a whole to take over the tasks of such ‘semi-political organization’, i.e. the Socialist Alliance of Working People and the future alliance of women’s societies.⁴³ It was felt that the gradual increase in living standards and the material conditions of life would lead to a general improvement in the social position of women. However, in reality this led to a depoliticization of ‘women’s issues’ and women’s associations, to an underestimation of women’s (political) force, and therefore to the reduced influence of women on the further development of socialist relations. In relation to the period of rebuilding and development, in the mid-1950s women’s activity decreased, cases of women’s labor rights’ violations and worker layoffs became more frequent, as did regressive attitudes.

⁴² Cf. de Haan, *Aspasia forum*, cit., p. 175 and *passim*.

⁴³ The AFŽ was gradually transformed, first into the League of Women’s Associations (1953-1961), and then into KAZDAŽ, the Conference for the Social Activity of Women (1961-1965), fatefully following the Communist Party line, that is, the conviction that “our socialist society functioned in a genderless way”. The second period, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, was characterized by the loss of the second and most important dimension of women’s activism: work for society and work for/on themselves. The third period of socialist women’s activism was marked by grassroots feminist and civil initiatives called *neofeminizam* (‘new feminism’) or second wave feminism, which was visible only in big Yugoslav cities such as Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana.

After the abolition of the AFŽ socially active women lost their independent platform for political action and became more exposed to attacks and insinuations and more dependent on the fatherly figure of Tito who had always had a patronizing and paternalistic attitude towards women. Describing ambiguous and complex relationship between communism and feminism in socialist Romania, Mihaela Mudure reached similar conclusion:

The communist project of modernizing society granted women some rights: universal suffrage, the right to education, political visibility. But these successes were only apparent, these rights were void of content as voting and political visibility was fake political agency in a dictatorial system. The right to education was also affected by the imposed ideology of the time. Women were not granted these rights as autonomous social agents, the greatest patriarch became the Party and within the Party: the secretary general.⁴⁴

The failure of party policy to solve the problem of gender and social inequality, feminist scholars believe, lies in the communist renewal of the 'will to power' and with it the restoration of a social hegemony that "once again reproduces not only inequality but also new forms of oppression and a lack of freedom".⁴⁵ The ongoing asymmetry of power was more likely "a consequence of the operation of the Communist system itself" than the product of "centuries of oppression"⁴⁶. Given that the 'new woman' was a symbol of the transformative potential of Yugoslav socialist society, her moral discreditation and criminalization because of her political and public engagement represented a dangerous backlash. According to my research at least three elements of a post-revolutionary patriarchal anxiety of Party's authorities can be detected: a) the political fear of ambitious women ('quality staff'); b) the ideological fear of the women guardians of the traditional and religious foundations of collective identity; c) a cultural mistrust toward the mobile woman who easily transcends family, social and ethnic boundaries. The testimonies of women political prisoners show that the attempts of resisting ideological dogmatism, discriminatory practices and the patriarchal structure of the Party from within resulted in severe sanctions, and that attempts at free thought and autonomous political action outside of the party line, was severely punished.

⁴⁴ Mudure, *Zeugmatic spaces*, cit., p. 421.

⁴⁵ Bosanac, *Visoko čelo*, cit., p. 12.

⁴⁶ Wolfe Jancar, *Women under Communism*, cit., p. 3.

Numerous examples of the coexistence of antiintellectualism and antifeminism, nominal egalitarianism and resistant patriarchal consciousness are stated in Gordana Bosanac's (1936) 'philosophical autobiography'⁴⁷ which in detail describes her intellectual development during the 1950s. Her professor of philosophy at the University of Zagreb complemented the issue of dialectical materialism with a discussion of the difference between intelligent men and less intelligent women's facial physiognomy, claiming that men have a high-brow, because their 'box of thoughts' needs more space. The professor demonstrated a full range of gender discriminatory practices in his academic work without ever being sanctioned for them. From that moment on, this student, the future Marxist philosopher and sociologist began to think about the obverse and reverse of the official policy of gender equality:

However, it turns out that there is a stronger, 'more legal' force that governs the will of the people, some unwritten rule, and one that rules gender differences among people invisible, yet effective, that with all the discipline of real socialism exists, there is nevertheless that discipline, which he recognizes and subsumes as his own evaluation. This force did not have a name, it was not critically discussed and was not contested, and only much later was appointed as patriarchal consciousness. It never questioned the acknowledged 'socialist consciousness' so they could peacefully exist alongside one another.⁴⁸

Concluding Remarks: From Silenced Revolutionaries to Feminist Activists

The social power of the Yugoslav communist party faced with the large scale recruitment of new members was strengthened by the promotion of emancipatory values and the 'cultivation of virtues' – by taking over the Leninist myth of communists as 'people of exceptional virtues'. An integral part of this myth, based on the belief that socialist society is the best and most just of all social systems, includes psychosocial measures of self-control, namely, the internalization of fight against all human weaknesses, flaws and imperfections. The persistent correction of one's own shortcomings by encouraging virtues (and identification with dead partisan heroes) also implied the correction of biographies of those who did not correspond to the model of being an exemplary person of exceptional intellectual abilities and moral qualities, but of

⁴⁷ Bosanac, *Visoko čelo*, cit.

⁴⁸ Cf. Bosanac, *Visoko čelo*, cit., p. 196.

humble working class or peasant family origin. The transformation of repressive measures of discipline and punishment into practices of self-disciplining, self-criticism and self-correction, as described by Michel Foucault⁴⁹ follows the efforts of an individual to adapt to modern industrialized society and its socialist version. "The Yugoslav paradox" is perhaps best described by Carol S. Lilly who claimed that the transition away from idealism of Yugoslav male and female revolutionaries originated as a move toward it:

For only when the Yugoslav Communist truly attempted to realize the promises of their ideology did they begin to lose faith in their ability to transform society, culture, and human beings by persuasive means. Party rhetoric, the leaders then discovered, was successful mainly when it relied on preexisting values and beliefs, but was much less so when it tried to instill in the population new ideas and new behavioral norms. Persuasion, in other words, could occasionally help realize the party's short-term political agenda but not its long-term transformative one.⁵⁰

This is a crucial moment for the forming of a symbiosis between the socialist emancipatory agenda and traditional 'women's values' nurtured equally in the socialist women's press as well as in the private sphere of the home where the patriarchal logic of undervalued and invisible women's physical and affective labor fought back against the ideals of 'state feminism'. The rivalry of two collectivist projects (patriarchal and communist), which in their own way disciplined, socialized and exploited women's labor and reproductive capacity for the paternal or common good, has found a common interest in restoring the discourse of femininity hand in hand with the discourse of successful professional women. As Barbara Wolfe Jancar concluded: "much of the research in Communist countries has an instrumental goal: to provide the leadership with information about the way women feel, work, and live, with the aim of improving their performance at work, upgrading family life, or increasing the birth rate".⁵¹ The main problem regarding the unfortunate alliance of Yugoslav leftist women intellectuals and communists stems from the fact that the Party's political goal was not to raise autonomous, responsible and well-informed female citizens.⁵² As Josip Broz Tito

⁴⁹ Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, cit, pp. 223-251.

⁵⁰ Carol S. Lilly, *Power and Persuasion. Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia 1944-1953*, Westview Press, Boulder CO and Oxford UK, 2001, p. 251.

⁵¹ Wolfe Jancar, *Women under Communism*, cit., p. 10.

⁵² Svetlana Slapšak, "Between the vampire husband and the mortal lover.

clearly stated in his speech at the first AFŽ Congress held in 1945 in Belgrade: Yugoslav 'forward-thinking women' were expected to justify the trust they had been given, and focus all their forces on "issues of strengthening our government".⁵³ The ethnologist Miroslava Malešević commented on this paternalistic and instrumentalist behavior of former comrades, who concentrated on consolidating power: "Having fulfilled the task enforced by extraordinary circumstances, a former partisan woman and shock worker would ... withdraw from the social scene as quickly as she emerged on it. Energetic breakthroughs into all professions, including the highest levels of government, were quickly put to a stop".⁵⁴ The Croatian feminist scholars Biljana Kašić and Sandra Prlenda added that after the joint victory with their revolutionary male comrades in 1945, women "had to turn back to their private histories and, by decoding the revolutionary symbols (both utopian and traditional), exposed the extent to which women's history could undo any ideological narrative closure".⁵⁵ Evidence of the downplaying of women's (revolutionary and leftist) history lies in the fact that the socialist Yugoslavia never established a research institution, archive or museum dedicated to its world-famous women's partisans and revolutionaries, among them ninety-one war heroines with the highest decoration in the country, the status of National Hero. In that sense it is difficult to say whether "Cold War women's organization in Yugoslavia and elsewhere played an active [and important – R.J.K.] role in everyday Cold War politics", as Chiara Bonfiglioli recently concluded in her article.⁵⁶ I do agree that during the 1940s and the 1950s, due to the tightening of relations between the Cold War parties and the continuing struggle for the implementation of women's rights (abortion was partly liberalized in 1963, and fully in 1977), Yugoslav women in general were politically more active and more upset by measures which prevented them from succeeding in their actions more than their successors in the later decades of the mature 'socialism with a friendly face'.⁵⁷ But the

A narrative for feminism in Yugoslavia", *Research on Russia and Eastern Europe*, 2, pp. 201-224.

⁵³ Tito quoted in Pantelić, *Partizanke kao građanke*, cit., p. 54.

⁵⁴ Miroslava Malešević, "Osmi mart – od utopije do demagogije", *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta SANU*, 36/37, pp. 53-80, cit. p. 70.

⁵⁵ Biljana Kašić and Sandra Prlenda, "Women's History in Croatia: Displaced and Unhomed", *Aspasia*, 7, 2013, pp. 154-162.

⁵⁶ Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Women's Political and Social Activism in the Early Cold War Era", *Aspasia*, 8, 2014, pp. 1-25.

⁵⁷ At the same time we must bear in mind that Yugoslav socialist authorities

fact is that we had to wait for a generational change and the late 1970s to hear the voices of new women, most often the daughters of revolutionary and/or ‘purged and silenced’ mothers, who were able to articulate questions concerning their perplexed positions in socialist family and autocratic state in feminist terms,⁵⁸ whilst simultaneously being open to look for the answers among their activist “sisters” in the East and the West alike⁵⁹.

intensively searched for other sources of party legitimacy “including the gradual decentralization of power, a higher standard of living, and greater freedoms (including the freedom to travel abroad) than were available to the citizens of any other Communist regime”, Lilly, *Power and Persuasion*, cit., p. 252.

⁵⁸ Yugoslav scholars and activists who managed to organize the first feminist international conference (*Drugarica Žena. Žensko Pitanje // Comrade Woman. The Women’s Question*) in Belgrade in 1978 publicly called themselves feminists. Chiara Bonfiglioli proved in her MA research that this event has been foundational for feminist movements in the following decades that were in some way “part of larger globalised changes occurred since 1989, changes that have also affected the practices and theories of feminism in Eastern and Western Europe”. Bonfiglioli, “Back to Belgrade, 1978. An exploration in memories”, in R. Jambrešić Kirin and Sandra Prlenda (eds.), *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective. Voicing Feminist Concerns*, IEF and Centre for Women Studies, Zagreb, 2009, pp. 268-278, cit. p. 277.

⁵⁹ The first version of this article was published in the journal *History of communism in Europe*, 5, 2014, pp. 36-52. I am grateful to the editors of the Zeta Books, Bucharest, for their kind permission to reprint it.

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Acting History Across Media: Margarete von Trotta's *Hannah Arendt*

Lada Čale Feldman

Summary

Margarete von Trotta's film *Hannah Arendt*, dealing mainly with the episode of the philosopher's life which produced her famous *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, renewed controversies surrounding the initial reception of this report. In contrast to the criticisms of the film which insisted on its referential aspect – the 'truth' of Margarete von Trotta's biographical rendition, of Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Eichmann's moral responsibility, as well as of the moral responsibility of Jewish representatives for deaths in concentration camps – this contribution will try to discuss the impact of the film in terms of its three intertextual frames of reference: first, the current cinematic appetite for 'playing for real', especially for playing prominent middle-age female public figures (for instance, Queen Elisabeth II by Helen Mirren or Margaret Thatcher by Meryl Streep); second, Hannah Arendt's own ideas on 'acting', conceived in its double, political and theatrical sense, as well as on *vita contemplativa/vita activa* dichotomy, given the difficulty of artistically *enacting* "the life of the mind"; third, the way Margarete von Trotta inscribes her film into the tradition of iconographic representations of 'the woman of ideas', insisting not so much on Hannah Arendt's own feminist allegiances, but on feminist implications of her acting on the public stage.

Doomed to feature as the most salient metaphor standing for the irretrievability of history – insofar as we conceive of history as an actual, embodied practice – the art of acting¹ strangely

¹ Comp. Leo Braudy, "Acting. Stage vs. Screen", in Robert Knopf (ed.), *Theater and Film. A Comparative Anthology*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London,

resembles the notorious neuralgias of women's historical position and their long-standing historical invisibility: acting is not only considered to be a reproductive art, but it is also an art that lacks autonomy, predicated as it is on constant negotiations with others, above all with changing playwriting and directing poetics as well as managing or directing decisions. Acting on film managed at least to escape the predicament of irretrievability, rendering many a female historical figure – both the actual and the performing one – memorable for times to come: it remains, however, rather dubious to what extent the thorny issue of female acting practice truly profited by this medium of its manifestation and, as a consequence, gained in historical and theoretical prominence.²

Here I will address a specific cinematic instance of representing history – that is, a strange case of a woman who made history – in which one can discern the imbrication of multiple media manifestations of acting, the 'crossing-overs' that are produced in art works which, for example, feature a film that is made out of the script adaptation of a novel in which parts of the original plot take place in a theatre. Such imbrications often rely on the ambiguity of meaning that from the very inceptions of philosophy haunts the word 'acting' – in the sense of doing something in the everyday world – with its often despised and troublesome Other, acting as performing, acting as pretense, all the more insistent since the same holds for the inverse tendencies in the history of ideas on theatre, to conceive of artistic acting practice as related to or exemplifying questions of subjectivity and agency, if not even achievements of self-authorship and authenticity of being. As I will try to demonstrate, Margarete von Trotta's biopic *Hannah Arendt* (2012) provides a telling instance of such multiple media and discursive framing of (female historical) acting: it uses the aforementioned double, retroflex connection of human and artistic

1976/2005, pp. 352-360. See also Edward Burns, *Character. Acting and Being on the Pre-Modern Stage*, Macmillan, London, 1990.

² The history of female acting, especially its resonances with changing philosophical conceptualizations of 'the woman problem', is an issue to which I cannot but repeatedly return, so far mostly in connection to drama and theatre, not cinema. Cf. Lada Čale Feldman, *Euridikini osvrti. O rodnim izvedbama u književnosti, kazalištu, teoriji i folklore*, IEF and Centar za ženske studije, Zagreb, 2001; Lada Čale Feldman, *Femina ludens*, Disput, Zagreb, 2005. Karen Hollinger undertook a more thorough investigation of the Hollywood actress both "as an artist and an ideological construct", deploring the fact that female cinema stardom falls into the general neglect of screen acting, "one of the most undertheorized areas in film study", Hollinger, *Hollywood Acting and the Female Star*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, pp. 3-4.

action as a cinematic strategy in order to underpin the fictional performance of the protagonist by the very ideas on acting that were exposed by Hannah Arendt herself in her first important book, *The Human Condition*.³

The fact that the book was initially meant to be titled *Amor Mundi. Love of the World*, seems itself to be eloquently alluding to the author's refusal to subscribe to the philosophical tradition of reflexive distance and solitary retreat, and to abandon the involvement in, and the address of, the mundane plane of human action. In this book, in which Arendt lays the ground for what will become her political philosophy, she questions the Christian distinction between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* by returning to the ancient Greek praise of a life devoted to the production of memorable, immortal deeds. Instead of the aforementioned dichotomy of actual and pretend acting, Arendt conceptualizes another distinction pertaining to the human condition, and thereby introduces a different kind of theatrical implication of our everyday dealings: while relying on specifically ancient Greek notions of what constitutes a character and counts as human action,⁴ she insists that *what* we produce during our lifetime – whether it be a book or a building – can have no true bearing on the understanding of our personality, since such an effect of our endeavors can only answer to the question of *what* we were. It is therefore only the actions that we undertake in the public space, *qua* political beings disclosed in public speaking, in making decisions and in acting upon them, that can answer the question of *who* we were. She thus foregrounds the material immediacy of acting and speaking in public – with all the fragility and unpredictability of their outcome – as the only means through which a person is revealed to the world in its Aristotelian *ethos*, in its distinctness and uniqueness. Our own *ethos* is, however, opaque to ourselves: only those who watch us doing, and who are willing to write the story which would narrate our life can fully account for *who* we were: such a story is therefore necessarily told by others who survive us, who can grasp our life in its entirety, as something finished and bounded.⁵

³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1958/1998.

⁴ From the perspective of theatre studies, and the extant traditions of poetics of pre-modern acting, cf. Burns, *Character*, cit., pp. 18-27.

⁵ Cf. Julia Kristeva who insists on "the possibility of representing birth and death, to conceive of them in time and to explain them to others, that is, the possibility of narrating" as the crucial component of the human condition which for

That is also why Hannah Arendt considered theatre to be a key cultural institution of ancient Greece: it was a place where stories of memorable deeds were not only told in words, but actually embodied and enacted anew, enabling the Greek audience to grasp both the meanings of one's life and to confront the very question of a life's meaning: "Only the actors and speakers who re-enact the story's plot can convey the full meaning, not so much of the story itself, but of the 'heroes' who reveal themselves in it".⁶ Hannah Arendt thus partakes of the philosophical tradition of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor, with, however, a crucial difference: unlike all those philosophers, beginning with Plato, who conceived of human action as of something akin to an actor's doings on stage insofar as these doings are dictated by a script or a directing agency transcending actors themselves, she emphasized the mundanity of human actions, relying on the concept of both acting and spectating as this-worldly activities. The meaning of human action is thus for her not something prescribed in advance, but rather intrinsic to the action and yet fully realized only if it is grasped by the audience, that is, by those who will watch and be capable to then narrate our actions as storytellers of our lives. Above all, unlike Plato, Arendt praised the particular case of theatre actors whom she considered to be supreme storytellers insofar as they also corporeally inhabit these stories as they unfold, and as they interpret the uniqueness of one's actions and being, channeling their meanings to the interested subsequent audiences: "against static *mimesis*, Arendt calls upon theatrical gestural action as the *modus operandi* of optimal narration".⁷ This significant displacement of the theatrical metaphor from otherworldly to the mundane and much more politicized frame of human action, which ascribes immense responsibility to three inextricably connected human roles in the theatrical event – the one of the storyteller (the playwright), of the actor, and of the spectator – will bear on my interpretation of the attempt not only to narrate, but to also artistically enact several crucial episodes

Arendt "grounds human life in what is specific to it, in what is non-animal about it, non-physiological". She continues: "This concept, whose Aristotelian provenance is obvious, links the destinies of *life*, *narrative*, and *politics*: narrative conditions the duration and the immortality of the work of art; but it also accompanies, as historical narrative, the life of the *polis*, making it a political life, in the best sense of the word (one that, ever since the Greeks, has been under threat)", Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt. Life is a Narrative*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2001, p. 8.

⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, cit., p. 187.

⁷ Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, cit., p. 18.

from the philosopher's own life in Margarete von Trotta's film. As already mentioned, I will argue that this conceptual framework informed von Trotta's work on the script, as well as her cinematic directing strategies, much more than any attempt at 'truthfully' recreating historically picturesque snapshots from Hannah Arendt's life.

Let me state at the outset that von Trotta's biopic is a film which apparently does not in any way deal with Hannah Arendt's eventual feminist allegiances, representing as it does an episode in her life in which she was involved in the controversy surrounding the Eichmann trial (as a matter of fact, the initial title of the film was meant to be *The Controversy*). To those of you who are not familiar with that historical episode, just a short reminder that Adolf Eichmann was a German official responsible for the transportation of thousands of Jews to the camps; when the Israeli government and police kidnapped and arrested him in Argentina and then brought him to Jerusalem to try him for his war crimes, the American political journal *The New Yorker* commissioned Hannah Arendt, then already a world reputed author of *Origins of Totalitarianism*,⁸ to report on the trial. She wrote a series of five articles which were later published in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem, a Report on the Banality of Evil*⁹ in which she claimed that Eichmann was not a monster, as everyone apparently wanted to believe him to be, but an average bureaucrat, unable to think, and that he embodied what she called "the banality of evil". Moreover, she claimed that Jewish councils, by their obedience and collaboration, facilitated the deportation of the Jews. Finally, she questioned the entire legal procedure and especially its outcome by arguing that Eichmann should have been prosecuted in an international and not a national court, and that he should have been tried and condemned for contributing to the crime against humanity, not against a specific ethnic group. These three claims stirred what is today still considered as an almost incomprehensibly violent reaction from both the American and Israeli Jewish community, which protested in an undignified way, even sending her death threats. The film focuses on the circumstances that prompted her decision to write about the trial as well as those that prompted the ensuing attacks she had to suffer, by disclosing the ways her interpretive decisions regarding

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1951.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report in the Banality of Evil*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, The Viking Press, New York, 1963/1964.

Eichmann's personality, and regarding the way the trial was conducted, were shaped by her own life story, and by her own personality and *ethos*.

Curiously enough, however, the reception of the film – from the many reviews I had the chance to read on the Internet – made me think about a sudden reversal of critical positions habitually taken with respect to aesthetic production with clear feminist ambitions, which, to my mind, von Trotta's film had all along. Namely, both feminist artworks and criticism are all too often accused of 'a referential fallacy', that is, of a forceful concentration on the ways aesthetic representations do or do not conform to the authenticity of female experience, to a woman's way of feeling and knowing, to her actual social, material and historical conditioning, and these habitual accusations are often accompanied by what I think is an otherwise thoroughly justified insistence upon the at least relative autonomy of aesthetic expression, the primacy of its structural and intertextual, rather than referential qualities. So why do I evoke these accusations in connection to Margarete von Trotta's film *Hannah Arendt*? Because I believe that the full feminist implications of this film were either completely missed, when they were not denigrated by the popular press, and that they were missed or misconstrued precisely because critics seemed not to care too much about the dramaturgical choices and intertextual resonances of the film, focusing all too readily on its referential aspects – on the truthfulness of the film in its rendition either of Hannah Arendt's physical appearance and voice, or of her private and public life and the social circle she dealt with – as well as on the director's supposed justification of Arendt's judgement of Eichmann, the Jewish councils and of the Israeli government and tribunal.

Von Trotta's film, in short, renewed the controversy that it took as its topic, rather than being considered as an artwork in its own right, representing that controversy and reflecting upon the conditions that produced it. As for its feminist dimensions, not only were they undermined by the primacy of the mentioned focus on the Eichmann trial itself in its actuality – rather than on its media representation, which is the primary relevant aspect of it to cinema as a medium – but they were also often taken as something to be disregarded in advance by both Hannah Arendt's and the director's explicit refusal to use this label as their aesthetical-political agenda. It seems to me that it is precisely in this respect that this film could serve as an extraordinary example of the difficulties surrounding the very definition of feminist aesthetics: is it something pertaining to the intention of the author,

or something inherent in the matter chosen, in the structural features of an artwork, in its production choices, or something appearing only in the eye of the beholder, activating his or her associations, desires and identifications? Interestingly, in reviews that acknowledged feminism as a relevant frame of reference, von Trotta has been blamed not only of uncritically endorsing Hannah Arendt's stance and making a kind of hagiography, but also of having created just another "didactic feminist buddy movie"¹⁰ featuring strong independent women and their mutual emotional ties, as well as of having made a "stagey and mannered" film¹¹ and a typical 'melodrama',¹² obviously not an adequate and sufficiently masculine genre to the seriousness and the scale of the problem she was dealing with. So what prompted such reactions? I think von Trotta's characteristic feminist move, namely, her decision to show Hannah Arendt in both her private and her public dealings, both as a loyal and warm friend, a passionate and tolerant, if not magnanimous wife to a beloved but somewhat coquettish husband, and as a sharp, distanced, uncompromising analyst, professor and reporter – in short, both as an emotionally honest, and as an intellectually honest human being, regardless of whether such honesty suits the entrenched positions of the public sphere on any public issue she may have been involved in.

Above all, however, von Trotta was ridiculed for her ambition to represent thinking on screen,¹³ in scenes which I personally find admirable, in which Barbara Sukowa, the leading actress playing Hannah Arendt, is shown to be doing this, that is, acting thinking, representing thinking as an act that leads to crucial moral decisions and prompts further public acts. Just to provide an example which would prove with what kind of finesse von Trotta makes Sukowa do this, let us look for instance at how the film starts: in what seems at first to be an all too easily recognizable scene of the

¹⁰ Mark Lilla, "Arendt and Eichmann. The New Truth", *The New York Review of Books*, 2013, <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/11/21/arendt-eichmann-new-truth/>>.

¹¹ Peter Bradshaw, "Hannah Arendt. Review", *The Guardian*, 2013, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/sep/26/hannah-arendt-review>>.

¹² Martin Steven, "Review: Thinking on screen – von Trotta's 'Hannah Arendt'", *The Conversation*, 2014, <<http://theconversation.com/review-thinking-on-screen-von-trottas-hannah-arendt-23026>>.

¹³ See Lilla, *Arendt and Eichmann*, cit. Martin Steven says that in this respect the film "approaches self-parody", while Richard Brody thinks that the film belongs to a specific genre, "soft-core philosophical porn". Comp. M. Steven "Review. Thinking on Screen", and R. Brody, "Hannah Arendt and the Glorification of Thinking", *The New Yorker*, 2012, <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/hannah-arendt-and-the-glorification-of-thinking>>.

deportation of Jews in a threatening nocturnal nowhere, we are in fact confronted with the scene of Israeli secret police catching Eichmann unawares in his distant Argentinian shelter from the world. Right after he is put into the truck, we are shown his lamp left lying on the ground, as a symbol of a light of reason lost, both once upon a time in Eichmann and presently in the moves of his persecutors. The next shot: Barbara Sukowa as Arendt lights her cigarette, lighting thus the light of her thinking, which will follow us all throughout the film as a symbol of someone taking her time to reflect,¹⁴ instead of being led by irrational emotions – either by hatred of the horrifying executioner or by unquestioned allegiance to her own identity as a Jew, let alone by the memories of the fear from the threat she herself had to suffer under Nazi regime. The first lines that are spoken in the film are equally suggestive of the entire controversy that is about to be represented in the film, for we hear Janet McTier, playing Mary McCarthy, Hannah's best friend, protesting "Why are you defending him?" to which Hannah protests back "I am not defending him!", and although these lines do not refer to Eichmann, but to McCarthy's former husband, they do anticipate the misunderstanding that Hannah will soon face on a much larger scale, involving not only her proclaimed adversaries – above all, the Jewish American intellectuals and journalists such as Lionel Abel and Norman Podhoretz – but also some of her best male friends like Hans Jonas.

In contrast to those critical reactions to the film which pointed to von Trotta's own banality in treating Hannah Arendt's misrepresentation of both Eichmann and the Holocaust, for me this film, which was obviously intended for popular consumption, entered into quite a different line of associations and produced quite a different kind of disruption of cinematic expectations. I would like to situate this film within a discussion pertaining rather to the position of actresses within the dominant, Hollywood star system, to the availability and the stereotyping of female roles in cinema, as well as to the current growing phenomenon of 'playing for real', as Tom Cantrell and Mary Luckhurst called the acting task to "play real people".¹⁵ The analysis of the way Barbara Sukowa's interpretation fits into female 'acting for real' is all the more

¹⁴ For a rare appreciation of the impact of this scene for our re-evaluation of time for thinking in current university politics, see Iris Van der Tuin, "Making Time for Duration. Thinking at the Contemporary University", *History of the Present. A Journal of Critical History*, 5, 2, 2015, pp. 187-199.

¹⁵ Tom Cantrell and Mary Luckhurst, *Playing for Real. Actors on Playing Real People*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2010.

pressing if we have in mind the scarcity of such tasks for women in contemporary cinema and the outstanding achievements the representation of contemporary female public figures reached with recent cinematic versions of Queen Elisabeth II (*The Queen*, 2009) or of the former British Prime minister Margaret Thatcher (*The Iron Lady*, 2011). In both cases, interestingly, these characters seem to be caught by the camera eye in their rather unglamorous phases of life, in late middle or very old age, when they appear as grey haired, sexually unattractive women, sometimes even inexpressive in their stern faces, subdued manners or, in the case of the film *The Iron Lady*, lost looks of senile dementia, unappealing to the male gaze in their countenance and outfit, and yet authoritative and commanding while occupying their positions of power. The two films I mention feature two major contemporary stars, Helen Mirren and Meryl Streep, both of whom gained their reputation already in their youth, not only as drama actresses but also – if not primarily, in the case of Helen Mirren – as ‘sex bombs’. By the way, although many a reviewer of von Trotta’s film will insist on Sukowa already having been awarded for the equally complex role of Rosa Luxemburg some twenty years ago (*Rosa Luxemburg*, also directed by von Trotta, 1986), there will also be those who will prefer to mention her other former roles in Rainer Maria Fassbinder’s films, of *femme fatale* Lola and the good-hearted prostitute in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980).

On that note, it may perhaps sound unbelievable, but even Meryl Streep, with all her long-standing and indeed growing high visibility in current American film culture,¹⁶ is one of the rare stars that already in the early nineties of the 20th century dared to denounce the situation of actresses in the film industry. In her dark humorous diagnosis, written for the review *Screen Actor* in the now distant 1990, she bitterly comments how not only most of the roles a woman can get in Hollywood are that of prostitutes, but that, like hookers, actresses seem to lose their market appeal around the age of forty, and that if the trend of catering to young male audience continues, women will soon be exterminated from the movies altogether. Here is how she explains why she misses actresses from the Hollywood golden era:

These women inspired me. The derivation of that word is from Latin *in-spirare*: to breathe life into, to fill with life, to breathe in – and I did. I gasped when I saw these women. It made me want to

¹⁶ Meryl Streep, “When Women Were in the Movies”, in B. Cardullo, H. Geduld, R. Gottesman, and L. Woods, (eds.), *Playing to the Camera. Film Actors Discuss Their Craft*, Yale University, New York, 1998, pp. 242-246.

be something, to achieve something, to express my humanity, my aliveness, my connection to that radiant, important creation that was woman.¹⁷

It is precisely in this spirit that I watched Barbara Sukowa featured as a 50-year-old, grey-haired Hannah Arendt, and in particular all the close-ups of her face in which we are given the opportunity to count all her wrinkles, whether character ones or ones grown with age or indeed ones added by the mask. Given the assumption that close-ups allow for “a greater sense of actor-audience intimacy”¹⁸ that is said to be otherwise lacking in film as opposed to stage acting,¹⁹ it is remarkable to what extent von Trotta insists on them, as if reminding us of the role we play in the film, as well as of the role Hannah Arendt assigned to the audience in her philosophical interpretation of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor.

It is this allusion to Arendt’s ideas which guided the director in presenting several inserted ‘theatrical’ audiences within the frame of cinematic watching, in order to make us aware that these inserted audiences are watching what we watch, primarily the actress playing Hannah Arendt. Moreover, all throughout the film Sukowa’s middle-aged face is shown to be expressing a whole array of human emotions, from joyfulness, conviviality, love, even sexual arousal, via determination, intellectual absorption and contemplation, to concern, compassion and distress: it is a face and a body shown to be fully living the moment it is in, not a body restricted to the usual maternal or spinsterish functions of cinematic middle-aged women, whose sexual side, as E. Ann Kaplan demonstrates in her discussion of ‘the unconscious of age’ tends to be considered by the predominantly male reviewers to be something unimaginable and repulsive.²⁰

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 245.

¹⁸ Hollinger, *Hollywood Acting*, cit., p. 6. See also Hugo Münsterberg, “The Means of Photoplay” [1916], in Bert Cardullo (ed.), *Stage and Screen. Adaptation Theory from 1916 to 2000*, Bloomsbury, London etc., 2012, pp. 26-33; Erwin Panofsky, “Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures” [1934], in Cardullo (ed.), *Stage and Screen*, cit., pp. 39-54; Josef von Sternberg, “Acting in Film and Theatre” [1955], in Cardullo (ed.), *Stage and Screen*, cit., pp. 119-132.

¹⁹ For a rather curious contradiction reigning in the questions of intimacy between those who prefer performing live in contrast to playing to the camera, see Allardyce Nicoll, “Film Reality: The Cinema and the Theatre” [1936], in Cardullo (ed.), *Stage and Screen*, cit., p. 82; Bert Cardullo “Playing to the Camera or the House. Stage vs. Screen Acting” [1998], in Cardullo (ed.), *Stage and Screen*, cit., p. 208.

²⁰ Cf. E. A. Kaplan, “The Unconscious of Age”, in L. Marshall and V. Lipscomb, (eds.), *Staging Age. The Performance of Age in Theatre, Dance and Film*, Macmillan, London etc, 2010, pp. 48-49.

Unlike however both Helen Mirren's and Meryl Streep's endeavors to achieve the most thorough resemblance to the actual historical prototypes they were assigned to embody, Barbara Sukowa rejected the initial idea to imitate Arendt's voice or apply facial prosthetics in order to resemble her, especially her Jewish nose, and threw herself into the extensive reading and study of all the philosopher's works and correspondence in order to, as she professes in her interviews, truly think Hannah Arendt's thoughts in those cinematically controversial moments in which the film attempts to represent, to use the title of another book by Hannah Arendt, "the life of the mind". Not only are such tasks quite rare in female screen acting history, but neither can I help myself in considering Sukowa's choices against the background of von Sternberg's well known dismissal of the importance of thinking for acting, as opposed to attractiveness,²¹ as also against the tradition of the most prominent Hollywood acting school, Method acting, in terms of which actresses "are seen as incapable of the emotional intensity and philosophical depth said to characterize the performances of male Method actors".²²

Besides the fact that all three films representing female historical figures that I mention here insist on the correlations between public appearance and playacting, while featuring older women whose indisputable stature is blemished because of their coldness in dealing with public affairs, there is another strategy importantly connecting the three films, which equally stems from 'playing for real': they all seamlessly combine documentary material with the filmed sequences. In *The Queen* and in *Hannah Arendt* specifically, this procedure is used in order to foreground the protagonists' and therefore also the actresses' physicality, since in both these films we see the protagonist, the historical figure as acted by the actress, confronted with her major concurrent and yet to a certain extent twin figure featuring in the documentary cinematic material that is watched by the acted protagonist: in *The Queen* this threatening figure is a much younger, much more glamorously appealing Lady Diana, with her enigmatic, Mona Lisa look and smile, 'the queen of hearts' ruling over the British people in a way a Hollywood star rules over the popular mind, while in von Trotta's film it is Eichmann himself, to whom Hannah Arendt's character seems to be brought close from the very first

²¹ See also Josef von Sternberg "Acting in Film and Theatre", in Cardullo (ed.), *Stage and Screen*, cit., p. 119 et *passim*.

²² Hollinger, *Hollywood Acting*, cit., p. 9.

sequence that we saw, as to the source of the controversy she will soon overtake. It is quite a daring parallel, if we have in mind that Eichmann is not only the object of Hannah Arendt's writing and political analysis, but also in light of the sheer facts that it is the man that the Israeli politicians took as a scapegoat on which to outpour all the horrible frustrations generated by the Holocaust catastrophe in its entirety. That move was for Arendt wrong from the start, given that she was adamant at judging the individual for his individual deeds and individual responsibility, and for crimes against humanity, not against Jews.

Allowing the reading of this film as an occasion to re-generate the trauma of the initial controversy, however, is far from my critical intentions, since in my opinion, von Trotta's interest did not lie in either disparaging or justifying Hannah Arendt's interpretation of the measure of Eichmann's 'guilt', 'monstrosity' or, indeed, 'banality', but rather to create the conditions of spectating that would create a parallel between us as spectators and Hannah Arendt's spectating position during the Eichmann trial. We are insistently invoked to watch Barbara Sukowa watching Eichmann, but I single out the shots in which we encounter the character of Hanna, played by Barbara Sukowa as if seated in the press-room, while observing the documentary transmissions of Eichmann's trial as if appearing to the philosopher/journalist via television screen, when she is seen to be given the opportunity to slowly scrutinize his face, attitude and behavior in the actual courtroom.

In such a way a chain of possible identifications is created that goes from us via the fictional Arendt as both the spectator and the female actor in the public space, to Eichmann's actual body in documentary transmission, who represents the same focus of both her and our attention as the one Arendt would subsequently become to the outraged public, which was trying to grasp the meaning of her actions just as she was trying to grasp the meaning of Eichmann's action, and just as we as spectators are put in a position of trying to grasp the meaning of Sukowa's acting. Von Trotta, it seems to me, emphasized thus the question of what it means to be a person, to represent a person, to understand who the other person is, as well as to know who we are. There is a line in the film pronounced by Sukowa, or better to say supposedly read by Sukowa from the letter she is writing as Hannah Arendt to *The New Yorker*, in which she explains her motives for following the trial: "I have never seen these persons in flesh", which means, "I have never confronted them as actors in public, they were so far just impersonal forces to me, and I am interested in the

uniqueness of human beings, appearing in public as speakers and taking responsibilities for what they do and say”.

Furthermore, there is an entire host of allusions within the film to theatre, beginning with the trial as a sort of ‘courtroom dramatics’, as Hannah Arendt herself treated it in her book, a propaganda theatre, of course, by the Israeli government,²³ but a theatre still in which Adolf Eichmann can finally be allowed to appear as a person, to speak out and plead his case. In the film we see Barbara Sukowa playing Arendt as someone arriving at a conclusion that he simply relinquished that very last opportunity to appear as a person who thinks with his own mind and speaks with his own voice. The fictional Arendt describes him to her friend Kurt Blumenfeld (played by Michael Degen) as an insignificant ‘clown’, but we are free to check her diagnosis, since we are allowed to look at his face in the documentary transmission and judge for ourselves to what extent her evaluation of his performance was naive or perspicacious, for there were many suggestions by Arendt’s later detractors that Eichmann simply fooled her as a good actor.²⁴ We are thus, furthermore, made to reflect upon our evaluation of Sukowa’s acting in relation to Eichmann’s gimmicks in front of the Israeli judges, and thus to touch, in a truly exacerbated way and context, upon one of the most controversial issues in acting theory – how to distinguish shallow pretending from, to sound even more paradoxical, *true acting* in all its aesthetic, ethical and political potential?²⁵

²³ Arendt even describes the architecture of the courthouse as a kind of theatre “complete with orchestra and gallery, with proscenium and stage, and even side doors for the actors entrance”. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, cit., p. 7.

²⁴ This was the opinion of Willem Sassen, see Elke Schmitter, “Vivid Cinematic Essay Examines Hannah Arendt”, *Spiegel online*, 21 January 2013, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/magnificent-new-german-film-depicts-hannah-arendt-a-876955.html>>.

²⁵ Theatre theory has dealt with the issue in too many instances for me to be able to pay due respect to all of them on this occasion, but as far as the screen acting is concerned, a very good introduction to the discussion is given by James Naremore, especially his masterful treatment of “performance within performance”. See J. Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, University of California Press, Berkeley etc., 1988, pp. 68-82. A distinction between mere pretending and being socially authentic, which collapsed in Goffman’s everyday “presentation of self” is quite another problem than the aesthetic analysis of ‘expressive coherence’. Both theatre and film theorists therefore rarely address the issue of social pretending-within-performance. Croatian theorist Branko Gavella is an interesting exception, daring to postulate the distinction between moral and aesthetic ‘transparency’ and ‘sincerity’. See Lada Čale Feldman, “Gavella i Goffman”, in *Dani hvarskog kazališta. Grada i rasprave o hrvatskoj književnosti i kazalištu. Gavella. Riječ i Prostor*, HAZU i Književni krug Split, Zagreb, Split, vol. 39, no 1, 2013, pp. 139-170.

The film will further insist upon such 'theatrical' settings – and that is perhaps why it was criticized for its 'stagey' manners – in which we will be able to watch Hannah Arendt either watching and listening to others, such as, in her youth (played by Friedericke Becht), during Martin Heidegger's (played by Klaus Pohl) lectures, or appearing as herself in her significant social worlds, acting as a unique person, thinking with her own mind and speaking with her own voice, whether these settings be private or public: in Heidegger's office, in her own home, talking with her husband Heinrich Blücher (played by Axel Milberg), with her friends in both New York and Jerusalem, as well as with her secretary, or lying on the couch and chain-smoking, not merely like Hannah Arendt in her real life, but, I would say, much more like the emblematic Brechtian philosopher spectator, who, while watching a play, prefers to light a cigar and contemplate from an analytical distance in order to acquire knowledge of the intricate background mechanisms of human dealings, rather than to be simply caught in the illusion of their representation.

As if to be placed in the position of an audience within the film itself, we watch Sukowa as Arendt teaching at the university, in two very important scenes of the film in which the protagonist is shown to be using her own figure at the lecture platform – the very physical presence of her own body – in front of an audience of students. The physical presence required by lectures will thus figure as a kind of secondary medium of her otherwise verbally transmitted intellectual process, the passion of which she realizes primarily in the characteristic gestures and vigorous movements around the lecturing space, as if carried away by the argument she makes. The director especially focuses on one member of the audience specifically, a female student watching and listening to Sukowa as Arendt in complete absorption and intellectual rapture, as if sharing the lecturer's thought process, just as Arendt herself had earlier been shown to have once watched and listened to Martin Heidegger, palpably profiting from the sense of closeness generated by the fact that during the lecture, the originator of an idea is allowed to voice that same idea in a conspicuously sensuous, incomparable, unique rhythm, tempo and intonation.

Many a critic disparaged the way Martin Heidegger was introduced into the film, but again, I do not think it was done for the mere reasons of biographical consistency: in contrast to Arendt's courageous outspokenness, in the film he is shown to

be not only walking, but also literally hiding in the woods,²⁶ and not only in front of his jealous wife – he had an affair with Hannah whom he secretly continued to meet even after their emotional break-up – but also hiding in front of the whole world, and pettily claiming that he is just a little boy – ‘*junge Knabe*’ – incapable of orienting himself in the political circumstances in which he became enmeshed by embracing the ideology of Nazi party. Reviewers found these scenes with Heidegger completely flawed – to be precise, ‘cringe inducing’²⁷ – but I think that the part of the film concerning the character of the intellectual whom many would call the greatest philosopher of the 20th century offered another chapter to the whole issue of what it truly means to think and act accordingly: as opposed to the mindless Eichmann, here we are shown a brilliant mind, developing brilliant theories of thinking as something, as the character of Heidegger in the film professes, “giving no immediate strength to act”. With all its marvelous contemporary resonances, refusing the instrumentality of university teachings in the current neoliberal agenda, that statement, at least within the historical and narrative context of Margarete von Trotta’s film, sounds like an all too transparent alibi for not being capable to turn one’s thinking into responsible acting.

These meta-theatrical, meta-cinematic and above all meta-spectating moments lead me now to what I see as feminist accents of the film, accents which in this case, in a true Brechtian manner, overflow the borders of cinematic illusion: we are given a film by a woman director, Margarete von Trotta, filming a script written by two women, Margarete von Trotta and Pam Katz, with the assistance of a camerawoman, Caroline Champetier, to whose camera eye Barbara Sukowa is playing, impersonating a woman philosopher whose thinking and acting in a public space not only inspires young women but is also inevitably perceived and understood, regardless of whether she herself caters to it or not, in connection to the fact that she is a woman. For the whole

²⁶ For a more thorough discussion of the historical background of these episodes and the significance of the scene representing ‘the walk in the woods’ as “the central image in Heidegger’s thought”, see Joel Rosenberg, “Into the woods. Eichmann, Heidegger, and Margarete von Trotta’s Hannah Arendt”, *Jewish Film and New Media*, 2, 2, 2014, pp. 201-216.

²⁷ Lilla, *Arendt and Eichmann*, cit. David Rieff used exactly the same qualification. See Rieff, “Hannah and her Admirers”, *The Nation*, 2013, <<https://www.thenation.com/article/hannah-and-her-admirers/>>.

controversy that Hannah Arendt stirred with her, as was stated, over-sophisticated coinage, the “banality of evil” – by which she designated an unprecedented, modern phenomenon of the normalization of evil – had a lot to do with the fact that it was uttered by a woman, and a woman of ideas for that matter. Before I corroborate my contentions with instances in the film that to my mind speak in favor of such an interpretation, let me just dispel any doubts regarding its controversial genealogy by first pointing to a study by Jennifer Ring, *The Political Consequences of Thinking, Gender and Judaism in the Work of Hannah Arendt*²⁸ in which one can find a nice analysis of the complex role Hannah Arendt’s gender played in the reception of her book on Eichmann among both European and American Jews, and second, to a study by Janis Bergman Carton, *The Woman of Ideas in French Art, 1830–1848*²⁹ which, although dealing with a very short period in the history of arts in the 19th century – a period however in which precisely the woman of ideas flourished with the rapid growth of the popular press – demonstrates equally well how the sight of a woman who thinks and writes or is politically engaged produced at the time a kind of iconographic scandal. The intellectual woman was namely either represented in caricatures as a ridiculous bluestocking, or as a sexually monstrous transvestite, or she was, in rare cases of idealization of feminine intellectuality – of suggestion that a woman can dispose of some kind of active interiority – allegorized in figures like Mary Magdalene, Sapho, and the like. Pictures by Henri Lehmann figure as rare reverent representations of female intellectual depth, but Bergman Carton is quick to inform us that the painter was fiercely attacked by Baudelaire himself for such iconographic choice and backward historical style.³⁰ It is also worth noting that in both these perspectives the woman of ideas was conceived of, according to Carton’s examples and findings, in sharp contradistinction to woman’s ‘natural’, maternal duties.

In Margarete von Trotta’s film – which should be understood against the background of such a tradition of iconographic misogyny, let alone cinematic manipulation of the male gaze – our attention is turned upon the fact that the primary sin attributed to Hannah Arendt was her cold, ironic and flippant tone, sneering and cynical, that is, her lack of feeling, her intellectual arrogance, which

²⁸ Jennifer Ring, *The Political Consequences of Thinking, Gender and Judaism in the Work of Hannah Arendt*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998.

²⁹ Janis Bergman Carton, *The Woman of Ideas in French Art, 1830–1848*, Yale University Press, New York, 1995.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 162.

all boils down to her lack of femininity. Suggestion of cynicism is a clear allusion to her lack of maternal instincts: in the film, we hear her very rational explanation of why she never became a mother – first because she was poor and then because she was too old – for which she is immediately scolded by Kurt Blumenfeld's wife, when Arendt pays a visit to her Zionist friend at his home in Jerusalem. Arendt also says explicitly that she would probably never have had such a tender relationship with her own daughter as she has with Lotte, her secretary (played by Julia Jentsch), who then adds with understanding that friends are people we choose to love freely. Pertaining to the context of mothering, the scene in which we see Martin Heidegger running to Arendt's student room and immersing his head into her lap is also significant, for it seems to be pointing to the need of all the '*junge Knaben*' – all the young boys who will soon be lost in political turmoil and turn into Nazi ideologues, or ideologues of any kind – for the protection of, or a return to, their mother's lap, even in situations of obvious sexual appetites. We are likewise made to read through Hannah Arendt's eyes the letter arriving to her from a neighbor that calls her a Nazi whore, just as women were called *Judenhure* by Nazis themselves. Her secretary Lotte reads, with her eyes full of tears, another enraged letter containing the description of Hannah Arendt's physical appearance as something exuding coldness, contempt and brutality, almost the same kind of monstrous evil that was thought to reside within Eichmann himself, and once again we are invited to make the correlation between the two figures, as social actors whose physical appearance was mercilessly exposed to the public eye and its irrational appetites, a correlation all the more scandalous since we know of the atrocities that Eichmann committed just as well as we have seen, in the film, the kindness, warmth and sensitivity with which Hannah Arendt treats human beings by whom she is surrounded, underlying her explicitly stated preference for individual friends, regardless of their political opinions and allegiances, and not for families, nations or other groups with which she is supposed to identify.

In this way, ambivalent analogies between Jewish and female identity politics are being drawn and it is through these analogies that we are made to understand both Hannah Arendt's and Margarete von Trotta's reluctance toward inducing any kind of all too easily made feminist identifications: just as Jews can easily turn their suffering into an ideology preventing them from thinking and judging soundly, so also any kind of advertising of identity politics risks not accounting for the unique circumstances of a

unique human being acting in a unique way and taking unique responsibilities, indeed, making a stake out of this very uniqueness of her own thinking and acting. I would therefore say that feminist aesthetics motivating von Trotta's choice of her collaborators, her focus on a woman's gaze, both within and outside the borders of her film, as well as her willingness to again make a film with a strong female protagonist, is extremely subtle and cautious: it points to the extent to which women are bound to be sensitive to this story, as strongly as it points to any dismissal of one's full and unique humanity for the sake of group identifications. Making us resist the interpretive moves to which Hannah Arendt's person was subjected to, during and after her lifetime, the film thus forces us to both acknowledge the feminist implications of her situation, and to abstain from identifying her primarily as a woman, as a female philosopher and political thinker.

But let me remind you once again that the fact that her works – the report on Eichmann in particular – acquired great fame does not in any way help one to grasp the stakes of her uniqueness, since, following her own rule of thumb, these works cannot answer for who she was, but rather for what she was. It is therefore crucial to perceive the reliance of the film on both the actress interpreting her life and on the documentary material featuring Eichmann, which provides a foil against which the audience will judge the protagonist's character, her own acting choices. As opposed to the person she strived to be – the person only engaged actresses like Barbara Sukowa can make meaningful for us – Adolf Eichmann was, as Arendt says in the movie to Kurt Blumenfeld, not a person, but a nobody. But a nobody is only one step away from everybody, and that is, I think, something a lot of film critics had difficulty swallowing, for we all prefer to think about the Holocaust as, to use one of the reviewer's formulation, 'unassimilable otherness': Hannah Arendt, however, thought that the evil enabling the Holocaust to happen was something that could start and flourish anywhere, an intrinsic possibility of everybody, to disregard human beings for the sake of an abstract cause, a phantasm of group identity, which forces its recruits to choose to be and to act as a nobody. As is well known, she ran from Germany only to be imprisoned by supposed friends, Frenchmen, and even in the USA where she found a heaven of democracy on earth, as she says to the students in the film, she is rejected by her best friends and forced to be afraid again that the hatred she generated through her independent thinking will expel her from the country as it once did from her native homeland.

A true summary of the entire film and the peak of its cinematic strategies, explicit and implicit arguments, is the six-minute performance by Barbara Sukowa delivering Hannah Arendt's final moving speech to the students, in a kind of, indeed, university *theatre*, at the moment in time outside the cinematic space in which, as Iris Van der Tuin justly points out,³¹ the very profession of scholar and university professor underwent an unforeseen moral, disciplinary, and financial crisis. It is during that scene that one can fully admire Sukowa's double *tour de force*, both as a stage actress and as a film actress who found the source of her artistic style in the study of a process of thinking in public, making the intensity of her thought be expressed by her body. Upon arriving at the lectern, she first asks for permission to smoke, as if she is asking permission to again think through, in the very midst of her corporeal exposure to the audience, her own particular reasons for the use of words that had stirred such public turmoil. In the auditorium, we once again watch the variety of responses within the audience she must confront: university bureaucracy filled with aspiring Jewish professors, her loyal but now offended, disgusted, and estranged friend Hans Jonas (played by Ulrich Noethen), her students amazed at the opportunity to now watch their professor answering for her deeds in public in the same way we as the empirical audience earlier saw Eichmann summoned to 'the courtroom dramatics' to answer for his former decisions and deeds.

Just as Arendt's professor and lover Heidegger whom we also previously saw lecturing to her while she was looking at him in awe, so now Arendt is shown drawing all her persuasive power to convince and enlist her students to her cause, especially the young woman that we noticed in the previous parallel situation, the one who will probably continue her professor's work with the same alignment of passion and intellectual clarity that the young Arendt pleaded for in the film while consulting with Heidegger. As if determined to accomplish the most difficult task of her life, Sukowa as Arendt starts reading and smoking, only to soon abandon her notes and dispose of her glasses, in order to move freely around the room and address her audience directly, to look at her detractors in return, boldly and honestly, to let her emphasis grow in a vocal crescendo while supporting her delivery by vehement gestures, even better to clarify the terms by which she framed the puzzling human disaster of the Holocaust,

³¹ Cf. Van der Tuin, *Making Time for Duration*, cit., pp. 187-199.

of the Jewish collaboration with the executioners both in the Ghetto and within the camps, and of Eichmann as the model of human abnegation of responsibility under totalitarian regimes, let alone of the way the current Israeli government handled the trial. I urge any one of you whom I have successfully convinced of the thoughtful design of this film to watch this last scene again, memorable insofar as it is a rather unique instance of an actress being given the opportunity to use her body in order to convey such immaterial entities as the stakes of moral philosophy, and to represent the very embodiment and vulnerability of the inevitably gendered and yet unique position from which one is bound to watch the world, to love it and to know it, and – to act accordingly.

Arendtian Concept of Judgment: Between Thinking and Acting?

Daša Duhaček

Summary

Contemporary feminism has – as has mainstream philosophy – juxtaposed and weighed the concepts of theory and practice, especially considering *feminist* theory in relation to *feminist* activism and vice versa. On the other hand, the political theory of Hannah Arendt has addressed these issues through a myriad of approaches, her concept of judging being one of the most challenging.

This text will use Arendt's political theory as a point of departure and analyze a possible feminist approach to the category of judgment as it may or may not be lodged within either thinking or acting; or, possibly, between them. It is my argument that, mainstream philosophy notwithstanding, Arendt herself did not see the relation between theory and practice as an (outstanding) problem of contention. What remains to be assessed is how does feminist theory interpret the category of judgment, given its potential to relate either to thinking or acting.

Staying unequivocally with Arendt's concept of the political – instead of responding to the immediate needs of the social – and, also, keeping a critical distance from identity politics, contemporary feminism (Linda Zerilli) claims that a freedom-centered concept of the political is worth the risk of losing the safety nets of maintaining any universal goals.

Hannah Arendt on Judgment

A possible point of departure in discussing judgment may be Hannah Arendt's last major work, published posthumously, entitled *Life of the Mind*. This work was to unfold what she also designated as *vita contemplativa*, but, importantly, she suggests that it can be viewed as a counterpart, or a work complementary

to her book *The Human Condition*, which she originally entitled *Vita Activa*.¹ It is a truism that Hannah Arendt devoted her life's work to drawing our attention to the significance of *vita activa*, and highlighting the kernel of the political – action. However, there was also another matter: “I had been concerned with the problem of Action, the oldest concern of political theory and what had always troubled me was that the very term I adopted for my reflections on the matter, namely *vita activa*, was coined by men who were devoted to contemplative life...”² Her work on the *Life of the Mind* was almost an intellectual debt that she felt an obligation to fulfill. It was to have three parts, Thinking, Willing and Judging, pertaining to the three mental activities. As is known Hannah Arendt died just as she finished the second part, on Willing and – other than two the epigraphs – she did not write any part of Judging. Nonetheless, while working on this part of *Life of the Mind*, she delivered and consequently wrote preparations for the *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, a text which has, for some time now, been a source of numerous interpretations for Arendt's category of judgment.³ Judgment, up to then, albeit certainly practiced, was not yet comprehensively or systematically theorized about in her texts.

Therefore, one of the venues of these interpretations is the question if the unwritten part on judging could have articulated arguments which would bring together *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* and bridge the gap that mainstream philosophy has, throughout its history, built between them. In that respect, to date, the concept of judgment is a place of contention, even to the extent that noted interpreters of Arendt consider it a significant challenge just “to throw a bit of cold water on the tendency among political theorists” to interpret Arendt's concept of judgment as the one which bridges the gap between thinking and acting.⁴

It is my argument that, regardless of her unequivocal, critical distancing – to say the least – from philosophy, as a metaphor of *vita contemplativa* and her focus on the political, Arendt herself did not see the relation between theory and practice as an

¹ Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, Part One, Harcourt Brace and Company, San Diego, 1977, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*

³ This text was a part of Arendt's preparation for teaching at the New School in 1970, just as the parts on Thinking and Willing were a prepared for the Gifford Lectures which she delivered in 1974.

⁴ Dana Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror. Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999, p. 88.

(outstanding) problem of contention, especially not as something that would form the configuration of her last book so as to present it in this dual structure: thinking as opposed to acting.

The topicality, the urgency in considering the concept of judgment is for Arendt elsewhere, i.e. in its defining element, namely, “judgment is one of the fundamental abilities of man as a *political* being”.⁵ This makes judging relevant for both, thinking and acting, i.e. for the actor and the spectator.

In explicating the category of judgment as relevant to the political Arendt invokes Kant. For Arendt, the point of departure is Kant’s *The Critique of Judgment* (once called the *Critique of Taste*). Judgment – that the analysis of thinking and willing were leading to – was, without a doubt, to be politically relevant. The fact that Kant’s category of judgment was deployed in aesthetics was no obstacle. Moreover, the category of judgment is developed in Kant’s *Critique* in such a way that the topics addressed are “all of them of eminent *political* significance”.⁶ Developing these politically relevant topics Hannah Arendt underscores other issues which provide the context of judgment: sociability of men,⁷ and, the problems stemming from focusing on the particular.⁸

In turn these two issues which Arendt highlights in introducing the process of judging lead to the significant conclusion about the judgment, namely its contingency, and, consequently, the space of freedom it necessitates. Arendt’s postulate that freedom is the *conditio per quam* of the political is the context in which the tension between thinking and acting should be placed.

Ideal of Certainty vs. a Defeated Cause

One of the first interpretations of Arendt’s incomplete theory of judgment was presented by Michael Denny, who had the advantage of being present at the lectures where it was articulated. He proceeded from the epigraphs found under the title ‘judgment’ in Hannah Arendt’s typewriter after her death, the first being Cicero’s dictum “The defeated cause pleases Cato,” and leads up to the core of the problem which presents

⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Crisis in Culture”, in H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin Books, New York, 1993, p. 221.

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989, p. 14.

⁷ Nota bene, Arendt’s use of the term men is to be understood precisely as she used it, i.e. as a generic term and not as gendered term.

⁸ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant*, cit., p. 14.

itself in “the tendency in philosophical ethics that allows one, having proved evil is conceptually impossible or that theft is a contradiction in terms, to disregard the fact that people continue to go around murdering and robbing each other”.⁹ Denny captures here what Linda Zerilli much later expands on, in order to argue that, “[a]t stake in the kind of judgment that is relevant to politics is not knowledge, but *understanding*...”.¹⁰

Highlighting her argument Zerilli states that “each *thinker* casts the entire *political* problem of judgment as an epistemological problem ... that can only be solved by philosophy and the search for first principles” and adds that it is critical to resist “the framing of a political problem of judgment in epistemological terms”.¹¹

However, most interpretations of Arendtian judgment could not be satisfied with Cato’s pleasures with defeated causes; they appear to be closer to the ideals of philosophers still glued to Hegel and that strain of German idealism in general, of whom Hannah Arendt had to say: “Pursuing the Cartesian ideal of certainty as though Kant had never existed, they believed in all earnest that the results of their speculations possessed the same kind of validity as the results of cognitive processes”.¹²

Two Elements: Judging on the Particular and Sociability

At stake here is the political as Arendt conceptualized it and there the category of judgment plays an important part. As said, one of the key perspectives from which ‘the affairs of men’ are to be considered is that “we have men *in the plural*, who actually are in the center of our considerations and whose true ‘end’ is, ... *sociability*”.¹³ It is the sociability and communicability of men which makes the appearance of the political possible and thus creates the spaces where the beautiful or the miracles of political action can be judged.

This communicability (of judgments of taste) is “*conditio sine qua non* for the *existence* of beautiful objects” because “the *judgment* of the spectator *creates the space* without which no such object could appear at all”. Furthermore “the very originality of the artist (or

⁹ Michael Denney, “The Privilege of Ourselves: Hannah Arendt on Judgment”, in Melvyn Hill (ed.), *Hannah Arendt. The Recovery of the Public World*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1979, p. 263.

¹⁰ Linda Zerilli, “‘We Feel Our Freedom’. Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt”, *Political Theory*, 33, 2005, p. 162 (emphasis added).

¹¹ Linda Zerilli, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Judgment”, *Signs*, 34, 2, 2009, p. 304, p. 306.

¹² Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, cit., p. 16.

¹³ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant*, p. 26.

the novelty of the actor) depends on making himself *understood* by those who are not artists (or actors)".¹⁴

The difficulty arises not when the universal (rule or a principle) is given; this would make the process of judging *determined* by subsuming the particular under the universal. "If however only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it, then the judgment is simply *reflective*".¹⁵ Moreover, "judgment in general is the faculty of thinking the particular".¹⁶

What follows is that validity in traditional epistemological terms is not the primary concern for Arendt. But even more importantly, it is not to be considered to be the primary concern for her concept of the political either. Moreover, Arendt opts for the 'defeated cause' rather than for the 'ideal of certainty'.

Some of the noted interpreters of Arendt's political theory "do not think that Arendt ever gave a *fully satisfactory* answer to the questions she raised about the relations of thinking and evil".¹⁷ It was never Arendt's intention to *convince or provide a fully satisfactory* answer the complex problem of relating thinking to (moral) judgment (of evil). Moreover, following from her distancing from the ideal of certainty, it would be self contradictory to give a fully expanded answer. What Bernstein, as well as Seyla Benhabib, see as a missing closure with an impasse of Arendt's theory, is an acute awareness of the problem that could not be resolved without compromising the issue of judgment on the crux of its key points, judging particularity and plurality of human beings.

The conclusion that cognitive validity was not the primary concern, but that it is political validity makes it easier to address the apparent juxtaposition of actor vs. spectator.

Spectator and Actor/Thinking and Acting

In one of the main interpretations of the category of judgment, that is often used as a point of departure and has hence almost become a standard, Ronald Beiner points out that the category of judgment is in Arendt's work unfolded either as a faculty of a political actor, or as a capacity of a spectator.¹⁸ Arendt has

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 63 (emphasis added).

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969, p. 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 171 (emphasis added).

¹⁸ Ronald Beiner, "Interpretative Essay", in Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant*, cit., p. 92.

introduced the category of judgment by attributing it to both the actor and the spectator, which, as Beiner and many other interpreters have noted, has been uneven.

Namely, in one of her earlier texts on the subject of judgment, *Crisis in Culture* Arendt, underscores that judgment is relevant to the realm of the political: “the faculty of judgment in its proper perspective ... implies a *political rather than a merely theoretical activity*”.¹⁹ Not only does Arendt in her early writing on this issue highlight judging as a political activity, and focus is therefore on the actor, but she also prioritizes the political. In her later work she analyzed judgment with a decisive emphasis on the decision making process, or judging, of a spectator and while fulfilling her debt to *vita contemplativa*, she appears to be privileging the spectator.

Lisa J. Disch, a feminist theorist, claims that “dilemma of spectatorship versus [political] membership on the judgment writings” was imposed and is in fact not consistent with Arendt’s main line of argument.²⁰ We may translate the terminology which Lisa J. Disch uses and in a faculty of thinking see spectatorship and, in political membership, an exemplary actor.

Both, the actor and the spectator exercise the faculty of judging under the condition of plurality which is, at the same time *conditio humana*, and *conditio per quam* of the political. And most importantly, within this understanding of the category of judgment there is a potential, a possibility to dispense with a dilemma of acting *versus* thinking.

Arendt’s *Lectures in Kant’s Political Philosophy* almost entirely revolve around the position of the spectator, the onlooker. This shift in emphasis, however, was not of primary concern to Arendt. What she considered her primary task is to construct the parameters of judgment so that it may reflect all the complexities *irrelevant of where it is to be deployed*, action or spectatorship, politics or storytelling, present or past. The fact that judgment was more thoroughly treated as the judgment of the spectator rather than the actor may be attributed to a number of things, ranging from the obvious fact, that Arendt did not finish her work on the subject, to the more subtle issue, that certain points in dealing with judgment could have been held to be more controversial when approaching the judgment of the spectator than that of the actor; the most notable being the plurality of men.

¹⁹ Arendt, *Crisis in Culture*, cit., p. 2019.

²⁰ Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1994, p. 143.

The category of judgment has significance throughout the times of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Life of the Mind* and although there is shift in emphasis the meanings are complementary and *not* contradictory.

It is feminist theory, or better said, theory inflected by feminism that has fully taken this into account.

Contemporary Feminism on Judgment

Feminism has serious reasons to be invested into the concept of judging, especially in considering the potential of an Arendtian concept of judging since it is a political judgment which is here at stake. Although Hannah Arendt's political theory has been in the focus of many feminist theorists, not many of them have in fact confronted the problem of judgment.

Some of the earlier interpretations did point towards this direction. Lisa Jane Disch, using as a point of departure the Arendtian approach of storytelling, leads up to unfolding the category of judgment, as distinct from thinking.²¹ Judging demands plurality – and this is precisely why it is politically relevant – whereas thinking is a solitary business. L. J. Disch considers that a critical stance towards mainstream philosophical tradition is very important, a stance which Arendt also develops throughout her work. Seyla Benhabib shares in this sharp distinction between thinking and judging – moreover she detects and builds a tension between these two faculties of the mind.²² However, Disch and Benhabib differ in assessing Arendt's critical stance toward (mainstream) philosophy – as opposed to Disch, this critical stance often meets with a disapproval of Seyla Benhabib.

A somewhat different position is more successfully established in the way Judith Butler built the political theory of Hannah Arendt in her more recent work. While developing the issues of the end of the nation-state, of sovereignty, and cohabitation, Judith Butler unfolded the category of judgment against the backdrop of a whole set of political problems, from politics of Israel to the Eichmann trial. Her question brings thinking and judging closer, when she asks, “is thinking in Arendt's sense always an exercise in judgment of some kind... ?”²³

²¹ Disch, *Hannah Arendt*, cit., p. 167.

²² Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 1996, p. 192.

²³ Judith Butler, *Parting Ways. Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2012, p. 155.

The work of Linda Zerilli is a step forward in clarifying the significance of judging. Linda Zerilli has used as a point of departure what she has chosen to name as a freedom centered feminism. Her unfolding of this concept –freedom centered feminism – first addresses feminisms where, she claims that issues other than freedom were in the forefront, such as the question of the social or the question of the subject (especially as articulated) in identity politics. Although she recognizes the legitimacy of these issues she is also critical of the way they overflowed and threatened to drown/sink the feminist scene.

Since her analyses are focused on building the concept of freedom centered feminism, this almost unavoidably leads up to the category of judgment. And, the category of judgment is analyzed within the framework of Arendt's political theory, or, more precisely, Arendt's concept of the political. Instead of responding to the immediate and ever present needs of the social and framing all struggles based on identity politics with a never ending series of exclusions which always ends "with an embarrassing etc"²⁴ of 'wounded' identities,²⁵ Zerilli withdraws all of these safety nets woven into the feminist concepts of the political. The seductive element of these concepts holds a promise of reaching a final goal, an ultimate purpose. As opposed to this Zerilli presents the need for creating a *space*, ruled only by the principle of freedom and thus open for the potential appearance of judgments.

So, a response to the question "[w]hy is it [the faculty of judgment] important to freedom-centered feminism?"²⁶ is a fundamental reason that judgment has the potential to respond to the requirement of addressing the appearance of the new, or "[w]henver we are confronted with something frighteningly new..."²⁷ when we cannot fall back on the presupposed certainty of concepts already present.

Judgment aspiring to *political* validity, is distinct from Kant's determinate judgment, which is a statement on the particular subsumed under a universal. It is not grounded in preconceived concepts, and it therefore does not necessarily rely on the logical;

²⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, New York, 1990, p. 143.

²⁵ Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments", in Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995, pp. 52-76.

²⁶ Linda Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005, p. 127.

²⁷ Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics", in Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Essays in Understanding*, Harcourt Brace and Company, New York, 1994, p. 325.

moreover it exceeds the constraints of the cognitive processes since it is not based on preexisting knowledge.²⁸ What is at stake here is to come to terms with the unexpected, the new, which Arendt's actor has to confront, first in order to understand, and then following that reflection, to act. This is why also, "[f]or freedom-centered feminists ... 'the problem of the new' is more than an *epistemological* question The problem of the new is a *political* question..."²⁹ Leaving aside the evident placement and prioritizing of the political in relation to the epistemological, judging is a process which concerns the particular, but does not have the firm ground or the stable framework or the safety net of the universal. "Rules are like a mental crutch to which we cling for fear of not being able to understand or judge at all".³⁰ This safety net, in the face 'frighteningly new' offers false hope and no safety. Therefore the criteria of the (standard) objectivity do not apply.

Using Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Arendt – opposing his model of determinate judgment (from the universal to the particular) – turns to the Kantian concept of the reflective judgment and uses his aesthetics to construct the parameters of what she proposes a *politically* relevant judgment should be. What Zerilli draws out and presents is Arendtian judgment as a *process*. The issue to be addressed becomes less and less a fixed category of judgment and becomes a process of judging. We return here to the initial formulation of the judging faculty as an activity. This activity not only builds, but also sustains the space of political action. Moreover, this process is a continual, sustained, thoughtful, painstaking process of building a *space* based on human plurality, where only the possibility of judging in freedom is protected – as well as threatened.

This process is also very much based on what Arendt designates as representative thinking, formulated in Kantian terminology as "an enlarged mentality".³¹ In her interpretation, "that the capacity to judge is a specifically political ability in exactly the sense denoted by Kant, namely the ability to see things not only from one's own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present".³² However, Arendt is precise to state that "this is neither a question of empathy ... nor of joining a

²⁸ Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss*, cit., p. 128.

²⁹ *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

³⁰ Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss*, cit., p. 219, n. 6.

³¹ Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, cit., p. 19.

³² Arendt, *Crisis in Culture*, cit., p. 221.

majority".³³ What is stake here is not the identity of any separate group nor a particular social stratum, but the common world, or "the difference between understanding another *person* and understanding the *world*".³⁴ And what is needed is imagination or, more precisely "training one's imagination to go visiting".³⁵ Consequently political judgment can only appear in such a space, which is also the space of acknowledgment.³⁶

Judgment therefore is not a bridge between thinking and acting, because if one acts in a *politically* relevant way, then it cannot be other than thoughtful (as opposed to thoughtless), and vice versa, thinking is, in and of itself, a political act. Furthermore, this means that no single reflection aspiring to be a (political) judgment can be instrumentalized, used, or in the function of any cause.³⁷ It can never be a means toward any end. It is contingent, because it is freedom-centered. This entails a risk, taken as a part of, and underlying any (political) action. Therefore, judgment as a human faculty is not confined, restricted, limited to either the spectator or the actor.

However, Hannah Arendt, especially in her later texts, does appear to privilege judgment of the spectator: "The advantage the spectator has is that he sees the play as a whole, while each of the actors knows only his part, or if he should judge from the perspective of acting, only the part of the whole that concerns him. The actor is partial by definition".³⁸ In fact there is no such advantageous position as that of the spectator, because this artificially built position exists only in the imagination of the theorist, inasmuch as all the would-be-spectators are in fact on the stage, and they are acting their part, whether they acknowledge it or not. Moreover, the play Arendt has in mind is more or less the same one which Benhabib invokes when she asks "If we are no more than the sum total of expressions we perform, is there ever any chance to stop the performance for a while, to pull the curtain down and let it rise only if one can have a say in the production of the play itself?".³⁹

³³ Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics", in *Between Past and Future*, cit., p. 241.

³⁴ Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss*, cit., p. 150 (emphasis in the original).

³⁵ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant*, cit., p. 43.

³⁶ Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss*, cit., p. 158.

³⁷ Dana Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror. Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999, p. 89.

³⁸ Arendt, *Lectures on Kant*, cit., pp. 68-69.

³⁹ Seyla Benhabib, "Feminism and Postmodernism. An Uneasy Alliance", in S. Benhabib et al. (eds.), *Feminist Contentions*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 21.

Arendt is not building a privileged position of the proverbial/metaphorical spectator who attends the Olympian Games in order to see/watch (*theorien*), and is therefore neither a philosopher; nor is she 'a partial actor' juxtaposed against this spectator who has the advantage of seeing 'the play as a whole'. Her concern is building a space of action.

Although not focusing on the roles of either the spectator or the actor *per se*, but on the kernel of the political judgment, Zerilli maintains that "[t]he spectator is the one who, through the use of imagination, can reflect the whole in a disinterested manner, that is, a manner free not simply from private interest but from interest *tout court*..."⁴⁰ Is the position of the spectator a privileged position, especially since in relation to *vita contemplativa*, *vita activa*, (political) action is – or should be – in Arendt's world a privileged human activity? Zerilli also maintains that this position is "achieved ... when I look at the world from multiple standpoints ... to which I am always something of an outsider and also something of an outsider to myself *as an acting being*".⁴¹

Thinking *versus* acting is a crude distinction which does not do justice to Arendt's fine tuning, but it does follow the general ambiguity of feminist, as well as mainstream philosophical – traditional and contemporary – split, a rift artificially built. But, as a spectator *and* as an actor I am one. The point of (analytically) separating one from the other appears as tearing apart a single being (indeed, placed in the web of human plurality) in order to underline the 'thinking business', solitary as it may appear at first glance, so as to underscore that the process reflection for the faculty of judging is – or should be – part and parcel of any political action. Otherwise we face thoughtlessness.

The spectator, whose position in rendering judgment may be regarded as privileged in relation to the actor, is only privileged in terms of temporality, because the only aspect of being solitary is the personal/individual responsibility (and/or guilt) for the act one has committed. Reflection allows for hindsight, we perceive of the whole, which this different temporal positioning allows for. The supposed rift, the gap, the in – between thinking and acting, often perceived by mainstream philosophy, may have called for a false dilemma which then in turn required a bridge construed by judging between them. They are not two distinct processes, but they may appear and become distinct if temporally placed:

⁴⁰ Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss*, cit., p. 158.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 150.

namely, one is judging *in* the present, or one may be judging *on* the past, or, one may be judging *about* the future. Thereby these processes become distinct, since one cannot judge *in* the past or *in* the future.

The issue of time, the temporality of judging as a process is missing. Here Arendt's own constant framing within time (and space) parameters should be considered, which even she does not always do. Namely, what Arendt or her interpreters perceive and isolate from the time framework and designate as a position of the spectator is a position of privilege in terms of the temporality of judging and it is turned to the past. However when turning to the future, the position may become slippery, interchangeable between actor and spectator. It is only the present which is undoubtedly always already the position of the actor, but the position which does not exclude *theorien* – this privilege is severely constricted by time and often even lost, devoured by it. Only the difficult, sometimes unbearable, position of the actor is what drives some to construct the (ivory) tower of spectatorship.

To conclude: since feminism is inextricably entangled with political act(ivism) to the extent that the political is the *sine qua non* of its very existence, judgment, conceptualized precisely as discussed, has the power to become “central feature of critical feminist political practice”⁴² as well as the central feature of any critical political practice.

⁴² Linda Zerilli, “Toward a Feminist Theory of Judgment”, *Signs*, 34, 2, 2009, p. 297.

The Abject Body: Feminist Approaches to Hannah Arendt's Philosophy in Julia Kristeva, Linda M. G. Zerilli, and Judith Butler

Iva Rogulja Praštalo

Summary

Starting from the fact that Hannah Arendt did not elaborate much on the problem of the body and on its role in the process of forming the political, Julia Kristeva, Linda M. G. Zerilli and Judith Butler tried to reconstruct her view on that topic. The authors claim that the dominant public discourse, almost always represses the body, ascribing it to the same adjective of 'abject'. While Zerilli focuses on the violent nature of the law dividing the private from the public and the body from the political, Kristeva points out that the bond between the body and speech is too strong to be questioned, so the body cannot be condemned only to the private sphere; embracing the terminology, Butler also addresses the 'abject body', saying that it refers to any body which defies the imposed ideal: the white, male, heterosexual body.

Even a casual glance at contemporary political and social situation reveals how important and urgent it is to act in terms of feminist agenda. Once an optimistic and bright future that offered us dreams of stabilizing women's rights and achieving synergy within a healthy sisterhood slowly got replaced by (once again) a misogynistic current world of renewed patriarchy and conservatism. Thanks to a number of conservative parties and their harsh campaigns, fundamental women's human rights such as the right to live free from violence or a right to decide if and when a woman has children have become debating points. In a society in which a highly respected member of the largest religious group decidedly (and without any legal or moral consequences)

states that a woman is 'secondary', in a relation to a man, it is hard not to be anxious about the future. However, one has to wonder what lies in the foundations of this never-ending nonsense? What is the first, most obvious difference between a man and a woman? Certainly, it is a body, unpleasant and detachable little package that 'houses' our mind and attracts prejudices. The question of its role in the unfavourable positioning of a female subject attracts the attention of four philosophers mentioned in this essay: Hannah Arendt, Julia Kristeva, Linda M. G. Zerilli and Judith Butler.

By differentiating between the two dimensions of human identity, formulated as a question of *what* a human being is and *who* it is, Hannah Arendt's political theory introduces two strictly divided spheres: the private and the public. While a mere glance at the physical aspect of the body can answer a subject's question about what s/he is (human being belonging to one of the two sexes), the question of who s/he is will remain unanswered as long as the subject remains within the imaginary walls of her/his solitude. A prerequisite for resolving the problem of one's 'who' is to step into the public sphere of the political that is constituted by the act of common acting and speaking. Furthermore, the ability to act and speak within the community presupposes a certain plurality: the presence of others who will observe and witness our words and deeds, and who will also become observed by us. It is only in such an environment that our life can be narrated and that the identity of one's 'who' can be partially revealed to a subject and its community.

However, the public sphere is not equally available to everybody – as Arendt points out, in the ancient Greek society women and slaves did not possess the right to vote, and, therefore, were limited merely to a body and to the sphere of strict privacy. In an analogy with Aristotle's theory that says that one's soul can never be exposed to the view of others, Hannah Arendt states that the body must be common and apolitical, and can, thus, have only two functions: production and procreation. The body is, in her view, something that is given, that should be accepted as it is, while its sole function in the sphere of the political is to partake in the constitution of plurality as one of the 'human conditions'.

Feminist criticism detects the weak spot of Arendt's theory at this exact point. It remains unclear why would a female philosopher, who must have experienced the political and social consequences of being a female, so strongly defend theses that one's gender is politically irrelevant and that each body is equally apolitical. Starting from the question of whether Arendt's

unwillingness to talk about the body (or deliberate diminishing of its relevance) is symptomatic of her view on feminism, female theorists have for decades been searching for something that Zerilli calls the 'Arendtian body'. The term 'abjection of the body' will, therefore, unite all three theorists: talking about the maternal body, Kristeva draws attention to the repressive nature of a dominant, symbolic discourse that will, by suppressing the semiotic part of language, subdue the primal drives which are inseparable from the (maternal) body; Zerilli points out at the violent nature of the law which divides the private from the public, i.e., the body from the polis, resulting in undisguised fear of corporeality; Butler, on her part, notes that even the gender and the sex of a newborn are the results of the so-called naturalizing trick conducted by the dominant discourse: every deviation of (unreal) social scripts results in a sense of abjection towards the body. My comparative analysis of these interpretations of Arendt's political theory, organized in three sections, tries to reconstruct her genuine stand towards the body, determining whether it is applicable to the modern notion of the body's importance.

Julia Kristeva – the Semiotic, Maternal Body

Starting with the question of what motivates the subject to step into the public sphere, why s/he needs others, and what s/he is like before the interaction with the society, Julia Kristeva concludes that, within every need for communication, there is an aspiration for exchanging one's opinion with others. Sharing our thoughts with others, comparing our points of view and joint evaluation of other people's actions represents a prerequisite for creating a social web, that is, Arendt's 'sphere of the political'. What is, indeed, the meaning of the words *thought* and *thinking* after all? Referring to Kant's theory, Arendt points out that, before stating anything, the subject needs to have a thought about it, a judgment based on "taste as the faculty of distinguishing, of discriminating between pleasure and displeasure".¹ Therefore, in order to have an ability to speak, the subject needs to have a body whose sense of pleasure defines her taste and indirectly her judgment as well. In that close link between the two senses (pleasure and displeasure) essential for the formation of taste/judgment, and the body, Kristeva detects the biggest puzzle of Arendt's political theory. Freeing one's thought of its solipsism and its entrance into

¹ Cf. Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt. Life is a Narrative*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2001, p. 67.

the sphere of public thinking is linked, quite paradoxically, to the “only thing we cannot share”² the body. Therefore, the body becomes a paradigm of private property. If the main prerequisite of entering the public is the pronouncement of a judgment based on physical pleasure or displeasure, how could the body remain as apolitical as Arendt requires it to be? Without the body, would we have anything to talk about, anything to act upon? What is the true nature of relation between the public/political and the body?

Arendt considers the body to be nothing more than a constitutive element of plurality – her femininity is, as she sees it, something that is “irrefutably given”³ and therefore (just like Arendt’s Judaism) cannot and should not be brought into question. In a quite contrary reasoning, Julia Kristeva sees the sex of the (female) body as the main reason for its social isolation, which she ascribes to the repressive nature of the public discourse. Embracing Lacan’s differentiation between the symbolic and the semiotic dimension of the language, Kristeva speaks of a phallogocentric symbolic law of the father which fears the mother-defined-femininity closely linked to the semiotic.

The first dimension of the language is, of course, the realm of structured public thinking, ‘understandable’ speech – in which a phallus has the privileged role,⁴ and the law of the father dictates all interpersonal relations – while the other dimension is focused on the body and the complex relationship between the mother and the newborn who has not entered the realm of language yet. The pronunciation of first meaningful words will certainly widen the child’s social circle – apart from the mother, his/her verbal experiment will now be available and intelligible to other members of the community. Therefore, the child’s role in the society grows proportional to the development of his or her ability to speak. However, stepping into language, society and the political is always accompanied by some degree of trauma. In order to attain *who* that will match *what*, the child has to differentiate from the general ‘human’, and undergo a process of individualization, the separation from the mother, and the formation of his or her singular identity. This seemingly natural and painless process is, indeed, says Kristeva, extremely repressive and violent, especially in relation to the body. A symbiotic link between the mother and

² Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, cit., p. 67.

³ Ivi, p. 69.

⁴ Kathleen Lennon, “Feminist Perspectives on the Body”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2010. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/feminist-body/>> (05/2014).

her unborn child will, from the moment of birth, slowly move towards its inevitable end – the well-known dichotomy between nature and culture imprints its marks on every single body and reminds us that our stepping into civilization, accepting culture, the symbolic and language necessarily brings along a breakdown of our link to nature, primal drives, the body and the maternal. Is that abruption always equally successful? Can the body be disciplined without severe consequences? Kristeva's answer lays within the term 'abject body':

When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it.⁵

A similar reaction is evoked by a glance at clipped nails, excrement, or an open wound – proofs that a restrained and repressed body defies the discipline forced upon it, warning us that the limit between us and the others, the private and the public, is amazingly thin and permeable. By refusing to drink the offered milk, the subject consciously questions (and undermines) parental authority, and forms its own identity, but also loses control over its body while its repulsion of food is operated by the unconscious. By rejecting the imposed milk skin, the subject strengthens the link between itself and the Other (parent), but, at the same time, rejects that which is not Other to him – food. Rejecting the food will, hence, result in the subject's (un)conscious rejection of itself, even if that means its own death.

However, the amount of abjection varies depending on the sex of the body. The pre-symbolic maternal body presents greater danger than the male body, while it bears greater abjective potential. The body that bleeds monthly (although its skin, the border between the outer world and the body, is not damaged) provokes double discomfort – not only does the impurity⁶ emerge in regular cycles and flow uncontrollably *from* the female

⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Moći užasa. Oglad o zazornosti*, Naprijed, Zagreb, 1989, p. 9.

⁶ Kristeva alludes to a historical link between menstrual blood and impurity, that is an interpretation of the menstrual cycle as a period of *monthly cleansing* during which women in underdeveloped societies succumb to a variety of special rules of behavior.

body, but it also passes through the same hidden gap through which all human beings have to pass in the act of birth. Hence, every subject, by the act of birth, has become impure, and the battle against the body is lost at the moment it starts. The mother's fertile body becomes the strongest reminder of how futile the struggle against the body really is – relevance of the body as the main prerequisite of our existence cannot be diminished. "Archaic fear of the mother is basically fear of her ability to give birth";⁷ an ability which the male sex, due to its biological structure, cannot develop; consequently, 'mother' and 'maternal' are to be devaluated and placed away from reason, logic and culture.

To the semiotic maternal body, in constant opposition to the symbolic, the newborn will present an opportunity to reaffirm its status in the field of culture and language, but that sort of transition would (even if it were possible) result in the further tightening of the bond between the mother and the child, and hence complete the child's inability to emancipate itself from its mother. The literal cutting of the umbilical cord must therefore, be followed by the symbolic emancipation of a new human being by way of stepping into the realm of language, that is, the rejection of the mother's body, and of the body in general, as abject and unwanted.

Paradoxically, the body reaches its ultimate abjective power at the moment of its death, for nothing is as abject as a corpse. The corpse, as a material deprived of any spiritual substance, is the sole body without the soul, and will therefore produce the strongest sense of repulsion – it will remind us that the body is, in spite of our efforts to dominate it, capable of trespassing the border between life and death, and of 'winning' by returning to the realm of the semiotic and indescribable to language.

However, there are other, less fatal, means of freeing the semiotic potential of the body. According to Kristeva, a woman can choose between two allowable actions: writing poetry and becoming a mother. While the latter postpones the abject effect of the body (for the female body will be glorified only as long as it serves its reproductive purpose), poetry will result in the subject's final defeat. Embracing the semiotic 'babbling', based on sound and rhythm rather than on meaning, re-establishes the primal symbiosis between the mother and the child and annihilates the process of subject's differentiation and individualization. Therefore, writing (and reading) poetry gradually pushes the subject toward psychosis.

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Moči užasa*, cit., p. 91.

Although coherent and interesting, Kristeva's theory of the body as a place of battle between the symbolic and the semiotic, the mother-like and the law of the father, reproduces the repression that it tries to demonstrate. Moreover, she strengthens the problematic dichotomy between male and female as cultural and natural, or intellectual and instinctive. Furthermore, by imposing motherhood and the semiotic as immanent to femininity, she re-establishes gender boundaries and resurrects the 19th century classification of hysteria as a primarily female illness. Another 'female' illness closely linked to the body emerges in the 20th and 21st century – it is called anorexia.

While the first one illustrates "rebellion against linguistic and cultural rules of the father, as well as returning to a 'maternal language', that is semiotic babbling of a newborn",⁸ the second one focuses on disciplining the body. By refusing to eat, the anorexic will, as Bordo points out, seemingly gains control over her body and, at the same time, diminishes 'unwelcome' maternal attributes such as fertility. An androgynous body deprived of female visual tributes (sometimes even of abject menstruation) becomes very similar to Michel Foucault's *useful body*⁹ – however, the body's subversive power will always remain merely a potential one. Protest against the cultural repression of the body will, sadly, often remain only unconscious – a 'restrained' body may, in theory, revoke power and equality to male subject, but it will, in truth, become weak, fragile and impotent, that is, equivalent to an ideal imposed by the phallogocentric discourse.

Linda M. G. Zerilli – Sacred and Hidden Corporeality

Arendt's elusion of the body intrigued American theorist Linda M. G. Zerilli as well. Yet, she interprets it as a deliberate undermining of the social distinction between the two genders, pointing out that Arendt herself said: "I have never pretended to be anything else or to be in any way other than I am, and I never even felt tempted in that direction. It would be like saying that I was a man and not a woman – that is to say, kind of insane".¹⁰

⁸ Susan Bordo, "Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body", in Vincent B. Leitch (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York and London, 2001, pp. 2362-2376.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage books, New York, 1977, p. 136.

¹⁰ Arendt cited in Linda M. G. Zerilli, "The Arendtian Body", in Bonnie Honig (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, The Pennsylvania State University, 1995, pp. 167-188, p. 170.

Speaking of the body and of its two functions of procreation and production, Arendt mostly concentrates on the sense of physical pain, an experience for which the gender distinction is completely irrelevant. Extreme and unbearable pain, says Zerilli, alienates the body from the public sphere, and condemns it to a private sphere “for nothing, by the same token, ejects one more radically from the world than exclusive concentration upon the body’s life, a concentration forced upon man in slavery or in the extremity of unbearable pain”.¹¹ A sense which, due to its specific nature, cannot be shared with others, places the body in the sphere of the private, usually described as hidden and sacred. What exactly is happening in the privacy of the body that makes it sacred? Primarily two actions, which remain hidden not only from the public but from the subject himself – birth and death. None of us knows where we were before our birth, the same way we cannot know where we go after we die. The mystery of the two ultimate points of human existence has been incorporated by ancient Greeks into the most important and long-lived antique cult of the Eleusinian Mysteries through which Greek culture speaks about birth, fertility and afterlife:

Eleusinian Mysteries provided for a common and quasi-public experience of this whole realm, which, because of its very nature and even though it was common to all, needed to be hidden, kept secret from the public realm: Everybody could participate in them, but nobody was permitted to talk about them. The mysteries concerned the unspeakable, and experiences beyond speech were non-political and perhaps antipolitical by definition, where the initiated is said to know “the end of life and the Zeus-given beginning”.¹²

The rites in which “everybody was permitted to participate, but none was allowed to talk about”¹³ evoked the myth of Demeter, the goddess of fertility, and her daughter Persephone,¹⁴ whose abduction resulted in the creation of the four seasons of the year.¹⁵ Yet, Arendt chose to link the creation of the world to

¹¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, cit., p. 112.

¹² Ivi, p. 63, n. 61. The internal quotation (“the end of life and Zeus-given beginning”) is from the ancient Greek lyric poet Pindar.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ The Roman version of her name is *Persephone* but mythology often refers to her as *Kore* (daughter) which is pronounced very similar to *Khora* (maternal principle in Julia Kristeva’s theory).

¹⁵ Karl Kerenyi, *Eleuzinski misteriji*, Vuković and Runjić, Zagreb, 2013.

– Zeus! Pindar’s syntagm ‘Zeus-given beginning’, adopted by Arendt,¹⁶ is considered by Zerilli as symptomatic and it raises the question whether an unfavorable position of the body is linked to its gender, fertility, motherhood and femininity. Although this statement is doubtful, indeed, the female body has a bigger disruptive potential for its biological nature which suggests that it knows (or at least might know) more about the moment of birth. Therefore, its subversive potential must be suppressed by proclaiming it undesirable, dangerous and abject.

Although “the sex of the body is a public secret”,¹⁷ it must remain hidden while the body is banished from the world by a strict and repressive law which “represents a wall dividing mother from others and precluding any access to her”.¹⁸ Repeating the thesis of Kristeva, Zerilli claims that the cession to the body and its semiotic drives results in a radical alienation from the world, and a step into the psychotic. At the same time, the rejection of the body will have the same effect because no matter how premeditated thoughts and deeds might be, they are inseparable from the body and its drives.

However, the wall created by a repressive law, a wall which the subject strives to tear down, is not completely negative. Drive-regulated action creates “a complex web of actions and words”¹⁹ between people, so there must be a physical interspace which combines them as a virtual wall of collectiveness. Paradoxically, action directed towards breaking of boundaries needs the same boundaries for its survival, in the sense that they provide the plurality of perspectives needed for answering the question of who one is.

Speaking of plurality, both Arendt and Zerilli point out the problem of modern society and its inclination towards hyper-liberalization and the elimination of repressive walls. Breaking taboos and prohibitions liberates our body from the enforced boundaries of gender, sex, nationality, etc., still, relief is only temporary; it gives the subject a false sense of belonging to a community, while actually condemning it to something that Arendt calls “subjectivity of one’s own singular experience”.²⁰ In that state, the identification of one’s ‘who’ becomes impossible due to the fact that it becomes uncertain whether there is a subject to whom that ‘who’ can be ascribed.

¹⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, cit., p. 63, n. 61.

¹⁷ Zerilli, *The Arendtian Body*, cit., p. 178.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 183.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The solution is, therefore, a compromise – instead of eliminating boundaries, we should re-inscribe them with the imperative of permeability. The body coming out of isolation – “the dungeon of subjectivity”²¹ – can blur the boundaries of its sex (even to the point of being almost unrecognizable), but it must keep, at least, one referent point of its self.

In a modern society that aspires to massiveness, the repression of the body reaches new levels of articulation. While the past centuries censured the body, hiding it from public view (and subjecting it to the sometimes-insane dictates of the fashion, which made the body dependent on others),²² nowadays society ‘fights’ the body with creativity. Instead of hiding it, modern society hyper-represents the body to the point of diminishing its relevance. Seductive and naked (mostly female) bodies call out to us from billboards and commercials; sexualized public figures set the approved model for imitation; the idyllic body of the fertile mother assures us that the modern society has embraced and glorified fertility. Is it really so?

Fertility and motherhood, attributes of the body responsible for its formerly repressed position, have nowadays (thanks to a reversion of strategy) become tools of an even stronger repression. Fearful supremacy of the mother’s body which is, along with the other abject potentials of the body itself, able to host a new life for a period of 40 weeks, has been neutralized by ‘speaking the unspeakable’ of birth. Unlike the moment of dying, the act of birth has lost its sacredness – in the era of technology, the process of giving birth stays documented as a part of an initiating rite of parenthood. However, behind an alleged glorification of the female body lays repression, which is ironically strengthened mostly by women themselves. Moreover, the female body has been reduced only to its ability to give birth to another life. By letting a body and its drives into the sphere of the public, the symbolic enables a discourse about women and femininity while still remaining rigid and linking femininity only to the body. Consequently, the female body has been reduced only to its ability to give birth to another life, while the public discourse, somewhat simplified, offers only two models of identification with the female subject: the temptress, and the mother, where only the latter gets the ability to really act in the public sphere.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² It is enough to remember a corset which has been deforming women’s chests, complex dresses with insertions so wide that they have completely blocked access to the female body, or extensive bathing suits that have, once soaked, been cooling the swimmer to the point of freezing.

According to the etymology of the term, the 'temptress' is there to tempt the male subject, therefore remaining simply an object of lust, or a referent model which, by her fragility²³ and over-emphasized-feminine-bodily-attributes, subliminally suggests that desirability is always linked to fertility. As a conclusion, female body must, if it wants to participate in the public, be maternal, and can only be so. The glorification of fertility and a special form of motherhood (which reduces the complex mother-child relationship merely to biological dependence manifested through breastfeeding) are, surprisingly, accepted among women. Recommendation of the World Health Organization says:

Breastfeeding is the normal way of providing young infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. Virtually all mothers can breastfeed, provided they have accurate information, and the support of their family, the health care system and society at large. Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended up to 6 months of age, with continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods up to two years of age or beyond.²⁴

How should a mother who spends two (or even more) years of her life as a mobile milk factory, actively participate in the public and politic sphere remains unsaid. Simplified, the mother who refuses to breastfeed defies nature while she refuses to prolong the abject status of her body. Alleged liberalization will, therefore, be fatal to the body. The epistemologically impotent temptress, or the heroic mother, may *cross* the wall dividing them from the public, but, even when they do, they will still remain only observers.

However, the biggest abject potential generates a subject refusing to choose between the two sides – the woman which refuses to be reduced to a sexual object (but at the same time, does not want to/cannot become a mother) and the woman who refuses to form her gender identity around her sex. Exactly those 'problematic' subjects find their place in the gender theory of Judith Butler.

Judith Butler – Defying Social Scripts

Before discussing Judith Butler's theory, it is important to point out to a specific view on the body which distinguishes her from

²³ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, cit., p. 2370.

²⁴ World Health Organisation, <<http://www.who.int/topics/breastfeeding/en/>> (04/2014) – the web page refers to many published papers and research on the topic of breastfeeding which are all financed by World Health Organization.

the theorists already discussed. Unlike Arendt (who stresses the certainty of her gender and claims that to say that she is a man, and not a woman, would be 'kind of insane'),²⁵ Butler focuses on the complexity of defining the terms 'sex' and 'gender'. Questioning the 'insanity' of gender confused subjects, she claims that the gender category is actually the result of a 'naturalizing trick'²⁶ which produces an "illusion of natural unity between biological sex, gender identification and heterosexuality".²⁷

Instead of describing, the public discourse produces the gender of the newborn – "it 'girls' a girl"²⁸ by addressing the female body as a 'she', and male as a 'he'. However, Butler does not ascribe the abject character to a body only because it is female. Gender performances that we (and everybody around us) tend to repeat, are always based on "social scripts"²⁹ that prescribe unachievable ideals. Hence, the heterosexual white male body becomes socially privileged while all the others, who are not fitted into a set model, gain the title of unwanted and abject. Transgender, transsexual, homosexual or disabled subjects, as well as women, therefore become abject, not because of their connection with the semiotic, but because of the excluding nature of the public discourse. Moreover, Butler questions the subversive potential of the semiotic, reminding us that we cannot ascribe meaning to something that is not already *in* language. At the same time, the forming of language is not possible without suppressing the semiotic.

However, the biggest difference between Butler and the previous interpreters of Arendt lies in the term maternal. The link between fertility and the female body is, Butler states, the result of "a compulsory cultural construction of a female body as a maternal body",³⁰ to which the repressive law of the father imposes the imperative of reproduction. Arendt elapses from maternity as well. Although she mentions the act of giving birth, it does not serve the purpose of glorifying motherhood but stresses the alienating character of an extreme corporal pain. Sex and gender are, as far as Arendt is concerned, placed at the very

²⁵ Cited in Zerilli, *The Arendtian Body*, cit., p. 170.

²⁶ Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva", in *Hypatia. A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 3, 1989, pp. 104-118.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, Routledge, New York, 2011, p. 7.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

margin of the problem – they are, for their unbreakable link to a body, apolitical and irrelevant.

How can the radically unfavorable position of a body be corrected? Butler offers something which is similar to Arendt's 'action' (which is by definition "unpredictable" and "irreversible",³¹ her term is "discursive citation".³² The subversive potential of this term lays in the fact that the meaning of the gender constituting performance depends on the context. Transsexuality will, therefore, undermine the link between the body shape and gender; travesty can bring gender stereotypes into question; homosexuality will destabilize the link between gender and heterosexuality. When combined, these subversive practices represent the most efficient tool in the battle against the abject character of the body.

How does Butler's theory connect to the subversive strategies of her two predecessors? Female homosexuality, which Butler considers to be one of the most efficient mechanisms for disclosing and re-inscribing gender binaries, is, in Kristeva's theory, characterized as one of psychosis, as an "irreversible loss of one's self"³³ and a "regressive libidinal stadium prior to culture".³⁴ The complete reconstruction of the mother-child bond (in its primal form in which the subject is still not differenced from the mother) will not only represent a violation of the homosexuality taboo but will also flirt with the strongly prohibited incest. Therefore, the semiotic is allowed to enter the public only through one of the two socially viable and privileged praxes: poetry as a place of controlled emanation of subconscious, and motherhood by which a female subject becomes (someone's) mother as well. However, the combination of the two mentioned forms of praxis will (for a female subject) often be disastrous: "the heterosexual mother poet will suffer from eternal melancholy".³⁵

However, Arendt and Butler fail to mention the problem of a male homosexual and incestuous subject. Although he is also undetachable from his body and linked to primal drives of maternal, both theorists will fail to notice his abject potential; they will ascribe to him less or even none abjectness. What will happen when a male body points its sexual drive towards an object of the same sex, or even his own mother?

³¹ Ivi, p. 236.

³² Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, cit., p. 2.

³³ Butler, *The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva*, cit., p. 111.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 112.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 111.

Annuling the individualization process brings a male subject back to the dangerous field of tabooed incest – although she is the appropriate sex, the mother will remain strictly prohibited as a sexual object. Libidinal focus on his own mother makes a male subject as abject as his female double and, in addition, causes him to ‘forget’ who he became after the initial mother-child separation.

A similar problem arouses in the case of homosexual fixation on the father or any subject of the same sex. Although focusing on the male, the paternal and the symbolic (as a contrast to the female, maternal and semiotic) should reaffirm the male principle and strengthen the dominant public discourse, male homosexuality has a great subversive potential. The male subject, as a regulatory principle, in its homosexual version, embraces attributes which are usually ascribed to the female gender and, by doing so, blurs the gender binary. Therefore, the subversion lies in the fact that the male subject does not need to imitate the Other as a strategy for improving his social status. Phallogentric discourse which describes the female as “attractive, sentimental and gentle”³⁶ and the male as “determined, courageous and bluff”,³⁷ will all of a sudden be facing a problem of knowing but not recognizing the subject standing before it. Paradoxically, in order to publicly acknowledge his sentimental and gentle feelings towards the same sex, the male subject needs to be ‘determined’, ‘courageous’ and ‘bluff’. Hence, the main precondition of the public statement of affinities, which would make him abject in the eyes of the public discourse, is the possession of the same attributes that qualify him as a regulatory principle of his own gender.

The Everlasting Quest

Although the question of Hannah Arendt’s motives for eluding the problem of the body lacks an unambiguous answer, the complexity of the problem suggests that we should, for now, be satisfied with different interpretations of the ‘Arendtian body’. Is the body, for Arendt, really apolitical and, therefore, uninteresting, or does her elusion hides an unspoken critique

³⁶ Definition from Vladimir Anić, *Rječnik hrvatskog jezika* [Croatian dictionary], Novi liber, Zagreb, 2000, p. 1395: Difference between the definitions of the terms *man* and *woman* testifies about their different position within the dominant discourse. While the first term refers only to *an adult male*, the other definition splits into several levels. *Woman* is first of all a) *a person of the sex opposite to a male*, and only then b) *an adult female*. Second entry explains that a *woman is a spouse of the opposite sex (in conversational manner)* while the third one defines a woman as a servant (conversational manner).

³⁷ Ivi, p. 563.

of its repressive position and the subtle suggestion that gender binarism is unnecessary and unwanted? Between the two options, I am inclined to believe that the abject character of the body lies in its determination to revolt against the imperative of reproduction, and to defy socially imposed ideals, no matter which sex or gender it is.

If we accept Kristeva's explanation, talking about the body and its drives will always evoke the link to the maternal, fertility and the female principle; the submission of the body by the symbolic and the dominant is, therefore, motivated by the abject ascendancy of the uncontrolled female body. Although Kristeva's interpretation, followed by Zerilli's theory, is not completely wrong, she forgets that Arendt places all bodies into the sphere of the private, regardless of their sex. Forced gender determination of those bodies and their limitation only to maternal attributes neglects a stronger argument: the body *has to* have its place in the sphere of the public because of its inseparability from speech and action as elements constitutive of the political. Reason and thinking cannot function without the 'empirical material' provided by the body; without it, reason is utterly closed in its solipsism, at the same time distant and impotent. As to fertility-if we decide to proclaim it one of the attributes immanent to the female body, it seems adequate to speak of intellectual fertility, which is born from the female growing need to find her space in the sphere of the public and the political.

Some Remarks on the Position of Women in the History of Yugoslav Experimental Cinema: The Case of Tatjana Ivančić

Petra Belc Krnjaić

Summary

Researching (amateur) film archives from a feminist perspective opens several practical and theoretical questions; who decides which films to archive, restore and showcase – especially when they engage with film and visual arts, professional as well as amateur production, and how does the researchers' position affect her/his work? Looking at films of amateur/experimental filmmaker Tatjana Ivančić from Socialist Republic of Croatia, this paper examines some of the possible archival and institutional shortcomings which caused the marginalisation of female experimental filmmakers from Yugoslavia and proposes several simple actions which could correct these omissions.

Whose histories are being collected? And for whose benefit?
(Sara de Jong and Saskia Wieringa)¹

But I would prefer, I must say, students to concentrate not on the individuals or on history, but on the actions of archives, what they have done in looking after their collections, making their collections available, etc.
(David Francis, former Curator of the British National Film Archive)²

¹ Sara de Jong and Saskia Wieringa, "The Library as Knowledge Broker", in Sara de Jong (eds.), *Teaching Gender with Libraries and Archives. The Power of Information*, vol. 10, ATGENDER and Central European University Press, Budapest, 2013, p. 17.

² Paolo Cherchi Usai et al., *Film Curatorship. Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace*, Synema – Gesellschaft für Film und Medien, Österreichisches Filmmuseum, Vienna, 2008, p. 62.

ongoing discovery and questioning, as old certainties were overturned. Meanwhile, back in the classroom, I was studying the intellectual history of the Italian Renaissance. I have a very sharp and poignant memory of an incident that occurred about halfway through the term. Bolstered by my outside reading with the Women's Union, I finally ventured to inquire of my professor why we hadn't yet encountered any texts by or about women in the course. My professor froze, glowered at me, and pronounced, "Miss Borland, women as we understand them today did not exist in the Renaissance". In effect he was telling me that the intellectual tradition I was lucky enough to inherit was entirely masculine, because women as thinking subjects were an historical novelty of the very recent past. This erasure of a whole class of subjects was a very effective exercise of power. It wasn't until class was dismissed, and I was on my way out the door that it occurred to me that *men* as we know them today hadn't existed during the Renaissance either.

Teaching and writing history was and remains political project, for historical legacies shape our understanding of the possible and impossible. Women's history in the 1970s responded to that project, recognizing that the stories we tell ourselves about the past do have consequences in the most basic sense of who counts as a knowing subject. Mary Louise Pratt's² exemplary study of the development of the European bourgeois subject through close readings of 18th and 19th century travel narratives demonstrates that the travel narrative readership participated in a new planetary consciousness that both described and possessed far-flung places, subjugating their inhabitants or eliminating them altogether, and ultimately producing among the survivors uncertainty about their own ability to describe and define reality.

My colleague, Sabra Webber, warns against "colonizing the past" by which she means the scholar's tendency to view past actors as always "less evolved" in their thinking than we are.³ Webber joins Homi Bhabha and others in recuperating the "subtle

Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1976; Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology. The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1979; Alan Dundes, "The Psychology of Legend", in Wayland Hand (ed.) *American Folk Legend. A Symposium*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971, pp. 21-36; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good. 150 Years of the Experts Advice to Women*, Anchor Books, Garden City, New York, 1979.

² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edition, Routledge, New York, 2008 [1992].

³ Sabra Webber, *Folklore Unbound. A Concise Introduction*, Waveland Press, Longrove IL, 2015, p. 25.

have been an important recognition from the (amateur) film community. However, as Croatian film director Zoran Tadić insightfully observed while writing on Ivančić's oeuvre,

[w]hat can't be measured neither by awards nor by festivals, what truly impresses, without courtesy and protocol, is the level of the films, a closed, full-blooded and accomplished authorial world, brought to life with an abundance of unconcealed scrutinizing passion, and yet so simple, that we are barely aware that Tatjana Ivančić is an indispensable name of the Croatian, and not only amateur, filmmaking.⁹

Yet, in the recent resurgence of Yugoslav experimental cinema in the international art institutional context, the work of Tatjana Ivančić seems to be completely forgotten. The exhibition *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film. Experiment in the Art of Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s*, curated by Ana Janevski in 2008,¹⁰ and the catalogue/book of the same name published in 2010,¹¹ mention only established and institutionally recognized female artists – Bogdanka Poznanović, Marina Abramović, Sanja Iveković, and Nuša Dragan. In 2010, Ljubljana's Moderna Galerija / Museum of Modern Art hosted an exhibition *This is all film! Experimental film in Yugoslavia 1951-1991*, co-curated by Janevski, Bojana Piškur, Jurij Meden, and Stevan Vuković. Amongst female artists included in this exhibition there were only Nuša Dragan, and Breda Beban, also an institutionally (and internationally) established artist. The four-part film programme *Artists, Amateurs, Alternative Spaces: Experimental Cinema in Eastern Europe, 1960-1990*, organized by Ksenya Gurshtein and Joanna Raczynska for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C.¹² did not take into consideration the entire Yugoslavia but focused on SR Croatia and SR Serbia, presenting only one female artist – Sanja Iveković. Finally, the book of essays on Yugoslav black wave and

⁹ Zoran Tadić, "Tatjana Ivančić maritime mini-documentaries", in Zoran Tadić, *Ogledi o hrvatskom dokumentarcu*, Hrvatski filmski savez, Zagreb, 2009, p. 144., "Ono pak što se ne mjeri ni priznanjima ni festivalima, ono što istinski zadivljuje, nekurtoazno i neprotokolarno, jest razina filmova, zatvoren, punokrvan i cjelovit autorski svijet, ostvaren s toliko neskrivane (sic) promatračke strasti, a tako jednostavno, da smo jedva i svjesni kako je Tatjana Ivančić nezaobilazno ime hrvatskoga, ne samo amaterskog, filmskog stvaralaštva".

¹⁰ See the website of the exhibition *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film. Experiment in the Art of Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s*, <<https://bit.ly/2q5zGYs>> (4/2018).

¹¹ Ana Janevski (ed.), *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film. Experiment in the Art of Yugoslavia in the 1960s and 1970s*, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Warsaw, 2010.

¹² Film Series: *Artists, Amateurs, Alternative Spaces. Experimental Cinema in Eastern Europe, 1960-1990*, <http://bit.ly/2FyEr7v> (3/2018).

experimental cinema, *Surfing the black*,¹³ published in 2012, included a text by Ana Janevski, "We Cannot Promise To Do More Than Experiment",¹⁴ in which the author writes about the Zagreb amateur ciné-community, albeit focusing only on its male protagonists.

These books, exhibitions and film programmes might be considered as some of the most important general overviews of the Yugoslav experimental cinema which took place in the past ten years in an international institutional context,¹⁵ a context immensely important for the distribution of knowledge, the canonization and legitimation of art. By failing to include the work of Tatjana Ivančić in their overviews, have the authors of these books and exhibitions simply continued to perpetuate certain historical blind spots, and if that is the case – what would be the cause of this gender-biased vision?

At this moment I believe that the institutional context in which Ivančić's films are currently placed has made her work invisible to museum curators and art historians who began labeling this existing amateur/experimental film corpus as Yugoslav experimental cinema and started exhibiting it in the museological context (Ana Janevski, Bojana Piškur, Jurij Meden, Stevan Vuković etc.). Although the institutional background of an artwork (in this precise case – experimental film) could be perceived as far less interesting than its content analysis, the concept of the institution seems to occupy one of the central positions in the process of rethinking art/film history through a feminist perspective. As art historian Linda Nochlin says, social and institutional context are the very instances responsible for the 'failure' of women to step into the realm of art. "The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs, and signals".¹⁶

¹³ Gal Kirn (ed.), *Surfing the black*, Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht, 2012.

¹⁴ Ivi, pp. 46-75.

¹⁵ The book *Cinema by Other Means* (2012) by Serbian/American scholar Pavle Levi undoubtedly also belongs to this scope of texts and film programmes deserved for the acknowledgment of Yugoslav avant-garde film practice and its integration in the historical context of the Western cinematic avant-garde. However, *Cinema by Other Means* is not explicitly focused on the historiography of Yugoslav experimental cinema, as is the case with the abovementioned catalogues and programmes, and for the purposes of this paper I didn't take Levi's book into consideration. Nevertheless, *Cinema by Other Means* does not mention Ivančić, or any other female experimentalist from Yugoslavia.

¹⁶ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists", in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, Routledge, New York, 2018, p. 150.

"By stressing the *institutional*"¹⁷ in her seminal essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists", Nochlin encouraged many scholars to follow in her wake¹⁸ and use the method she devised as a paradigm.¹⁹ This invitation to expose the ways in which the institutions shaped and are still shaping women's existence helps us at the same time to understand (and to expose) the ways in which they shape knowledge on women as subjects and objects of history, subsequently producing inequality and authorial in/visibility. "Not a given to be studied, art was what the art historical expert stated it was. Generations are marked by what we show and tell and what we do not show and do not tell" wrote Griselda Pollock,²⁰ encouraging us to openly ask: whose history is being written in the context of SR Croatian/Yugoslav experimental cinema, by whom and for whom?

Creating a 'Yugoslav Experimental Filmmaker' in the Post-Yugoslav Context

After the fall of Yugoslavia and the separation of its socialist republics in the early 1990s, the amateur ciné-club films produced in the SR Croatian ciné-clubs were made into a collection by the Hrvatski filmski savez (Croatian Film Clubs' Association, hereinafter called the CFA) – a non-governmental umbrella association of amateur filmmaking, which originated in SR Croatia.²¹ CFA was established in 1963 under the name of Kinosavez Hrvatske (Croatian Cinema-Association) as an association dedicated to promoting, supporting and developing the non-professional and amateur filmmaking, and today it forms a part of the Croatian Association of Technical Culture.²² Besides its regular program activities, CFA "has also been housing a film and video archive since 1974, including a collection of 580 film titles and 3.000 video works made in the period from 1928 to 1998".²³ Due to its lack of infrastructural conditions needed for maintaining a film collection, the films that the CFA gathered are (mostly) being

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 176.

¹⁸ Cf. Griselda Pollock, "A Lonely Preface", in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York, 2013, p. xviii.

¹⁹ Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists*, cit., p. 176.

²⁰ Pollock, *A Lonely Preface*, cit., pp. xviii-xxvii.

²¹ Croatian Film Association was formerly called the Cinema-Association of SR Croatia, and today is occasionally translated as Croatian Film Clubs' Association.

²² "What is the Croatian Association of Technical Culture (CATC)?", <<http://www.hztk.hr/crotec/what-is-crotec/>> (4/2018).

²³ *Croatian Film Association*, <http://www.hfs.hr/hfs/onama_e.asp> (3/2018).

kept in the Film Archive of the Croatian state archives, and the legal status of this corpus of films is at the moment not completely clear. Besides the Croatian Museum of Contemporary art (which itself owns only a small number of SR Croatian experimental films and videos – around 30 for the period of the 1960s and 1970s)²⁴ there is no other institution in the present day Croatia which systematically takes care of the Croatian experimental film and video from the socialist period. CFA's praiseworthy decision to preserve, catalogue and archive the amateur ciné-club material made it a curated archive of the SR Croatian experimental film (and video), and a crucial (maybe even the only) source of knowledge on the Croatian experimental film history.

During the 1990s and 2000s CFA began broadening its range of activities, thus entering the field of professional filmmaking and Croatian film culture. Within its scope of publishing activities, in the early 2000s CFA began releasing a series of DVDs and books dedicated to the SR Croatian experimental film scene and ciné-club culture, albeit focusing predominantly on men and internationally established artists, as well as those authors which have been socially or otherwise canonized at their time (from the late 1950s onwards). The CFA published several monographs devoted to particular authors; Ivan Martinac and Tomislav Gotovac each have two books devoted to them, and Vladimir Petek got a thin monograph. The authors who were honored with monographic DVDs (published by the CFA) were also exclusively male:²⁵ Tomislav Gotovac (2009; 2015), Ivan Martinac (2007), Miroslav Mikuljan (2011), Mladen Stilinović (2013), Zdravko Mustać (2009), Željko Kipke²⁶ (2008), and Petar Trinajstić (2010). The DVDs dedicated to a particular period (*Early experimental film and video art in [SR] Croatia* [2007]; *[SR] Croatian experimental film and video of the 1980s* [2007] and *The Croatian experimental film and video of the 1990s* [2009]) included three female video artists – notably Breda Beban, Sanja Iveković, and Nicole Hewitt – but these artists did not begin their careers in amateur circles, as was the case with Martinac, Petek, Pansini, Gotovac and Ivančić, the members of the amateur film community which the CFA represents and stands for. Besides

²⁴ *Film and video collection of the Croatian Museum of Contemporary Art*, <<http://www.msu.hr/#/en/16/>> (4/2018).

²⁵ To summarize: this DVD collection consists of 42 male and only 4 female authors.

²⁶ According to my knowledge, Kipke was never a member of the amateur Ciné-club circle.

films by Iveković (*Monument*, 1976; *Osobni rezovi* [*Personal Cuts*] 1982; *Chanoyu*, co-directed with Dalibor Martinis, 1983), Beban (*Geography*, co-directed with Hrvoje Horvatić, 1989), and Hewitt (*In/Dividu*, 1999), the only other female author which found her place among this DVD-worthy group of male cineastes was Dunja Ivanišević (*Žemsko* [*Gal*], 1968), a one-time amateur filmmaker and a member of the ciné-club Split. Ivanišević is included in the DVD overview of the Split film school (2015), originally published as a visual addition to the *The Split Film School* monograph, which was initiated and edited by Sunčica Fradelić, current president of the ciné-club Split.

Among the information on Ivančić's work, two remarks shed some light on her curious contemporary invisibility. Vera Robić Škarica, former director of the CFA, and Aleksandar Ivančić, Tatjana's son, commented that Ivančić was not completely accepted in the Ciné-club Zagreb circle during the 1960s and the 1970s because she was a woman, and because her poetics differed significantly from what was considered aesthetically valuable at the time.²⁷ Have the custodians of the SR Croatian experimental film collection and the editors of these DVD and book editions kept reproducing (consciously or not) the same patriarchal/artistic value patterns dominant in the 1960s, which used to discriminate against women on the basis of their authorial style and gender? Was the foundation of this non-profit collection guided by the idea of preserving the local amateur and experimental film culture, or have there been attempts to 'commercialize' the collection, imbuing it with certain proven aesthetic and artistic values? If that would be the case, this raises the question of the standard and the role model for this type of established aesthetic and artistic values. What defines the quality traits which make certain films valuable enough to be made visible, while condemning others to stillness on the archival shelves? The position of Yugoslav experimental cinema between film and art, amateur and professional – undoubtedly also reflects on the overall visibility of such films, forcing us to pose one more question: can one intervene in the (historical) process of canon formation, and how can that be achieved?

²⁷ Eventually, Robić Škarica even helped Ivančić to establish her own small ciné-club through which Ivančić competed in the Yugoslav amateur film festival circle, although today her films are all listed under the Ciné-club Zagreb production. These information have been found in the transcript from the unfinished documentary on the history of Ciné-club Zagreb, and I would like to thank Croatian film scholar Tomislav Šakić for providing me with this valuable historical material.

Experimental Cinema and (the Formalism of) the Film Strip

In Croatia there is no Film Institute or a Film Museum which would strategically promote the national (experimental) film heritage. As a result, researchers and interested audience often rely on the extra-institutional film spaces, independently run art organizations and the student centers. Dealing with objects made on the material such as S8mm film, a medium Ivančić often worked in, makes it even harder to research such work, since neither the Film Archive nor CFA offer the possibility of watching the small gauge formats,²⁸ with the CFA being also very selective in regards to whom it will allow to research its archival material. From a researcher's position it is important that the films are viewable in good quality so that one can discern the details in the image, otherwise it can be difficult to analyze the film. Unfortunately, of all the films Ivančić made, to my present knowledge, only 14 are officially archived and rudimentary digitalised (presumably by copying the projection of a wall) which means that the technical quality of the existing digital copies of her films is quite subpar, thus making them difficult to analyze as well as showcase.

The question of the medium is particularly important for the history of experimental cinema, since the authors working in this genre often explored its materiality and formal elements. However, this idea of materialist and formalist approach towards experimental filmmaking influenced the writing of the 1960s and 1970s American and UK film avant-garde, often overshadowing the work of women who were exploring or rather – moving through a different visual territory.²⁹ On the one hand, there was the idea of the romantic artist,

²⁸ Besides, film is a delicate medium and each projection damages the strip which also deteriorates with time, especially if it is not adequately stored, affecting the overall quality of the image. Due to its technical specificities, the process of film restoration requires specialized knowledge and can be very time-consuming and expensive, especially if the films were produced in substandard formats such as S8mm. Merely digitally copying the projected S8mm film of a white wall might preserve certain amount of visual data, but if the filmstrip already lost some of its qualities, the digital copy can only give a vague idea of the original work. The film restoration in Croatia is almost without exception publicly funded, yet it seems there is no clear strategy or a list of priorities regarding the amateur/experimental material which needs to be preserved. This is additionally complicated by the fact that the Croatian national film heritage has not yet resolved its legal ownership status. Cf. Iva Marčetić, "Zamrznute pozicije" [Frozen positions], <<http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/zamrznute-pozicije>> (04/2018).

²⁹ Cf. Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wexman, "Introduction. Experimental Filmmaking and Women's Subjectivity", in Jean Petrolle et al. (eds.), *Women and Experimental Filmmaking*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2005, pp. 1-17.

and on the other, there were structural and materialist approaches privileging the strict formal organization of the material and the exploration of its material capabilities. "Inherent in the formalist rhetoric was the rejection of the alternative languages of cinema that didn't fit the prescribed norm, and loosely speaking individual artists were 'in' the avant-garde, if their work could be matched to theoretical categorization" wrote British experimental artist and theorist Jackie Hatfield, arguing that the experiments with narrativity, representation and multiple screens have not been included in "the main theoretical arguments that have shaped the histories of experimental film and video".³⁰

This leaning towards the materiality of the 1960s and 1970s cinematic experiments also marks the scholarship on the experimental film scene in Zagreb/Yugoslavia. Croatian film scholar Hrvoje Turković proposed three periods in the development of Yugoslav experimental cinema: the preparatory phase (1951-1962), the Genre Film Festival (GEFF) phase (1961-1970) – marked by the radical experiments in the medium of film³¹ – and the phase of the renewal and establishment (1974 onwards).³² Mihovil Pansini, one of the most influential SR Croatian experimentalists of the 20th century and the co-founder of GEFF, called the 1960s and partially the '70s "the film strip"³³ period of the Zagreb ciné-club,³⁴ while Ana Janevski similarly concluded that "the amateur films in Zagreb were characterized by experimenting with the medium"³⁵ and that "[t]he Zagreb filmmakers were interested in film for its properties and structure, and for the possibility of deliberation and experimentation via the medium itself".³⁶

This characterization of the period, although accurate for the bigger part, can be seen as reductive since it doesn't include the

³⁰ Jackie Hatfield, "Expanded Cinema and Narrative: Some Reasons for a Review of the Avant-Garde Debates Around Narrativity", *Millenium Film Journal*, 39/40, 2003, <<http://bit.ly/2g4GT74>> (12/2016).

³¹ GEFF was an experimental film festival taking place in Zagreb between 1963 and 1970, invested in the promotion of radical filmmaking and lead by the idea of antifilm as its main conceptual invention and theoretical guideline.

³² Hrvoje Turković, "Nacrt za povijest jugoslavenskog eksperimentalnog filma", *Bilten filmoteke*, 16, 7, 1980, pp. 19-38.

³³ Mihovil Pansini, "Pet razdoblja Kinokluba Zagreb", in Duško Popović (ed.), *Kinoklub Zagreb 1928/2003*, Hrvatski filmski savez/Kino klub Zagreb, Zagreb, 2003, p. 8.

³⁴ "Filmska vrpca".

³⁵ Janevski, *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film*, cit.

³⁶ Ana Janevski, "We Cannot Promise To Do More Than Experiment. On the Yugoslav Experimental Film and Cine Clubs in the 1960s and 1970s", in Kim, *Surfing the black*, cit., p. 52.

work of Tatjana Ivančić, whose films can hardly be summed up by this paradigm. Although Ivančić never experimented with multiple screens, her films are indeed marked by narrativity and representation which often veers towards abstraction and textural explorations as opposed to the hailed anti-illusionism of experimental film. Her films encompass the years from 1967 until 1986, which means she was prolific in the 1970s (the decade in which she made 50 films). These were the years which were, according to Pansini, still partially marked by the research of the medium, and according to Turković, marked by the revival of amateurism and the decline of the GEFF-like poetics in the wider Yugoslav context³⁷ with a “going through the motions life” in the context of Ciné-club Zagreb.³⁸ As exemplary cases of experimental filmmakers in the Zagreb circle of that period Turković singles out cinematographer Branko Bubenik, and the famous Croatian conceptual artist Mladen Stilinović.³⁹

Bearing all this in mind, it seems unfortunate that some of the relevant retrospective screenings of Yugoslav experimental cinema⁴⁰ mainly repeat the titles from the extant film programmes, while the international programmers mainly choose from the collection of films preselected by the CFA. Being omitted from the CFA’s publications, DVDs and recommendations, as well as the curated film programmes, Ivančić easily remained invisible for the researchers engaged with the field of Yugoslav experimental cinema.⁴¹

To Screen a Film (in the Right Context) is to Keep It Alive

The amateur film as a form of cinematic expression has generally been a neglected field of scientific research⁴² and the rare articles that dealt with the SR Croatian experimentalists – apart

³⁷ Turković, *Nacrt za povijest*, cit., p. 31-32.

³⁸ Hrvoje Turković, “Kinoklub Zagreb. Filmsko sadište i rasadište”, in Duško Popović (eds.), *Kinoklub Zagreb 1928/2003*, cit., p. 13.

³⁹ Turković, *Nacrt za povijest*, cit., p. 32.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Avant-garde cinema from Ex-Yugoslavia, 1950s-80s*, Anthology Film Archives, New York, (2015), <<https://www.havc.hr/eng/info-centre/news/anthology-film-archives-shows-avant-garde-films-from-former-yugoslavia>> (3/2018); “Croatie, la voici”, Cinémathèque Française and Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2012, <<http://www.culturenet.hr/default.aspx?id=47925>> (3/2018), <http://www.hfs.hr/hfs/zapis_clanak_detail.asp?sif=34134> (3/2018).

⁴¹ The predominant focus in all of these programmes is on the work of Tomislav Gotovac, Ivan Martinac, GEFF and the idea of antifilm.

⁴² “Projekt: Archäologie des Amateurfilms. Ausgrabungen zur visuellen Kultur der Moderne”, <<https://bit.ly/2HzVCWk>> (04/2018).

from a text by Croatian curator and art historian Branka Benčić⁴³ – never really problematized this institutional – that is: amateur position of them as filmmakers. Because of this amateur position – of the experimental film artists in Yugoslavia, and the lack of a Film Institute or a Film Museum in the present day Croatia, archiving these films within the CFA seemed as a reasonable and a commendable gesture. However, given their legal position as an NGO amateur association, and the plethora of their mandatory regular activities,⁴⁴ all the shortcomings of their work on this collection are completely understandable. A similar fate has befallen the SR Croatian video art scene, thus spurring the curator Branko Franceschi, who curated an exhibition dedicated to the [SR] Croatian video art in 2002, to ask whether CFA is the right institution to deal with video art or “should that particular role be given to the institutions that are made solely for the purposes of modern and contemporary art”.⁴⁵

Since 2015, when this paper was originally presented, several Ivančić’s films were shown in a non profit cultural institution, an art gallery and within the scope of an experimental film festival,⁴⁶ a text on her work (among other authors) has been published in the Croatian scholarly film journal *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis*,⁴⁷ and in 2018 one of Ivančić’s films (*The City in the Shop Window*, 1969) was a part of an important exhibition in the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb – *‘60s in Croatia - Myth and reality*. The organizers

⁴³ Branka Benčić, “Sve je povezano/Everything Is Connected”, in Sunčica Fradelić (ed.), *Splitska škola filma–60 godina Kino kluba Split*, Kinoklub Split, Split, 2012, pp. 14-34.

⁴⁴ CFA as the rooftop association of amateur filmmakers in Croatia coordinates and assists 46 of Croatian amateur ciné-clubs, it organizes film courses and workshops for children and adults, produces feature, documentary and experimental films and acts as a film distributor as well. Besides these activities, CFA publishes film books and film magazines, organizes state festivals of amateur film, and finally since CFA rents a movie theater, it also acts as a cinémathèque, organizing film screenings of contemporary and classic arthouse films. Overview of their activities can be seen in the yearly reports published on their webpage: *Hrvatski filmski savez*, <<http://hfs.hr/izvjestaji.aspx>> (3/2018).

⁴⁵ Branko Franceschi, “Zbirke videoumjetnosti u Hrvatskoj” [Collections of the Croatian video art], *Život umjetnosti. Časopis za suvremena likovna zbivanja*, 69, 2003, pp. 12.

⁴⁶ Galerija Greta, Zagreb, May 2016; CZKD, Belgrade, March 2016; CZKD, Belgrade, November 2016; Alternative Film/Video Festival, Belgrade, December 2016. All screenings were curated by the author of this article. Ivančić’s film *The City in the Shop Window* was also shown in April 2017 in the MM Center in Zagreb, and the screening was curated by the Croatian film critic Višnja Vukašinović.

⁴⁷ Petra Belc, “Experimental Film with a Female Signature. Short Overview of Selected Topics and Films”, *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis*, 88, 2016, pp. 57-78.

defined the exhibition as “a major cultural project”⁴⁸ whose aim is to encompass culture, design, architecture, photography, theater, literature ... and film, so this inclusion of Ivančić’s film in the exhibition segment of experimental film marks a big step in recovering her significance for the history of SR Croatian (experimental) cinema.⁴⁹

This, however, does not mean that the films of Ivančić have never been screened in Zagreb. According to available information, there have been two retrospective screenings of her work after her death in 1987; the first screening took place sometime in the late 2001 or early 2002 within the scope of a major Ciné-club Zagreb film retrospective,⁵⁰ and the second screening occurred in November 2008.⁵¹ Both of these screenings took place in the Ciné-club Zagreb, and as Vjeran Pavlinić remarked for the screening of 2001/2002, Ivančić was a “true discovery of this retrospective” but only three viewers came to see her films.⁵² Showing therefore Ivančić’s films in a wider artistic and cultural context a context more closely connected to the one represented by the Museum of Contemporary Art included different types of media/promotional outlets and meant not only addressing a different type of audience but also achieving a wider public reach.

Archival Sexism, or: What Defines a Good and Valuable (Yugoslav) Experimental Film

Mihovil Pansini in an interview he gave to the film critic Miloje Radaković said “... we talked about antifilm because ciné-club was left without film stock, so we didn’t have the possibility to shoot. It’s like when a man doesn’t have a woman so he masturbates. So this was a kind of masturbation. It is quite an ugly comparison, but there is something to it”.⁵³ While researching

⁴⁸ Muzej za umjetnost i obrt, <<https://www.muio.hr/blog/2018/02/06/najava-sezdesete-hrvatskoj-mit-stvarnost/>> (3/2018).

⁴⁹ The selector of the film programme is Tomislav Šakić, a Croatian film scholar who recently published a book (based on his PhD thesis) dedicated to modernism in Croatian cinema of the socialist period (Tomislav Šakić, *Modernizam u hrvatskom igranom filmu. Nacrt tipologije*, Disput, Zagreb, 2016). The book dealt prominently with the fiction film so the omission of Ivančić can be understandable, but the screenings of her films in the spring of 2016 and 2017 persuaded him to include her work in this exhibition (as expressed in a private conversation).

⁵⁰ Vjeran Pavlinić, “Prvih sedam desetljeća kinokluba Zagreb”, <http://www.hfs.hr/nakladnistvo_zapis_detail.aspx?sif_clanci=226#.WsuOBbw8ORs> (4/2018).

⁵¹ Cunterview.net, <<http://bit.ly/2I96qrX>> (3/2018).

⁵² Pavlinić, *Prvih sedam desetljeća kinokluba Zagreb*, cit.

⁵³ “... razgovarali [smo] o antifilmu zato što je Kino-klub ostao bez vrpce, te mi nismo imali mogućnosti snimati. To je kao kad čovjek nema žensku pa onda

the archives I encountered negligence regarding female films, a lack of understanding or interest for their particular poetics, and I believe that the quote by Mihovil Pansini quite accurately depicts the situation in the ciné-clubs of the 1960s and 1970s, which must have been uneasy for women. In the conversations during my research I was told that back in the day women were “creating more than enough”⁵⁴ and learned that the films of Ivančić were repeatedly mocked in the festivals for their “naïve lyricism” until the people from the film festival circuit saw her in person. Given the fact that she was a “nice older lady”, my interlocutor said “they” decided to hold themselves back from being more critical.⁵⁵ These occasions sparked my desire for reinscribing women’s work in the canon of Yugoslav film avant-garde, subsequently guiding my judgment more by emotions and less by reason. Was I sufficiently objective during my research? Have I been unintentionally biased while analyzing Ivančić’s films?⁵⁶ Are they indeed just unconventionally amateurish, or can she be rightfully called an experimental film artist?

It is hard to generalize on the quality of an entire oeuvre based on the knowledge of only 14 films out of the 74 Ivančić supposedly made, but in order to resolve my doubts I would like to compare her work to the work of Mladen Stilinović, and evaluate it in the light of texts on experimental cinema by Croatian film critics and scholars. This search for the ‘marks of quality’ which define the

masturbira. Tako je i ovo bila neka vrsta masturbacije. To je dosta ružna usporedba, ali u njoj ima nečega”. Mihovil Pansini in Miloje Radaković (ed.), *Pansini Antifilm*, Dom kulture “Studentski grad”, Beograd, 1984, p. 30.

⁵⁴ Aleksandar Erdeljanović, head of the Yugoslav Cinematheque archive in Belgrade.

⁵⁵ Vladimir Anđelković, president of the Center of the Serbian amateur film.

⁵⁶ It is indeed hard (or even impossible?) to be ‘objective’ or ‘neutral’ within (humanistic) sciences, especially when it comes to the question of the artistic judgment value. The concept of self-reflexivity has therefore been used on numerous occasions in order to assist or to clarify for the researcher the position he/she assumes within his own research material. “[R]eflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher” wrote Kim England, professor of geography at the University of Washington, in her much-quoted article dealing with the feminist approach towards the scientific research (Cf. Kim England, “Getting Personal. Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research”, *The Professional Geographer*, 46, 1, 1994, pp. 80-89.). The aim of the concept is to interrogate one’s own position/role within the chain of knowledge production, by being aware of all the aspects of power relations that might influence the research process, and is considered to be a part of the feminist research methodology (cf. Nancy A. Naples, “Feminist methodology”, in George Ritzer (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford and Carlton, 2009, pp. 1701-1706).

valuable SR Croatian experimental film might be considered as a gesture of provocation, since the field of experimental cinema is marked by a highly individualized authorial approach, and it seems as if each work has to be approached individually, from the singular artistic universe of that respective author. There are, of course, genres and modes of creation in experimental cinema (as would be the case with the structural or the diary film), but one might conclude that there exist as many typologies of experimental cinema as there are authors making it.⁵⁷

As notable examples I will use Stilinović's film *Zidovi, kaputi, sjene* (*Walls, Coats, Shadows*, 1975) and the writing of the Croatian film scholars, experimentalists and film critics on the question of self-consciousness as a positive qualitative factor in defining the artistic value of a film. Stilinović's film is chosen due to the fact that on the level of organization of visual material it resembles Ivančić's *Pijesak* (*Sand*, 1971),⁵⁸ and also because Stilinović made only two films within the Ciné-club Zagreb (*Počelnica 1, 2, 3* [*Primer, 1, 2, 3*] in 1973, and *Traže te* [*They are Looking for You*] in the same year), which once more underlines the question whether the CFA is dedicated to the preservation of the Croatian amateur (experimental) film heritage from the socialist period, or if its editorial politics have served other purposes.

Walls, Coats, Shadows, Pebbles, Stones and Sand

Stilinović's films are undoubtedly significant in the context of Yugoslav experimental cinema. But why is Stilinović, with only two films made within the Ciné-club Zagreb, considered more

⁵⁷ Cf. Peter Gidal, *Structural Film Anthology*, British Film Institute, London, 1976; Hrvoje Turković, "Što je to eksperimentalni film", in *Filmske sveske*, 4, 1981; Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1999; Malcolm Le Grice, *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age*, British Film Institute, London, 2001; P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film. The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002; Hrvoje Turković, "Što je eksperimentalni (avangardni, alternativni) film?", *Zapis. Bilten Hrvatskog filmskog saveza*, 38, 2002; Nicole Brenez, "Cinemas d'avant-garde", *Cahiers du cinéma*, Paris, 2007; Dominique Noguez, *Eloge du cinéma expérimental*, Paris expérimental, Paris, 2010; Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012; A. L. Rees, *Povijest eksperimentalnog filma i videa*, 25 FPS, Zagreb, 2016.

⁵⁸ The documentation on the films of Tatjana Ivančić from the Film Archive of the Croatian state archive dates this film to 1975, however I decided to use the date from the Ciné-club Zagreb monograph. The monograph has been published in 2003, while the dating from the Film Archive to my present knowledge relies upon the information from the book by Vjekoslav Majcen which was published in 1994. Cf. Vjekoslav Majcen, *Filmska i video zbirka Hrvatskog filmskog saveza*, Hrvatski filmski savez, Zagreb, 1994.

significant than Tatjana Ivančić, with her 74 films made in that same ciné-club? Let us take a close comparative look at two of their films. *Walls, Coats and Shadows* (1975, 6'40'', silent) consists of three major visual units; the first one is made up of close ups of different textures, presumably the surfaces of the city walls. Hence the first name in the title of the film the walls (Fig. 1). The second unit consists of different shots of passers-by, more precisely the medium shots of their coats (Fig. 2). Hence the second name in the title of the film the coats. The last, third unit, consists of the medium shots of the public walls and the shadows of the passers-by, which move across them. Hence the third name in the title of the film the shadows (Fig. 3).



Fig. 1:
Mladen Stilinović,
Walls, Coats, Shadows,
1975, 8mm. Printed
with kind permission of
Branka Stipančić.



Fig. 2:
Mladen Stilinović,
Walls, Coats, Shadows,
1975, 8mm. Printed
with kind permission of
Branka Stipančić.

Fig. 3:

Mladen Stilinović,
Walls, Coats, Shadows,
1975, 8mm. Printed
with kind permission of
Branka Stipančić.



The film *Sand* by Tatjana Ivančić (1971, 3'30'') opens with a close up of a small crab moving swiftly under the surface of the sea, followed by an intertitle which announces the name of the movie. Music which sets the atmosphere for the work is Debussy's *Première rhapsodie* (1910) and the camera focuses on the interplay of the waves and the refractions of light in the shallow shores of a sandy Mediterranean beach (Fig. 4). The underlying motif of this play of textures is the sand, and the film culminates with a musical crescendo and a dynamically edited succession of the shots of sand and stones (Fig. 5), gradually moving away from the fine grains of sand, gliding over somewhat bigger pebbles, and finally finishing with the close up of the rocky wall (Fig. 6), presumably near the sea shore.

Fig. 4:

Tatjana Ivančić,
Sand, 1971, 8mm.
Courtesy of Aleksandar
Ivančić, Croatian Film
Association, Ciné-club
Zagreb.

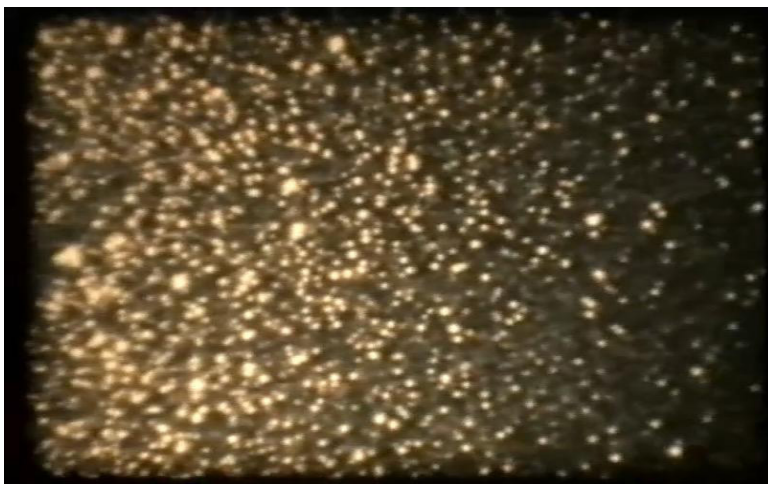




Fig. 5:
Tatjana Ivančić,
Sand, 1971, S8mm.
Courtesy of Aleksandar
Ivančić, Croatian Film
Association, Ciné-club
Zagreb.



Fig. 6:
Tatjana Ivančić,
Sand, 1971, S8mm.
Courtesy of Aleksandar
Ivančić, Croatian Film
Association, Ciné-club
Zagreb.

According to the monograph of the Ciné-club Zagreb, *Sand* was made in 1971, four years before Stilinović's *Walls, Coats, Shadows*, and we might conclude that they bear a structural resemblance. They both engage with surfaces and their textures, and on the whole they both operate on the level of conceptual structuration of the visual material. Both films carry the visual subject matter in their title and visually focus on that particular motif Stilinović engages with the shots of walls, coats and shadows, while Ivančić focuses on the sand. However, the breadth of meaning which they offer seems to be significantly different. In this particular case Stilinović keeps the meaning of the film harnessed to the purely visual level – the level of wit and play-on-images, which are characteristic traits of his authorial poetics throughout other media as well.

His visual pun thus remains only on the level of the form through which he points the viewers' attention towards the textures of the surfaces gradually informed by the shadows of the passers-by. Ana Janevski considers this film to be in an ironic relation to the idea of the structural film,⁵⁹ while Hrvoje Turković primarily accentuates the rhythmization of the visual material as the main quality of Stilinović's *Walls, Coats, Shadows*.⁶⁰ It seems as if Ivančić, on the other hand, aims at conveying something that bears the conceptualization of a bigger philosophical scope – that of the change in the nature of things themselves. In Stilinović's film we see authorial wit paired with geometrical compositions and formalistic concepts of repetition based on the similar visual material, while Ivančić, besides the engagement with the formal levels of surfaces and the exploration of textures, recounts of sand, pebbles and stones stemming from rocks, indicating a unity which eludes our vision distorted by the fragmented appearance of things. On the verbal level of the title, Stilinović frames his film almost tautologically – *Walls, Coats, Shadows*, while Ivančić extrapolates the smallest unit of her motif and turns it into a simple yet all-encompassing sign: *Sand*.

Given the fact that Stilinović generally continued on the materialist experiments of the GEFf circle,⁶¹ and admired the authors such as Pansini, Petek, and Gotovac,⁶² it is possible to conclude that his poetics fits perfectly within the modernist material-oriented narrative, privileging formal and media experiments over work which perhaps needs a more attentive and nuanced approach.

Authorial Self-Consciousness?

While reading the texts on SR Croatian experimental filmmakers, I noticed a recurring remark regarding intentionality and self-conscious filmmaking as indicators of a valuable work. "Yugoslav cinema of the 1920s (but later as well) does not correspond to the global experimental movement neither in terms of production nor cinematic/filmic self-consciousness"⁶³ wrote film researcher Vanja

⁵⁹ Ana Janevski, "If you know exactly what avant-garde is and how to name it, it probably isn't very avant-garde, right? *On the experimental films of Mladen Stilinović*", in Diana Nenadić (eds.), *Mladen Stilinović, Primer 1, 2, 3, Experimental Films and Videos, 1971-2006*, DVD booklet, Croatian Film Association, Zagreb, 2012, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Ivi, p. 18.

⁶³ "U jugoslavenskom filmu 1920-ih (ali i kasnije), ne može se svjedočiti o nečemu što je proizvodno/filmski samosvjesno, identično svjetskom eksperimentalnom pokretu". Vanja Obad, "Kratki prilog povijesti prve jugoslavenske filmske

Obad in his text on the early Yugoslav film avant-garde (emphasis added). "Although it is not an anthological work, *Žemska/Gal* [a film by Dunja Ivanišević] will play its part in the writing of the history of cinema in Split at least as a curiosity. It has already served to gender activists as an example of *female self-conscious* film with a Dalmatian domicile"⁶⁴ concluded film critic Diana Nenadić in the monograph of the Ciné-club Split (emphasis added). "Of avant-garde in Croatia in the second sense – of a tendency-movement – we can fully discuss only the period of the neo-avant-garde, that is the 'second filmic avant-garde'. That period – end of the 1950s and especially the 1960s – is an era of a *self-conscious appearance* of 'experimental film' in Croatia ... and here we also refer to it as the 'geff-period'",⁶⁵ stated film scholar Hrvoje Turković in his essay on the experimental film and video from SR Croatia (my emphasis). "In that work [by Vladimir Petek] there are no formal or theoretical points of contact with [Norman] McLaren, not in the first phase of transitory, undocumented films, nor later. Petek wasn't working *intentionally, but psychophysically*"⁶⁶ remarked Mihovil Pansini in the Ciné-club Zagreb monograph (emphasis added).

If self-consciousness is an indicator of the significance of a film or a filmic movement, as these quotations seem to suggest, then why are the films of Vladimir Petek,⁶⁷ who, according to

avangarde", *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis*, 75, 2013, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Diana Nenadić, "Splitska škola između klupske i osobnih mitologija/'Split School' between club and personal mythology", in Fradelić, *Splitska škola filma–60 godina*, cit., p. 86.

⁶⁵ "O avangardi u drugome smislu – pokreta tendencije – može se u Hrvatskoj govoriti s punim pravom tek u razdoblju neoavangarde, odnosno filmske 'druge avangarde'. To je razdoblje – kraj pedesetih i osobito šezdesete godine – doba samosvjesne pojave 'eskeperimentalnog filma' u Hrvatskoj ... a o njemu se u nas još govori kao o 'gefovskom razdoblju'". Hrvoje Turković, "Hrvatski eksperimentalni film šezdesetih i videoumjetnost sedamdesetih kao avangardno krilo modernizma" [Croatian experimental film in the sixties and videoart in the seventies as an avant-garde wings of modernism], *Academia.edu*, <<http://bit.ly/2GpLOv7>> (3/2018).

⁶⁶ "U tom radu nema nikakvih formalnih ni teorijskih dodira s McLarenom, ni u toj prvoj fazi prolaznih, nezabilježenih filmova, niti kasnije. Petek nije radio intencionalno, nego psihofizički". Pansini, *Pet razdoblja Kinokluba Zagreb* cit., p. 7.

⁶⁷ In the entire CFA's textual and DVD production dedicated to the topic of SR CroatiaIn the entire CFA's textual and DVD production dedicated to the topic of SR Croatian experimental cinema, Vladimir Petek is represented with only one film (*Encounters*, 1963, on the DVD *Early experimental film and video art in SR Croatia* [2007]) and the monograph written Đorđe Janjatović (*Vladimir Petek*, Hrvatski filmski savez, 2001). Petek officially made 24 films within the frame of the Ciné-club Zagreb, and his oeuvre is tremendously important for the SR Croatian and Yugoslav experimental cinema. He made some of the first material experiments in the medium of film in the Yugoslav (and possibly international) context, and is one of the most exciting and prolific experimentalists of the 1960s, with his activities

his colleague Pansini, did not possess this level of self-conscious intention, omnipresent in the overviews of Croatian experimental film from the socialist period? We could easily claim that, according to an interview Ivančić gave to the film magazine *Sineast*⁶⁸ in which she displays extreme awareness of the technical aspects of the medium of film, her work undoubtedly bears a high level of self-conscious filmmaking. Why has that not been enough to include her work in the overviews of the SR Croatian or Yugoslav experimental cinema? The interview which her son Aleksandar Ivančić gave to the authors of a documentary (unfinished at the time of this article's submission) on the history of the Ciné-club Zagreb elucidates the position of Ivančić within the ciné-club circle.

She was quite often being awarded, and the people who had pretensions to become filmmakers ... there was a certain amount of jealousy. But I know she had a lot of problems with her position in this amateur film because she was of course a woman, but her style was different from the style that was probably trendy back then, so I think she was never accepted as an equal member in the Ciné-club Zagreb, because these members had completely different pretensions and ideas and I think that she even got her own ciné-club made especially for her, Ciné-club Studio ... but precisely due to these bad relationships she worked within the Ciné-club Studio in the last phase of her activity.⁶⁹

Besides the fact that her films obviously did not fit the preconceptions of experimental films of the 1960s and the 1970s, as has been confirmed by Aleksandar Ivančić, it seems as if Tatjana Ivančić's ciné-club colleagues had a hard time dealing with the fact that she was not only creatively independent but also successful in the amateur film circle.

spanning well into the 1990s. Petek is chosen as an example of an author whose work is almost without exception included in the programmes showcasing SR Croatian experimental cinema in an international context, yet he still does not have a monographic DVD, while his work according to his contemporaries fails to meet the (necessary) standards of self-conscious creating.

⁶⁸ Tatjana Ivančić in Bojko, *Vratiti žanrove*, cit., p. 274.

⁶⁹ "Ona je često dobivala nagrade a ljudi koji su imali pretenzije da postanu filmaši zapravo su postojala je jedna ljubomora određena. ... Ali znam da je imala dosta problema sa svojom pozicijom unutar tog amaterskog filma jer je bila naravno žena, ali i njezin stil je bio drugačiji od stila koji je tada valjda bio u trendu, pa mislim da ona u Kino klubu Zagreb nikad nije bila prihvaćena kao ravnopravni član, jer su ti članovi imali potpuno druge pretenzije i ideje i mislim da je zbog nje osnovan čak klub koji se zvao Kino klub Studio ... ali upravo zbog takvih relativno loših odnosa je djelovala u zadnje vrijeme svoje aktivnosti kroz taj kino klub Studio". Aleksandar Ivančić, unpublished transcript, n/a.

Disrupting Historicity by “Lost and Found Scholarship”

In her text “Women’s Art. A Manifesto” Austrian experimental filmmaker VALIE EXPORT wrote the following (opening and closing) words: “THE HISTORY OF WOMAN IS THE HISTORY OF MAN. THE FUTURE OF WOMEN WILL BE THE HISTORY OF WOMAN”.⁷⁰ In this short, sharp, and direct programmatic text she argues against the normative image of woman, which has been created and perpetuated by men, and invites women to take control over the media “as a means of social struggle and social progress”⁷¹ in order to reassess and revise these traditional (male, artistic) values. EXPORT wants women to inscribe and insert themselves, along with their personal artistic visions of the world and themselves, and in any chosen media into the existing cultural and social order, and reclaim these preconceived normative spaces of creation. It seems as if Tatjana Ivančić, uncompromisingly following her authorial vision and persisting in her unorthodox poetics, managed to do precisely what VALIE EXPORT asked for at the time. However, although her films were undoubtedly noticed in the 1970s, the present institutional position of her work has caused it to become invisible for the international audience. By perpetuating the dominant male values and norms of the 1960s and 1970s experimental cinema, Croatian Film Association continued to privilege male authorship and male authorial poetics, which it now seemingly differ from what Ivančić was trying to do in her work. Since we live in a thoroughly institutionalised system, uncovering the institutional blind spots and misleading information was a necessary first step in the attempt to recover women’s experimental film history of the 1970s Yugoslavia. But considering the fact that the artwork in question was film what needs to be done in order to efficiently disrupt the unimpeded flow of history?

As it has already been mentioned, the films of Tatjana Ivančić were shown in an (independently run) art gallery in Zagreb, in May 2016. Several film critics and film scholars attended the screening, wrote favorably of her work,⁷² and it wasn’t long before

⁷⁰ VALIE EXPORT, “Women’s Art. A Manifesto”, in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (eds.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art. A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, p. 755.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Damir Radić, “Ženski spol i alternativni pol”, <<https://www.portalnovosti.com/enski-spol-i-alternativni-pol>> (4/2018); Ejla Kovačević, “Eksperimentatorice u jugoslavenskom alternativnom filmu”, <<https://bit.ly/2KatxmP>> (4/2018); Sonja Leboš, “Jugoslavenske eksperimentatorice izlaze iz sjene”, <<https://bit.ly/2qTdO3I>> (4/2018).

her films began a small regional tour. In 2018 one of her films, *The City in the Shop Window* (1969), was shown in the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb, as a part of a large exhibition dedicated to the important artistic and cultural achievements of Croatian modernism from the Yugoslav period.

Taking care of a film collection therefore means keeping it constantly alive and active; films which remain closed in DVD boxes or left forgotten on archival shelves will continue to remain invisible. Taking care of women's intellectual and artistic legacy implicates incessant struggle against dominant narratives and tireless promotion of differences. That is the reason why Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards in their *Third Wave Manifesta* insisted on the "access to our intellectual feminist legacy and women's history; ... and to have women's history taught to men as well as women as a part of all curricula".⁷³ Disrupting historicity for Tatjana Ivančić meant confronting the Present with a Difference, while disrupting historicity in my case meant extracting that (now historical) Difference from its institutional archival tomb and confronting the dominant narratives by repeating and explaining it. As Griselda Pollock astutely remarked, to merely insist on the corrections of the existing canons is not sufficient: "[w]e need to challenge the entire apparatus and its underlying ideological function that distorts all of our understandings of who we are and who we can be".⁷⁴ This might be precisely what American film scholar Lauren Rabinovitz defined as the 'lost - and - found scholarship'⁷⁵, that is, the work on women's artistic legacy by which we are at the same time "refashioning film theory and historiography".⁷⁶

As it seems, feminism became a fashionable mainstream.⁷⁷ Using this heightened mainstream interest in all things female as an opportunity to both theoretically and historiographically promote women's cinematic legacy obviously can make a change, but whether this change will last and what impact it might have when the *it* moment of feminism passes still remains to be seen.

⁷³ Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, "Manifesta. Young Women, Feminism, and the Future", in Freedman, *The Essential Feminist Reader*, p. 425.

⁷⁴ Pollock, *A Lonely Preface*, cit., p. xxvii.

⁷⁵ Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Future of Feminism and Film History", *Camera Obscura*, 21, 1, 2006, p. 42.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Cleo Levin, "Feminism Is the Latest High-Fashion Trend", <<https://slate.me/2ls6l9O>> (4/18); Selene Oliva, "The New Feminism Choose Fashion to Communicate", <<https://bit.ly/2K6Dhyu>> (4/2018); Madeline Fry, "Feminism Is in Fashion, but It's a Questionable Style", <<https://bit.ly/2K7sa8w>> (4/2018).

Bitch Better Have My Money: Female Eros and Aggression in Contemporary Pop Music

Ana Fazekaš

Summary

This paper intends to propose an analysis of the connection between (hyper)sexualisation, (pseudo)feminism, and aggression in contemporary mainstream pop music made by and for women. It reads the implications and potential repercussions that these discourses have in regard to their vast young fan base, questioning what the political significance of such a commodified version of feminism might be, and whether it can lead to substantial changes in perception and culture. The main question is whether and in what way the mass feminism of contemporary young generations will prove to be a mode of a feminist reclaiming of the future.

SIDE A

Track 1: Intro

In order to write on this topic,¹ I must deal with an intellectual/emotional clash similar to the one that Susan Sontag describes when opening her notes on *Camp* one is strongly drawn to it as much as offended by it: “That is why I want to talk about it, and why I can. For no one who wholeheartedly shares in a given sensibility can analyse it; he can only, whatever his intention, exhibit it. To name a sensibility, to draw its contours and to recount its history, requires a deep sympathy modified by

¹ This article was written at the beginning of 2017, and references recent events that happened following the 2016 American presidential elections.

revulsion”.² When it comes to pop music, I can say the same; that exact mixture of attraction and indignation is the reason why I want to talk about it, why I can, and why, in a way, I must. If I look back at the beginning of my academic career, when my first contacts and interests concerning art and feminism began, I find out that what has shaped me most is popular culture, especially music. It seems to me that I will never again be in such a unique position that is close enough to the youth culture I want to discuss, as well as far enough from it. I am writing about the millennial audience, raised with social media and Internet; a public with a short attention span, used to scrolling instead of reading, watching TV shows rather than movies, dividing concentration between a large number of simultaneously opened tabs, at the same time oddly nostalgic of artefacts dating a not-so-distant past, which they now declare *vintage*. Even if, in these circles, there is much talk about feminism, and it seems to be cultivating an interest in topics and views related to it, the question to answer is how feminism is re/presented and perceived, and, given the input of young generations today, what kind of future awaits it.

Track 2: Girls Just Wanna have Fun-damental Human Rights

The first cassette I ever bought growing up was one by Spice Girls (1996), a British group whose poetics is based on the concept of female friendship and *girl power*,³ before moving on to Britney Spears (1999), with her Republican-Christian roots and music obsessed with heterosexual love relationships, presented as if they were at the core of personal identity and worth. Spears’ individual sexual revolution happened in her third album (simply titled *Britney*), where she entered the adult world dominated by the male gaze, as the sexual object par excellence. Her transition into adulthood was basically from a Catholic schoolgirl/barely legal/soft porn image to a fully grown (meaning, fully sexual) young woman; the transition hit was called *Slave 4 U* (sic!). At the same

² Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’”, 1964, p. 1. See <https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag_Susan_1964_Notes_on_Camp.pdf> (01/2017). See also Tim Souster, “Notes on Pop Music”, *Tempo*, 87, 1968-1969, pp. 2-6.

³ It is worth noting that Spice Girls were an important moment in the constitution of the market for young girls as we know it today, since they were the first all-girl global sensation that induced public hysteria in the way solely male performers had done up until then. Also, the introduction of an idea of female gangs, based on solidarity and sisterhood that is much more important than romantic interests (as well as a palette of possible identities to choose from), was a big breakthrough in popular culture by women for women-in-the-making.

time came Destiny's Child and Alicia Keys; at eleven years old, I was hypnotised by their album titles, *Independent Women*, *Survivor* and *A Woman's Worth*. For a while, in elementary school, I would proclaim myself a feminist, having in mind images of strong, tough, superhero-like women, something along the lines of the re-made *Charlie's Angels*. I was not really concerned with the fact that these women were called *angels* (ethereal, one-dimensional, inherently *sidekick* creatures) but with the fact that they were, indeed, *Charlie's*.

My adolescence was, on the other hand, mostly defined by an alternative music in which I found refuge from conventional femininity, yet along a topos that (I only later perceived and questioned) was male-dominated, where female performers represented an exception rather than the rule. In that respect, it was not exactly an alternative cosmos. It seemed that pop music, in its narrower sense, made place for femininity only in a controlled, restricted and conventional form, which enforced in girls who were searching for another environment, aesthetic and worldview, the perception that pop was, at the same time, feminine (*girlie*) as well as low quality, non-intellectual, lacking provocation and inspiration for those with intellectual ambitions. I would claim that it was forming a subtle interiorised misogyny, instilling in those girls a kind of pop/feminine/apolitical/banal vs. alt/masculine/political/ intellectual dichotomy. The presence of few role models such as Kim Gordon, Siouxsie Sioux, PJ Harvey, and Patti Smith, in my case only strengthened the idea that truly powerful women artists, questioning conventional femininity, de-constructing and re-constructing it in their terms, were only exceptions to the patriarchal rule. Any kind of feminist engagement, solidarity, the feeling of collective experiences to be established, shared and questioned among women, was simply not possible. Still, there was a subversive element to these acts; the music was loud by definition, a sound full of distortions and subversive lyrics, which also opened the gateway for me to female aggression expressed in ways that I had been taught were not appropriate or acceptable. It was only when much older that I grasped the subversive importance of these artists. Female voices making specifically female stories audible (with their implicit or explicit political dimension) were appearing in music with the evolution of alternative artists, peaking in the nineties with the feminist punk movement called *riot grrrl*. These predominantly female bands welcomed interaction between female artists in a male-dominated scene that felt very unwelcoming to women; they

spoke of sexuality, female aggression,⁴ sexual violence, domestic abuse and rape, and patriarchal pressure in general; they spoke in anarchist, anti-capitalistic and anti-consumeristic terms. They opposed racism, homophobia and ableism, problematising class issues not only artistically but also in DIY publications, political pamphlets and conventions in which these issues were freely discussed.⁵ It is more than symptomatic that soon the movement crumbled under media hyper-exposure and manipulation; mainstream producers found commercial potential in some aspects of the movement, and so the *riot grrrl's girl power* became the slogan of the hardly feministic commercial product Spice Girls (to the initial founders' frustration, as they deemed that no commercially driven artist could be truly representative of their subversive idea(l)s).

Track 3: Mediating Women's Experience

It is interesting that Kathleen Hanna, one of the initiators of *riot grrrl* and singer for Bikini Kill, stresses media misconceptions and pressure as a key factor in the decomposition of the movement. Their aims and methods were based on anarchist direct action and free interpersonal information flow, which could not survive in contemporary mass media culture. What was especially traumatic was that the media representation of their work focused on the content of some of their songs, choosing to interpret them as reactions of 'sexually abused and disturbed young women', as opposed to their programmatic intention to voice collective experiences that all women could relate to.⁶ *Riot grrrl* communicated through handmade fanzines

⁴ Dana Crowley Jack, *Behind the Mask. Destruction and Creativity in Women's Aggression*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

⁵ "For more and more subcultures (youth or otherwise), the ability to intertwine politics and style is a risky and necessary tactic in cultural-historical period marked by the 'logic of late capitalism' in which the commodification of resistance is a hegemonic strategy. The hybrid political texts and distribution networks produced by feminists like Riot Grrrls are significant in the formation of Third Wave movement cultures; they are both 'popular' and subcultural, they provide spaces for youth-controlled conversations, and they can operate as an interface between different Third Wave cohorts (they connect Riot Grrrls to one another but also to other feminists and women)". Ednie Kaeh Garrison, "U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave", *Feminist Studies*, 26, 1, 2000, pp. 141-170.

⁶ Forcibly reading women's art as autobiographical, especially when it speaks of various traumas, is one of many modes of neutralising the potential power of those artists' voices, their call to share feeling and experiences, questioning of women's daily experience with patriarchal micro-fascism, making it visible. By

that were distributed hand-to-hand.⁷ They organized multi-media events, often including round tables and discussions on various feminist topics, as well as open mics for women to share their thoughts, experiences, poetry or music, and acts of political activism. Today fanzines paradoxically exist online, many of them specifically concerned with feminist content, alongside blogs, web portals and social networks. The network community is broadening, also developing its rhetoric, gaining more and more importance, its potential being explored and used in journalism, advertisement, propaganda and art. For the first time ever, thanks to Twitter and Instagram, there is a virtual/real space in which public figures communicate with their audience, increasing the illusion of knowing one's pop icon. More than ever, through artificially manufactured social media personas and avatars, everyone feels as if they are both intimately close and chillingly isolated.

In the past year I have been working in a non-profit artistic association as production assistant (my main task being social media management), and writer for the online edition of a well-known women's magazine. Every organisation that wishes to communicate with a broader audience needs Internet sites as well as Facebook pages, Instagram profiles and Twitter accounts, that need to be updated several times a day, and where the only imperative you are given is: *You need clicks*. This means you need attractive headlines, the newest information found on other social media, popular names and peeks into the personal lives of the rich and famous. Most of the news is simply sensationalised social network content; no research is needed; everything has to be produced and consumed at an extremely fast rate.

We have to acknowledge that this condition both reflects and generates new modes of communication and perception; everything is being processed and recycled so quickly that any feeling of personal responsibility for what is being said, is erased just as fast. On a more positive note, and although there is a great deal of manipulation in play, the plurality of voices has never been more overt and obvious, and, interestingly, talk on feminist, racial and LGBTQIA+ issues, is omnipresent, as if everything appearing in the public space has to pass through those filters.

reducing the significance of this type of artistic work to an individual case, the (hostile) public is reducing subversive and activist potential the art could have. *Riot grrrl* bands were also represented as man-hating, unfeminine, and delusional.

⁷ Michelle Comstock, "Grrrl Zine Networks. Re-Composing Spaces of Authority, Gender, and Culture", *JAC*, 21, 2, 2001, pp. 383-409.

SIDE B

Track 4: Aggressive Erotica

It is difficult to challenge patriarchal (mis)conceptions of women without extensively dealing with the perception and representation of female sexuality. When it comes to its presence in mainstream popular music, we can extract several gendered possibilities: a) idealised women to be worshipped in male discourse (in a Platonic, Petrarchesque manner); b) women in love (in an early Britney Spears kind of way, as she sings *I was born to make you happy*); c) heartbroken women (in another early Britney Spears kind of way, as she sings that *her loneliness is killing her*); d) nameless women used as exclusively sexual objects or props in male hip-hop culture (serving as an important indicator of the alpha male position of power); e) scorned, angry and vengeful, women (a version of the demonised witch or succubus).

Female alternative musicians have always been heavily preoccupied with sexuality, heterosexual and queer, reclaiming the discourse they felt had been exclusively reserved for men. They position themselves as *active* sexual beings, distinct from the pornographic blow-up dolls plaguing the mainstream pop scene. Similarly, by inhabiting an active position and becoming the sexual subject, as opposed to an object of (male) desire, a significant number of female pop icons recently have taken a feminist stand for themselves. At least, many of them claim so. While the aforementioned punk feminists significantly underlined their refusal to be seen as sex symbols,⁸ pop music feminists are embracing the same imagery, presumably 'on their own terms', in order to refuse to disappear into a symbol of and permanently remain linked to sex. Moreover, their sexuality is being expressed more aggressively than ever, the gaze *violently* turned back to voyeurs.

However, many feminists stress the importance of acknowledging the need to draw critical distinctions between feminist refusal of patriarchal discourse, and performances circulating the signs of refusal, while actually expressing complicity with patriarchal discourse. The list of contemporary female pop musicians that could fall into this description is long. For instance, one could devote pages to Lady Gaga's overt sexuality that, at one moment, turned into explicit LGBTQ advocacy, exploring sexual fantasies and perversions

⁸ Charles Shaar Murray, "No pop, No Style, Poly Styrene is Still Strictly Roots", *Web Archive*, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20091027102504/http://www.geocities.com/vintageinterviews/xrayspex.html>> (01/2017).

in an artistically as well as politically self-conscious, neo-avant-garde way.⁹ As a seemingly less complex author, Nicki Minaj has received much attention with her hit song *Anaconda* and the sexualised video released along with it. As one in a relatively long list of odes to her own body, sexuality, and, especially, her 'behind', *Anaconda* is interesting in that it uses and parodies a hit song from 1992, by a Sir Mix-a-Lot, entitled *Baby Got Back*, charmingly subtitled: *I Like Big Butts*. The original song uses, as *leitmotiv*, the verse "My anaconda don't want none unless you've got buns, hun", which Nicki cites, cuts and subverts.¹⁰ This postmodernist parody technique, along with brutally ironic lyrics that place men in objectified positions, makes the song much more than just another sexy pop song.

Obviously, in addressing feminism in pop music, one cannot overlook the institution named Beyoncé, who extensively uses postmodernist¹¹ techniques, especially in her recent work; playing with autobiography, teasing the audience peeping into her personal life, as well as quoting her earlier work, sampling existing songs, collaborating with artists in various media, collaging political speeches and documentary video footage, making elaborate and complex products such as her HBO movie-album *Lemonade*, praised as the peak of contemporary popular music as well as an overtly political statement connected to pro-sex black feminism (for a critique of its political value, see hooks, 2016). Nigerian writer and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the author of the TED talk turned into the short book entitled *We Should All Be Feminists*,¹² was sampled in Beyoncé's song *Flawless*.

⁹ Lady Gaga has also spoken publicly of her experience of rape that happened early in her career, revealing the very vulnerable position many young women face when starting their professional life, be it celebrity life or not. As a matter of fact, many women of the entertainment industry have spoken out about surviving sexual assaults in the wake of the recent presidential election in USA, to which I will devote some space later in this article, although the #metoo movement and TimesUp initiative will peak later in 2017, and continue to grow through 2018.

¹⁰ Both songs, Sir Mix-a-lot's as well as Nicki's, are also significant as celebrations of the curvy body shape, which is linked to the African-American body-aesthetic, as opposed to the *skinny white girl* ideal in dominant culture. This is a topic in itself that has been and still is present in black feminist criticism, which I am not nearly equipped to tackle. However, I do believe it to be quite important to have in mind that many of the contemporary pop artists I am talking about here are quite self-consciously representing more than one marginalised group and many of them problematise racial issues in various ways and extents.

¹¹ For other examples of postmodern poetics in pop music, see Tony Mitchell, "Performance and the Postmodern in Pop Music", *Theatre Journal*, 41, 3, [Performance in Context], 1989, pp. 273-293.

¹² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*, Fourth Estate, London, 2014.

When interviewed, Adichie vaguely and reluctantly commented: “Anything that gets young people talking about feminism is a very good thing”. Later, responding to the critiques of Beyoncé’s feminist credentials, the writer asserted that “Whoever says they’re feminist is bloody feminist”.¹³ On the other hand, bell hooks is less inclusive when stating that, though she appreciates some of Beyoncé’s work, the overtly sexualised songs and videos (such as *Partition*) remain “part of the tropes of the existing, imperialist, white supremacist, patriarchal capitalist structure of female sexuality”.¹⁴

It is difficult to find space for the expression of female sexuality that avoids reiterating exploitative tropes, and not only those since women are systematically and exclusively exposed to patriarchal (imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist) views on female sexuality. Imagining and implementing an alternative to these concepts is the all-encompassing task of an entire civilisation. However, it is important to take into account the socially and historically determined givens of the world as we know it, those that form the psychological basis for sexual affinities, appetites, as well as perversions (in the psychoanalytical, morally neutral sense of the word) as the result of the (affirmative or negative) interiorisation of socially constructed assumptions. Much talk could be devoted to the myth of female masochism, and the way it is introduced into various discourses, especially of art and culture. In this sense, I find interesting the work of FKA Twigs, a schooled dancer only recently turned into a singer, who devotes most of her songs to the body (not surprisingly, since her life has been devoted to exploring bodily expressions) and to (heterosexual) sex. The way she treats this topic is quite different in regard to the aforementioned trends. She often uses the motive of the male gaze, in order to re-frame it; she often embodies the masochistic fantasy, but it is her own fantasy, where she constitutes the masochistic/submissive sexual position as part of a balanced dynamic between

¹³ Danielle Britni, “Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Defends Beyoncé: ‘Whoever Says They’re Feminist is Bloody Feminist’”, *Clutch Magazine*, <<http://www.clutchmagonline.com/2014/03/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-defends-beyonce-asks-shouldnt-women-sexuality/>> (01/2017.) Relatively recently, Adichie admitted that she was reluctant to comment on her part in Queen Bey’s song and video because she felt uncomfortable with the attention it has gotten her. She also felt that Beyoncé’s feminism was different from her own feminism in that Bey “gives quite a lot of space to the necessity of men”. It seems that if we are all to be feminists, it is possible that everyone will develop his/her own personal feminism.

¹⁴ Kat Stoeffel, “bell hooks Was Bored by ‘Anaconda’”, *The Cut*, <<http://nymag.com/thecut/2014/10/bell-hooks-was-bored-by-anaconda.html>>, (01/2017).

partners, fully empowered and empowering as well as sensual and erotic.¹⁵ Labelled with an odd generic determination, *avant-pop*, FKA places herself on the margins of pop, programmatically concerned with setting an opposition to what she deems crude porn-like aggressive displays of sexual relationships.¹⁶

Track 5: Eroticised Aggression

A very different artist, Rihanna, entered the pop realm with typical *dancy* pop songs of love and having fun. The first twist to her persona was made with the album *Good Girl Gone Bad* in which the songs have explicit sexual allusions, opening up space for female aggression, and continuing to even more explicit content in songs such as *Rude Boy* and *S&M*. Her inhabiting of the presumed masochistic female position in the sexual relationship is active, aggressive and unapologetic. There is nothing submissive in the way she proclaims her masochistic sexual preferences, or anything else for that matter. Years before, she found herself in an abusive relationship with a pop star, which escalated (at least once) to extreme physical violence. Photos of her abused body were leaked to the press as she became the poster child for domestic abuse, as well as the butt of all politically incorrect jokes on violence against women. *Riot grrrl* bands devoted much space to violence against women, all kinds of abuse, as well as patriarchal micro-fascism, which are not topics that easily fly in pop, given their unattractiveness for a public in search of easy entertainment. Still, Rihanna issued multiple songs on abusive relationships, female rage and vengeance against the abuser (especially in *Man Down*), all of which became hits, followed by public attention and discussion.¹⁷ Female aggression, rage and riot, present in alternative music, have slipped into pop, instantly perceived in the public eye as feminist, as if feminism is inherent to

¹⁵ Daisy Jones “Why ‘M3LL155X’ is FKA twigs’ strongest feminist statement”, *Dazed and Confused*, <<http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/25916/1/why-m3ll155x-is-fka-twigs-strongest-feminist-statement>> (01/2017); Watson, Stephanie, “The Surreal and Startling Power of FKA Twigs”, *Bitch Media*, 2015, <<https://bitchmedia.org/article/surreal-and-startling-power-fka-twigs>> (01/2017).

¹⁶ Liz Ryerson, “Away From Being Told Who I Am: on FKA twigs, double-standards of online pop feminism, and transcendent art”, *Medium*, <<https://medium.com/@ellaguro/away-from-being-told-who-i-am-f38fbc3fa9db#.xuabjsyha>> (01/2017).

¹⁷ I must mention that the extent and overall relevance of this public discussion is quite limited, but I still find it an interesting moment, especially since Rihanna embraced the interest the public has given her trauma and responded with a series of songs and videos basically dealing with sex/love and violence in different ways.

female aggression, and female aggression is inherent to feminism (both being well-known, though highly misguided stereotypes).

Rihanna's recent hit *Bitch Better Have My Money* contains several aspects worthy of analysis. It was released with an elaborated video that must be regarded as an extension of the song, not merely a means of getting the music on TV channels. The video opens with a vague shot of a large chest with a pair of female legs hanging from its side and covered in blood. It cuts to a beautiful blonde in a fancy beige apartment, getting ready to go out with her pet-puppy-prop under her arm. In the elevator, she is kidnapped by Rihanna, who is wearing an elaborate, almost Roma girl-like outfit. As the video proceeds, Rihanna and her two female associates strip and torture the woman, while apparently blackmailing her husband: "Your wife in the back seat of my brand new foreign car, Don't act like you forgot, I call the shot-shot-shots". As the video comes to a close, it becomes obvious that the husband owes money to the Rihanna-character, and has no intention of returning it, despite his wife's threats; to be represented as disgusting as possible, he spends this money on strippers. Understanding that the man has no love or respect for his wife, let alone the other women in the video, Rihanna murders him quite brutally, returning us to the initial frame of the video only to find out that it is, in fact, Rihanna lying (1) naked, (2) in a chest full of money, (3) covered in the man's blood, (4) lighting what appears to be a joint.

There are many interesting motives in this short film, which is in a way based on Rihanna's personal experience of being robbed by her accountant (which was, in real life, settled in a legally far more acceptable way). Firstly, the *bitch* who *better have her money* is a man, which is a well-known mode of feminist re-appropriation of misogynist discourse.¹⁸ The genre that extensively uses this term in reference to women, as well as one heavily preoccupied with violence, murder, money and crime, is hip-hop, especially its *gangsta* rap subgenre: Rihanna incorporates all these elements, while placing herself at the centre of the narrative as a kind of drug dealer/loan shark/person of the underworld, as opposed to women exclusively represented, in these genres, as hoards of

¹⁸ What can be deemed problematic in this case specifically is that calling a man a bitch (done by men also) still partially remains inside the patriarchal structure, implying, in a way, that an insult traditionally meant for women is all the more insulting for a man (implying femininity and submissiveness). As far as I could gather, the most popular determination women are prone to give themselves these days in pop is – *bad bitch*.

twerking props. The video provoked both feminist praise and critical backlash about women on women violence and reverse racism as the tortured woman is white.¹⁹ Perhaps, the sexualised torture sequences can be regarded as problematic, in terms of their playing into the objectification and victimisation of women, but I believe that there is a dimension to the kidnapping that is almost like an initiation, rescuing the woman from a beige life in a picture-perfect unhappy marriage, and welcoming her to a decadent female-club lifestyle. The racial moment might feel uncomfortable, but it is supposed to be so; the division of perspective cannot be erased, however politically-correct we try to be. If we read the video as a kind of feminist manifesto (which is far-fetched, but not exactly out of left field), it is important that the woman in question is white, conforming to beauty standards, belonging to a high class, even if seemingly financially dependent.

Track 6: Selling (out) Feminism?

It is interesting to note that the only sexual (not to say, love) relationship that Rihanna portrays in the video is one with *money*. One cannot escape the fact that feminism in popular music is inextricably connected to capitalist and consumerist ideology; the *independent women* of pop are *financially independent*, their success being measured in money. In a hypertrophied version of Virginia Woolf's cry for *a room of one's own*, these women have mansions of their own, and they are proud of it. From the already cited speech of bell hooks: "There's a lot of booties out there that are glamorous but not connected to the fantasies of wealth and we equate wealth so much with freedom".²⁰ We must not forget that American feminism has a different history than that of ex-socialist countries, presenting a longer and deeper connection to capitalism in its populist extensions. In a capitalist regime, the primary [white] feminist issue used to be, exactly, becoming financial independent, and identifying with the consumer in his/her own right. In this structure, everything is linked to perpetuating the social/political system that eventually devours feminism as a crucial point of resistance. If *riot grrrl* attempted to address working class issues,

¹⁹ I strongly hold the position that reverse racism as well as reverse sexism and reverse cultural appropriation does not exist, as the terms are tightly linked to a hegemonic dynamic; the group that does not hold power in a specific culture cannot practice systematic discrimination towards the group that is in the dominant position, and the very introduction of such ideas in discourse is reactionary and disrupting.

²⁰ Stoeffel, *bell hooks Was Bored*, cit.

the same is (unsurprisingly) missing from pop music, while the concept of work *is* weirdly incorporated into pop songs. For example, *Work Bitch* by Britney Spears, *Work* by Rihanna, or the most recent *Work from Home* by X Factor created group Fifth Harmony, are songs which are not only disconnected in every possible way from the working class, but also relate work with sex. In her text “Women, Pop Music and Pornography”, Meredith Levande quite bluntly links profit from conspicuous pornography with what she deems pornographic imagery in mainstream pop music (also manufactured primarily for profit).²¹ There is something moralistic in her view as well as an uncontained frustration that she, as a musical artist herself, feels in connection to music *industry*. While she suggests pornographic visuals and behaviour are being transferred to the realm of pop music, I find that pornography follows trends just as any other business concentrated on profit. It does not surprise me to find similar motives in pornography as I see in advertisement, film and music. Representations of sex have always been present and attractive to people; liberal society found ways to make it more explicit; and capitalism found ways to exploit, package and sell it, which means that the porn industry itself did not *create* the misogynistic misconceptions, but it merely feeds on them.²² What this author misses is the fact that artists, whose image she is so concerned with, target an audience that is different from the one which pornography is sold to, in bulk their music is heavily and mostly consumed by young girls. If we can agree that mass production rests on the supply–demand principle, there is obviously a demand for feminist discourse as well as modes of *actively* expressing female sexuality and anger. What is problematic is that, in packaging these discourses in marketable and hardly subversive products, it enforces existing stereotypes and perpetuates the status quo. However artistically questionable, this *is* what young people are raised with, and every trend is an answer to an existing demand. Of course, not all pop stars are entering the discussion about feminism in popular culture, but the most *powerful* women in pop (and I do not use the term lightly), and those with most creative control over their work, are playing a significant part in the discussion.

²¹ Meredith Levande, “Women, Pop Music, and Pornography”, *Meridians*, 8, 1, [Representin’. Women, Hip-Hop, and Popular Music], 2008, pp. 293-321.

²² That is not to say that this should not be challenged, but I find it crucial to criticise these problems from a viewpoint devoid of conservative and moralistic prejudice. The pro-sex vs. anti-porn discussion is still alive and well, and as heated as ever, however it is near impossible to place oneself fully on either side of the spectrum.

Thinking back on my own past, in my young age I was searching for modes of expressing my uncanalised anger, aggression and sexuality. I delved into popular music long before exploring literature, visual and performative arts, and theory. Today's generations have access to significantly more content that can answer their needs. They have something I didn't have at the time: social networks, flooded with various interpretations of the material one is exposed to. The main problem I see here, is the lack of systematic guidance in following this over-exposure. Education in the field of feminism, racism, LGBTQIA+ issues, as well as in popular culture, is confined to college education that is too late and too specialised. College courses on Beyoncé and Rihanna are being taught in several Universities in the USA and Canada, and theory of pop culture and media play a great part in a variety of fields in the humanities and social sciences. However, the influence of these pop stars is extended to a far greater audience than the one linked to study programs, and the younger generations lack the critical and analytic knowledge and tools to process this material, causing misunderstanding, and reducing the potentially subversive power of existing pop art.²³ To cite Gayle Wald, in her analysis of No Doubt's song *Just a Girl* from 1997: "The point here is not merely that girlish innocence sells records but that Stefani's sarcastic discourse of helpless, innocent girlhood simultaneously functions as a strategy of feminism and a strategy of commerce (where feminism and commerce exist in a complex and shifting, rather than a simple and binary, relation to one another)".²⁴ More importantly, further in the text, she maintains that:

As the foregoing analysis of various contemporary female rockers suggests, however, women - especially those who benefit from their privileged national, racial, or economic status - will need to stay alert to the necessity of interrogating, in an ongoing and self-critical fashion, the conditions that govern their access to social and cultural agency. If I am sounding a note of particular urgency, it is because I believe that youth music cultures continue to offer girls important sources of emotional sanctuary and vital outlets for the expression of rage and pleasure, frustration and hope.²⁵

²³ Which results in moments like when members of a self-proclaimed feminist group Fifth Harmony, producing trashy songs whose *feminist* quality is lost even with the most benevolent of viewers, constantly and clumsily refer to feminism and "the female empowerment thing" in interviews.

²⁴ Gayle Wald, "Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth", *Signs*, 23, 3, [Feminisms and Youth Cultures], 1998, p. 589.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 608.

While facing a change of government in Croatia along a conservative, right-wing, nationalistic and Catholic church-oriented vein that threatens to apply fascist methods and blatant media censorship in its attempts to suppress the plurality of voices, I have begun to find comfort in the *uncontrollable* Internet culture and social networks that sometimes provide more information than traditional media outlets, hoping that girls (and not only girls) raised listening to programmatically aggressive artists, will be ready to *riot* if and when the need arises.²⁶

Bonus Track 1: Curbing My Own Enthusiasm

The following is written in addition to the essay I read on the conference in May 2016, as a reaction to the events that developed in the socio-political field, both in Croatia and globally, in the following months. Somewhere between the Croatian Catholic right-wing establishment (questioning abortion laws, and trying to force universities in bed with religious institutions), the incessant manipulation of Middle Eastern warzones created by neo-imperialist contest between superpowers, and Donald Trump as USA's president, my morale and hope have sunk in terms of trusting modes of defiance. Though I have expressed hope that the Internet culture might provide a mode of resistance to the rise of highly regressive ideologies that are developing all around the world, I must stress the other side of that optimistic coin, as armchair activism may even have negative consequences (as opposed to no consequences at all), in that it allows people to think that liking and sharing of posts as a daily dose of activism is enough in itself; the illusion of the effort makes it less probable that the real effort will arise.

Croatian *Cosmopolitan* magazine has recently released an issue in which the fourth wave of feminism is trending, and it is allegedly *hot* and *fun* and definitely *men-inclusive*.²⁷ We cannot

²⁶ "Strong feminist art might or might not be obviously political; by virtue of its expression of an oppressed cultural experience, it will always in fact be political. In the most directed of such art its purpose (and contrary to the myth of functionless art as high art, it does have a purpose) is to provide information about women's experience, invite an exchange with its audience on the issues raised, and ultimately to transform culture. Feminist art is always concerned with communication with its audience. It cannot rest on prior assumptions or conventions about the nature of art; it must create its own basis for audience understanding", Suzanne Lacy, "'Three Weeks in May'. Speaking Out on Rape, a Political Art Piece", *Frontiers. A Journal of Women Studies*, 2, 1, 1977, pp. 64-70, p. 70.

²⁷ Which has driven Maša Grdešić, the Croatian scholar preoccupied primarily with feminism and popular culture, whose doctoral thesis and first book is a

afford for feminism to be hot and fun, and whatever we want it to be, not just yet, not while women are being killed and raped, misrepresented and untrusted, while their/our reproductive rights are being challenged, while the feminist legacy is being used to sell products as well as to start wars.

On that note, a blogger named Jessica Valenti (Feministing.com) has made a substantial effort to introduce feminism to young generations of women, firstly through her blog, later with a book entitled *Full Frontal Feminism*.²⁸ As opposed to Adichie's *We Should all Be Feminists*, Valenti declares that *we all already are*. Written in a way that is presumably attractive to young women, with slang and swear words, dealing primarily with sexual liberties, *Full Frontal Feminism* is a short guide through depressing statistics about patriarchal oppression, informative in some respects, but obsessed with being likeable, persuading high school girls to call themselves feminists without any relevant guidance as to what that should mean. My reproaches echo those of author Nina Power, who in her book *The One-Dimensional Woman*, by referencing Marcuse,²⁹ has cleverly pin-pointed many ways in which feminism was, and still is, exploited by the capitalist system, mentioning Valenti and her book, *gloves-off*, as a symptom of impotent and counter-productive pop feminism:

Stripped of any internationalist and political quality, feminism becomes about as radical as a diamante phone cover. Valenti 'truly believes' that feminism is necessary for women 'to live happy, fulfilled lives'. Slipping down as easily as a friendly bacteria yoghurt drink, Valenti's version of feminism, with its total lack of structural analysis, genuine outrage or collective demand, believes

study of women's magazines and especially Cosmopolitan (see Maša Grdešić, *Cosmopolitika. Kulturalni studiji, feminizam i ženski časopisi*, Disput, Zagreb, 2013), to write a sort of farewell letter to the publication. Grdešić was the first professor to introduce me to feminism and this was done through the academic exploration of 'women's genres', popular culture and cultural studies, making one more decisive link in my life between feminism and theories of popular culture. But what I had found touching while reading Grdešić's article is her frustrated abandoning of the topic she had worked hard on for years (not to say it is uncommon for a scholar to move on from his or her research topic). This was a gesture. Perhaps this is only my reading into the text itself, but I have felt it as a loss of patience, a feeling of almost treason by the magazine, an unwillingness to compromise and provide excuses for media that feed like parasites on feminist legacy, while doing more harm than good, with deteriorating quality and in a moment in time when there is a serious threat to everything relevant that this legacy has assured. See Maša Grdešić, "Cosmo i četvrti val feminizma", *Muf* <<http://muf.com.hr/2016/11/04/cosmo-i-cetvrti-val-feminizma/>> (01/17).

²⁸ Jessica Valenti, *Full Frontal Feminism*, Seal Press, New York, 2007.

²⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *Čovjek jedne dimenzije*, "Veselin Masleša", Sarajevo, 1968.

it has to compliment capitalism in order to effectively sell its product. When she claims that 'ladies, we have to take individual action', what she really means is that it's every woman for herself, and if it is the Feminist woman who gets the nicest shoes and the chocolatiest sex, then that's just too bad for you, sister.³⁰

The final frontier of Valenti's ideology leads to the complete deterioration of the meaning of feminism, for "[i]f feminism is something you define for yourself, then what's to stop it being pure egotism, pure naked greed? Absolutely nothing".³¹ Furthermore, what Valenti proposes as the basis of feminism's attraction, is almost frightening, as Power rightly underlines: "'Feminism says that you have a right to enjoy yourself. An obligation, even.' An obligation to enjoy oneself? Few things are more menacing".³² Enjoyment, happiness, thrills, desires, commodified and made into something to pursue, referenced as a right to be celebrated, are all elements that take the focus away from the political issues, closing individuals in a one-dimensional world, where *change* equals a make-over. In order to make substantial impact, feminism has to be linked to anti-capitalist ideology, challenging all and any kind of hierarchy that forms and perpetuates an unjust system. What irritates me in *valentinesque* discourse is the fact that, in a way, it re-produces the feeling of fright that women live in their lives, perpetuating the false notion of a necessary compromise regarding feminism, as if basic human rights and equality were negotiable. This is not the time to denounce the tradition of radical feminism or be scared to be labelled a *feminazi*, a man-hater, a *nasty woman* if you will, to tuck ourselves in the comfort of the third/fourth wave's inclusivity. It is not about feminism being the latest accessory or trend; is it really a positive phenomenon, if more and more women are calling themselves feminists while putting in brackets most of what feminism has been fighting for? 'Feminism' has been used to force women into engaging in paid and unpaid labour, to relentlessly buy and style themselves in order to live up to today's cool girl/powerful woman images, to divide, to side-track, even to start new imperialist wars and to enforce xenophobia.³³

³⁰ Nina Power, *One-Dimensional Woman*, Zero Books, Winchester, Washington, 2009, p. 30.

³¹ Ivi, p. 35.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Being quite the unapologetic leftist feminist whose diagnosis of the contemporary world spares nothing, Nina Power deserves a longer quote here: "The political imagination of contemporary feminism is at a standstill. The perky,

Recently, not only citizens of USA, but of the whole world, have spent the months glaring at the course of the election, and the parts of our lives that are, whether we like it or not, engaged in American popular culture and iconography, are receiving a frightening message: Trump's campaign of bad jokes and dangerous clichés as arguments, gaslighting³⁴ and cognitive dissonance as method, message of hate, division, fear, violence, all the while directly (his voters would generously say, 'honestly') expressing contempt towards women, POC, Mexicans, Muslims, LGBTQIA+, the differently abled is gaining enormous support.

In the midst of the Catholic-conservative backlash on the rise in Croatia (making Croatia great again, I presume), as some have stressed, the ranting toupee becoming the President of USA should not be our primary preoccupation. Still, as Facebook news feeds turn *trumpian* orange, I cannot help but feel that this is a global call to arms, and an urgent wake-up call to acknowledge how the liberal progress has been in many ways fictitious, how much of the population has been left out, accumulating fear and frustration. I must say that even the celebrity propaganda,³⁵ more active than ever in trying to compel voters not to support this *capitalism incorporated* figure, fail the cause, proving my earlier optimism to be unrealistic or, at least, premature.³⁶ There is only

upbeat message of self-fulfilment and consumer emancipation masks a deep inability to come to terms with serious transformations in the nature of work and culture. For all its glee and excitement, the self-congratulatory feminism that celebrates individual identity above all else is a one-dimensional feminism. It is the flip-side of the image of the one-dimensional worker who is expected never to let herself or her company down by dressing badly, not being enthusiastic or, worst of all, getting pregnant. The feminization of labour and the laborization of women will continue to run adrift on the major contradictions of capitalism and the opportunistic sexism that accompanies it, and no amount of sticking-plaster pleasures will compensate". Power, *One-Dimensional Woman*, cit., p. 69.

³⁴ It is worth noting that an article expressing this notion of *gaslighting* in the context of Trump's campaign was printed in the magazine *Teen Vogue*, as author Lauren Duca pointed out that teenage girls are capable of critical thought and should be introduced to politics, since it is their present and future that is being decided. Lauren Duca "Donald Trump is Gaslighting America", *Teen Vogue*, <<http://www.teenvogue.com/story/donald-trump-is-gaslighting-america>> (01/2017).

³⁵ To show just how urgent thinking about gender trouble has become (not to mention religious freedoms and racial issues), in January 2017, an article was published in American *Cosmopolitan* magazine bluntly entitled *Celebrity Feminism has no Place in Trump's America* by Eliza Thompson, <<http://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/celebs/a8642654/celebrity-feminism-has-no-place-in-trumps-america/>> (01/2017).

³⁶ Keeping in mind that millennials mostly voted against Trump (for better or for worse, I cannot exactly say – *for* Hillary Clinton), and a huge march was staged in Washington DC at the time of the inauguration to protest Trump's formally

hope that, in the midst of such global chaos, a front will truly rise to reclaim the future in the name of empathy and equality, and challenge contemporary demons, who can be exorcised truly and only by the extinction of the capitalist/neo-liberal/globalisation system, that makes it all happen – the worst and cruellest form of invisible warfare and imperialism in history.

becoming POTUS. It seems there are plenty of women, especially young women willing to speak up and challenge the terrifying situation, not concerned with being depicted as, to use Power's formulation, "deranged Jezebels hell-bent on fucking society up with their roaming womb-induced crazy-thoughts". Power, *One-dimensional Woman*, cit., p. 35.

: The future

The Crazy (Br)Other: Islam and the West

Durre S. Ahmed

Summary

The paper draws on the ideas and writings of C. G. Jung, a foundational figure in Psychology. It is based on a meta-analysis of Jung's analysis of the dream of a European patient in which the symbols of the cross and the crescent are deconstructed in the context of an unconscious psychological conflict. A textual analysis indicates that in fact, this conflict is consciously present in the doctor rather than the patient. The paper challenges Jung's assumptions and suggests a different cultural, psychological and historical perspective which is more 'feminine' and anti-patriarchal regarding both Christianity and Islam.

A foundational figure in modern clinical psychology, Carl Jung was initially Freud's star pupil; but eventually parted ways with his mentor primarily because of disagreements about the role of religion in the human personality. For Freud, in the modern age, religion was an illusion without a future.¹ The hallmark of a mature, modern person was a well developed capacity for reason/rationality, which would lead her to discarding a childish reliance on religion as an 'infantile neurosis'. In contrast, for Jung, religion functions almost as an instinct, remaining an inextricable aspect of the human psyche and its need for meaning. As such, it is important to understand both the psychology of a given

¹ See Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, The Hogarth Press, London, 1928.

religion and the psychology of a religious person. (The two are not the same. In the context of his ideas underlying Analytical Psychology, Jung researched and wrote extensively on both. While remaining a practicing psychiatrist and a clinician, he also wrote extensively on different religions). For Jung, religion had to be understood beyond dogma in terms of individual experience/s and integrated into the adult personality. Denying/ignoring its reality as an individual and collective phenomenon would ensure that it remained powerfully unconscious, eventually leading to severe negative and destructive consequences. Given that religion is center stage today, Jung's prescient ideas can be useful in understanding some collective dynamics underlying current tensions between Islam and the West.

An earlier, detailed empirical analysis of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*² reveals both the problems and prospects of the complex relationship between Islam and West, and the results of that study form the context and background to this paper.³ In brief, the study shows that while the main focus of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* is the Judaeo-Christian tradition(s), considerable attention is also given to many others including the Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Confucian, Taoist, as well as certain indigenous traditions such as those of Native Americans. However, in every area which can be considered as forming a sort of identifying 'profile' of a religion (e.g. founding figure, text, ritual, symbols, etc), Islam is given the least critical attention. In an opus spanning 22 volumes, there are only two substantive references to Islam which pale in comparison to the attention paid to all other religions/traditions. Generally, Islam is mentioned most frequently only in passing, usually as part of the monotheisms; but not discussed in any nuanced manner. Overall, Islam remains a sort of shadowy 'absence' in *The Collected Works*, visibly 'present' yet substantively absent.

For example, in the context of symbols in Jungian psychology, the symbol of the cross has hundreds of references to it in Christian and non-Christian contexts, as does the 'star' of David. Yet, the

² Carl Gustav Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, edited by Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler, translated by RFC Hull, 2nd edition, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979. Also published by Princeton University Press.

³ Durre Ahmed, "Islam and the West. An Analysis of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*", *Journal of the Henry Martyn Institute for Interfaith Dialogue*, 19, 1, 2000, pp. 5-62.

prototypical symbol of Islam, the Crescent, is not referred to even once. Given the centrality of symbols in Jungian psychology, there are of course extensive references to the significance of the moon, particularly as a feminine symbol, but none of these is linked with Islam. Along with the general absence of any depth in discussing the psychology of Islam, *The Collected Works* contains quite a few negative and stereotypical references to it, such as Islam's 'rigidity and fanaticism', and other derogatory remarks on Muhammad.⁴ The study concludes that, as represented by Jung's writings, between the absence and negativity vis-à-vis Islam, in Jungian-cultural terms Islam can be seen as the 'shadow', the 'other' in Western un/consciousness.

The Best of the West

The idea that Islam is indeed the 'shadow/Other' finds a vivid illustration in a series of 30 dreams of an individual who had come to Jung and which form the basis of Jung's *Seminar on Dream Analysis*.⁵ Published posthumously more than two decades after Jung's death, it is a verbatim transcript of a seminar conducted by Jung over a period of about two years (1928-1930). Many of the participants of the Seminar went on to become eminent Jungian analysts and authors, including Esther Harding, known particular for her work on women and the Feminine in Jungian psychology. The text provides "the fullest account of Jung's method of amplification in the analysis of a patient's dreams and the most detailed record of the treatment of a male patient by Jung himself".⁶

From the perspective of a Muslim and a Jungian, *Seminar* provides a fascinating glimpse into Jung's analytic methods which, in turn, can enable a very different reading/interpretation of not only the dreams but also the discussions around them which form the bulk of the book. In order to stay within a more general level of discussion for the non-specialist lay person, I will consider just one dream which encapsulates certain key relevant themes. Before proceeding, a brief description of the dreamer is in order.

Like Jung himself, the dreamer can be seen as a personification and symbol of the 'best of the West'. He is a forty five year old businessman, in Jung's words: "intelligent, cultivated, prosperous, very polite":⁷

⁴ Jung, *The Collected Works*, cit., vol. 9, part 2, p. 175; p. 95, n. 102.

⁵ Carl Gustav Jung, *Dream Analysis. Notes on the Seminar Given in 1928-30*, vol. 1, William McGuire (ed.), Routledge, London, 1984.

⁶ William McGuire, "Introduction", in Jung, *Dream Analysis*, cit., 1984, p. xvi.

⁷ Jung, *Dream Analysis*, cit., p. 6.

As a child, he spent time in Egypt ... a European born in Africa and had spent part of his life in exotic countries ... had a successful business career, so much so that he could afford to retire ... a nice family, nice children, nice fortune ... had wide international exposure ... widely read, has a very thorough mind ... not neurotic, highly intellectual and cultured ... had read philosophy and some psychoanalysis ... was terribly bored with life in general and with his life in particular.⁸

The dreamer exhibits no pathology, there is nothing lacking in his life, no traumas, no crises. He had come to Jung not for any specific treatment but to deal with a sense of ennui and a search for meaning, which in Jungian terms, is inevitably linked to questions of religion and spirituality. According to Jung, his problem was typical and he “did not really require ‘treatment’... so I said to him ‘we will see what your nature, physical as well as spiritual will produce. You have to be patient, as I have to be. There is no prescription’”.⁹ In short, the dreamer is not psychologically or ‘mentally’ ill. He is a sophisticated, cosmopolitan, intellectually inclined, materially fulfilled, healthy person who comes to Jung in search of deeper meaning, what Jung calls a ‘subtle problem’.

The Dream

He finds himself in a hut in Africa, somewhere in the upper part of Egypt Then his younger son brings him a kettle containing all sorts of peculiar old things. He takes up a whole bundle of small scythes, made not of steel, but of sheet iron – simulacra, not the real thing. Below that in the kettle he finds handles of old swords, made of metal but the blades were all broken off. Below that was a statue of Christ, made of sheet iron, with a sword as long as the figure, and he notices that one can easily remove it from the statue. He wants to carry the kettle away with all its contents, but a native suddenly appears and declares that one would use all those scythes, banked up on the wall of the hut between small lamps in a sort of ceremonial. Then it dawns upon him that the hut is by no means ordinary but a kind of mosque, and that the scythes are crescent moons, and he realizes that the handles of the swords are Coptic cross symbols.¹⁰

Jung begins the analysis by providing the dreamer’s own associations of key images:

Jung: Associations: the upper part of Egypt (which of course means the more southern part) is to him a symbol of his own upper region, his most spiritual part, his superior man. About his youngest son, he says that he has often dreamed of him and has taken him as a symbol of rejuvenation, his hope for the future. It was he who found the kettle. Concerning the contents of the kettle, he says that scythes symbolize crops, production, and the sword symbolizes destruction. The crescent

⁸ Ivi, p. 86.

⁹ Ivi, p. 301.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 317.

moon would be productive, while the Cross, the sword would be destructive. Within the last years, he has often thought of the extraordinary intolerance of the Christian Church, suppressing, even destroying, everyone who did not share the same opinion. But he never consciously credited Islam with a great productivity. On the contrary owing to its dogma of Kismet, the domination of fatality, he thought that Islam belonged to the old iron, something to be thrown away. He had a feeling in the dream that he was attributing an archeological value to those contents. The lamps in the hut he associates with those that you see in Islamic countries, in the mosques at the feast of Ramadan and other nocturnal ceremonies. He is astonished that this house is a mosque, a house of God, with different religious symbols that seem to be of more archeological value than materials for a cult. They are as if out of use, thrown together in a pot, regardless of their origin; the cross and the crescent would not be found together naturally, they exclude each other, but here they do not hurt each other through their incongruity.¹¹

Without going into details of the massive amounts of interpretive material that Jung and his students bring to this one dream; its significance can be gauged from the fact that while the book analyzes 30 dreams in 706 pages, discussions on just this one dream cover 115 pages far more than any other dream. Which is not to say that the text as a whole, or subsequent to the dream, gives due significance to what comes up in the interpretive process, and this will become evident shortly. The main point at this stage is that the dreamer himself finds this dream as being of “tremendous importance to him personally”¹² and the analyst/s too give it the most significance in terms of the breadth of information that is brought to understanding its main symbols, namely the cross and the crescent. In order to conduct the research into these symbols, the group is divided into two and each presents/discusses vast amounts of information collected about the two symbols. In sum, all agree with the dreamers’ (and Jung’s) understanding that the crescent is the symbol of Islam and the cross of Christianity.

For Jung, the symbols of the cross/Christianity and crescent/Islam are “obviously pointing to two attitudes of mind”. The hut is the spiritual place of re-birth, the crocodile pertains to primordial spiritual origins, something deeply unconscious “which is not influenced by will power”. The son is the “rejuvenated self, the hope for the future”, bringing the kettle/cauldron of the crosses and the crescents which have to be ‘cooked’ for spiritual nourishment. “In the cauldron things are cooked together, out of things strange

¹¹ Ivi, p. 318.

¹² Ivi, p. 321.

to each other, irreconcilable, something new comes forth, this is obviously the answer to the paradox, the impossible impasse".¹³

Discussing the symbol of the cross, Jung echoes the dreamer's reservations of violence and 'extraordinary intolerance' of Christianity:

Dr. Jung: Now the figure of Christ with the long sword of sheet iron, as long as the figure itself, what do you make of that?

Mrs. Sigg: it is a symbol of the cross.

Dr. Jung: yes, the sword has always symbolized the cross They (Christians) prayed to the sword before a battle, made their vows, pledged their word by the sword, with the advantage of old Germanic idea that it had a soul.

Miss Wolff: There is an old Germanic poem where Christ is presented as a hero with the sword, doing great deeds.

Dr. Jung: Yes, he is presented there as a healer and also as the healer and the warrior. It is peculiarly applicable to our Christian nations, just emerging from the Great War. We are most of us very unconscious about it. To one born in the East it is convincing and impressive that a Christian people could use the sword to that extent. It is the German war-like quality, the primitive berserker rage that is in the Western man in general. So this man's Christ is equipped with a long sword, that most peaceful redeemer And the sword is detachable, an impression that would not originate in the Western Christian mind, only in the one born outside, to whom the European is not the model of virtue. As soon as I was outside our white civilization, I saw what Europeans are like. We look awful. The Chinese call us devils and it is true, thin cruel lips, and our wrinkles are uncanny. And we are always intent on something that no devil can understand. What are we seeking?.... Wherever the white man went, there was hell for other nations; one has to be outside to understand. The white man is a very beast devouring the earth, the whole world trembles at him. Such Christianity is a compensation, a hellish lie so these people born outside of Europe have a critique, and a certain detachment; it produces a different situation.¹⁴

The discussion of the Islamic crescent is, interestingly, treated with far less criticism:

Dr. Jung: This man was not lamed by being born among primitives. He was born among the Moslems, and there was a time when the Islamic mind was the leader of thought, the only light of consciousness in the deep medieval gloom. We used to go to school there. (Universities of Saragossa and Cordova.) And now the native man is coming in, explaining that his symbolism is still alive: the scythes, the crescents, which are to be hung among the lamps in the mosques at Ramadan, the highest feast of the Islamic cult. Islam is living in the native side of him. The Christian religion is no longer alive to him. So this man consists of two, a native of that country, and, on the other side, a European, but with a strong emphasis on the native.¹⁵

¹³ Ivi, pp. 325-329.

¹⁴ Ivi, pp. 337-338.

¹⁵ Ivi, pp. 338-339.

Jung implies the important historical and cultural linkage of Islam being part of the Western unconscious. Like the dreamer, the West too, at an early 'age', 'went to school' in an Islamic milieu. Similarly, Jung's observations on Islam are interesting insofar as he criticizes the hostility which existed even during that time. One can say that the situation of the dreamer 'being born among Muslims', is today an existential and cultural reality for numerous Westerners. Similarly, if one accepts modern depth psychology's emphasis on the importance of what happens in childhood, one could say that the encounter with Islam that took place in the dreamer's childhood symbolically encapsulates the encounter with Islam during the West's cultural and civilizational infancy ('we went to their schools/Universities: Sargossa and Cordova'). Finally, as Jung's comments show, these currents about Islam run not only deep in the Western unconscious but are also rather negative. As such, the situation today is a historical, unconscious continuity.

Continuing with his analysis of the symbols of the crosses and crescents:

*Dr. Jung: One would rather assume them to be in his consciousness, but they have been cast aside-broken scythes, disused rubbish, no good any longer. They have been thrown down into the kettle, below consciousness, this is exactly what is the matter with him, as with millions of Christians, the living symbols have already fallen into the unconscious and they don't know it. People here say, "I am not a Christian, I don't believe in those old things", and yet their whole psychology is Christian. They don't know that they are suffering from a lack of religious function. These symbols are already in the kettle to be made over as soon as someone puts a fire under it.*¹⁶

Brothers and Others

We now approach the main point of the analysis. The dreamer's dilemma is set out, namely, the opposites (as Jung saw them) of the unconscious, yet powerful presence, of Islam *and* Christianity. To repeat, the dreamer himself saw this dream as being of 'tremendous importance to him personally'.¹⁷ He is relying on Jung to go beyond what are basically self-evident (to the dreamer) symbolic motifs of the cross/Christianity and the crescent/Islam. The task is to 'cook' them, 'melt together' in the kettle, the 'raw material' of the cross and the crescent; in short, to reconcile and integrate ('blend') them meaningfully into the dreamer's psyche/consciousness. Can the analyst(s) show the way?

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 336.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 321.

*Dr. Jung: Here, then, are two determining but contradictory factors. They are incompatible things: swords, scythes, the figure of Christ etc., all thrown together in disorder, and naturally they cannot blend unless they are put through a reconciling process. These two strong imprints, the Islamic and the Christian, should blend, there is an arrested development of personality because they won't blend – these two standpoints so utterly different that they cannot possibly blend, he is at a standstill, he cannot move forward, it is as if his legs are going in different directions, so he remains stationary. The irreconcilable nature of Christianity and Islam must be reconciled, he is unable to do it consciously, and I also am unable.*¹⁸

There it is. Interestingly, on the one hand Jung is almost vehement about the “‘impossibility’ of what is required (“they must be reconciled” yet “they won’t blend”). Even more puzzling is that he goes on to say shortly later, almost as vehemently: “But, you see, this man’s intuition foresees the necessity of bringing these two objects together”.¹⁹ This unconscious imperative, along with the fact that even in his session the patient had told Jung how the dream had “tremendous personal importance”, indicates the significance of the task facing both dreamer and his doctor(s) regarding the resolution/reconciliation of the psychological conflict. But as Jung himself admits, he too, like his patient, is ‘unable’ to offer him any way forward towards a harmonious resolution of that which ‘must be reconciled’.

A ‘Disguised’ Muslim

Contrast this paralytic inability to ‘reconcile’ Islam and Christianity in two well educated Westerners – and more if we take the group of analysts – collectively representing the best of the West; with the attitude of a poor, probably illiterate, Somali Muslim’s encounter with Jung in Kenya. In *The Collected Works* Jung recounts how, while traveling through North Africa, his Somali herdsman-guide assured me that I was, as he put it, *Mty-ya-kitabu*, a man of the Book, meaning the Koran. He had gathered from our talks that I knew the Koran better than he did (which was, by the way, not to say a great deal). For this reason, he regarded me as ‘islamu’.²⁰ That is, the Somali saw Jung as a Muslim.

Recounting the same episode in his autobiographical *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*,²¹ Jung says ‘They termed me as a “Man of the Book” because of my knowledge of the Quran. To their minds I was a disguised Mohammadan. Beyond the questions posed by the

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 336 (my emphasis).

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 337.

²⁰ Jung, *The Collected Works*, cit., vol. 9, p. 143.

²¹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, edited by Aniela Jaffe, translated by Richard and Clara Winston, Pantheon Books, London, 1963, p. 265.

dreamer, and Jung's inability to reconcile Islam and Christianity, the question arises: If the two religions are in fact as irreconcilable as Jung claims, how could a Somali herdsman accomplish such a reconciliation? Instead of the view of Islam as so utterly 'other' that it is (consciously) irreconcilable with Christianity, the Somali is in effect saying, 'you are like me, I see through your disguise, you are not an 'other' but a br(other), like myself, a Muslim' ('islamu').

Jung's explanation can imply that this was because of his (perceived) familiarity with the Quran and is really not adequate especially since, it is possible that he took the term 'Man of the Book' literally and personally. The Quran (and Muslims) frequently refer to the Jews and Christians as 'people of the Book' in the context of those who had been given a sacred scripture, namely the Torah and Gospel. In either case, even in the context of a monolithic, stereotypical Islam, the seeds of this reconciliation are present in the Somali's statement and the Koranic embrace, albeit within limits, of Judaism and Christianity and the 'people of the Book'. While valid, this explanation is inadequate in light of Jung's perception that he was seen by the Somali as a "disguised" Mohammadan.

The fact remains that the Somali did not see Jung as an irreconcilable 'other'. Possibly, this had to do more with the fact that he was, according to Jung, of the 'Sufi faith' and which, as Jung says later in the *Seminar*, is not only widespread, but Islam's 'secret backbone'.²² In short, the difference between the herdsman and Jung is in the differing ways each interprets/understands Islam (and each 'other').

Patients and Healers

Apart from the Quran itself, it is among the pluralistic epistemologies of Sufi Islam that this reconciliation between what are 'obviously two attitudes of mind'²³ is most evident. It is important to note that what is today referred to 'Sufi' Islam was in fact normative Islam till at least the early decades of the 20th Century.²⁴

As a whole, the theoretical foundations of Jung's ideas are strongly anchored in his remarkable insights into the archetypal and hence, commonly shared, psycho-spiritual dynamics of many religions. In a way, Jung managed to psychologically reconcile many other, seemingly very different religions, and given the

²² Jung, *Dream Analysis*, cit., p. 336.

²³ Ivi, p. 321.

²⁴ See Karen Armstrong, *Islam. A Short History*, Random House, New York, 2000.

generally positive statements about Islam during the Seminar, one would have thought he would be able to show the patient some way out of the 'impasse'. The main reason why Jung was unable to do so was perhaps mainly because of an ignorance about Islam. As indicated in my earlier research, basically there is a void when it comes to even an elementary grasp of the Islamic idiom and its psycho-symbolic universe. This ignorance-prejudice is all the more striking considering that Islam is part of the monotheisms, and to that extent, is closer to its co-religions (in terms of prophets, stories and the monotheistic message) than, for example, Buddhism and Hinduism.

But perhaps it is the similarities which stand in Jung's way. He basically assumes all the negative problematics (as he understood them) of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as 'naturally' similarly part and parcel of Islam. Simultaneously, his ignorance of Islam makes him unable to see the differences, thereby doubly reinforcing the assumption that there are no remarkable differences worth considering. Given his frequent impatience and critique of Judaeo-Christianity, Islam implicitly becomes part of this critique. As just one crucial example: The creation and role of Eve in the Biblical fall from paradise and the steady stigmatizing of the Feminine is a well established Jungian (and feminist) critique of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In the Koranic version this is radically different. Eve is neither derived from Adam's rib and nor is she the seductress and culprit in the fall. In fact, her name is not even mentioned; and if anything, it is Adam who is seduced by Satan and subsequently he "and his spouse" are both expelled from Paradise.

Thus, there is very little indication of a rudimentary knowledge regarding crucial differences between Islam and the other monotheism in *The Collected Works*. When perceived, the differences are less grounded in facts and more in opinions coming from a modern Christianist consciousness. For example, Mohammad's 'primitive cast of mind', 'Islamic fatalism', and the Quran as 'incoherent', having 'no mind to it'. To reconcile such a spectrum of negative elements is obviously impossible, hence the impasse faced by both patient and doctor/s. In the *Seminar*, Jung's largely positive comments on Islam are, ironically, more political than psycho-theological.

For real differences to be perceived, there has to be some fundamental idiom belonging to the 'other' which can be articulated and then serve as a basis for comparison. But since no real differences have been articulated, no real reconciliation is

possible. Whereas in *The Collected Works*, negativity is assumed on the basis of seeing no difference, in the *Seminar* it seems there is nothing in common, apart from a rather stern, vengeful Yahweh-esque God. Everything else is unconscious, hence the difficulties and the 'impossible' nature of the task confronting the analysts.

Returning to the *Seminar* and the dreamer's/analyst's dilemma, the situation becomes even more intriguing. One can note here in passing that the dream prior to the one being discussed was about a mandala, a Jungian spiritual symbol par excellence. As such, the next dream is a more vivid representation of what exactly needs to be done, the heart of the matter, so to speak, and which the dreamer finds of 'tremendous personal importance'. Having declared the dilemma, the *Seminar* turns its attention to a thorough analysis of the two main symbols: the cross and the crescent.

More than a hundred pages are devoted to this exercise, especially the symbolism of the moon. However, other than the self-evident observation that the crescent moon forms part of the design of the flag of many Muslim countries, no substantive connection is made with Islam. Presented by Esther Harding, much of the material was subsequently incorporated in her *Women's Mysteries*.²⁵ The only attempt made to link the symbolism of the moon with the psychology of Islam and the Feminine is at best largely negative stereotypes and worse, factually totally incorrect:

*The taboo on women is carried to its greatest extreme under Islam, where the crescent moon stands as the symbol of the whole religious culture. Here women are not only secluded during menstruation, but must live their whole lives behind the veil. It is as though in the Islamic system woman is only known in her moon aspect and therefore dangerous at all times. In accordance with this we find that Islam teaches that woman has no soul of her own. The Prophet says: "The woman is a man's garment". That is, she is recognized only as the personification of the man's anima, and is accorded a place in heaven only as the spouse of her husband. It is interesting to note further that, whether as cause or effect, women in seclusion in harems and zenanas do as a matter of fact only live for the erotic side of life.*²⁶

The paragraph is a microcosm of the Western understanding of Islam: sweeping generalizations of a religion that encompasses vastly diverse cultures, western stereotypes of the veil and sexuality which Raana Kabbani has written about in *Imperial*

²⁵ See Esther Harding, *Women's Mysteries. Ancient and Modern*, Shambhala, Boston, 2000 (first edition 1955).

²⁶ Jung, *Dream Analysis*, cit., p. 375.

*Fictions. Europe's Myths of the Orient*²⁷ and a partial, inaccurate quotation from the Quran.

The fact is that in the large majority of areas in the Islamic cultural world women have never been secluded during menstruation, nor do they 'live their whole lives behind the veil.' Harding's notion that 'Islam teaches that woman has no soul of her own' is entirely unsubstantiated. Similarly, the saying attributed to the Prophet that the 'woman is a man's garment' which leads Harding to conclude that 'her only place is as a personification of the anima'. In fact, this is a partial quote from the Quran. The full text reads: "they (wives) are as a garment to you and you are as a garment to them" (Q: 2:188). These are the only linkages - if one can call them that - that our Jungians can make between Islam and the enormous material that was generated by the group on the complex and significant symbol of the moon.

Keep in mind that the dreamer is searching for spiritual meaning and regarded the dream as personally important since it posed the all important question of how to reconcile the seeming irreconcilability of Islam and Christianity. But given the Jungian's own ignorance/prejudice about Islam, the dreamer's needs are simply ignored.

It is towards the end of more than a hundred pages of analysis/discussions about the symbolism of the cross and the crescent that the impasse is 'resolved'. Not through intellectual/analytic effort, but rather, through synchronicity.

Towards Reconciliation

The first move towards bringing the analysis and Seminar back to the main problem, comes from *outside* the group. One of the participants brings a drawing done by her five year old child: of a house, the mother, crosses and a crescent.²⁸

Jung sees this as a sort of psychic 'leakage', given that the child was far too young to comprehend the group's intellectual concerns and to which the child had had no exposure. Yet again, the group goes into a long digression on symbolic astrology, eventually leading to the concepts of Yin and Yang as conceptual representations of the energies representing the crescent and the cross respectively.

"It is not in vain", says Jung, "that in the dream the crosses and crescents are thrown together in the same cauldron where

²⁷ Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions. Europe's Myths of Orient*, Pandora Press, London, 1994.

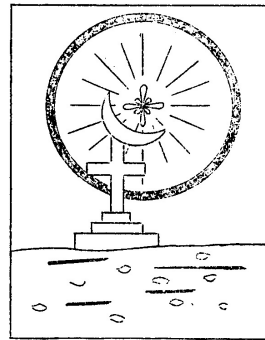
²⁸ Jung, *Dream Analysis*, cit., p. 401.

they should obviously blend, and that for a certain purpose. The purpose is the important thing. If the Yang and Yin came together, the result is a release of energy which might be symbolized in different forms. It might be emotional energy in the case of the dreamer or ... as inspiration or a great vision".²⁹

The breakthrough (though not for the patient) occurs shortly after Jung has drawn parallels between the symbols of the cross and the crescent with the Taoist Yang and Yin symbols respectively. Interestingly, yet again, the crescent moon/Yin/Islam triad and its connection with the Yin-Feminine in Jungian psychology is not attended to in depth even though, again, one could say that it was Jung's reclaiming of the Feminine in psycho-theology which was one of his most important contributions to the field of analytic psychology.

Shortly, after the Yin/Yang discussion, Jung presents another drawing as evidence of how the unconscious operating in the group had anticipated the vision of the meeting of the opposites, that is, of the Yin/Yang together denoting a state of harmony, balance, in short, in reconciliation. It is a drawing made by a member of the group *prior* to any discussions concerning the union of the symbols of the cross and the crescent:

Dr. Jung: Here is the cross, then the crescent, and they are peculiarly together, and then instantly comes a tremendous outburst, a release of energy in the form of an enormous sphere of light Here is the whole theory that when the opposites come together there will be a great manifestation of energy of some sort. Now that peculiar light engendered by the cross and the crescent is a new enlightenment, a sort of revelation. If the truth of the crescent be united with the truth of the cross, it would produce that enlightenment, the combined truth of Islam and Christianity. If it were possible to extract the essential truth of each and blend them, then out of that clash would come an enormous illumination which would amount to a new conviction. Both Islam and Christianity are psychological methods of treating diseases of the human soul. They prescribe methods of living, attitudes, moral codes as well as dogmatic explanations of why things are as they are, how man misbehaved and God saw himself forced to do something about it, sending sons or prophets to cure the evils of man. Christ was essentially the healer. If I told a patient that his religion ought to cure him, he would think I was stark mad. But in the beginning it was effective. these methods are quite simple. Then they become more and more removed from the



²⁹ Ivi, pp. 417-418.

*human sphere. But one can hardly talk of it without blushing, on account of the false ideas that have been pumped into it, big words hollowed by two thousand years of suggestion. For a long time now, the Christian religion has not worked, so it became a Church of great splendor and power to increase its influence by suggestion. Now this picture shows a new light. Such an outburst is an anticipation of new understanding, new vision, a unity which gives new expression to the world and to man. Everything appears in a new light. That is renewal, re-birth Such a vision is quite impersonal. For the time being it is in the unconscious. it takes people tremendous time to realize the simplest deduction.*³⁰

One can note here again, that had it not been for two unconsciously inspired drawings by a child and adult, neither Jung nor any other participant-analyst would have been able to arrive at these insights. Having diagnosed contemporary Christianity's inability to heal, the group as a whole remains unable to heal the dreamer's spirit/soul seeking to reconcile the cross and the crescent. This task is accomplished through synchronicity: First the drawing of a child and then a flash of intuition in a participant prior to the intellectual analysis of key symbols. If the analysis itself failed the process of reconciliation, it is because it failed to bring any substantive, conscious understanding of Islam and stayed within stereotypical Orientalist assumptions, reflective of Jung's own understanding of Islam in *The Collected Works*.

At the same time, within *Seminar* and *The Collected Works*, one can glimpse how Islam 'comes through' in precisely those elements which, from the Jungian perspective, need to be reclaimed for Western spiritual renewal. Among them, according to Jung, are the loss of *eros* as a function of relatedness and linked to it, the denigration of the notion of the Feminine. I can only hint at some connections: visiting the Taj Mahal, Jung wrote of its beauty and saw in it, the architectural manifestation of the 'Islamic *eros*' which, as he put it, remains a jealously guarded 'secret'. While he does not elaborate on this, one can speculate that it may be something in the form of the Taj Mahal, especially its dominant dome(s) which are undoubtedly the most sensuous of forms, overflowing with *eros*. Not to mention that the structure is ultimately a monument to the idea of Love. The strong historically evident links of Islam and culture is itself an indication that 'Islam' (like the 'West') cannot be simplified into a monolith. As Edward Said correctly observed, there are in fact innumerable Islams.³¹ Neither Jung or his students

³⁰ Ivi, pp. 418-420.

³¹ See Edward Said, "Impossible Histories. Why the Many Islams Cannot be Simplified", *Harper's Magazine*, July 2002.

seem to be aware of this. In case of the *Islamic eros* as evident in the Taj Mahal, it is product of South Asian Islam which is a unique culturally inspired synthesis of what can be considered Indo-Persian Islam, the seeds of which go back at least seven centuries and of which the Taj can be considered its architectural zenith.

Recall that the dreamer is surprised to discover that the place of the dream is a mosque. Harding's comments on the seclusion of women in Islam living only 'for the erotic side of life', is a literalized reading of this 'secret' of the spiritual Islamic *eros* and the archetypal Feminine. These elements gain further intensity when linked with the complex symbolism of the moon/crescent, which, in spite of its bisexual character, has dominant Feminine associations particular in Jungian psychology. Identifying, articulating and highlighting these archetypal aspects of Islam, would lead to a very different understanding of the religion. But this can only be done from *within* Islam and requires setting aside the assumptions of the West's religious and cultural malaise in which, according to Jung, the Feminine and *eros* itself has all but disappeared.

The Seminar took place during the 1920's, a time when Western colonial power was at its peak. It is frequently forgotten that, as a whole, the colonial project encompassed almost the entire Muslim world. This encounter itself is significant for the impact it must have had for not only Islam/s, but also the West. In any case, at that time, as Jung says, 'it is in the unconscious', as indeed it had always been, since the West's civilizational infancy ('We went to their schools.')

In Jungian analysis, the movement from the unconscious into consciousness is frequently a traumatic upheaval. The harbinger of this change is frequently the 'shadow', that is, the dark, unknown side to the psyche. In dreams (of males) it frequently appears as a stranger (the other) or a brother. Seventy years after the Seminar, the shadow that was/is Islam is erupting into Western (un)consciousness. In the process creating collective anxiety and paranoia on all sides. No longer colonized/tamed/dormant, in a sense it has had to go 'crazy' in order to be acknowledged. The entire edifice of Western psychotherapy rests on the study of pathology. As such, Islam's present dominant, and considerably ugly face, may well lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of how it is both different and similar to Judaism and Christianity. Theologically, historically and culturally, perhaps it

is time that the West recognizes that the presently crazy 'other' is actually its (br)other.

Today, the lack of understanding of Islam can have serious consequences for the Muslim individual in the Jungian therapeutic context. Given the deep links between culture and religion, and rising global tensions between Islam and the West, the implications are equally serious for the Western psyche. In the present situation, the Jungian scholar and analyst can play a major therapeutic role, not only as a healer of cultures but also in terms of moving towards the vision of 'a new understanding ... renewal, rebirth' which was anticipated in the *Seminar* in the reconciliation of Christianity and Islam. Even at the individual level, this task needs to be initiated urgently. Not only for the vast number of Westerners, who like our dreamer (and Jung) have a direct experience of Islam through travel and as direct contact as it now exists in the West, but also for the almost 20 million Muslims living in Europe and the North America. Many of them are highly educated individuals, quite likely to seek out a Jungian analyst at some point in their lives. Is the Jungian therapist equipped to cope with the individual and collective suffering of the time and show the way to the future?

Migration and Female Writings: Experiencing Contamination, Decentralizing Narration

Simona Miceli

Summary

Starting with a sociological research carried out via qualitative methodology, I present the experiences of some migrant women writers in Italy. I suggest to interpret their practice of writing as an example of agency which serves multiple functions: it allows the women I interviewed, to deal with the suffering due to migration, and with the difficulties caused by the receiving society; it acts as a tool of cultural belonging to – and social participation in – the Italian society, allowing these authors to defy the collective unconscious dealing with migrants and women at the same time.

Alternative Narratives

How does one communicate the pain of loss in a foreign language?

Why bother?

Can one love again away from home?

(Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*)¹

In contemporary Europe, migration is perceived as a pressing social problem: migrants are often considered either as weak people who need protection, or as threatening individuals who must be marginalised, even prevented from entering the country. These preconceived notions are common in Italian media debates, entangling migrants in hegemonic narratives and commonsense

¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York, 2002, p. 251.

assumptions.² My critical point is that, although the concept of migration seems endlessly interwoven with ideas of poverty, passiveness, and dangerousness, rarely are migrants devoid of agency.

Stereotypical constructions circulating through media debate and ordinary talks have cultural roots. In this regard, Balibar talks of 'neo-racism', which is no longer based on biological assumptions but on cultural differences.³ Embracing an intersectional perspective, we should also consider to what extent gender stereotypes are involved in cultural constructions of the migrant. If migrant men are often seen as dangerous or even as criminals, migrant women are usually depicted as passive subjects, or as victims. More specifically, migrant women seem to serve as the quintessential representations of otherness: they keep being trapped in opposite stereotypes, related, on the one hand, to exoticism and the sexual field, and, on the other, to the care of people.⁴

The circularity between public discourse and daily racism must be understood in relation to the Eurocentric and Westernist matrixes of modernity. As Gurinder Bhambra maintains, at the origins of the idea of modernity lies the identification of a temporal fracture with the pre-modern world and the existence of a spatial difference between Europe and the rest of the world. This perspective has produced a Eurocentric vision of modernity, which she defines in these terms:

*Eurocentrism is the belief, implicit or otherwise, in the world historical significance of event believed to have developed endogenously within the cultural-geographical sphere of Europe. In contesting Eurocentrism, I contest the 'fact' of the 'specialness of Europe' – both in terms of its culture and its events; the 'fact' of the autonomous development of events, concepts, and paradigms; and, ultimately, the 'fact' of Europe itself as a coherent, bounded entity giving form to the above.*⁵

² Emma Bond et al. (eds.), *Destination Italy. Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative*, Peter Lang AG, Bern, 2015.

³ Etienne Balibar, Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities*, Verso, London, 1991.

⁴ Manuela Coppola, Sonia Sabelli, "'Not a Country for Women, not for Blacks'. Teaching Race and Gender in Italy between Colonial Heritage and New Perspectives", in Brigitte Hipfl, Kristín Loftsdóttir (eds.), *Teaching 'Race' with a Gendered Edge*, The European Association for Gender Research, Education and Documentation, Utrecht and Central European University Press, Budapest, 2012.

⁵ Gurinder Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity. Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, p. 5.

It is not only a matter of recalling a past whose effects are still active in the present, but also of choosing how to make sense of the past, as this has important effects on the understanding of the present:

The way in which we understand the past has implications for the social theories we develop to deal with the situations we live in today. Through recognizing the constituted 'other' as always and already present in history and participating in its production, but written out of it, we can begin to reconceptualise forms of theoretical discourse and political practice today. If theory has been largely predicated on an idea of the uniqueness of Europe then calling that into question upends most theory. This, then, provides a clearing from which we can begin to look at the world again and begin to create new forms for the future.⁶

In the light of these remarks, I believe it is interesting to question ourselves on narrative modalities other than those of Eurocentric matrix, that take shape not elsewhere, but within Occident itself. Therefore, I would draw attention to the case of migrant women writers, who provide, for me, the example – one among many – of a cultural practice which defies the collective consciousness about migrants, and women at the same time, reminding us that they are not people who can be talked about, but people who can talk about themselves. My starting hypothesis is that the writing of migrants is relevant because of the quality of the texts, which I cherish, and because writing acts as a practice through which the person who writes, is able to express his/her subjectivity as a human being, in spite of the fact that Italian society denies them social and cultural recognition, treating them as a 'collective subject.'

Through these interpretative lenses, I would suggest that the potential of the writing practices that migrant women put in place, consists in their ability to decentralize the universalist narration of history. Even if we cannot consider the totality of their texts as counter-narratives, especially because some are not intentionally conceived as such by the authors, we are undoubtedly faced with narratives that prove alternative and different from the dominant ones. We can hypothesize that the universe of meaning which finds expression in their writings, is not founded on Eurocentric and Occidentalist assumptions. According to this perspective, the ability of the literary medium to broaden the imaginary might stimulate an interesting re-articulation of the commonsense

⁶ Bhabra, *Rethinking Modernity*, cit., p. 11.

(mis)conceptions typical of Italian society, by inviting readers to develop alternative forms of thought.

If the European history of the others has been written in terms of lack, the need to break this narrative into multiple stories by writing it from other points of view, and taking the floor in the first person, becomes increasingly widespread.⁷ This is exactly the case within the gender perspective: together with the need to provincialize history, there urges the re-telling of the story from the point of view of women. In a long conversation / interview with Renate Siebert, Assia Djebar expresses herself along these lines:

I decided to stop investigating on my individual story and on Algerian history. Considering that the integralists were preparing for putting themselves on the line, at least on the cultural and social level; considering that, in two or three years, they were giving an absolutely caricatural image of the origins of Islam, I had no choice but do as I did about our colonial past. That is, I had to reread the sources about the first times of Islam and write about it as a woman, starting from the women.⁸

A similar view is to be found in the epilogue of the novel written by one of the women I interviewed:

The whole male Vuković genealogy, which she had known by hearth since ever, as it were a painful nursery rhyme to which she did not have access, was there, accompanied by the women. Those women, who had stayed anonymous in the tales she had drunk in her life as a daughter, inhabited her by birth right. The spaces that appeared empty in the family tree, drafted long before her birth to the world, and which had inevitably turned up on her, were full of women. She understood that it is the women who bear fruit on the men's trees.⁹

⁷ See Geneviève Makaping, *Traiettorie di sguardi. E se gli altri foste voi?*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2001.

⁸ "Decisi di smettere di investigare sulla mia storia privata, sulla storia dell'Algeria. Poiché gli integralisti si preparavano a tornare in forze nel gioco, per lo meno sul piano culturale e sociale; poiché, a distanza di due o tre anni, stavano dando un'immagine completamente caricaturale delle origini dell'Islam, a me non restava che fare come avevo fatto per il nostro passato coloniale. Dovevo cioè rileggere le fonti sui primi tempi dell'Islam e scriverne la storia da donna, a partire dalle donne". Renate Siebert, *Andare ancora al cuore delle ferite. Renate Siebert intervista Assia Djebar*, La Tartaruga edizioni, Milano, 1997, p. 130 (my translation).

⁹ "L'intera genealogia dei Vuković al maschile che lei conosceva a memoria da sempre, come fosse una filastrocca dolorosa alla quale non poteva accedere, era presente, accompagnata dalle donne. Quelle donne, rimaste anonime nei racconti di cui si abbeverava nella sua vita di figlia, l'abitavano per diritto di nascita. Gli spazi che apparivano vuoti nell'albero genealogico compilato molto tempo prima

Writing becomes the place where writers express the multiple positions they play in their lives, as people who experienced migration, and as women as well, following the explanation of one of the women I interviewed:

I think I have always hidden I am a woman when I write. Probably it is not accidental that I created mostly male characters ... I used to think that a female character is not neutral. Because she is a woman, you know? This is my analysis of my past perception. In fact, when you write about a woman people say 'Why do you write about a woman?'. You write about a man and no one asks you anything. He is a character, a man, he does something... It was a kind of internalized male chauvinism I had for a long time without realizing it. I didn't question myself. I took for granted that writing about women meant talking about women's problem, as a female character and a male one couldn't do the same things. However, is a female character plausible without female problems? I don't know. ... So writing *24 scatti* was a change for me. I didn't hide this aspect and I lost myself in this female character. I let her think and say everything she wants, have her experiences and her worries which are female and also human because women are one part of humanity. It was very enjoyable (Anna Belozorovitch).

This research investigates the link between the experiences of migration, migrant women, writers and writing. I chose to interview women and collect their life stories using a sociological approach with a qualitative research methodology. Therefore, my study does not focus on analysing the texts within a literary framework, but on investigating the meaning that each writer gives to her experience of life, migration, and writing.¹⁰ Through the interviews I carried out, I present a facet of the life journey of the women I met: their capacity to look at the collective future starting from their own stories.¹¹ Their tool is the act of writing.

della sua venuta al mondo e sciaguratamente finito su di lei, erano pieni di donne. Capi che sono le donne a dare i frutti sugli alberi degli uomini". Tijana Djerković, *Inclini all'amore*, Playground, Roma, 2001, p. 196 (my translation).

¹⁰ Numerous literary studies on migration literature in Italy have been carried out. See Daniele Comberiati, *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro. La letteratura degli immigrati in Italia (1989-2007)*, Peter Lang Editions, Bruxelles, 2010; Chiara Mengozzi, *Narrazioni contese. Vent'anni di scritture italiane della migrazione*, Carocci, Roma, 2013.

¹¹ Because of the space limits of this publication, in the following pages I will present only some extracts from the interviews I carried out in my research. However, I would like to underline that, in my research work, I listened to the life stories of these women, here minimally recalled, after having read their texts, and in long encounters which then originated long-lasting relationships. In this sense, the interviews' short passages here quoted, are a small part of a wider and deeper work

Working Through the Past, Creating Cultural Belonging

According to the renowned theory of Sayad, migration can be defined as a 'total social fact', meaning that it affects every – economic, social, political, religious, and cultural – aspect of the migrant life. One interviewed writer saw such a theory become reality in her own life:

I had never been so disoriented as I was when I arrived here, even in Bosnia during the war, even in the refugee camp. Living in Bosnia among people who were suffering as much as me... All of us lived the war; all of us were displaced people, so we were a community. But arriving in Italy in a very small town where the last war was in 1945 and attending the school with many young people who knew nothing about what I was going through... I mean I was the strange girl. I was the stranger in a society that worked perfectly, where my peers had teenage problems. Integrating into that society was very difficult (Elvira Mujčić).

This testimony proves the migration experience as more alienating than experiencing war in everyday life: as Elvira explains, her loneliness and disorientation were caused by migration itself. More precisely, these feelings originated in the sudden perception of not belonging to a community. In line with Sayad, the one who migrates goes through a twofold experience: he/she is at the same time, an immigrant and an emigrant, which means that he/she is not only someone who arrives in the receiving society, but also someone who leaves his/her country and culture. The discrepancy between the familiar world left behind and the unfamiliar society ahead is a major feature of the migration experience. In other words, migrant life does not begin with migration. Migration is a considerable part of the wider story of their life, something that divides it into a 'before' and 'after'. Though migration reveals itself as a strong experience, we should not forget that, before emigrating, migrants were people living an ordinary life, the traces of which mark deep wounds, in terms of memories and nostalgia, in their new life. Indeed, the stories I have collected show that writing may act as a way of dealing with an emotionally distressing past, at least in the early days:

of collaboration. Furthermore, the women writers were involved in the subsequent step of my analysis, that is, the transformation of our conversations in written texts where we tried to preserve the orality of their spoken language. Since the language of the interviews was Italian, and all quotations are given in my translation of the original, I am aware that some nuances, especially those related to orality and relationality, might be not completely perceived in all their complexity.

I understood I couldn't escape from my past. Repression wasn't a real option because things always come out one way or another. So, I took my first steps in questioning myself and finding some answers. I started thinking that I could fix everything through the writing process (Elvira Mujčić).

The migration is the hardest experience I ever had. It was so hard that at a certain point in my life I used to feel physically sick. I had an incessant migraine for twenty years ... until I wrote my first book. After that I never had a migraine anymore. I realized that everything I had inside me needed to come out somehow, but I didn't allow myself to do this thing because my writing language was French (Marinette Pendola).

Because migration, especially a forced one, separates people from their motherland, it necessarily engenders a need of memory so as to maintain contact with something believed lost.¹² The extracts above show how writing can elucidate a suffering experience. Naming the wounds coming from the past makes it possible to live the present, which does not imply forgetting the traumatic experience but, rather, incorporating it into one's identity.¹³ The following extracts suggests that it is not just writing, but writing in a language which is not the mother tongue, to serve an important function:

Writing in *Italian* helped me because it was a kind of filter between my emotions, the suffering and the act of writing. There are a few pages about my father, the prison, a few pages... but I made a great effort to write them. Plus, I was writing in Italian. Maybe I couldn't do it in Croatian (Vesna Stanić).

I need a language which has nothing to do with my childhood. Obviously, a foreign language separates me from my childhood, *Italian* doesn't speak with my childhood and it has nothing to do with it. On the contrary, Albanian wakes up my childhood demons, my memories. I needed to keep this part of my life out, or at least distance myself from it (Ornela Vorpsi).

While opening past wounds, migration gives the resources to heal them: a new, 'neutral', language which makes it possible to go back into the past and, at the same time, to distance from it.

¹² Julia Creet, "Introduction. the Migration of Memory and Memories of Migration", in Julia Creet, Andreas Kitzmann (eds.), *Memory and Migration. Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2011.

¹³ Anna Lisa Tota, Trever Hagen, "Introduction. Memory Work – Naming Pasts, Transforming Futures", in Anna Lisa Tota, Trever Hagen (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, Routledge, London, 2016.

So far, I have presented cases in which migration, as a sort of universal experience, causes an uncertainty which can be handled through writing. However, the sense of not belonging can only be partly attributed to initial cultural instances of disorientation; experiencing the exposure of their being and person to prejudices and stereotypes plays a relevant role. In this respect, writing becomes a central resource when facing both the difficulties caused by migration itself, and those perpetrated by the host society. It also may contribute in an active way to regaining a sense of self-confidence and self-awareness within the receiving society, as the following story shows:

When I came here I was just a girl, the first black girl in town and then I also wrote a book... I mean, people said: 'I want to see what this African girl is able to write'. So everyone came [to book presentation] and the room was full every time because they were so curious ... When I did my first presentation in town all those people, who used to whisper when they saw me in church came to listen to me. That time I got my satisfaction (Amilca Ismael).

Writing starts as a way to fix something coming from the past and strengthen one's identity in the present. And what is more relevant, writing does not only compensate for the drawbacks of migration; it also acts as an effective tool of social and cultural inclusion, symbolizing belonging to the host society. When I asked Laila whether there was a moment she understood that the migration to Italy had become a long-term choice, she replied:

It was when I decided to write in Italian. Because it was then that I said to myself: 'I want to take part [in Italy]. I don't want to use the language, I want the language to use me'. It was then that I decided to make a sort of investment. That was the moment... Writing as being part... Yes, sure ... I am a very lucky person because I found my voice. Italy gave me this opportunity (Laila Wadia).

These examples lead me to assume that writing may act as a practice of cultural citizenship, lessening feelings of exclusion. Citizenship is grounded not only in the juridical level and the associated rights and obligations, but in "feelings of belonging, values, principles, myths, real and imagined communities".¹⁴ On the one hand, citizenship is bestowed by the State in accordance

¹⁴ Evangelia Tastsoglou, Alexandra Dobrowolsky (eds.), *Women, Migration and Citizenship. Making Local, National and Transnational Connection*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, p. 14.

to legal requirements; on the other hand, it is negotiated by the people who own it partially. Partial ownership of citizenship concerns people who are legally citizens but, who are not culturally considered part of the community. Laila herself described the writing act as essential to her decision about taking part in Italian society, and she ultimately made it only when she had the upsetting experience of applying for citizenship:

I'll never forget the moment I showed up at the prefecture with my documents after waiting seven years to get married. I was told it was a marriage of convenience... to get the citizenship. Those were maybe the worst words I was told in my life. I mean I have never feel so humiliated. That moment, I think, was a wakeup call because I hadn't started writing yet, I let them mistreat me... I didn't have the resources to... I realized that language is a defence tool and I couldn't stand up for myself (Laila Wadia).

In line with a multi-layered concept of citizenship, which entails passive aspects (access to rights), and active practices (participation in society) alike, migrant women may be able to "strive to validate their cultural capital as national capital to achieve inclusion and belonging".¹⁵ Acquiring citizenship does not simply mean obtaining the recognition of rights, but also and mainly, being involved in the society. I interpret writing and publishing Italian literary texts as a way of being involved. Laila's story reminds me of the 'contaminate subjects', the people able to turn a situation of vulnerability, which the migrant condition is, into an occasion for personal change, without losing identity but opening it to cultural hybridization.¹⁶ This journey of personal change may lead the writers to claim that they belong to Italy:

Speaking of taking part in a place, [writing in Italian] is a way to enter the 'Italianness' without going through the official documentation process, without going through bureaucracy. It is like entering the front door without asking for permission (Kaha Mohamed Aden).

My first tale is not just a tale, it is rather me yelling about my unrecognized 'Italianness'. In that period people talked a lot about '*L'Italia sono anch'io*', a campaign aimed to make public opinion

¹⁵ Umut Erel, *Migrant Women Transforming Citizenship. Life-stories from Britain and German*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2009, p. 153.

¹⁶ Elena Pulcini, "Contamination and Vulnerability. The Self in the Global Age", in Silvia Caporale Bizzini, Melita Richter Malabotta (eds.), *Teaching Subjectivity. Travelling Selves for Feminist Pedagogy, ATHENA3 in Women's Studies in Europe*, Utrecht University and Centre for Gender Studies, Stockholm University, 2009.

aware of Italy's changes. ... I needed to lay a claim: 'I am Italy as well!'. Because people just keep asking me: 'Where are you from?' or: 'You speak Italian very well'. It is quite annoying if you grew up here (Rahma Nur).

Wider Horizons

By developing a sense of belonging to the receiving society, writing may become a way to participate in society. Writing about oneself means writing about other people's experiences, especially in a migration context when these texts represent a shared perception of individual identity.¹⁷ My interviews seem to confirm this argument going one step further: there is a recurring statement of giving voice to someone who has none and who has lived similar experiences. The following example is only one among several I encountered:

I think writing my first two books happened by chance because there was a lot of autobiographical stuff... I deeply needed to talk about my past, my story. I don't feel this need anymore. My need is wider. I want to talk about a community and I think it is important to give a voice to the Italians of Tunisia because they never had a voice (Marinette Pendola).

The societal issues that these women seem to be interested in, develop in diverse directions. Many women are interested in issues concerning the host society. As an example, one of the writers wrote an entire novel on the increasing invisibility and loneliness of the elderly in western countries:

I used to work in an elderly care home where I met so many people. I like listening to people, especially the older ones. They told me many stories about their youth and I saw they had so much to tell... So I said to myself that I could write these stories down and I started writing without stopping ... I like writing because I can give voice to people who haven't a voice. I want to tell stories that nobody knows... I know I can't change the world, but I would like to contribute (Amilca Ismael).

There are then those who want to tell something about their country of origin so as to question both stereotypes and international issues:

¹⁷ Silvia Caporale Bizzini, "I Remember, Therefore I Write. The Voices of Contemporary Italian Canadian Women Writers", in Caporale Bizzini, Richter Malabotta (eds.), *Teaching Subjectivity*, cit.

The bombing of Serbia was an unjustifiable criminal act, which is still unpunished, a barbaric and cowardly act. This explains why it is usually forgotten, underplayed and justified. I felt the need to fix the memory of that terrible spring. I went to Belgrade three times under the bombs and I decided to recount those three journeys because I didn't want to forget them and I didn't want people to forget them. It was very difficult for me, as Serbian, to live in Italy in that period. I survived thanks to the writing which, as a mirror, reminded me who I was (Tijana Džerković).

Not only is writing a way of participating in society, but also a political act in that it enters the public sphere. The interviewed women explicitly claim that the writing act needs to take on a social function:

Writing is also a way to be politically involved. Think about my tale *My name is fingertip* 5423. It is a way to participate in politics because it questioned a law, the Bossi-Fini law, whose goal was to fingerprint every migrant. So I imagined that every fingertip detached from the migrants' hands and they went to the central police station to protest. This is one of the most important functions of literature: participating in the social and political life in the place where you live (Christiana de Caldas Brito).

We consider this conception of the writer's role as an example of the concept of "the capacity to aspire" articulated by Appadurai.¹⁸ According to the scholar, aspirations are cultural and social abilities which make people act in the present so as to affect the future. As I have tried to show, in the experience of migrant women writers, the first steps in writing are often driven by individual needs which gradually become societal-oriented, making them develop an interest in the collective future. After all, whoever desires to participate in a society, as through writing, is someone who wants to change the future. Therefore, some of them consciously start producing texts which can impact the society. Indeed, the migrant women writers' interest in other people's stories and/or in collective issues, is not separate from their need to work on their past story, as I discussed in the previous section. The two are intertwined: working on their own stories is exactly what allows them to see a wider picture. Using writing to work through their memories helps them acknowledge

¹⁸ Arjun Appadurai, "The Capacity to Aspire. Culture and Terms of Recognition", in Vijayendra Rao, Michael Walton (eds.), *Culture and Public Action*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2004.

their own experience and conceive their whole life as a journey full of meaning rather than a set of experiences independent from each other. As Jedlowski pointed out, experience is more than what everyone lives in his/her biography, to be understood as a process of self-reflection which consists of both living and understanding life.¹⁹ This process, he explains, can be initiated for different reasons (experiencing migration may be one of those), but in any case, it requires a certain distance from one's own life to question and understand one's own story. I suggest that writing can provide the opportunity to observe oneself from the outside. Understanding who a person used to be, and what he or she went through, affects the way in which the present is understood and makes the purposes of the current actions clear.²⁰ In other words, opening up the past makes it possible to act in the present, rather than being stuck in memories that cause suffering:

I do believe that the key of the future is in the past. The key of the individual future depends on our capacity to get over the past. Broadly speaking, the key of the collective future is in the lessons we can learn from the past, in the things that the past somehow should pass down to us. So, I think that the past is very important because it is the only certainty we have, the only thing that has already happened ... The future is unknown... I am not afraid of the future; actually, I am an optimistic person. I fear the past because it keeps tricking me. Every time I solved some past problem, my present and accordingly my future became light and more pleasing to live and to imagine (Elvira Mujčić).

The concept of 'reflexive nostalgia' offers an interesting reading of this passage. In line with Boym, nostalgia is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well, a way of remembering the past without forgetting the future.²¹ The purpose of this kind of nostalgia is not to come back 'home', but to understand the past; it helps people regain a sense of self-awareness which is essential to thinking about the future. And the future is often focused on the collective. Indeed, things change over time, and the women writers, after facing their past, express the need to have a wider horizon of meaning. Past and future can be linked in the present by the concept of 'responsibility', which is related to the past through reflexivity, which "transforms what is known and

¹⁹ Paolo Jedlowski, *Il sapere dell'esperienza. Fra l'abitudine e il dubbio*, Carocci, Roma, 2008.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, cit.

adapts it actively and creatively to the needs of the present”.²² In doing so, reflexivity makes people themselves want to improve the society in which they live and is thus oriented to the future:

So, having the chance of doing something I enjoy [writing], is something I have always seen as a responsibility, something that you should do if you have the opportunity. We are all responsible for our actions, so if you have the chance to do something, you shouldn't give up. I mean... We should make some efforts to improve the world in which we live ... In that moment I felt I had the chance to say something about Italian public life that was talked about a lot: migration. Today, like yesterday, migration is continuously talked about, but it is not actually understood. We mainly receive technical details, journalistic opinions, but... people don't directly know what migration means, what migration is (Ingy Mubiayi).

Contaminated Narratives

I would like to overturn the relationship between migration and writing as I have presented it so far. I have shown that writing helps the migrant women handle the difficulties caused by their migration experience, and moreover represent active elements in the receiving society. We may ask whether the writing act, in its turn, is transformed by migration itself, in a certain sense. Experiencing migration means dealing with cultural differences and cultural plurality in everyday life. Especially for those who emigrated during their childhood or adolescence, as Livia did, living among cultures and different realities is part of their identity. This affects not simply the choice of writing and the topic, but also the fundamental logic of the texts, which mirrors the cultural hybridization experienced by the author:

In my tale *Trame* I talk about connection between different realities. There is always something that creates a relationship... It happens also when I write a poetry. This is the trigger: two things, which till that moment were not related to each other in my mind, suddenly are somehow connected. It can happen through a story, a poetry, a new feeling, a sort of epiphany which makes me understand how those things are connected. This is the reason why a text arises: there are two or three things, different poles, which reach a common point (Livia Bazu).

The connection between migration and writing experienced by the interviewees can be interpreted as a 'third space'. In line with

²² Carmen Leccardi, "Memory, Time and Responsibility", in Tota, Hagen (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, cit., p. 114.

the Croatian sociologist Melita Richter, who personally emigrated to Italy, the 'third space' is a creative, mental place, which is directly related to migration since the latter offers migrants a new cognitive dimension as a result of being a stranger.²³ In this space writing becomes a resource in managing an increasingly multifaceted identity, since "the job of adding and not losing is substantial, a constant burden in the migrant's life".²⁴ As Tijana put in other words:

Living outside my place of origin partly changed me. It affected my way of dealing with the surrounding world. It's normal when you change perspective and your horizon widens. I think this should be true for everyone. However, my essence is still the same and I'm proud of it. The new experiences enriched my personality. Living elsewhere, in Italy, contributed to my development, helping me smooth things over and soften my harsh Balkan attitude. It also influenced the topics and the settings of my writing. I feel free to write also about the Italian topics, not only about the Serbian ones... simply because they both belong to me (Tijana Džerković).

While the change experienced by these women can be interpreted, as I have discussed so far, as a subjectification practice, it can have wider implications, since it is expressed through literary writings which aim at being published. I would like to suggest that a relevant potentiality of their texts consists in overturning the western standpoint from which history has been told and imposed on the rest of the world. Such an intent is particularly clear in Laila's literary purposes:

I have thought about this a lot... What do I want to transmit? Why do I have to be stereotyped and tell only 'migrant' stories. Is it because I am a migrant? I want to be free to write about everything and to be only a writer or a story-teller, not a migrant writer or a writer with different origins. Obviously, what I write is inevitably contaminated by my non-Italian origins. However, I want to recount Italy to Italians. Because I thought that up until now so many western people, anthropologists, sociologists and writers have told the other's stories from their point of view. They talked about India from their white people point of view. I would like to do the opposite. I would like to tell stories about Italy, about my Italian family, with the eyes of a different person. This is my challenge (Laila Wadia).

²³ Melita Richter Malabotta, "In Search of the 'Third Space'", in Caporale Bizzini, Richter Malabotta (eds.), *Teaching Subjectivity*, cit.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 88.

What Laila says, concerns the need for provincializing Europe, as Chakrabarty would put it, which is undoubtedly a necessary and important step but only the first one.²⁵ It produces a counterstance which, if not transformed in something else, remains nothing but a re-action: “All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what is reacting against”.²⁶ Indeed, some other considerations expressed by Laila suggest that these women are able to convey a non-hegemonic point of view not simply because of their non-western origins, but also because, in migration, they experience uprooting, where to learn straddling cultural differences:

I like playing with words and syntax and I enjoy contaminating Italian language, which I love, with metaphors and diverse colours. ... I like mixing everything up because I think that one of literature's aims consists in mirroring your personality. I mean, when you write, the characters and the plot matter, but the fundamentals are your personal experience and your personality, your ego. And at that level the hybridization and the desire of mixing, contaminating and experimenting comes up... not to astonish but to transmit who you really are, that is a person with a double or multiple identity. In my view, this is very important because I think this is our future... a trans-linguistic Babel. I mean, if I have to define myself right now, I believe I am a post-national trans-linguistic writer (Laila Wadia).

Through writing, we can perceive that the space inhabited by these women is not only the place of individual creativity, as Melita Richter describes it, but also the instance of cultural contamination and hybridization that, with Homi Bhabha, can be said to the essence of our time: “It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and the symbols of culture have no primordial unity of fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and red anew”.²⁷ The ‘Third Space’ is the location from whom migration writings speak; therefore, it is the subversive place which deconstructs and breaks up the ‘ultimate’ worldview, the one belonging to the western white man.

²⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000.

²⁶ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands. La Frontera. The new mestiza*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, 1987, p. 78.

²⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, p. 37.

Being migrant and being woman enable authors to use writing in order to deconstruct intersectional labelling and discriminatory processes acting in the receiving society, as I have shown, and in the sending society, as well. The position from which these women writers observe societies is the stand of people who have personally experienced both cultural and gender differences. This location causes multiple forms of discrimination and conflict in societies. Differently, experiencing multiple and intersectional points of view makes writing as the creative act that looks for a peaceful coexistence of differences:

In my view the tragedy of Somalia was caused by a specific way of living in the clans. ... I noticed that the clan's genealogy follows the male line: my father, my grandfather, his father... I said: 'What if I change the subject? '. Because we should do something about this war [the civil war in Somalia]. I was wondering what I could do in writing a tale... So, I said: 'I'll change the subject, I'll talk about grandmothers'. But I also wanted... Another problem is that you cannot run away from this genealogical tree based on blood because the blood defines which clan you belong to and other people might kill you only because you belong to that clan by birth. I wanted to send a message about the blood line and I added a third grandmother, so my grandmothers are not two, my mom's mother and my dad's mother, there is another one, who is an elective grandmother and who symbolizes a cure to our obsession with belonging to ethnic and blood groups I wanted to send a message: everyone may have a 'chosen grandmother' who can be a writer you like or a neighbour who took care of you... it is a bond which doesn't depend on blood. It is something that also Italians can do... because I had two problems, the first was the patrilineal Somali issue, the second one was the Italian citizenship that I had difficulty to acquire because of the relevance of the blood, the so-called *ius sanguinis* issue. So, I changed the subject and I added a subject (Kaha Mohamed Aden).

Such views are essential for war-torn countries, and, indeed, also for the future of the receiving societies. I have shown that these women have personally experienced the difficulties, even the suffering, due to the nostalgia of the past and the encounter with otherness. Nevertheless, they do not refuse to open their lives to the culture of the receiving societies, and, in doing so, they refuse to completely assimilate to that culture. They fulfil cultural hybridization by using the Italian language in a creative way, able to make connections among cultures and different ways to see the world. I believe their literary work is to be interpreted as a step forward towards new ways of imagining the future and

thereby of constructing it differently. A future which is, as Gloria Anzaldúa suggests, aimed at a new 'mestiza' consciousness, able to overcome the insurmountable dichotomies through which we have recounted, and are still recounting, history:

En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the braking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more culture ... The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, out thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning for a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war.²⁸

²⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, cit., p. 80.

Neo-Avantgarde and Feminist Underpinnings Of Post-Yugoslav Literature and its Utopias: A Comparative Reading of Judita Šalgo and Slobodan Tišma

Tijana Matijević

Summary

The topic of the paper is the exploration of the 'woman's woman' identity, as desired and conceptualized by the protagonist of Slobodan Tišma's novel Bernardi's Room, further analysed over its relation to the unwritten history of the post-Yugoslav literature. I tried interpreting what kind of a poetical and political identification that is and why it would be important to identify in such a way in the context of post-Yugoslav literature. To be a 'woman's woman' points at a tradition, that is at inheriting or continuing what comes to be defined as womanly, understood as a sexual, textual and a literary possibility, or becoming. Therefore, the effects of a comparative reading of the two novels by Vojvodinian authors Judita Šalgo and Slobodan Tišma enable observing the continuities among late Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav literatures, disclosing their Neo-avant-gardist and feminist underpinnings. While those aspects integrate in the imagination of a utopia, which bears upon the gendered bodies and territories, the paper also aims at responding to the universalist/particularist dilemma which accompanies the process of establishing a literary text inside a respective literary field.

Mislim da žene treba da odustanu od borbe.
Trebalo da se povuku na pusto ostrvo, na pusti kotinent o kakvom
šapuću, sanjare one hiljade luetičarki ujedinjenih tela i umova,
mislim da žene treba da napuste svetsko bojište, da pobegnu, povuku
se iz istorije, da odbiju da rađaju.
Žene treba da pokažu ni manje ni više kako mogu da zaustave, promene svet.
(Judita Šalgo, *Put u Birobidžan*)¹

¹ "I believe women should give up the fight. They should leave to the desert island, desert continent which is already in the murmurs and dreams of those

Nema polova, ja sam žena žene, svi muškarci su žene a žene su samo žene! Iz inata, odlučio sam da ubuduće govorim u ženskom rodu. Nije me uopšte bilo sramota.²

(Slobodan Tišma, *Bernardijeva soba*)

Introduction: (Dis)continuities of the Literary Field

This paper is the exploration of the “woman’s woman” declaration from the quote above and its connection to the unwritten history of post-Yugoslav literature. I will try to interpret how it addresses literary and historic continuities among late Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav literatures.

A dynamic marking the development and the conceptualization of Yugoslav literature corresponds to the wavering universalist and particularistic models of organizing and understanding a respective literary field of the East-Central European “literary cultures”.³ Its name is in fact just one of the few possible designations of the literary field coinciding with the Yugoslav state: depending on the principle which prevailed in the categorization (universal Yugoslav or particular national) either Yugoslav literature, Yugoslav literatures or individual national Yugoslav literatures, like Croatian, Serbian, or Macedonian were practically simultaneously circulating. Recent debates on the post-Yugoslav literature somewhat paradoxically legitimize it by claiming that even Yugoslav literature never really existed, or at best that it started dissolving long before 1991. Yet, the good news is that the *withering away* of the field “has never been concluded”,⁴ and that the true gist of any common framework

thousands of the luetic whose bodies and minds unified, I believe women should leave the world’s battlefield, they should flee, withdraw from history, refuse to reproduce. Women must show how they can stop, how they can change the world.” (Judita Šalgo, *Put u Birobidžan*, Stubovi kulture, Beograd, 1997, p. 153). All translations in this essay are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

² “There are no sexes, I am the *woman’s woman*, all men are women and women are simply women! Out of spite I decided to speak about myself from the female perspective, by using the feminine grammatical forms. I was not the slightest bit ashamed.” (Slobodan Tišma, *Bernardijeva soba. Za glas (kontratenor) i orkestar*, Kulturni centar Novog Sada, Novi Sad, 2012, p. 31).

³ The difference between the “pan-European” and the “national emphasis” in XIX century East-Central literary cultures illustrates well this argument (Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctions and Disjunctions in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2004, p. 8).

⁴ Svjetlan Lacko Vidulić, “Književno polje SFRJ-a. Podsjetnik na tranziciju dugog trajanja”, in Virna Karlić et al. (eds.), *Tranzicija i kulturno pamćenje. Zbornik radova*, Srednja Europa, Zagreb, pp. 27-43, p. 28.

is “in certain common situations and contexts, like those linguistic or artistic, strong enough to ‘bond’ the territories”.⁵

Yet, despite the *organic* connections and common “situations and contexts”, the reality of war is what influences the narratives of disjunction: “The trauma of the war-time in the beginning of 1990s that sharply divides these two systems [Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav], engenders the narrative about a discontinuity and the two incompatible worlds, as if they were never inhabited by the same people”.⁶ Thus the argument about the Yugoslav (or South Slavonic) cultures preceding and outliving the Yugoslav state⁷ allows for the more scrupulous and coherent conceptualization of the common post-Yugoslav literary field.

Another possibility is to read the post-Yugoslav literature as a minority literary discourse. As the feminist theoreticians of the (post)Yugoslav literature argue, literature written by women develops outside the canon: “Are the so-called small cultures able to generate parallel canons, except when the women’s writing is at issue?”⁸ Furthermore, a transnational feminist perspective in studying the post-Yugoslav literature identifies the existence of “paranational communities”,⁹ best represented in the “[s]elf-conscious or feminist oriented women’s literature”.¹⁰

A “woman’s woman” desired identity, Tišma’s protagonist’s choice of the female body and *voice* is a gesture of entering the space of women’s literature, or more precisely, of one particular woman’s writing – Judita Šalgo’s. Both Judita Šalgo (1941-1996) and Slobodan Tišma (1946) are the protagonists of the Yugoslav Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde: bringing back Šalgo and her fiction is a Neo-avantgardist signal, a feminist choice. The bond Tišma makes is constitutive to an alternative or a counter-canon of an “alternative *herstory* of women’s writing”.¹¹ Importantly, Tišma’s *return* to Šalgo’s writing and the Yugoslav past occurs as a Benjaminian “revolutionary *appropriation* of the past”.¹² While

⁵ Predrag Brebanović, “Jugoslovenska književnost. Stanovište sadašnjosti”, in Karlić (et al.), *Tranzicija i kulturno pamćenje*, cit., pp. 57-64, p. 61.

⁶ Maša Kolanović, *Udarnik! Buntovnik? Potrošač... Popularna kultura i hrvatski roman od socijalizma do tranzicije*, Naklada Ljevak, Zagreb, 2011, p. 24.

⁷ A claim supported by many researchers of the Yugoslav social and cultural history, among others Dubravka Stojanović, Dragan Markovina, Mitja Velikonja, etc.

⁸ Dubravka Đurić, “Teorijsko-interpretativni modeli u postjugoslovenskim pesničkim kulturama”, *Sarajevske sveske*, 32/33, 2011, pp. 333-363, p. 334.

⁹ Seyhan in Jasmina Lukić, “Rod i migracija u postjugoslavenskoj književnosti kao transnacionalnoj književnosti”, *Reč*, 87, 33, 2017, pp. 273-291.

¹⁰ Lukić, *Rod i migracija*, cit., p. 286.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 289.

¹² Brebanović, *Jugoslovenska književnost*, cit., p. 62.

the avant-garde “negation of the linear and naively progressive temporal consciousness”¹³ might suggest a negative, non-historical “aspiration to somehow attain happiness past main historical roads and ruptures, past history all together”,¹⁴ it also enables the new ‘social imagination’. Essential figurations in Šalgo’s and Tišma’s novels – female utopias – are at once the avant-gardist projections and the spaces of women’s bodily and communal performances: “the true explosion, the activation of the reality comes into being only after the events have been written down. The writing induces the events, the happenings, the history”.¹⁵ A comparative reading of Šalgo’s and Tišma’s fiction reveals the junctures constitutive of the post-Yugoslav literary field: its (Neo)avant-garde and feminist underpinnings which integrate in the utopian imagination.

Hysteria and History. Bodily and Utopian Transitions in the Post-Yugoslav Fiction

Judita Šalgo’s novel *Put u Birobidžan* (A Journey to Birobidzhan, 1997) narrativizes the founding/finding of a female continent, a women’s utopia. The initial concept has been the historical Birobidzhan, the district for the Jewish people in the Soviet Union, which in the fable of the novel translates into a haven for the ill – syphilis infected, prostitutes and deprived women – and eventually for all women. Bertha Papenheim (Freud’s Anna O.) travels to the Balkans and the Middle East in search of the female continent; spending some time in Budapest’s hospital “for venereal diseases, therefore, exclusively for prostitutes”,¹⁶ she is drawn to go *deeper* to the south-east by a rumour of the “movement or the state of mind” which intuited a “utopia of the great global refuge for women, the Female continent”.¹⁷

However, the initial mention of Birobidzhan is set within the *genesis* of the Jewish family Rot and their essential relationship to Birobidzhan as the historical and symbolic haven; the topos is re-actualized in the outbreak of the Yugoslav war as a suggested asylum for one of the Rot family members: “It is difficult to predict how important would Birobidzhan be in the future, but in the times of great tremor when worlds swoop down to the past, nothing

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Judita Šalgo, “Smrt utopija i svetski duh”, in *Jednokratni eseji*, Stubovi kulture, Beograd, 2000, pp. 170-175, p. 173.

¹⁵ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 69.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 71.

¹⁷ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 66.

else is there anyhow",¹⁸ for "Birobidzhan is the land without killing Birobidzhan as an ideal city (utopia) B. as the spare homeland".¹⁹ After a few episodes the story retrospectively draws back to the beginning of the century, Bertha's visit to Belgrade and acquaintance with the Rot family.

Judita Šalgo built her narrative about the female utopia on the insights of the psychoanalytical theory of hysteria and the medicinal discourses which influenced it, but also on their perpetual contestation and ironizing. She explored the regimes of female bodies and sexuality by making direct references to the "idea, found in Hippocrates and discussed by Plato, of the *wandering womb*— the extraordinary belief that the uterus, when deprived of the health-giving moisture derived from sexual intercourse, would rise up into the hypochondrium (located between the stomach and the chest) in a quest for nourishment".²⁰ The astonishingly precise imagination of the ancient medicine resulting in this predictable route of the uterus is converted into a quite improbable journey in the imagination of Judita Šalgo. Since a "[w]oman wanders through life the way the womb wanders inside the woman's body"²¹ and "on her travel Bertha herself feels like the womb which is wandering in the body",²² women are defined by and identified with their bodies. Yet, "when the womb gets tired and stops, then a woman herself continues the travel".²³ In Šalgo's discourse women 'emancipate' themselves from their bodies, by reclaiming them in their attempt to reach the "promised land": "A continent discovered by women guided by their uteri. A promised land which one reaches ... by incident, through a hysterical messianic cry, revolt and spasm, a scream".²⁴ The listed symptoms of hysteria don't relegate women to the place held in reserve for them by those in control of the femininity discourse, but quite the contrary, they are the symptoms of a riot and, most importantly, of the women producing their own discourses about their experiences, bodies, about themselves. Though one of the most prominent discourses of the feminine is precisely the psychoanalytical theory Šalgo appertains to, the

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 16.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 63.

²⁰ G. S. Rousseau, "A Strange Pathology. Hysteria in the Early Modern World, 1500-1800", in Sander L. Gilman et al. (eds.), *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1993, pp. 91-221, p. 118.

²¹ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 77.

²² Ivi, p. 105.

²³ Ivi, p. 90.

²⁴ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 94.

“fanciful geography of hysteria”²⁵ transforms in Šalgo’s novel into the women’s expansion onto the new territory, geographical, political, and bodily.

Though Anna O.’s identity had been suppressed and Freud had never even met her, she contributed greatly to the “psychoanalytical theory and technique”.²⁶ Hunter offered “a psychoanalytic-feminist reading” of Bertha’s behaviour and her inability, that is her refusal to use the regular speech which shown her need to liberate from “integration into a cultural identity [she] wanted to reject”.²⁷ What Hunter shows is that Bertha herself produced “the knowledge of the unconsciousness”, she has invented the “talking cure”; men (Brier and Freud) later theorized what Bertha herself performed. Bringing attention to the active role Anna O.’s suppressed and silenced sexuality and her revolt against the patriarchy had for the creation of the psychoanalytical discourse results in a modern feminist reclaim of the hysteria seen as “feminism lacking a social network in the outer world”.²⁸

Yet, the theme of reaching the female continent remains open; it is the matter of speculation, intention (“[i]f/when the female continent is discovered, it will be, it is, the emotional fact-the truth of emotion”).²⁹ The ambiguity is inscribed in Šalgo’s understanding of the feminist worldview, together with other discourses she incorporates into the novel’s narrative,³⁰ paradoxically enabling the discourse of utopia, for “if there is anything certain, that is Birobidžan”.³¹ The uncertainty of the novel’s discourse is *completed* by the fact that the novel hasn’t been finished; effects of this are the self-evident openness of the ending, but also the multiplication of the author (two editors) and the entanglement of the real and the fictional. Judita Šalgo’s biography had become an aspect of the text in a bodily sense: the end of her life coincides with the end of the novel, enabling an auctorial postscript. What

²⁵ Rousseau, *A Strange Pathology*, cit., p. 118.

²⁶ Dianne Hunter, “Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism”, in Katie Conboy et al. (eds.), *Writing on the Body. Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1997, pp. 257-276, p. 258.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 260.

²⁸ Israël in Hunter, *Hysteria*, cit., p. 272. In this respect important is the book: Sander L. Gilman et al. (eds.), *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1993.

²⁹ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 151.

³⁰ Rosić wrote about this issue in her article: Tatjana Rosić, “Autopoetika kao antiutopija - motiv ‘nove zemlje’ u romanima Vojislava Despotova i Judite Šalgo”, *Sarajevske sveske*, 13, 2006, pp. 265-289.

³¹ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 174.

has been a narrativization of the text as the body now becomes the body as the text. The unintended inscription of her own body into text is the ultimate (Neo-)Avant-garde gesture: while exploring the “possibilities of conceptual and performative art practices, Vojislav Despotov³² and Judita Šalgo had come upon The Body, that is simultaneously the object and the instrument of the cognition; ... body is territory, but also a medium; the base for writing and the writing itself”.³³

Šalgo’s work and this novel in particular recur as a common topic in present-day literary research, especially in the field of feminist theory and women’s writing.³⁴ The circulation of the figure of the “female continent” as a metonymy of women’s writing and women writers illustrates a cult status of the book, as a rule perceived as epochal and ground-breaking.³⁵ Nevertheless, the influence of the *Birobidzhan* is not consumed by these tributes: the most critical – though not recognized so far – is its reappearance in Slobodan Tišma’s novel *Bernardijeva soba* (Bernardi’s Room, 2011). Constructing his novel as a multiple reference to Šalgo’s book, the author reiterates the *Birobidzhan* narrative by adding the telling ending: unlike the *Birobidzhan* chronicle, in *Bernardi’s Room* the protagonist actually reaches the utopian female continent.

In Tišma’s novel the story revolves around the protagonist remembering of the (Yugoslav) better past, but the Yugoslav war and the dissolution are also facets of the narrative. The title refers to the Yugoslav modernist designer Bernardo Bernardi³⁶ and the furniture he designed, a metaphor of Yugoslavia (Yugoslavia *as the past*). Yet, the figure also points at the status of this past and this country in the contemporary discourse: the furniture set is an aestheticized reminder of the obsolete former times. Hence, Šalgo’s and Tišma’s novels bring up the historical reality of the Yugoslav war, in both novels narrativized by its relation to

³² A prominent Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde poet.

³³ Rosić, *Autopoetika*, cit., p. 268.

³⁴ One of the researchers coins the term “Šalgology” (šalgologija; Dragana V. Todoskov, *Tragom kočenja. Prisvajanje, preodevanje i raslojavanje stvarnosti u poetici Judite Šalgo*, Zavod za kulturu Vojvodine, Novi Sad, 2014, p. 38).

³⁵ An anthology of the Serbian contemporary short stories written by women is edited by Ljiljana Đurđić, *Ženski kontinent* [Female continent], Prosveta, Beograd, 2004); Vladislava Gordić Petković’s book of essays *Na ženskom kontinentu* [On the female continent], Dnevnik, Novi Sad, 2007), etc.

³⁶ Member of the Exat 51, group of painters and architects “who presented a living connection to the activist heritage of the historical *avant garde*” (Iva Ceraj, “Bernardo Bernardi – The spiritus movens of Early Design in Croatia”, *art BULLETIN*, 63, 2013, pp. 98-119, p. 99).

territories and bodies, either non-existing or imaginary (a former country, a utopia).

Bernardi's Room is a story about a young man, Pišta, who started dwelling inside the old car wreck after an unsuccessful attempt at a 'male' commune, in fact a shared flat with a mixed group of his friends and acquaintances. His maturation is preceded by a crisis which culminates after he sells the designer furniture ("Bernardi's room") – his last belongings – to a dealer who pays with counterfeit money; the protagonist ends up in jail after trying to pay for something with it. The plot resolves when his long-absent mother helps him get out of prison, bringing him with her to a remote farm in the wilderness. There he undergoes a type of rite of passage and an initiation into the woman's commune. He continues to live with his mother and other women inhabitants of the commune on the farm in south-eastern Serbia. His mother takes him where Šalgo's protagonist never managed to really arrive: the journey ends and I would like to offer a possible explanation for such an unpredictable twist.

Psychoanalytically marked figures of parents, allusive rhetoric, a mysterious female protagonist from the past and finally Pišta's claim for his femininity form an expressive discourse of body and desire, which also shapes his remembering of the past. Comparable to Šalgo's approach, Tišma debunks the psychoanalytical understanding of femininity. The protagonist Pišta often imagined to be somebody different and actually intended to change his sex due to the already existing "preconditions";³⁷ Pišta himself witnesses that "there was an empty space, a void between [his] legs".³⁸ Initially travestying Freud's *penis envy*, Tišma complicates his 'gender challenge' by ironizing the "form of biology rooted in classical Antiquity, where sexual difference was construed as difference of *degree*"³⁹ which in fact allows illustrating the structural similarities and thus the "*mutability*"⁴⁰ of male and female bodies".⁴¹ Namely, "[m]en and women are, in this model, not different in kind but in the configuration of their organs Turn outward the woman's, turn inward, so to speak, and fold

³⁷ Tišma, *Bernardi*, cit., p. 30.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 12.

³⁹ Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco, "Normal Bodies (or Not)", in Mariam Fraser et al. (eds.), *The Body. A Reader*, Routledge, New York, 2005, pp. 145-149, p. 145.

⁴⁰ Emphasis added.

⁴¹ Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology", in Fraser et al., *The Body*, cit., pp. 151-157, p. 154.

double the man's, and you will find the same in both in every respect".⁴² Yet, what Tišma does is that he uses this topology against the standard misogynist theories: it is possible to be both, or to choose to be either a man or a woman.

Therefore, Pišta's 'imperfection' conflicts the "Freudian notion of castration, by which female difference is defined as lack rather than Otherness".⁴³ Pišta favours this otherness: "I want to be a woman's woman because I am attracted to women, I am attracted to *womanliness*, I want pure essential womanly love I as a *woman's woman* need the compassion of the woman's woman".⁴⁴ This choice of the female sex/gender, in effect qualifies Pišta's admission to the female continent. After his mother takes him to the female commune and he undergoes the rite of passage, the women in the commune complete a performance of crucifying him to a cross placed on the five-pointed star, after which the protagonist *becomes* a woman (the performance involves the sexual indications of the devirginating; also, after he wakes up they give him women's clothes to put on).

While Šalgo's utopia is beyond reach, in Tišma's novel it is 'colonized'. Confirmation of this *homecoming* is underscored by the latently erotic scene in which Pišta shoots from the air gun into the target together with the "three graces": "Hitting in the centre, yes! What I was always missing".⁴⁵ The lack ("missing") permits hitting in the centre, which is quite a precise metaphor of the protagonist's gender teleology (his womanly lack helps him reach the goal).

A Lacanian⁴⁶ argument that the "gap in some sense *belongs* to the object, identification is always imperfect"⁴⁷ helps associate Freudian imagination of sexuality and the feminist understanding of the identity (of writing): "The instability of 'femininity' as female identity is a specific instability, an eccentric relation to the construction of sexual difference, but it also points to the fractured and fluctuant condition of all consciously held identity,

⁴² Galen in Laqueur, *Orgasm*, cit., p. 153.

⁴³ Mary Jacobus, "The Difference of View (Women Writing and Writing About Women)", in Mary Eagleton (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory. A Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, pp. 216-219, p. 217.

⁴⁴ Tišma, *Bernardi*, cit., p. 30.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 112.

⁴⁶ It is difficult not to touch upon Lacan, present in Tišma's text both as a suggestion and its feminist revision or ridicule.

⁴⁷ Thomas Brockelman, "Lacan, Jacques (1901-81)", in Edward Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 5, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 336-338, p. 336.

the impossibility of a will-full, unified and coherent subject".⁴⁸ Similarly, besides being about 'feminine subjectivity', hysteria has been recognized as "an expressive discourse" by the surrealist artists Aragon and Breton,⁴⁹ while the French feminist theoreticians – Julia Kristeva in particular – associate the Avant-garde art and the *écriture féminine*.

Performances of Utopia: Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde and the Post-Yugoslav Literature

Publishing her first poetry collection in 1962, Judita Šalgo continued experimenting with poetic language and publishing throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Her Neo-avantgarde textualism entailed the "gestural, bodily, oral, visual ... performing of the text".⁵⁰ Šalgo's performances also evidence the inseparability of the language and body, that is of the text production and the role the body plays in it.⁵¹ Body and its artistic and political configurations are revisited in Tišma's sexual/gender 'performances of the protagonist's body'. Though most often ironized, references to the performances he or members of his group carried out are amalgamated in the fable of the *Bernardi's Room*,⁵² together with the final episode of the novel occurring as a performance of the protagonist's transition.

One of Tišma's most famous actions, performed in 1970 – *Kocka* (the cube) – is translated into text through a network of complex geometrical symbolism. The cube is a very important figure in the novel (as a perfect sublime form); Bernardi's room as the central narrative object is precisely in the shape of a cube. An opaque inscription *Aesthetics* the protagonist sees in the female commune is a textual replica of one famous photograph performance in

⁴⁸ Cora Kaplan, "Speaking/Writing/Feminism (*On Gender and Writing*)", in Eagleton (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory*, cit., p. 181.

⁴⁹ Hunter, *Hysteria*, cit., p. 272.

⁵⁰ Maja Solar, "Tradicija je otvorena, tradicija je u zatvoru", *Polja*, 53, 449, 2008, pp. 63-67, p. 66.

⁵¹ One of most impelling is her performance *Položaji književnosti* (Literary positions) in which by positioning her body variously Šalgo negotiates her auctorial position but also the position of women in the language and in the literary and cultural hierarchies, <https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=polozaji+knjizevnosti+judita+šalgo>.

⁵² Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde groups: textualists (Judita Šalgo, who was also the director of the cult cultural center Tribina mladih), Januar and Februar, Bosch+Bosch, Kôd (Slobodan Tišma) and (\$) were active in textual experiments as well as in processual and conceptual art in the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s; information about the actions and programs of the Vojvodinian Neo-avantgardists is collected from Miško Šuvaković, "Neoavangarda, konceptualna umetnost i krize socijalističkog modernizma", *Republika*, 430-431, 2008, <<http://www.republika.co.rs/430-431/19.html>> (11/2016).

which the illuminated advert of the construction company was photographed. Furthermore, the *sea* figures as an important symbol in the text as either the Adriatic (the Yugoslav sea) or as a denser image of the *Ocean*, drawing back to Lautreamont's work *Les Chants de Maldoror* (The Songs of *Maldoror*); the motto of the novel is the verse from Lautreamont's poem: "Pozdravljam te, stari Okeane!" [I salute you, old Ocean!].⁵³ It is also an intertextual reference to Šalgo's usage of the figure of ocean in her *Birobidzhan* and another direct citation of the performance by Slobodan Tišma and Miroslav Mandić *More – Antimore* (Sea/Anti-Sea) in front of the Novi Sad cathedral in 1970.⁵⁴

Finally, the female commune is a textual reappearance of the commune the members of the Neo-avant-garde groups *Kôd* and (\$) founded in a house in Novi Sad. Božidar Mandić transferred the idea later to the mountain Rudnik,⁵⁵ creating a village commune still active nowadays *Porodica bistrih potoka* (Family of Clear Streams). A performance representing the crucifixion on the five-pointed star is a persiflage of one of the most well-known performances of Marina Abramović *Rythm 5* (performed in the Student Cultural Centre (SKC) in Belgrade in 1974) indicating 'mental and physical purification'; yet, after she laid down inside the burning five-pointed star shaped structure, she lost her consciousness due to lack of oxygen. Tišma's evocation is an ironic reminiscence of the Yugoslav cultural production and its affected subversion, or simply a pun on the 'mainstreaming' of avant-garde art.

Without attacking its own *body* utopian Avant-garde art is impossible: "the attack on the institution of art is the condition for the possible realization of a utopia in which art and life are united".⁵⁶ Artistic practices of the Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde aimed at transgressing the borders between art and reality, and the performance as the format of this transgression placed the body as the physical reality and as the medium in the centre of this action: "Performing is the material social practice which is being carried out in the reality and whose effects are the features of

⁵³ A book favoured by the members of the Situationist International, which influenced the Vojvodinian conceptualists, Slobodan Tišma included.

⁵⁴ This kind of interdiscursive play has infinite effects: the Ocean is also a fact quote of the song *Okean* by Tišma's band *La Strada*.

⁵⁵ Mountain in eastern Serbia, comparable to the female commune on the farm in south-east Serbia in Tišma's novel.

⁵⁶ Peter Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde. An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of Theory of the Avant-Garde", *New Literary History*, 41, 2010, pp. 695–715, p. 696.

that reality".⁵⁷ Reproduced historical performances are narrative signals of the reality in the text, which is the ultimate artistic possibility discerned within the Neo-avantgarde discourse:

The discourse of the Neo-avantgarde is ... marked by the affirmation of the text as a second-degree discourse, which in itself does not produce solely the meta-position of an artist, but makes explicit the preceding concept, the context (intertextual relation, fact quotes etc.) Quotations of the Neo-avantgardists are made of flesh and blood, not because they resemble life, but because they embody life itself.⁵⁸

A dissent from the ruling cultural discourse and the harsh response of the state ("misinterpretations, resistance, bans and even arrest of some artists")⁵⁹ link the late Yugoslav Neo-avantgarde and the avant-gardist nature of the post-Yugoslav art and literature, which are in conflicting relationship with the mainstream nationalist cultures throughout the region; clearly, a "[p]olitical mobilization requires politicization, but politicization cannot exist without the production of a conflictual representation of the world".⁶⁰

The propensity of post-Yugoslav discourse to politicize culture, its transformative interest beyond the formal issues identifies it as an avant-gardist movement: "the avant-garde denotes supra-stylistic or extra-stylistic radical, excessive, transgressive, critical, experimental, projective, programmatic, and interdisciplinary practices in art and culture".⁶¹ Though post-Yugoslav discourse rarely involves radical and incident writings and acts, its supra-stylistic, interdisciplinary, programmatic and transgressive quality define its avant-gardist position. Moreover, it relates to historical Yugoslav Avant-garde which was a "special geopolitical and geo-aesthetic set of artistic and cultural phenomena",⁶² in fact a transnational and transcultural field "defined by the internal dynamics and interrelations of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats,

⁵⁷ Ana Vujanović, "Performativ i performativnost. O događajnosti, učinkovitosti i nemoći izvedbe kao čina", in Aleksandra Jovičević et al. (eds.), *Uvod u studije performansa*, Fabrika knjiga, Beograd, 2006, pp. 119-140, p. 133.

⁵⁸ Dragana Beleslijin, "Muško, žensko, embrion, knjiga - quattro corpi in cerca d'autore", *Polja*, 464, 2010, pp. 123-129, p. 123.

⁵⁹ Šuvaković, *Neoavangarda*, cit.

⁶⁰ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political (Thinking in Action)*, Routledge, New York, 2005, pp. 24-25.

⁶¹ Miško Šuvaković, "Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia", *Filozofski vesnik*, 37, 1, 2016, pp. 201-219, p. 204.

⁶² Ivi, p. 201.

and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and by the external dynamics, cosmopolitan relations, and internationalizations of local artistic excess and experimentation with international avant-garde practices".⁶³ Likewise, a multinational society⁶⁴ and a multilingual structure of the Vojvodinian art scene⁶⁵ are vital to the Yugoslav Neo-avantgarde, also marked by the intense communication among the artist from different parts of Yugoslavia.

The feminist analysis of the Yugoslav war and dissolution equally recognizes the multiplicity of the Yugoslav culture, opposing it to the gender and ethnic homogenous cultures of nationalism and war:

In most of the writing of former Yugoslavia's feminist theory the reality of war and the discourse of nationalism is gender identified What also runs like a thread through these writings is the need for these feminist authors to ground themselves in the sanity of peace, absolute rejection of any nationalism, and a reminder of multicultural frameworks of the former Yugoslavia.⁶⁶

Feminism politicizes the reliance on Yugoslavia: post-Yugoslav discourse is seen as the platform of resistance⁶⁷ and a utopia necessary in imagining the new post-Yugoslav cultural and political space.⁶⁸

Šalgo's indefinable utopia reflects her attitude about the possibility of its embodiment: "Utopian thinking is puritan: it does not allow duality ... Utopia is fundamentally discriminative; it seeks perfection, or nothing".⁶⁹ However, it supports the utopian imagination: "A vision must be inhabited swiftly, one must organize a life in it, turn it into an image, a clear idea, if necessary – a fixed idea – a durable and solid object of an imagination".⁷⁰ As Tišma has demonstrated, only if a utopian locus is an *intersection*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Solar, *Tradicijska je otvorena*, cit.

⁶⁶ Daša Duhaček, "Eastern Europe", in Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, Blackwell, Malden, Massachusetts, 1998, pp. 128-136, p. 134.

⁶⁷ Svetlana Slapšak, "Twin Cultures and Rubik's Cube Politics. The Dynamics of Cultural Production in Pro-YU, Post-YU, and Other YU Inventions", *Südosteuropa. Zeitschrift für Politik und Gesellschaft*, 3, 2011, pp. 301-314, p. 311.

⁶⁸ Slapšak in Tatjana Rosić, "Feministički esej u srpskoj književnosti i raspad Jugoslavije", *Književna istorija*, 47, 2015, pp. 233-254, p. 244.

⁶⁹ Šalgo, *Smrt utopija*, cit., p. 171.

⁷⁰ Šalgo, *Birobidžan*, cit., p. 101.

of a vision and corporeality, a feminine embodiment, 'the target is hit': "a moving target, a moving fleeing homeland, wandering promised land"⁷¹ is reached.

A female utopia is a proper figuration at once absorbing gender bias and embodying gender "perfection". In itself a radical project, it corresponds to the "utopian character of the Avant-garde project".⁷² Judita Šalgo's and Slobodan Tišma's novels intertwine and add to the discourse of post-Yugoslav literature via feminist and feminine aspects of their literary realities, which communicate through the shared cultural and artistic space of Yugoslav Vojvodinian Neo-avantgarde. They are the constituent parts of a literary tradition whose trajectory leads to post-Yugoslav literature. The Yugoslav Neo-avantgarde and feminist literature 'commission' the post-Yugoslav literature as a transnational, *différance* and a utopian discourse whose token is the female continent.

⁷¹ Ivi, p. 104.

⁷² Bürger, *Avant-Garde*, cit., p. 696.

The *Génie* of Nnedi Okorafor's *Oeuvre*: Genre, Gender and the Generosity of Writing

Silvana Carotenuto

Dedicated to the sisters of *Feminist Futures*

... le génie, c'est-à-dire...
la vie (car le génie, son nom l'indique, témoigne toujours... *la vie*).
(Jacques Derrida)

Summary

In what follows I focus on the 'life' or *genie* of Nnedi Okorafor's science fiction in order to illustrate the singular and metonymic, original and universal, 'bond' it establishes between the transgression of the limits of its genre, its creative intervention in the question of gender, and the inventive thrust into the generosity of its future writing.¹

I delineate the interconnecting forms of this 'bond' in a general/generic survey of the poetics of Okorafor's speculative works; I then concentrate on the 'novel for youth' *Zahrah The Windseeker* as the originary and original example of how writing can disrupt its genre's (order of) 'belonging' by constructing the agent of this disruption as the figuration of an African, albino, brave and magic girl who is determinate to offer her 'gift/talent/bless' to deconstruct all dialectics between the 'Known' and the 'Unknown', while searching and reaching out for the 'antidote' that will save her friend.

¹ Referring to the 'invisible elements' embedded in the natural imagery of Okorafor's novels, Alice Curry, in "Traitorousness, Invisibility and Animism. An Ecocritical Readings of Nnedi Okorafor's West African Novels for Children", *International Research in Children's Literature*, 7, 1, 2014, p. 39, thinks they are "metonymic of the porous boundaries between the earthly and spiritual, living and dead, human and nonhuman that often underpin the worldviews of West African traditional culture". In my reading, the 'metonymy' of Okorafor's African worldviews is linked to the desire for a new global Literature, the achievement of its literary expression through a process of writing which is both an 'investigation' and an 'invention' of Literature.

I hope that the crossing of the genericity/ generality of my survey and the singularity of Okorafor's textual generosity will invite the reader to expose herself to the 'act of literature' offered by writing as its 'gift' to the world of the future, or to the future of the world.

The Search for Literature

Okorafor's novel signs the original and complex example of 'Organic African Literature': "[w]riting stories set in Nigeria and in other parts of Africa was not a conscious decision. It was organic. And I have never questioned it. I write where the energy is. I follow my muse and my muse is definitely from my father's hometown of Arondizougu, Nigeria".² 'Organicity' is the energy that animates the writer in her literary life; 'Africaness', on its part, is what constitutes the root – the original inspiration – linked to the enriching result of present and future 'technology', in a crossing that, as Okorafor laments in her concern with the destinies of the continent, is invisible and marginalized in contemporary literature:

When I travelled to Nigeria, I would see Nigerians interacting with technology in a way that I was not seeing reflected in literature. I was not seeing Africa as a whole reflected in writing about the future.³

Organic technological Africa, and the advent of the future: what matters to Okorafor's inspiration and goal is that these elements are meant to show their absorbed participation to the practices of Literature *tout court*, their active involvement in the analysis of the Laws and the Missions of Literature (the anticipation would here be that Okorafor's 'mission' discards the linear itinerary of 'History' to access the rhizomatic disseminations of 'Nomadology'). In Okorafor's *oeuvre*, writing is actively engaged in the fight raved by Literature against ancient and contemporary evil, differentiated in forms but equally inscribed in violent African and Western

² Okorafor in Nathaniel Bivan and Risqah Ramon, "Nigerian writers shouldn't focus on fame, money," *Daily Trust*, Sep. 24, 2016, <<https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/nigerian-writers-shouldnt-focus-on-fame-money-nnedi-okorafor.html>>.

³ Okorafor in Hope Wabuke, "Nnedi Okorafor Is Putting Africans at the Center of Science Fiction and Fantasy", *The Root*, Dic. 29, 2015, <<https://www.theroot.com/nnedi-okorafor-is-putting-africans-at-the-center-of-sci-1790862186>>. For useful overviews, see Moradewun Adejunmodi, "Introduction. African Science Fiction", *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Inquiry* 3, 3, 2016; Nick Wood, "Academia and the Advance of African Science Fiction", *Omenana*, March, 2015, <<https://omenana.com/2015/03/05/academia-and-the-advance-of-african-science-fiction/>>; Deirdre C. Byrne, "Science Fiction in South Africa", *PMLA*, 119, 3, 2004 [Special Topic: *Science Fiction and Literary Studies: The Next Millennium*].

landscapes, all expressed in the organic, systemic and poetic re-invention/re-flection/re-‘vision’ of the essential traits of literary creation: the novel’s title, the name/s of the character/s, *le récit*, the perspectives of the plot, the question of authorship, the insurgence of choral work...

In its practices of innovation, according to the progress of its birth, growth and maturity, Okorafor’s writing gradually manages to forge the ‘Book’ of Literature *à sa manière*, the literary act envisioned and announced in the exposure, increase and acceleration of its ‘generosity’. The Book refers to other books, other narrative examples of African *technè* that function as guides, letting themselves be ‘rewritten’ according to generative legacies and to the inventive hybridization of genres and canons, continuously regenerating beyond the barriers of communication so as to allow the understanding of the other/s across languages.⁴ By moving from one to the other, in ‘experience’ (Freud signifies the term as *fort/da*, ‘from-to’), these ‘books-within-the-Book’ constitute the ‘gifts’ of Literature which prove to be able to protect friendship, change the destinies of humankind, celebrate difference among the species, and finally announce the opening of writing to the future-to-come.

The Laws of Genre and Gender

Each novel that I write helps me hone my craft that much more...
(Nnedi Okorafor)⁵

The *génie* of Okorafor’s *oeuvre* can be followed in some novels that mark the times and the forms of its literary life: *Zahrah The Windseeker* (2005), *Who Fears Death?* (2010), *The Book of Phoenix* (2015), *Binti* (2016) and *Binti: Home* (2017).⁶ These works articulate an inventive capacity whose literary passion threads specific phases of birth, growth and maturity. These are narrative movements often described as ‘Literature for Youth’, ‘Literature for Young Adults’

⁴ ‘Hybridity’ marks Okorafor’s life or *génie* as a Nigerian-American writer: “That hybridity, the conflicts, the similarities – the fusion of these two cultures combining and conflicting – that is why I am who I am and why I write what I write”. Okorafor in Wabuke, *Nnedi Okorafor Is Putting Africans at the Center*, cit.

⁵ Okorafor in Jeremy L. C. Jones, “If It Scares You, Write It: A Conversation with Nnedi Okorafor”, *Clarkesworld Magazine*, 39, 2009 < http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/prior/issue_39/>.

⁶ Okorafor, *Zahrah The Windseeker*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, 2005; *Who Fears Death?*, DAW/Penguin, New York, 2010; *The Book of Phoenix*, DAW/Penguin, New York, 2015; *Binti*, Tor.com, 2016, <<https://www.tor.com>>; and *Binti: Home*, Tor.com, 2017, <<https://www.tor.com>>.

and 'Literature for Adults' by the commercial labels or the editorial interests that, in 2016, assign the Hugo Award to Okorafor's 'novella' *Binti*. In what follows, differently, these labelling markers are employed at the service of some 'organic' images which prove 'internal' to Okorafor's search for the act of Literature.

In *The Great Foreigner*, Michael Foucault reckons that "What is Literature?" is the question that 'excavates' the origin, the growth and the maturity of Literature.⁷ On its part, Okorafor's inventive engagement writes, and writes again, of a 'cave' that stores parts of ruined technology. Indeed, in abandonment and dusty smell, this 'cavity' maintains, and continues to maintain, the mystery, the secret and the fascination of the process of producing the story (in one occasion, the cave hosts spiders intricately intent in their patterns of 'weaving'). The 'cavity of interrogation' calls for the identification of what and who creates the story (always the same story, always already different from itself, and from the stories that precede and follow it) of the 'Law of Genre' by exposing it to the 'Law of Gender', which is acted out by the female, feminine and feminist 'silhouette' of its metaphorical, embodied, and legal figuration:

... the Law, in its female element, is a silhouette that plays. At what? At being ... born, a being born like anybody and no body. She plays upon her generation and displays her genre, she plays out her nature and her history, and she makes a plaything at an account. In mock-playing herself she takes into account the account: she recites; and her birth is accountable to the account, the *récit*, one could even say to her (to *la voix...*) the narrative voice, *him, her, I, we*, the neuter genre that subjects and merges itself while giving birth to her, who lets himself be captivated by the law and escapes her, who she escapes and whom she loves. She lets herself be put in motion, she lets herself be cited ...⁸

The Law of Genre imposes its orders, rules and limits, simultaneously exposing itself to the disruption of all imposing and ordering functions. In *Zahrah The Windseeker*, the separation between the 'Known' and the 'Unknown', the realms set in an

⁷ Michel Foucault, *La grande straniera. A proposito di letteratura*, translated by mf/materiali foucaultiani, Cronopio, Napoli, 2015. All translations from Italian into English in this essay are mine.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre", *Glyph*, 7, translated by Avital Ronell, 1980, p. 226. For the essential traits of 'feminist science fiction', see Alcena Madeline Davis Rogan, "Alien Sex Acts in Feminist Science Fiction. Heuristic Models for Thinking a Feminist Future of Desire", *PMLA*, 119, 3, 2004, pp. 442-456 [Special topic: "Science Fiction and Literary Studies: The Next Millennium"].

opposing dialectics that is provoked by ignorance and which provokes ignorance, constitutes the nucleus of the adventure of the 'Jungle'. In *Who Fears Death*, the Law defines the limits of purity in terms of ethnic cleansing and abuse of women, asking for the responsible re-action of the brave and courageous ones. In *The Book of Phoenix*, the limits between life and death, associated to the manipulation, subjugation and exploitation of humanity, are exposed to instances of 'global warming' counter-signed by the 'burning' that attests the rebellion and the revolution of all subalterns in the world. In *Binti*, finally, the limits between 'here' and 'there', the 'internal' and the 'external', delineate the original place for the female character to decide, freeing herself from its enclosing borders, to reach for 'outer space'...

What matters in this play of limits is that transgression happens by means of the birth, the growth and the maturity of a girl, a woman, the 'alien' creature who shows ('monstrosity' plays here the powerful show of a new life, a different relation to death, the unexpected emergence of future worlds) the lineage of other geneses and other genealogies. Indeed, it is the inscription in Okorafor's *oeuvre* of the geneses and the genealogies of the female Other. Emerging from elemental panoramas (the Jungle, the Desert, the Middle Passage, the Threshold, the Return Home), the heroine, placed at the center of the literary action,⁹ assumes different figurations. She is born Dada, who originates in the African mythology which has long been forgotten by peoples. She becomes Ewe, 'the child of rape', who interprets the 'wound' that hurts Africa, mirroring itself in the conflicts and gendered violence inflicted on the entire globe. She develops as ABO, the 'Accelerated Biological Organism', who knows how to burn up all mortal fatalities of global power, manipulation and exploitation. Her last appearance is Binti, the 'genius' of mathematics in her confrontation with the alien people of Medusa. These female figurations are all meant to offer their incredible, impossible and incomprehensible 'gifts' to the Law of Genre: the capacity to levitate and fly, the prodigy of bringing back to life, the ability to be reborn, the talent at 'harmonizing' – the cosmos, and writing with it, if Okorafor's 'novella' synthesizes all traits of her previous experiential/ experimental writing.

⁹ Okorafor explains that her 'heroines' are often created in intimacy and recognition: "... à partir de femmes, notamment nigériennes, que je connais – famille, amies, connaissances". See "Interview Nnedi Okorafor sur *Qui a peur de la mort?*", *Actusf*, 31/10/2017 <<https://www.actusf.com/detail-d-un-article/article-17963.html>>.

It is to the geniality of this female gift, alien *puissance* or superhuman capacity, that writing entrusts the mission, the journey, the passage, and, at the end of its 'nomadology', the un-folding of the secret of Literature. In the originality of Okorafor's quest, the path does not present any linear progress, but rather evolves in the diffraction and rhizomatic unfolding of infinite ramifications. Beyond any individual enterprise, at stake is the narration of fictional experiences that constitute 'bonds' of 'love' – thanks to the "small but beautiful thing" of good company, or the alliance of the "family in struggle", as if to convince the reader, with Jacques Derrida's critique of genre, that the dialectics between 'I/we' must be deconstructed by "me the genre, we genres ... the 'I' is a species of the genre 'we'".¹⁰ Indeed, the rhizomatic and collective unfolding of the story does not aim at the resolution of the plot, but at gaining *l'ovule d'écriture*¹¹ which, in Okorafor's experimental imaginary, becomes the 'egg' of the Jungle's fabulous animal met in *Zahrah The Windseeker*; the 'Seed' that brings abundance to African farmers in *The Book of Phoenix*; the 'edan' or 'computational mechanism' found in the desert in *Binti*, whose 'secret', forever locked in its enveloping aura, allows understanding among species...

The 'egg' of writing is to be left intact and integral; the 'secret' of Literature is not to be unveiled. Open to the process of becoming, it comes to the surface only to allow the observation – Okorafor's visual poetics¹² – of its power of generation and germination. The pleasure of the egg's touch, the yolk, the lines and circles it contains, the vibration it provokes, the silent and magic language of its functioning, represent the 'antidote' (the term is often employed in Okorafor's *oeuvre*) to ancient and contemporary evil, the *pharmakon* that, in its ever-possible chance of contamination, allows the realization of the story. On one side, there is the politics of writing; on the other side – which is the same side – there is the inscription of the inventive interest. The crossing is powerful: the 'antidote' saves the friend, hybridizes all claims to purity, burns those who think of obtaining immortality through manipulation

¹⁰ Derrida, *The Law of Genre*, cit., p. 203.

¹¹ Cf. Derrida, *Genèses, généalogies, genre et le génie. Les secrets de l'archive*, Galilée, Paris, 2003.

¹² Referring to the 'grasshopper' she once saw on Chicago University campus, Okorafor articulates her 'vision' of ecological wonder: "This is a creature that we see all the time but when you look at it, really look at it, you see its exotic beauty. I still maintain a sense of wonder when I look around me, I guess. I've been like this since I was a kid. I tap into this when I write and describe things. I am drawing from observation I've made of things in real life". Okorafor in Jones, *If It Scares You, Write It*, cit.

and exploitation, finally facilitating pacts of harmony throughout the cosmos. While the 'gift' operates its 'generosity', writing reflects ('seeing far', with 'points of view' and 'visions' turned toward *l'à-venir*) on the 'whole' and the 'parts' (the reference goes to the question of 'belonging' or *apartenir*) of Literature, its title, name, *récit*, perspective, authorship, collaborative work, the harmony of its graphy...

'Harmony' is what, at the end of Okorafor's experimental path, signs the generosity of writing.¹³ In the analysis of its 'whole' and 'parts', the Book guides, re-writes and, in the end, writes the 'novella' *Binti* as the final inscription of the feminine genre of 'Organic African Literature'. The signature of success, however, does not seal its reach, if, on the last step on the 'ladder of writing',¹⁴ the words ending the sequel of Okorafor's novella, *Binti: Home*, leave the scene open to the future: "We will see" is the echo of what is left behind the always-possible-continuation of the story.¹⁵ Indeed, the generosity of Okorafor's stories of vision or vision of stories, is to leave the unfolding of Literature's birth, growth and maturity open to the advent of the future, to the promise of *l'à-venir*.

Wonderful 'Expansion'

The question of the literary genre is not a formal one: it covers the motif of the law in general, of generation in the natural and symbolic sense, of birth in the natural and symbolic senses, of the generation difference, sexual difference between the feminine and masculine genre/gender, of the hymen between the two, of a relationless relation between the two, of an identity and difference between feminine and masculine. (Jacques Derrida)¹⁶

Zahrah The Windseeker dates the foundational instance of Okorafor's *oeuvre* considering that the experience of its construction teaches the young writer of literary experimentation, the use of the "first person".¹⁷ Held in agential constitution, the novel assumes the

¹³ In Derrida, writing reveals a "generous force of engenderment or generation – *physis*, in fact – as with race, familial membership, classificatory genealogy or class, age class (generation) or social class" (*The Law of Genre*, cit., p. 208). These elements are central to Okorafor's literary life or *génie*, inscribing in her *oeuvre* all fictional *vertiginous* classifications and genealogic-taxonomies.

¹⁴ Cf. Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, translated by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993.

¹⁵ Okorafor, *Binti: Home*, cit. (I am quoting from the e-book of the novel, which does not present page references). *Binti: Home* is followed by *Binti: The Night Masquerade*, the third sequel published in 2018 by Tor.com.

¹⁶ Derrida, *The Law of Genre*, cit., p. 70.

¹⁷ Okorafor in Jones, *If It Scares You, Write It*, cit.

physiognomy that will grow and reach the maturity of Literature according to what is here inscribed by its writing.

The origin of the process lies in the most superficial edge of the Book and in its most elemental *fabula*, where the external margin mirrors in the internal fold of the story. The originary element attaches its value to the novel's 'title'. Jean-Luc Nancy believes that the *title* of a book brings with itself "that whole of differential traits that composes the form ... the place and singular fold (*tour*) in which the idea takes body".¹⁸ As it will become clear in the progress of the story, the 'idea' embodied by the title *Zahrah The Windseeker* announces that the proper name 'Zahrah' must join the 'title' of the 'windseeker', who carries on winds and breezes, so as to allow, in the assumption of one by the other, and vice versa, *Zahrah The Windseeker* to entitle itself. The hymen is traced by the traits inscribed, at its opening, by the novel's "Dedication":

*To the late Virginia Hamilton
Who showed me that people can fly,
And my father and mother, who gave me the means to soar

The eyes of eagles see far*

In this inscription, the 'show' of flight, its 'extension' in the sky, and the birds that see 'far', all play determining roles. It is the question of a 'monstrosity' – the physiognomy of the future¹⁹ – in search of its ability to fly, the 'gift' that might have been common to everybody in the past, but that can now only be imagined in its im-possibility, to be re-gained perhaps in the future by means

¹⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy explains that "the 'Idea' or the 'unity of inflection' (*tournure*) of the book marks its original and/or genial character, its distinctive trait or specific imprint, by following "le tour, les tours, contours et détours de cette tournure". My attempt here is to demonstrate that Okorafor's literary life follows all the 'tours, contours and detours' of the search of the Book. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Del libro e della libreria. Il commercio delle idee*, translated by Graziella Berto, Cortina, Milano, 2006, pp. 18-20.

¹⁹ Derrida binds the element of 'monstrosity' to the question of the 'future': "The future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters.... All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous *arrivant*". The philosopher specifically emphasizes that "the monster ... simply ... shows itself [*elle se montre*] – that is what the word monster means – it shows itself in something that is not yet shown and that therefore looks like a hallucination, it strikes the eye, it frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure". Derrida, "Passages – from Traumatism to Promise", *Points ...: Interviews, 1974-1994*, translated by Peggy Kamuf and Others, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995, pp. 386-387.

of the 'extension' of the levitating effort. It is an 'extension' that echoes in the rhythm of the novel, its pages incising what Hélène Cixous defines as the 'guide-word' or the 'magic-word' of the text:²⁰ the term 'far', signifying distance, enlargement, difference and excess, marks the development of the novel in the resounding prose of "too far", "farther", "farther up", "how far", "as far as", "far away", "as far as", "the farther", "any farther", "far", "far away", "farther enough", "this far", "so far" ...²¹

"Dedication" is followed by the most literary element, the 'Letter' that announces the 'extended' form of its imaginative *puissance*. In italics, the missive calls for the acknowledgement of its 'difference' from reality, the right of the story to a 'just' form of communication, its 'other' signature:

Dear Reader,
... That's not journalism. ... No, I am not a witch, a jinni, or a ghost posing
as my living self ... my story will tell you what really happened. And no matter
where you're from, I want you to understand it well.
Sincerely,
Zahrah Tsami.²²

'Difference' marks the birth of Literature, vindicating the reality of its signs, the volume of its writing, and the address to its shared *partage*. The signature belongs to Zahrah Tsami, born in coincidence with the opening of the *récit*: "When I was born, my mother took one look at me and laughed".²³ The mother laughs in recognizing the generation of her daughter in the realm of difference, alterity, and specialty. Is it only a diversity of 'surface', considering that, at the beginning of the novel, what strikes is the uncanny growing of vine leaves in Zahrah's hair? Monstrosity shows, in fact, a deeper meaning: pushed by currents of air, the girl is able to 'levitate', the magic 'thing' that surprises her, and, together, the reader. The uncanny discovery is associated to fear,

²⁰ Cixous, *Three Steps*, cit., pp. 90-98.

²¹ Okorafor, *Zahrah The Windseeker*, cit., pp. 8, 32, 40, 90, 133, 141, 147, 167, 190, 190, 242, 246 (italics in the original).

²² Ivi, p. iv. Writing's reality is foundational in Okorafor's *oeuvre*: "The characters are real to me. I hear their voices. Their actions affect me: the places I write about *exist*. I have felt the sting of their sand storms and smelled their forests: The creatures really do bite, snarl, sing, spit, sting, etc. When I am writing, I'm there and I enjoy being there". Okorafor in Jones, *If It Scares You, Write It*, cit. The 'reality of writing' transforms into the 'writing of reality' when Okorafor uses precise references to historical or contemporary events.

²³ Okorafor, *Zahrah The Windseeker*, cit., p. vii.

unbelief and terror: it is “so odd and impossible”.²⁴ Confronted by generalized prejudice, in order to understand the happening, Zahrah needs to share her secret. When her ‘only and best friend’ Dari witnesses her show of levitation, remaining ‘without words’, silence is filled with her determination to know: “I wanted to understand”.²⁵

Needing information on the ‘prodigy’, Zahrah and Dari decide to visit the Great House of Knowledge, the Library built by the architect Cana with glassava, a transparent plant made of ‘language’ – which, as Foucault maintains, is “the transparent system thanks to which, when we speak, we are understood”.²⁶

²⁴ Ivi, p. 17. The enterprise resounds with philosophical emphasis: “Le génie qui est tu excède et le symbolique et l’imaginaire, il est aux prises avec l’impossible”. Derrida, *Genèses*, cit., p. 88. In Okorafor’s *oeuvre*, the narrated mission is “impossible” in *Zahrah The Windseeker*, cit., p. 283; the journey is “more than” impossible in *Who Fears Death*, cit., p. 191; and, in *The Book of Phoenix*, cit., p. 109, the “middle passage” is “beyond” the impossible.

²⁵ Zahrah has another friend, Papa Grip, the ‘Mystical Negro’ who shows wisdom and dignity. Okorafor is strongly critical of the ways in which this figuration – “Wiser and spiritually deeper than the white protagonist” – is used by American Literature as a plot device that helps the white protagonist out of troubles (see Okorafor, “Stephen King’s Super-Duper Magical Negros”, *Strange Horizons*, 25, October 2004, <<http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/stephen-kings-super-duper-magical-negroes/>>).

²⁶ The ‘Library’ is at the core of the philosophical interest in the functioning of Literature, the interpretation of the Book, and their intricate relation to Death. For Derrida, *Genèses*, cit., p. 20, the – written, erected, monumentalized and capitalized – allegory of the Absolute Library marks the tomb and the monument of conservation, destined “to guard the secret by losing it”, and where to utter “adieu and salut, salut à La Littérature et salut de Littérature, survivance and survive d’une Littérature”. Foucault, *La grande straniera*, cit., p. 64, speaks of the ‘recuperation of the library’ as “the space of books that accumulate, that lean one upon the others, and of which each has only the crenelated existence which cuts and repeats it ad infinitum on the sky of all possible books”. On his part, Nancy, *Del libro*, cit., p. 37, p. 46, writes of the solid being of the library as the passage beyond death: “Libraries and bookshops are the depository, the reserves and expositions of those caskets of which one has to force the locks before closing them with new locks”. For Nancy, the universal library or bookshop is “the Idea of the book as exposed substance, as subject that shows and present itself, and that pronounces its cogito” that obeys only “its own law, the law of its proper (its character, its idea, its form, its style, its motion and its emotion)”. In Okorafor’s *oeuvre*, the Glass House of Knowledge in *Zahrah The Windseeker*, the magic house full of books in *Who Fears Death*, and the Library of Congress in *The Book of Phoenix*, include the archives of ‘ecocriticism’, ‘cosmocriticism’ (cf. Cécile Dolisane-Ebossé and R. H. Mitsch, “Jacques Fame Ndongo: An Interview with Cécile Dolisane-Ebossé”, *Research in African Literatures*, 41, 1, 2010, pp. 166-71) and ‘eco-bio-communitarianism’ (cf. Godfrey B. Tangwa, “Some African Reflections on Biomedical and Environmental Ethics”, in Kwasi Wiredu Malden (ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Blackwell, Massachusetts, 2004, pp. 387-95). I thank Curry, *Traitorousness, Invisibility and Animism*, cit., for these archival

Inside the Library's rooms, they find uncertain and unreliable news in a fashion magazine; at the same time, on the extraordinary Library's shelves, they also find the 'revolutionary' digi-book *The Forbidden Greeny Jungle Field Guide*, written by the Great Explorers of Knowledge and Adventure Organization. This finding transports the novel's textual event on the plane of its *fabula*: the digi-book invites the readers to cross the limits of the 'Jungle', the forbidden place that borders with the town, and whose perimeter, as believed by popular prejudice and ignorance, can be trespassed at the risk of one's life.

If Derrida remarks that "as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity", simultaneously, the Law imposing (the order of) 'incontamination' produces its 'Counter-Law' or "Essential disruption: ... an internal division of the trait, impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even cancerization, generous proliferation or degenerescence".²⁷ In *Zahrah The Windseeker*, the double bind develops its own matter of deconstruction. Dari reckons the Jungle as the place for his friend to practice, undisturbed and free, her flying talent; Zahrah, horrified but open to her friend's suggestion, accepts to visit the forbidden place. Holding hands while trespassing the edge of the Jungle, on the threshold, they witness the insurgence of difference: "I stepped over the border.... Nothing really happened. Nothing outside myself ... Different".²⁸ This is not a discreet change, in that, after a series of visits to the Jungle, the element of 'chance' – which is without order and/or counter-order – unexpectedly falls onto the path of writing: Dari is beaten by a war snake, whose poison precipitates him into a state of deep sleep. In order to rescue the boy from coma, there only exists the antidote of "the yoke of an unfertilized Elgg".²⁹

From now on, the mission of Okorafor's literary enterprise is exposed to the Law of 'genre', and to the 'gender' of its invention. Desiring to save her friend, Zahrah performs what is against all sense, advice and wisdom, taking the 'edgeless' decision which, for Derrida, "borders perhaps only on madness",³⁰ and that arrives to Zahrah as natural as impossible: "It was like a seed

references.

²⁷ Derrida, *The Law of Genre*, cit., pp. 202-3.

²⁸ Okorafor, *Zahrah The Windseeker*, cit. p. 97.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 115.

³⁰ Derrida, *The Law of Genre*, cit., p. 218.

spouting, only growing and taking over my mind".³¹ Alone and unaware of the extent of her 'gift', the girl assumes the dangerous task of searching for the 'antidote', the 'egg' of the wild animal that will save her friend. The mission proves the contamination of (the order of) genre: the "mythical *Alice in Wonderearth* tales"³² are rewritten in the hymenic relation with 'the 'Book of the Jungle', their crossing marking the difference of Okorafor's invention of African Literature from Kipling's original text of adventures.³³ The re-writing – which reveals, as remarked by Jean-Luc Nancy, "the condision of a loving and uninterrupted rewriting of the enigma"³⁴ – takes place along the disseminated lines of the path that, without mooring or hold, is guided by the Digi-book along an itinerary that proves "sinuous, uncertain, linear and discontinuous, fragmentary, unplanned, in itself multiple and, together, closed on itself, but interminable in one or other way".³⁵

Terrified but moving, Zahrah encounters the 'life-forms' inhabiting the 'Unknown'. Among tall palms trees, mystic mangos, and immense baobabs, she meets huge spiders, giant birds, and bush cows. Beaten by a whip scorpion, she is helped by a giant tortoise; to get her strength back, she is offered honey by the bees belonging to the 'wood wit'. Panthers, carnigourds, and wild dogs attest Okorafor's love for 'weirdness' and 'nonsense':

Carnivorous hummingbirds ... An enormous wormlike creature moving beneath the sands who is obsessed with the number ten ... Spontaneous forests. Sparkling lizards that can infest a house giving it unlimited electricity but also the problem of constant static. A mosque made of glass and solar cells which blooms with fragrant periwinkle daises on its root at midnight every night.³⁶

Along the path of her impossible mission, Zahrah experiences two weird encounters. She first meets the Modern People consisting of the welcoming and peaceful speaking monkeys, that host and

³¹ Okorafor, *Zahrah the Windseeker*, cit., p. 116.

³² Ivi, p. 141.

³³ In the range of narrative inspirations, Okorafor privileges the writings of contemporary authors such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ben Okri, Stephen King, Roald Dahl. See Marguerite Abouet and Tove Jansson, "Nnedi Okorafor sur qui a peur de la mort?", *Les Projets Standpoint*, 2014, interview available at <<http://www.actusf.com/spip/article-17963.html>>. For the interest of my reading, I here evoke her interpretative confrontation with some Western Urtexts of the 'adventure' genre.

³⁴ Nancy, *Del libro*, cit., p. 9.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 36.

³⁶ Okorafor in Jones, *If It Scares You, Write It*, cit.

feed her, healing her wounds up the moment when she is ready to proceed to the nest of the 'Elgort'. The other encounter happens just before confronting the monster, and involves the Speculating Speckled Frog – whom the girl has already met without knowing that "it leaves on a higher place of consciousness, within the past, present and future: it knows all before and after it happens".³⁷ The Frog is a spiritual being, sometimes male and sometimes female, who represents the "genre, genius or spirit of another law".³⁸ He replies only when he is posed the right question; Zahrah asks the question, and he accepts to direct her in her final advancement.

The scene of the 'nest' shows terrifying signs of destruction.³⁹ Zahrah enters the 'cave' – which Michel Foucault associates to the question that interrogates "What is Literature?", meaning "a cavity which has been opened in Literature, a cavity where Literature should place itself and gather all its being".⁴⁰ Again allowing the chance to chance, Zahrah chooses, among the many signs of the beast's generative reproduction, the 'unfertilized' egg. This action signs the mad instance of truth: with the 'antidote' in her hands, running away from the scene and hunted by the Elgort, Zahrah finally understands the *puissance* of her 'gift': "I am not born to die like this ... I am not born to die like this ... I took to the sky. Yes, I knew how to fly".⁴¹

The mission is realized, celebrated by the Frog's congratulations to the gifted girl: "You have done the impossible".⁴² The 'antidote' saves Dari. Success seals the 'commerce' of the book, if, from now on, the story will be told over and over again. Zahrah's mother understands the 'reality' of what has been carried out by her talented daughter – "I thought she was just telling stories ... But they weren't just stories, even if they sounded like there were. It's real"⁴³ – and, on its part, the Digi-book announces the 'future-to-come' of the novel: "Inform the rest of the world, for what good is knowledge if it's not shared?".⁴⁴ Zahrah recounts her experience to Dari; his radical ideas coupling with her tales of adventures,

³⁷ Okorafor, *Zahrah The Windsecker*, cit., p. 235.

³⁸ Derrida, *The Law of Genre*, cit., p. 224.

³⁹ Okorafor explains the relation established between 'destruction' and 'writing': "I have an obsession with chaos and destruction. Tornados, earthquakes, hurricanes, sudden, unexpected horrible change. Writing is my way of facing it". Okorafor in Jones, "If It Scares You, Write It", cit.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *La grande straniera*, cit., p. 57.

⁴¹ Okorafor, *Zahrah The Windsecker*, cit., p. 260.

⁴² Ivi, p. 262.

⁴³ Ivi, p. 279.

⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 286.

they both offer their versions of the story to the journalists. Now and here, the legend grows everywhere: “the Book has saved both their lives”.⁴⁵

Zahrah the Windseker closes the Book on this saving act of generosity, to be offered, again and again, to what urges Literature, since its beginning, to the desire of changing the world in/by the ‘wonderful extension’ of writing. It is the precious ‘gift’ of women claiming the puissance of love and transformation: “As if the world were expanding ... as if nothing was what it seemed anymore”.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 248.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 308.

Women Novelists and Love as a Tool of Changing Historical Perspective

Svetlana Slapšak

Summary

Through the analysis of the concepts of speculative fiction and science fiction the two are classified in the same typology. The utopian element is defined in gender perspective as the crucial feature of the genre. The notion of *chronotopos* allowed to include the historically determined love-adventure novel into the gender-genre model. The meeting point of all these genre varieties, beside more or less expressed feminist goals, is episteme, or the knowledge defined poetics.

In a recent debate, Margaret Atwood defined her novel *A Handmaid's Tale* as a speculative fiction, while Ursula K. Le Guin insisted it was science fiction. The confusion between the two terms goes much further: some think that the notion of speculative fiction is larger than science fiction, while others think quite the opposite. In my opinion the message by now departed Ursula K. Le Guin is that any reflexive perspective, historical or futuristic, has its bearings on thinking of gender and how it is constructed. Very often it is related to the author's gender and gives an important insight into gender constructs of (relative) contemporaneity of the author and his/her work, floating between concepts of history and the imaginary of the future. Women authors, since the rise of the novel, insert more of the utopian or dystopian ideas concerning gender positioning in the past or in the future, including the changing and dynamic 'floating' of their gender *chronotopos*. This is due to the constant presence, threat from and wish to

(re)gain their freedom from patriarchy, or to find a way to live with it. Patriarchy is the most enduring social 'arrangement' in known human history: as far as we know, matriarchy existed in 'pockets' of time and space – that is *chronotopoi* – and never obtained the global expanding force of patriarchy. Patriarchy was and is still capable of blending with almost any ideology, belief or religion: it reappeared in socialist countries of the Soviet block and even quicker in much more liberal Yugoslavia, it rushed in taking horrifying forms and devastated all human rights with special forms of vengeance against women in all transitional countries after 1989. We live in patriarchy today as if almost nothing happened in human minds between the 18th and the 21st century. Therefore, patriarchy is certainly the deepest trauma and the underlying motive for all women's and others' writing in speculative fiction or science fiction. Overcoming patriarchy, even in smallest portions, demands a serious amount of knowledge and responsible understanding of biology, archaeology, ancient cultures, historical anthropology, contemporary anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, philosophy, arts and culture, education, etc. To make a long list short, it demands episteme in its basic meaning, methodologies which correspond both with the history of sciences as with running schools of thought, and argumentative discourse acceptable both in academia and in the world of culture. Women in the bigger, Eastern part of Europe had a bitter pill to swallow and to learn that nothing is gained for ever (or much shorter time) earlier and faster: now it is the moment for women of the West, including the USA, to experience the extreme speed of the process of re-establishing patriarchy and to react. Predicting such a turn many years ago, Margaret Atwood had to observe, analyze, display, imagine, conclude and go through an extremely demanding epistemic process in order to make her novel convincing and eventually so timely and appropriate. That is a primary science fiction writing procedure. But at the same time, insisting that her work belongs to the speculative fiction, the author might have claimed a multi-dimensional time and re-thinking of history. This is my interpretation: I would like to introduce *chronotopoi* as a distinctive notion which puts together and on the same typology level speculative and science fiction.

Speculative fiction and science fiction have the same transparency of literary procedures: myths of creation do not apply to the genres which have to be scholarly (or mock-scholarly), convincing, didactic. The (truly) imagined societies in these genres have to rely on historical models of societies, their fragments,

parodies, or contrasted, twisted but never totally unrecognizable social structures, even when 'human' is not on the list of literary personae. Therefore, the invention of the future is related to the invention of the past. My intention is to give several examples of historical novels which challenge the patriarchy and were written by women. In their distribution of male and female roles and their attribution of ethical standards to genders, these novels present a vast choice of scientific procedures, logical argumentation and other scholarly features. And at the same time, these procedures form different kinds of utopias and dystopias and all are oriented toward a demise of patriarchy.

I have to trace some transformations of an ill-defined but very successful and in this debate the most pertinent genre, the love-adventure novel. Most researchers today agree that the origins of the European and American love-adventure novel lie in the Greek novel of the Hellenistic period. Although this genre inspired parodies, it was thought so little of by ancient authors that there is not even a name for this type of narrative. Modern discussion aligns the ancient novel with female readership but, despite the now well-established discipline of ancient women's studies, little research has been undertaken in this area. From the beginning, the genre has been defined by its readership and the name *roman* denotes its relationship to the demotic tongue in the territory of the Romance languages in medieval times; the new name, novel, was borrowed from the Anglo-Saxon area. The term which perhaps sheds most light on the concept of the genre is the modern Greek term *mythistorima*, connecting the imaginary (*mythos*) with the narrative (*istorima*, story rather than history). The Greek term denotes the novel as a genre, entirely losing the meaning of the love-adventure novel as a bastard-genre (due to its popularity with the masses, its triviality and lack of relevance to value-systems). If, however, the term is removed from the Greek language context, it could encompass some important elements of a possible definition of the adventure novel: mythical stereotypes, a similarity to the fairy tale, a loose connection with history, the seductiveness of the narration.

The most significant chronotopic feature of the love-adventure novel is the relation between the individual and the history, which is always spatial. The hero of the love-adventure novel faces an alien world and some kind of a metaphysical guarantee of ethics in the adventure time. This is the stage on which history and the individual meet and invent each other in the love-adventure novel. The narrative strategy of the love-adventure novel modulates

the rhythm of events and incidents with descriptive passages concerning the alien world: costumes, make-up, decoration, food, technology, attitudes, lore, exotic language. The standard descriptions of places, temples, pictures and sculptures in the ancient novel correspond with the modern descriptions of old ships or invented future technologies, in all imaginable varieties, but the principle objective of the narrative remains the same: to slow down the pace while holding the reader's interest, which curiously corresponds to some erotic *jouissance* techniques. Even the duller passages of explanation, sometimes highly technical (how the battleship functions, how to decipher an old manuscript, how the alien technology works, how to tend the goats, how to make glass from the sand on a desert island and such extremely refined constructs as the Klingon language) operate within this equivocal framework of pleasure denied. Is the narrative coined mimetically after the reading/pleasure pattern? This could be the hallmark of narrative strategies in the love-adventure novel. An analysis of this phenomenon would show it to be gender-based, as in the study of Janice A. Radway. The hero must regard love as the most important achievement, even if he is reluctant to accept it. He enters history, masked as adventure time, and leaves it at the moment in which his love is about to begin its 'real' historical time. Even if the heroes are married, the adventure time is a period of revival or temptation in their love, and after the adventure time they will resume their everyday relationship. The position of the hero and his beloved is distinct from that of the other characters in the novel, especially the historical ones, and sometimes the characters from history are much more vivid.

We see the persistence of the basic model as established in the ancient novel: a couple in love in an alien world, *peripeteia*, and then a settling back into mythical anonymity and an individual Utopian happiness. In this way the adventure novel is a rather impressive model of linking the mythical with critical thinking. It gives transparency to the transition from narrative to discourse and back. It stands in opposition to the two rhetorics, fictionary and factionary and, by doing so, reveals one of the principal procedures of any manipulation. This is the most remarkable and the most subversive arena for ideological intervention in the genre. It proves equally successful in both directions, either presenting new ideological models or denouncing them. We first recognise the ideological invention in the character construction of the love-adventure novel hero. The hero of the love-adventure novel finds himself with a heroine, leaving the adventure time

and entering the time of everyday life. The adventure time may also be represented as national history, littered with temptations, battles and hazards, and the present time brings this to a symbolic culmination, introducing the private as the collective and so relegating the heroes to the capsule of the nation's moneme, family, and its basic function, that of reproducing the nation.

The nineteenth century novel excelled in the destruction of human hope: heroism is impossible, honour is always destroyed by ambition, love is sublime if never consummated. The adventure shatters this repressive model, which limits men to work and prayer, and opens the horizons of freedom and the healthy suspension of responsibility. Ernst Bloch was a rare case of a philosopher who saw the primary political energy of the love-adventure novel, or *Kolportageliteratur* (this term, like *Trivialliteratur* relates to the way in which these novels are sold) as emerging from the very fact that this kind of writing is not unsullied literature. In this way, the love-adventure novel subscribes to the concept of hope, of change, of breaking with the past. The reader of the love-adventure novel acquires a fantasy power and thus compensates for his/her everyday impotence; false bourgeois ideas about individual freedom collapse and the construct of social and political conditions is clearly revealed. Ernst Bloch's praise of the love-adventure novel may be seen as a component of a postcatastrophic revival project, but it is also an important element in the contemplation of a prospective revolution. Bloch is horrified at the possibility of the expansion of bourgeois inertia and individual invisibility. With his view of the love-adventure novel, the occasional interest of philosophers in the genre moves towards an ideology, as an area for the proper functioning of the genre.

Ernst Bloch condemned the censorship, especially in the case of Karl May's novels, which were popular among boys. But what about heroines? She is spectacular for her lack of physical strength or experience in fighting, as she is more often compelled to use her brains, her rhetorical skill and her female strategies to escape danger. In addition, she is socially determined to be dominated. The hero does not always arrive in time to save her, they may spend most of the time in separate adventures. She may even be the cause of the hero's adventures and his consequent problems; she may control and manipulate changes in his attitudes and beliefs and even prescribe conditions for her relationship with him. When we compare some ancient heroines and their adventures with some modern heroines in less elevated love-adventure

novels, the difference is staggering. We must also ask ourselves if heroines have really been lacking from love-adventure narratives for the boys since the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, there is a great deal of romantic interest in Dumas' novels: there is a number of self-aware heroines ready to endure physical challenges in the novels of Jules Verne. It is almost impossible to find a love-adventure novel in which the love interest is just left at home, or introduced at the end of the adventure. The genre is dominated by love relations as much as by adventure itself. Therefore, consideration of the genre as being for boys is more pertinent to possible changes in the novels' readership. An explanation might be found in the social and cultural changes which accompanied the industrial revolution. The introduction of public schools gave no particular advantage to women, because they had a tradition of being privately educated and, if they were admitted to an institution, it was in a gender segregated system, under which boys were certainly privileged. Whether officially or not, under the school system, women became the persistent readership of love-adventure novels. The system underlined gender differences: boys were prepared for access to power, while education had a somewhat more superficial meaning for girls, who gained little from it. With access to power, the phantasms for boys were snatched from the girls, and this new readership appealed to writers. The world had become much smaller due to the vast colonising projects and these future masters of that world, armed with practical, industrial and bourgeois knowledge and marked by respect for the sciences, were a new challenge for the writers: they could write not only about history (and adventure) but also about sciences (and adventure), raising the prestige of the genre considerably. So it is perfectly arguable that Jules Verne wrote for boys, young and old. Previously the writer of love-adventure novels had counted on a faithful and financially dependable female readership with a tradition of buying books. With the coming of the industrial revolution and the state-controlled school system (which began as early as the 18th century), such a writer was writing for an audience which was generally not capable of purchasing books on its own account, but only with the assistance of parents, teachers, school administrators and so on. In other words, the writer had now to take into consideration censorship, various versions of *Ad Delphinum* restrictions, the interest of the church in the school system, family morals, bourgeois rules and standards, the sensitivities of the wielders of power and so forth, not to mention those critics who functioned as defenders of public

morals and the publishers who had to defer to all of these. In this new cultural situation there was also a place for anti-establishment writing and reading, with all the predictable risks. Ernst Bloch's description of Karl May's books being removed from beneath the Christmas trees of Germany after a destructive criticism in a daily newspaper is very compelling in this respect. As the public school system also understood the use of national languages throughout Europe, the ground was now almost completely prepared for an obligatory ideological investment, or at least control over the writing of the adventure novel. Because of this I consider the debate over boys as writers and readers of the adventure novel irrelevant. The structural change in the reading public and gender was certainly a factor in this change at the beginning of the industrial era, and the subordinate position of literary production, induced a situation in which, from all possible perspectives, the role of ideology has been crucial ever since. Authors responded with alacrity, protesting outside the school system against these new limitations and defending the autochthony of literary production, but there was no returning to the liberal and libertine publishers, authors and readers of the eighteenth century. Women, silently and secretly like Emma Bovary, retained their propensity for lower literature, but the world of literature was now segregated.

In many popular historical novels (more or less blending with the love-adventure genre type) love is an unpredictable plot element, fostering happy ending or a happiness of an individual in history as an arbitrary outcome, more dependent on a genre convention than on credibility. If love is realized, it stays out of history and the couple 'retires' from the world as a rule. Compared with Alexandre Dumas, Paul Féval, Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, Rafael Sabatini or Alexandre Poushkin, some women novelists stand out in their plot constructing, which presents love as a crucial force/motivation or a decisive type of behavior initiating and defining the action in history thus establishing an important place in social structuring. Such basic discrepancy can be analyzed in the novel *Gadfly* (1897) by Ethel Lilian Voynich and *La bicyclette bleue* by Régine Deforges (1981) and its nine sequels (till 2007). *Gadfly* became influential in a global sense (several millions of issues printed), becoming the compulsory reading in all the socialist countries, from USSR and China, including the early Yugoslav socialism (translations in the 1950s). Beside the social-political obligation, the novel was genuinely popular among young people. In the work of Régine Deforges, the initial pastiche of *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell (1936) serves

as a convincing vehicle for proposing another perspective - the one in which both members of a couple in love have to 'perform' their relation in different social and political environments, proving that love both creates political and social reality and is created by it. In both cases, authors form an argument which interacts with revolutionary movements and left-oriented political positions. The third case is a Yugoslav Vera Obrenović-Delibašić with her novel *Kroz Ničiju zemlju* (*Through the No-man's Land*), in which through action and risk a Muslim woman's emancipation is accomplished. Being labelled a Soviet sympathizer, the author spent several years as a political prisoner, and the reprints of her novel re-surfaced more than 30 years later: her career was limited to translation.

I want to compare women authors in the same genre, who managed to write-in national or other than revolutionary-left ideas into their work (Emmuska Orczy, M. J. Zagorka, Erica Jong and others) in order to argue that the revolutionary-left positioning coincides well with contemporary emancipatory movements and ideas incorporated in them. However, this distinction does not exclude evident emancipatory meanings in other women authors' work. The comparison should serve to map a much larger map of emancipatory interventions by women authors in their inclusion into popular genres and the system of power and cultural authority. In this contribution I will limit the comparison to two of the novels I mentioned. In her novel *Scarlet Pimpernell*, Emmuska Orczy presents an odd couple: married in a passionate affair in Paris at the time of revolution, an actress and an English aristocrat move to England, to his rich lifestyle. Suspicious of her treason of some of his French aristocratic friends, he distances from her, maintaining his identity at home as a petty nobleman, interested only in fashion, horses and sports. The numerous adventures in the novel are, in fact, a background for two emotional adventures: Marguerite discovers that her husband's real personality is worthy of her love, and Sir Percy discovers his wife to be a brave and honest defender of human rights. The husband loves desperately, his wife is disappointed in the marriage. She begins to explore his psyche, tries to change him, reeducates him in how to become a person again and then unconditionally supports his new integrity. There are no grounds for speculation on Orczy's feminism, but her text represents a kind of feminist Utopia: how to make a man out of a boy, how to construct a satisfactory partner, and how to share the adventure with him. Without that adventure, Marguerite is pining away in a socialite marriage, and Sir Percy is growing more and

more depressed, suspicious and superficial. By going in search of each other, they escape the curse of a stereotypic marriage and save each other for a real, active, adventurous life. Where, then, is Orczy's alleged conservatism? This is, in fact, a type of novel which corresponds exactly to Ernst Bloch's project.

In the Ethel Lilian Voynich' novel *Gadfly*, a woman's role in forming a revolutionary man is crucial: due to a miss-information, a young woman Gemma accuses her love interest Arthur to be a traitor, and at the same time, the enthusiastic young thinker, deeply in theology and philosophy, discovers that his mentor, a Catholic bishop, is in fact his father. Destroyed in both spiritual and real life, Arthur disappears and reappears several years later as a mysterious and experienced revolutionary fighting for the independence of Italy. Gemma does not recognize him and is fascinated by his bravery. Arthur is caught, and after unsuccessful attempt to turn his father to the side of revolution, he is executed, keeping his heroic attitude. Arthur in fact shakes off the patriarchal authority and everything that goes with it, and comes back to fight for Gemma's aim a revolutionary liberation of the people. Her ethical attitude has liberated him from the traps of patriarchal masculinity. In the socialist world, Arthur is a hero both for fighting hypocrisy and standing by an ethically perfect revolutionary woman whose attitude towards men is open and sincere.

In both cases, a very active heroine molds the chosen man in a socially dynamic situation which demands the engagement for the humanity. Their common goal is not (only) an individual fullness formulated as happiness, but the liberation and happiness of multitudes. In both cases, I could read-in the features of the feminist utopia of changing patriarchy. Successful on the individual level, the re-education of men should give the example how patriarchy could be deconstructed from bottom up. This stepping into the world of new gender relations and positions is facilitated by reading, learning and active participating in social movements, that is based in epistemic growth and progress: the case of positive feminist utopia differs from dystopia mainly in the lack and deprivation of knowledge and information, like in Atwood's novel.

The introduction of *chronotopos* helped to put closer the speculative fiction and the science fiction and to determine their common typology. It also enabled me to include the historical love-adventure novel into this typology.

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