Women Narrating Their Lives and Actions

Women Narrating Their Lives and Actions

Izdavači/Publishers:
Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku
Za nakladnika: Tvrtko Zebec
Centar za ženske studije
Za nakladnika: Rada Borić

Biblioteka/Series:
Feminizmi u transnacionalnoj perspektivi, knjiga četvrta /
Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective, volume four.

Uredništvo biblioteke/Editorial board:
Rada Borić, Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Biljana Kašić, Sandra Prlenda, Ulla Vuorela

Uredile/Edited by: Renata Jambrešić Kirin, Sandra Prlenda

Recenzenti/Reviewers: Nadežda Čačinovič, Sanja Potkonjak

Lektura/Proofreading: Susan Jakopec

Grafičko oblikovanje/Graphic design: Kristina Babić

Naklada/Printed copies: 300

Tisak i uvez/Printed by: Denona d.o.o.

Svibanj / May 2013.

ISBN: 978-953-6020-72-0
ISBN: 978-953-6955-42-8

CIP zapis dostupan je u računalnom katalogu Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu pod brojem 842966.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the National and University Library in Zagreb under 842966.

Objavljivanje ove knjige omogućilo je Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta Republike Hrvatske i The Rachael and Ben Vaughan Foundation.

This book has been published with the support of Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, and The Rachael and Ben Vaughan Foundation.

Women Narrating Their Lives and Actions

Edited by:

Renata Jambrešić Kirin

Sandra Prlenda

Centar za ženske studije / Centre for Women's Studies

Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku / Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research

Zagreb, 2013

Prikazani rezultati proizašli su iz znanstvenog projekta (Rod i nacija: feministička etnografija i postkolonijalna historiografija), provođenog uz potporu Ministarstva znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta Republike Hrvatske.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Sandra Prlenda

Women Narrating Their Lives and Actions: Introductory Remarks

The fifth course *Feminisms in a transnational perspective: Women narrating their lives and actions* (Dubrovnik, 23–27 May, 2011) gathering almost forty participants and thirty speakers, represents the peak of the course trajectory marked by fruitful cooperation of an international group of dedicated organizers from places ranging from Croatia, Italy and Hungary to Finland and Pakistan. Among them, we need to express our special gratitude to former course co-director Ulla Vuorela (1945-2011), who left an indelible mark on the course content and quality. That period was dedicated to spontaneous feminist achievements, intensive knowledge exchange, friendly encounters and plans for a bright future. However, the fragile position of humanities and the new tendency to strengthen the competitiveness of the *European Higher Education Area* has changed students' priorities and primary aims for mobility and education in the direction of pragmatism and fitting into the ECTS grading scale. The importance of books, proceedings and reading materials has been diminishing because of the standardization of quantitative assessments and priorities in favour of digital humanities and e-learning. Our Dubrovnik feminist course, which started in 1999 and was restructured in 2007, has been the antipode of this goal-directed utilitarian ideology, affirming the Platonic ideal of knowledge exchange as a matter of hospitality, recollection, narration and the ability to act and respond to social context. More often than not, its venue in a world-famous tourist Mecca, was an important object of attraction (particularly for colleagues who came by their own means) but also an obstacle for many postgraduate students to come and attend the course. Our intention to "internalize transnationality" is still waiting for assessment and epistemological critique, but we can fully embrace the wise words by our keynote speaker Gayatri Ch. Spivak that "in our good faith, surrounded by friends from many different places, we want to claim (...) that it is the public voice, the printed voice, that achieves transnationality, always imperfectly, always provisionally, always permitted by power". It is not by chance that the course's presentations and discussions dedicated to the topic of life narratives and problems of feminist theoretical and social activism produced a conclusion about "necessary

feminist intervention in legitimizing empirical knowledge and theorization of women's daily lives" (Sanja Potkonjak) and inspired the decision to focus the 2013 course on *Feminist critique of knowledge production*.

If we would like to emphasize one common idea or concluding statement connecting all fifteen contributions in this volume, it could be the renewed faith in theoretical, poetic and political writings that do not draw any line of separation between life and action but „identify *literature*, *textuality*, and *narration* as the privileged site for (....) the overcoming of the dialectics between life and action" and for exposing ourselves "to the narrations of the lives and the actions of other women (...) who, in their legacy or lineage, have lived and acted in the organic contact with alterity, in the poetic correspondence with writing, in the tragic vindication of the 'right' to be respected in the world" (Silvana Carotenuto). In that way we have confirmed the post–WWII statement by Hannah Arendt that "lives without words and action are dead for the world", but have also underscored the belief that interpreting (auto/biographical, testimonial, literary, graphical, painted, theoretical) narration is the proper (non)formal educational methodology by which we can foster the development of emancipatory and feminist thought in order to achieve a better understanding of power related stories that are modelling and "interpelling us" before we get an opportunity to communicate our own version of them.

Silvana Carotenuto, Laura Sarnelli and Durre Ahmed, each of them dealing with her own discursive formations, reveal the risky, ambiguous and subversive position of women's mindful bodies and voices within the *grand récit* of the history of ideas, law, religion and patriarchy. While Ahmed encounters the porous demarcations and stereotyped gender characterization of orality and literacy, reading, writing and translating in Western and Islamic cultural tradition, Carotenuto offers the concept of the *poet(h)ics* or the Spivakian practice of "learning to learn from the subaltern", i.e. "of sharing compassion with the poets; of reclaiming public mourning, of accommodating *change* and *agency* for/with the nameless". Sarnelli's analysis of a timeless figure of ethico-political agency, Antigone, follows a similar line of thought, informed by existentialist and post-structuralist readings.

Natka Badurina, Nejra Nuna Čengić, Jasmina Lukić and Irina Novikova discuss the repercussion of the "testimonial turn" and "the work of memory" both in feminist theorizing of women's witnessing between self-concealment and self-empowerment in a century saturated with unprecedented wounding events, as well as in relation to national identity formation in turbulent times and politically charged contexts. Starting from the reflection on the specific character of testimony about traumatic experiences of the Second World War

(Badurina), the authors look closely at different cultural texts connected with postconflict contexts – life stories by young women from Bosnia and Herzegovina (Čengić), filmic texts by Bosnian director Jasmila Žbanić (Lukić) and a variety of genres of life-writing from the post-Soviet Baltic cultural spaces (Novikova) – in order to discuss the advantage and disadvantage of manufacturing mass empathy with trauma victims for pacifist, feminist, nationalist and other communitarian vocabularies of identity. On the one hand, the "testimonial turn" in the study of women's life writing has shifted our focus to the forces that contribute to the interplay of emancipation and liberation with subordination that expose the trauma to which a witness may speak or write in public. Testimonies, although contested and often manipulated by persons and situations, importantly contribute to subverting essentialized discourses of identity and prejudices of (meta)cultural representation in the validation of victimized communities. On the other hand, emergent practices of women's self-authoring through community art, social forums, public hearings, artistic performances, and new media signal creative potentialities for the future.

An intersection of the textual, the political and the ethical is further revealed in contributions by Vita Fortunati, Julia Watson, Tina Pavlović and Slađana Mitrović who examine different ways to approach the complexities of women's autobiography in which ethics and aesthetics, singularity and exemplarity, thought and action, are intertwined. While Pavlović is describing the importance of Nawal El Saadawi's autobiography for grassroots formation of feminism in Egypt and other Arab countries, Fortunati analyses four influential feminist autobiographies to exemplify why autoreferential texts are so decisive to the history of European feminist movement and theory. Watson interprets the negotiation of identities and transgression as a form of woman's expression in graphic memoirs or "autographics" (from Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* to Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*) in order to show why they are revealing for feminist projects and human rights struggles. Asking the question how is transgression still possible in the visual art, Mitrović juxtaposes Courbet's painting *L'Origine du monde* and Tanja Ostojić's emancipation of sexual visual explicitness, especially within her web project *Looking for a husband with an EU passport* (2000-2005).

Ulla Vuorela, Natalia Pushkareva and Viktorija Ratković raise the question of how different women narrate differently their lives, particularly those trying to fit into a larger "scientific truth" of disciplines and institutions - like women in the Russian Academy of Sciences or Hilma Granqvist, the first Finnish anthropologist and a pioneer in Palestine studies. Biographies of these outstanding women are vivid evidence of the history of gender discrimination

and the gender asymmetry in academia, as well as in society as a whole, but also how among privileged women the same mechanisms of exclusion and inequality are functioning more often than the "strategic sisterhood" (Vuorela) by which women might disrupt or change institutions in a world increasingly governed by corporate concerns. Ratković testifies that such synergy of affirmative feminist efforts is possible giving an example of the Austrian multilingual online magazine with the slogan "from migrant women for all" and the definition of the "female migrant" as a political identity and as a subject of feminist and antiracist partisanship.

The consensus about the necessity of activist and academic introduction of women's voices into the structures of scientific knowledge and power balance was underlined by „epistemic intervention" or "epistemological engagement" as outlined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, our distinguished guest with whom the course participants engaged in a lively dialogue. She invited us to work together starting from posing some key questions such as how to differentiate between capital and capitalism, or to navigate between capital as a powerful (feminist) tool of empowerment and "romantic anti-capitalism" initiated by Karl Marx, between freedom from oppression and freedom to give away for social justice, between the right to self-expression and the danger of feminists becoming the "organic intellectuals of capitalism" and spokeswomen for capital's social productivity, between the statistical *effacement* of capital and „the gendered and raced imagination" related with living labour, etc. The danger of shrinking the course's scope on cultural issues and postmodern argumentation on decentred, partial, subjective and multiplying discourses of either "plural singular" or the self with particular self-interest was thus firmly rejected. Spivak's remarks were also the best intellectual drive and encouragement for selecting the topic of the 2013 Dubrovnik course on *Feminist critique of the knowledge production* and for continuing with the serious historical-materialist analyses of knowledge production connected to the position of women in academia and in a world governed by private interests and corporate logics. To conclude with Spivak's words:

> What you teach is how you teach: develop a way of teaching that will perhaps produce the motivation to use it differently – a will to social justice. Self-governing will not do it, self-expression will not do it, corporate funding for collective remarks about many nations will not do it. It's hard work. This changing, turning one's mind away from the idea of self-expression alone, is hand-in-glove with turning-capital-into-social socialism.

I.

How to read and teach canonical texts and feminist poet(h)ics

SILVANA CAROTENUTO

Pedagogy, Poetry and Politics: A Feminist 'Poethics'

In order to honour the theme of this conference, I would like to narrate the story of my life and my action in the world, setting it in the time-space of two dates: today, 2011, and 1977, the year I came to Dubrovnik for the first and only (up to now) time on my way to Turkey. I was 18, and I loved it: I ate oysters in the main square of the old city…Your invitation to Dubrovnik today has brought memories back, and much more: that journey marked the beginning of my professional life and action because, in 1977, back home, I enrolled the Faculty of Foreign Literatures, where I studied for four years; I then became a teacher, a researcher, a professor… My life and my action since then: after 34 years, looking back at the past from today the future has provoked me to systematize the becoming of my 'teaching' life and my 'intellectual' action since then...

How can I narrate this experience? I will try to follow the threads of my life and my action in the world, gathering around them the influences that other women, intellectuals, theorists, writers and philosophers, have had on my 'growing up' as a woman and as a teacher. These influences constitute a female and feminist genealogy that has constructed the constant support to my interest in the pedagogy of teaching, the teaching of literature (postcolonial female poetry) and the search for the political dimension of my profession. Pedagogy, poetry and politics: as guides in my life and my action in the world I choose three scholars, Gayatri Ch. Spivak, Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler, the mother of postcolonial theory, the Franco-Algerian inventor of écriture

féminine, *the philosopher of performativity.*[1] *For me, their engagement in postcolonial education, in a new valuation of poetry, in the vindication of a politics of respect for alterity, has meant – it still does – a source of infinite inspiration, in particular for two reasons: their theoretical, poetic and political writings do not draw any line of separation between life and action; they identify 'literature', 'textuality', and 'narration' as the privileged site for their radical overcoming of this essential dialectics.*[2]

The life of the organic intellectual Spivak is her action in the world – in the South of the world; the impulse towards écriture féminine*, in Cixous' Manifestos, is the necessity of translating writing into existence, and existence into writing; in Butler's philosophy, what would performativity be without its inscription in the political arena? In their narrations, life is devoted to action, and action is the experience of life; no subject-object of knowledge, but the urgency of partaking theory and praxis, singularity and exemplarity, thought and action. What an incredible lesson, an extraordinary poem, a necessary militancy, have meant for my life and my action in the world: the de-limiting de-constructive horizon of postcolonial learning, female reading, and militant engagement. These 'gifts' are soon to be followed by the second reason of my devotion to Spivak, Cixous and Butler: they have been signifying, for me, the overcoming of the dialectics between life and action, in that they themselves have been exposed to the narrations of the lives and the actions of other women, female writers, poets and literary characters, who, in their legacy or lineage, have lived and acted in the organic contact with alterity, in the poetic correspondence with writing, in the tragic vindication of the 'right' to be respected in the world.*

'Right' – I will tell you what Spivak (1982/2008), Cixous (1993) and Butler (2000) have thought on the question of 'human rights': a pedagogy that works 'at both ends' of the planet; the invention of a language that conveys and shares the right, for instance, of freedom of expression; the reformulation of respect for human life and human death, exemplary, in the public mourning of the victims of our contemporary global wars. Postcolonial theory,

1 The authors I choose here have been guiding me for a long time: to Spivak's influence I dedicated "Traduzioni culturali" (Carotenuto, 2009); Cixous's writing has inspired my "Una auto-biografia in-diretta: *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* di H. Cixous" (Carotenuto, 2001) and my translation of her *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (Cixous, 2002); for Butler (Carotenuto, 1997), and (Carotenuto, 2000), tried to make sense of her philosophy in my research and teaching.

2 The overcoming of the split between nature and culture, *bios* and *zoe*, as the sacred 'mission' that the women of the new century will carry on, is theorized by Julia Kristeva and Catherine Clément in their dialogue devoted to *The Feminine and the Sacred* (Kristeva and Clément, 2001).

écriture féminine*, and performativity: what the lives and the actions of my extraordinary guides have been gathering around the deconstruction of the rhetoric of human rights is the synthony (it is a question of 'music', songs, cries and 'claims') and the vicinity with the poetics of the lives and the actions of the writer Mahawsheta Devi, the poet Ingeborg Bachmann, and the tragic character Antigone by Sophocles. Devi's organic engagement with the destinies of the Indian tribes;*[3] *Bachmann's journey through a life devoted to the intensity of poetry; Antigone's impossibility to come to terms with power if not in the responsibility towards death …*[4]*. It is the moment when the stories of the intellectual Devi, the poetry by Bachmann, the fragility and strength of Antigone meet the ethical necessity of a reformulation of the practice of education in postcolonial conditions, at 'both ends of the world', in the privileged North and the South of the globe; the chance of establishing the link between 'us' and 'them' thanks to a poetic language that expresses the common pain of existence; the value of textuality in giving voice to the drive for justice, the need of a performativity of engagement with our present.*

Pedagogy, poetry, politics, poetics and… ethics: 'poethics' is a word written at the crossing of poetics and ethics: 'po-ethics'; as the grafting of poetics and ethics: 'poet(h)ics'; it can be written in the encounter of poetics and ethics, the invention of a word: 'poethics'. It means the crossing, the grafting and the merging of … life and action – it is the lesson, the poem, the performance that Spivak, Cixous and Butler, together with Devi, Bachmann and Antigone, offer me as a 'gift' to my life and to my action in the world. Pedagogy, poetry, and politics – 'poethics': the narration of my life and my action in the world would have been otherwise if I had not met, on my cammino*, since my first coming to Dubrovnik, in the time that has elapsed since then, the 'poethical' narrations – matrix, matter, material – of my female guides, the theorist Spivak, the writer Cixous and the philosopher Butler, narrating their encounter with the writer Devi, the poet Bachmann and the tragic Antigone, while sharing, among themselves and with me, the critical and creative affirmation of our female experiences – in life and in action.*

---

3 See my "Il consumo della foresta. La 'cacciatrice' di Mahasweta Devi" (Carotenuto, 2003).

4 In the narration of my life and my action, "The Hunt", a novel by Mahasweta Devi, the poem "Night flight" by I. Bachmann, and the destiny of Antigone by Sophocles, constitute the texts which reconnect, in their singular idioms, the problematic of 'Human Rights' with the alterity of their female characters, so as to celebrate the 'organicity' of a postcolonial praxis of 'teaching', the insurgence of a language that partakes human suffering, a new politics that establishes a public space where to mourn the nameless victims of wars.

Universal Alibi: Pedagogy from 'Below'

The critic Gayatri Ch. Spivak is invited to series of lectures devoted to "Human Rights and Human Wrongs". In the militant style of her contribution, she is critical of the rhetoric of human rights; she specifically interrogates who could be the 'dispenser' of rights, being uncomfortable with the 'Darwinian' logic that there might be someone – the fittest – who carries 'the burden of righting the wrongs of the unfit'. Spivak underlines the risk that, behind such a logic, is hidden the alibi for the 'white man' to embark in a new mission of 'civilization' by developing other forms of historical oppression and violence. Spivak does not refuse the necessity of intervening in the debate: the importance of Human Rights is, in her opinion, that it constitutes an interesting theoretical and practical "crossing" (2008:22). She does not even criticise the possible Eurocentricism of its discourse; she objects to the concept of 'development' and 'progress' that marks the rhetoric of Human Rights, proving, at an increasing rate, a new alibi for 'global' control.

Differently from the notion of 'development' and from the correlate 'consciousness raising', Spivak articulates the need for a practice of 'teaching human right norms' as an expanded definition of 'education': the quality of a pedagogical formation that works 'at both ends' of the world, a large scale education 'on both sides' – that is, within the Western universities or schools, or among the Southern elite, often educated in Western – or Western-style – institutions, and for/with the children of the rural poor, constituting the future electorate in the Global South. In Spivak's words, this 'utopia' aspires to the extension of education throughout the world, in a pedagogical commitment – a 'persistent pedagogic effort', she says – that teaches the 'humanities-to-come' as 'an uncoersive rearrangement of desire', ethically responding to the cultural imperative of the education of those who fell through colonial subject-formation as an empowerment at the lowest level. What kind of 'education' does Spivak envision? It is what proves a theoretical move in her critical philosophy: she is asking the 'supplementation' of the work of Human Rights by an 'education' that "unstabilizes the destiny of the subaltern" – the one who cannot access into, or the one who is removed from, any line of social mobility, and who is defined by Spivak as 'female gendered': "let us (nonetheless) name (as) 'woman' this disenfranchised woman that we *cannot* strictly, historically, or geopolitically, *imagine* as a literal referent" (Spivak, 1996:51). The subaltern cannot be a literary referent, but she can teach us – 'yes', 'yes' – she can teach us; we

can 'earn to learn' from her, she can educate the educator; "My teacher is the subaltern", Spivak confesses (2008:269).

What can the female subaltern teach us? For instance, she might teach us to question the 'reasonable nature of reason' by investigating its 'limits' as a 'white mythology' through the emergence of the critical instance, the insurgence of the 'ethical' into postcolonial praxis: "the other calls us, before will" (Spivak, 2008:22). Spivak remarks: "ethics is a task of relation before being a task of knowledge" (2008:22). And it is truly a task of 'relation': how can it be achieved? How to materialize its event? 'Textuality' can help, in its insistent work of *texere*: tex-ile, textil-ity, text-ing, textuality – doing, undoing and desiring, weaving intimacy, approaching alterity with respect. 'On both sides': in the 'Western universities', it will represent the necessity of 'reading', that is, suspending oneself into the text of the other, so that no one will be 'better', indispensable or capable of 'righting wrongs'. Reading provides the practical training into the learning from the 'singular' and the 'unverifiable', which proves to be, at the same time, an experiment of *poesies* (accessing the other) and *tele-poesies* – striving for a response from the distant other, without guarantees. For the 'subaltern', on her part, education will constitute a 'slow mind-changing process', the opening of imagination to the 'yet-to-come' on the basis of 'responsibility', which is underived from rights (Spivak, 2008:25) and which is another way of saying: 'the call of the other', 'the predication of being-human as being called by the other, before will'. For the 'activist', finally, education will imply her involvement in the everyday working (textuality) of the global social movements, so as to be able to support the necessary – and impossible – construction of a 'collectivity' among the dispensers of bounty as well as among the victims of oppression. Her participation as a militant – an organic experience of 'sharing' – will teach her a new sense of responsibility *'to'* and *'for'* the other, driven by the 'redistributive impulse', socially productive of an ethics of openness toward the imagined agency of the other.

Technically, on the level of the education of those whose wrongs must be righted, the first issue is 'communication' between and among the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world. Here, Spivak's suggestion is "to confront the imagination of a 'public sphere'" where, in the undoing of centuries of oppression, the cultural agent or the 'educator' attempts – without any guaranty – to 'suture' education into the rural subaltern normality. 'Suturing rights' into the torn cultural fabric of 'responsibility': for Spivak, it means to re-activate and re-code an erased ethical script, already and always present in the Global South communities. This

is a gendered-compromised script, deformed by internal histories – what the Western capital calls 'archaic' and defines as 'deficient', but which is, in fact, a script held in the self, half-archived and not directly accessible, a real creative intervention in language – out of us/in us. Historically 'different', this script inscribes alterity onto the scene of the critical reflection, an alterity in us/before us/facing us. Only if and when the educator learns to read this script, will she achieve epistemic access; when the moment of sharing the right/responsibility pattern comes, the 'teacher' or the 'educator' will understand that she can act as a 'suturer', an 'invisible mender', of the habits of democracy and parliamentary thinking onto an earlier cultural formation – without guarantees.

According to Spivak, this work can be attempted: (1) by learning one of the subaltern languages (essential to access the subaltern episteme); (2) by inventing a new pedagogy – W. E. B Du Bois would say that "it is more important to develop a critical intelligence than to assume immediate material comfort" (Du Bois cit. in Spivak, 2008:48); (3) by attending to the children and by taking their response to teaching as our teaching text; (4) by fostering independence; (5) by drawing forth consent (rather than obedience); (6) by entering the ritual practices of the community in a transgressive way. 'Recoding rituals' – I will provide you with a literary example of what Spivak articulates in her theoretical text. The example comes from (Spivak's translation of) the short story "The Hunt" written by the militant intellectual Mahasweta Devi (1995). I will quote this text not only because it shows the ethical engagement of the scholar's postcolonial theory in the logic of the organicity of the intellectual, but also because I have taught this text to students who, without being necessarily part of the rich universities in the North of the world, belong to an institution whose historical fame lies in the colonial and postcolonial process of 'Orientalism' – to use Edward Said's terminology. The University "L'Orientale" of Naples is the Italian academia where the teaching of oriental languages has served the interest of important colonial enterprises throughout history. Whenever I teach Devi's text to my students, it opens up a space for them and for me where to imagine a 'public sphere' in which their/my democratic ideas are confronted by radical alterity, and, ethically, by a notion of responsibility placed at the threshold of an aporetic choice – which is the unique space for responsibility to exist (if responsibility cannot be the practicing of already-set norms) and for the event to happen (if the event is always and already unbound to any already set-form).[5]

5 I am referring to the notion of 'responsibility' as provided by Jacques Derrida in his deconstruction theory. The notion is relevant, in different but common ways, to the postcolonial

Mahasweta Devi is an activist who works and lives with the rural tribes in India. "The Hunt" is set in the remote village of Kuruda, at the time of one of the annual festivals of the tribe: the Spring Festival, every 12 years dedicated to women. The narrative brings us slowly to the day of the festival; its interest, however, lies in the topic of 'deforestation': everyday, the train stops at the station of the village to bring wood away – the area grows Sal trees – "Sal logs arrive night and day by *truck*" (Devi, 1995:2). Timber plantations are a legacy of colonialism, the same legacy that produces the character of the story: Mary Oraon, a seductive and cold girl of 18, born of a tribe mother and a white colonizer who left her and her mother and went back to Australia. At the time of the story, Mary works at the local market, feared by the community because of her extraordinary strength; she always keeps the machete by her side; her look is different, her skin is of another colour. She is and feels different: "In her inmost heart there is somewhere a longing to be part of the Oraons" (1995:6). She tries to be part of the community, especially when Tehsildar Sigh descends from the train; he is a broker, a contractor sent to the village by the central government to profit on the Sal wood – 'fifteen rupees for a full-grown sal'. He is there also to abuse Mary who, as he dreams, will render "his business even more profitable". The story, in fact, goes on a quite different track: Mary sees into the man's true being, and, understanding his economical interest, she encourages the community to wait before selling him their wood, and contact the companies directly; she also defends herself against the man's insistent attacks and abuses.

The day of Jary Parab arrives, marking the women's turn to celebrate – "the ritual of the hunt that the tribes celebrate at the spring festival is for the women to perform this year" (Devi, 1995:12). Like the men of the village, the women go hunting with bows and arrows. The night before the beginning of the ritual, Tehsildar speaks to Mary: "Against the background of the spring songs, Mary thought he was an animal A-ni-mal"; in response, surprisingly, the girl promises him a date: "On the day of the feast. On the day of the spring festival" (1995:14). What is taking place between the 'subaltern' and the 'contractor'? There is a passage in the text that will provide with an insight into Devi's style (notice the italics, as the persistent trace of colonialism), and that shows the 'aporetic' moment proving so relevant in my teaching of Devi's narrative:

theory of Spivak, in the writing poetics of Cixous, and in the political performativity by Butler.

... The women are all in the forest. Each woman has stood excited in front of her own door armed with machetes and the men's bows and arrows...
Mary is wearing a new sari today...
Mary is running over with joy today...

Fire in the Spring Fire at the feast
Look and come home Not to forget -

Mary ran on... Mary is laughing. They won't find a kill. Like all games the hunt game has its rules. Why kill hedgehogs or hares or partridges? You get the big beast with bait.
In her colored sari and red blouse, Mary is now like a flamboyant tree in motion. As if a bunch of flowers from that flamboyant tree is running in the wind. Red flowers on all sides. Everything is red. A hare ran past. Mary laughed. She knows where the hare lives. Go back! No fear! Mary said laughing. In her drunken abandon. A great thirst dances in her blood. Tehsildar, Tehsildar. I'm almost there. Tehsildar wants her a lot... With how much violence can he want her? How many *degrees Fahrenheit*? Is his blood as wild as Mary's? As daring?
...
Mary noticed Tehsildar's red *shirt*.
Imported liquor, *cigarettes*, Tehsildar...
Yes, the face is beginning to look like the hunted animal's.
Mary caresses Tehsildar's face, gives him love bites on the lips. There's fire in Tehsildar's eyes, his mouth is open, his lips wet with spittle, his teeth glistening. Mary is watching, watching, the face changes and changes into? Now? Yes, becomes an animal.
--Now take me?
Mary laughed and held him, laid him on the ground. Tehsildar is laughing. Mary lifts the machete, lowers it, lifts, lowers.
A few million moons pass. Mary stands up. Blood? On her clothes? She will wash in the cut...
Mary comes out. Walks naked to the cut. Bathing naked in the cut her face fills with deep satisfaction. As if she has been infinitely satisfied in a sexual embrace...
...The spring festival fires are scattered in the distance. Mary is not afraid; she fears no animal as she walks, watching the *railway line* in the dark, by starlight. Today all the mundane blood-conditioned

> fears of the wild quadruped are gone because she has killed the biggest beast (Devi, 1995:14-17).

Mary kills Tehsildar, staying free from punishment – Mahasweta Devi comments on the scene she portrays:

> She resurrected the real meaning of the annual hunting festival day (the Festival of Justice) by dealing out justice for a crime committed against the entire tribe society. One of the causes of the great Santal Revolt of 1855-56 was the raping of the tribal women. People say that in the story I've gone too much for bloodshed, but I think, as far the tribal or the oppressed are concerned, violence is justified (...). When the system fails in justice, violence is justified. The system resorts to violence when people rise to redress some grievance, to protest. India is supposed to be a nonviolent country. But in this nonviolent country, how many firings, how many killings by bigots take place every year? When the system fails an individual has a right to take to violence or any other means to get (Devi, 1995:xviii).

'The right to resort to violence to get justice' – what different 'human right' pattern is being deployed here? How does the fiction work in order to 'suture' the socio-historical conditions of the Indian tribes and a notion of justice that justifies violence in order to get the 'right' to protect the forest and the village women? A possible answer comes from the discussion I have with my students when reading this text: if we took the actual space between us, here and now, as a synonym of 'public space', where to discuss Devi's engaged provocation, our most consolidated notions of democracy would be at stake – actually, they would traumatically be shaken. In the imaginative rewriting of Mahasweta Devi, the 'call of the other' interrogates our Western categories of knowledge, justice and ethics, in such an intense way that we might gradually become ready to 'learn to learn' from the subaltern Mary, from her intelligence, her capacity of being 'responsible' to herself and to her community, her subalternity translated into a 'cultural work' of essential necessity (Devi, 1995:xxvi). In our privileged contexts, through the ethical writing of an intimate and militant 'suturer', thanks to the text signed by a responsible 'mender', we are prompted to weave a textuality of reason, dignity, cultural awareness and respect with the female 'subaltern', marking the ethical moment when the reclaiming of rights may happen not from above, but from 'below'.

‘Up in the Sky’: the Freedom of Poetry

The dialectics between ‘below’/’above’, the literary text and the textile of political activism: in “We Who Are Free, Are We Free?” Hélène Cixous responds to the invitation of the Oxford Amnesty Lectures to discuss ‘Human Rights’ by questioning the solidity of the ‘individual self’ as predicated by its eighteen-century ideology. This ‘self’, in its presupposed ‘identity’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘inalienability’, has dramatically changed throughout history, with a heavy impact on the notion of ‘freedom’ implied in its identitarian composition: Cixous asks us to consider, as an instance, the ‘right’ of freedom of expression and opinion, strongly sustained by specific phallocratic and colonial patterns of speech. Should we get rid of the right, due to its imbrications with imperial discourses? Cixous, rather, posits her theoretical reasoning at the crossing of the value of the western philosophy of rights and its deconstruction, between its necessity and critique, its praise and dismissal. According to her, in our aporetic position, the word ‘freedom’ should be maintained, holding onto the infinite constellation of critical positions it inscribes:

> What am I in relation to liberty? What are we? What are you? Am I free? Have I ever been free? Have you? Where is freedom to be found? Where does liberty find refuge when it is under threat? (Cixous, 1993:202).

These questions frame a series of ‘dramas’: Cixous’s autobiographical tragedy as a writing woman, the drama of writing itself, and, on a larger plane, the place of freedom in our contemporary time: nowadays, the Western world is overlooking the twilight of freedom, a status of general dissociation, civil wars, national fervour, and a panic of non-identification and non-recognition, within the system of hatred and rejection of alterity that goes hand in hand with the historical present. Today each being is distinct, unique and non-other – with the result that otherness is banned and forbidden, and the risk is to loose oneself, to go astray. In Cixous’ opinion, however, this is exactly the place where ‘writing’ is born, marking a vital position for the birth of poetry: freedom from oneself, freedom of one’s desires, freedom from one’s prison or from the captivation that precedes all of us. Prisons and camps – they indicate “the border of experience”, “the experience of the limit of limits” (1993:203).

There can be various and singular limits to liberty: in colonial and diasporic contexts, they signify non-belonging, escape, alienation, class-apartheid and foreignness; in patriarchal contexts, they hint at misogyny and violence. Should we, in these contexts, turn to the reclamation of rights so as to be able to re-address the instances of limited freedom? Cixous, in a different voice from Spivak's arguing, still within the same ethical domain, maintains that we can – we normally do – turn to the secret strength of poetry, to what takes care of the complexity of our 'multiple identities', continuously crossing among themselves and with others. If, in Spivak, the militant urge is directed 'to unstable the destiny of the oppressed', Cixous refers here to a 'common destiny' among the multiple identities at play, in the 'alterity' within oneself and with the others in the world. Her effort is, however, in the same area of postcolonial thinking: for the French-Algerian thinker, the ethical is productive of a practice of 'sharing', an ethics of 'mutual necessity'. Poetry is the place for sharing: we only need to consider the strength of poetic writing, deeply opposed by all political power; the violence of history that causes the poets' partaking in a destiny of expulsion, imprisonment, and separation; the fact that, inspired by their sharing, the poets create a chain through time, each poet repeating the name of the others, thus inventing a linkage between the dead and the living, the earth and the sky. "An uninterrupted, a transnational, tranlinguistic music is heard", says Cixous: what music will it be? A furious liturgy, an epic of memory, a sublime 'lesson' (pedagogy is back, once again):

> What do we learn from the poets? First and foremost, the mystery of pain and compassion: in times of injustice, the 'subject' of pain is not me, but you. Your pain makes my own pain more bitter and more generous. Your pain restores my pain to me. For my pain, when it is too great, exceeds, escapes, grows alien to me, I can only undergo it dully, far inside me, where I am a stranger within me. It is only in your pain that I can suffer and weep, I need you to suffer my suffering (Cixous, 1993:206).

"I need you to suffer my suffering". The sense of interrelation, a necessary entanglement, the ethical configuration of 'you' and 'I' together, the sharing of your pain and my pain, the vital link of a common survival: these are the mysteries, the secrets, the strength and the value of poetry. It can be the experience of the women who, standing outside the Russian prisons, recognized the poet Anna Akhmatova, and asked her to describe the horror

of their existences (Akhmatova, 1983) Their appeal signed a simple, humble and tragic communion, the one that transformed 'identities' in radical ways: if Akhmatova replied that she would do what asked to do – that is, describe the horror – was it not the writing of the others to surface in her poetry? The writing of the 'unhappiness' that we – as 'others' to ourselves – share; the inscription of the internal homeland that the people and the poets, together, reconstitute in their common strangeness:

> I wove a shroud for them
> With the meagre words I heard from them (Akhmatova cit. in Cixous, 1993).

Once again, we find Cixous' reference to the text, to 'weaving' – would it be necessary to return to Freud's notion of the women as the first weavers in history, their technical excellency born out of their lack of the phallus, and their consequent necessity to cover up this lack? We could, rather and differently, stress the core, the practice and the ethics of 'contact' and 'com-passion' (passion with) in the moment when, as Cixous repeats, "anyone, man or woman, who contemplates the crucifixion, becomes a mother" (1993:208). In "Cixous without Borders", Spivak interprets Cixous' notion of 'motherhood'; by quoting her Manifesto entitled "The Laugh of Medusa" ("Listen to me, it is not the overbearing clutchy 'mother' but rather, it is, touching you, the equivoice that affects you"), the postcolonial critic remarks that Cixous' use of motherhood implies "a general sense of 'mothering', its definitive and cultural predication as *selfless* love, reinscribed by Simone de Beauvoir as the species-other passing into love subject". Motherhood is, in Cixous, "a *paleonymy* of words such as 'writing' or 'justice'", "a relationship with another woman", "an amazing formulation of responsibility…especially since the dimension is inaccessible and therefore the responsibility is effortful" (Spivak, 1996:51-52). This is a very complex problematic, and, for the time being, I will leave it; what matters here is that Cixous states that the 'mother' gives us language, a mother tongue that we must continuously re-invent. Language: the only and unique home to be saved, preserved and maintained, in order to exercise freedom, to resist through times of silence and murder, lies and crimes. The community of 'resistance fighters' will then link the women's practices of writing, and be able to create a common language, once again, for 'both ends': for the dispossessed and for the privileged, together.

For the dispossessed, the home they carry around the world is language. Language is what overcomes their exile, what remains their only possession (unique, and never possessed, as Derrida explains in his *Monolingualism of the Other*, 1998). The dispossessed live in language; with it, they weave the transformation of 'bad' into 'good', the end into a beginning, the desert into a spring, the poison turned into a gift, solitude translated into communality. By using a more intimate technique than *texere*, Cixous refers to the work of nature: the dispossessed 'garden' their human condition by 'grafting' (poet(h)ics is the grafting of the 'ash' into poetics) and 'implanting' language; this is the way that the poets and women knit, break, multiply, transform, and invent language. The same dialectic works for the privileged woman living in the West – Cixous's question is "is her condition so different, in relation to language?" Are we, in the occidental world, free from the media, from the dominant institutions and killers of truth, from the phobia that destroys the ones who seem foreign and radically others? This phobia is killing the women who think strong thoughts about other women; it falls under the heading of the biblical distinction between the 'clean' and the 'unclean'; it secludes those who approach the zones left unexplored, the immense richness of the unconscious, by means of dreams; it punishes those who enter upon divine matters with courage, against all threats of cultural starvation, intellectual apartheid, and social isolation. 'We' – Western, white and female beings, who possess secure identity cards – are afraid of this phobia, solitude, hatred, rejection, and silence – which is death for 'us' intellectuals! Even in our phobic times, however, 'freedom of speech' is the condition of our lives – we need to make our calculations, and decide in favour or against it. As far as Cixous is concerned, she is 'mathematically' sure:

> If I betray, if I give up women and poets, afterword I shan't be able to write. Now, (1) If I can't write, I am dead; (2) I would rather die than write what is not true, write betrayed and betraying. So I don't' have a choice (1993:215).

Cixous' 'lack of choice' constitutes an 'unremitting combat against her fears', a poetic fight supported by those who are the guardians of anger, the soldiers of freedom of opinion, the fighters against national pride and for the freedom of language: Clarice Lispector, Franz Kafka, and Ingeborg Bachmann, in her splendid "Night Flight" (Nachtflug):

Our field is the sky,
tilled by the sweat of engines,
in the face of night,
risking dreams -
(...)
Who lived here? Whose hands were pure?
Who lit the night
haunted the spectres?
(...)
Who lives there below? Who is weeping?
Who has lost the key to the house?
Who cannot find the bed? Who is sleeping
On the steps of the stairs? Who, when the morning comes,
Will dare to interpret the silvery trail?
(...)
Who will dare to remember the night? (Bachmann, 1986)[6]

For Cixous, this poem presents an 'astral vessel of the incalculable'; its speed, velocity, and writing prove something bigger than her and us, stronger than her and us. And, at the end of Bachmann's poetry, in her passive sensibility and in her active questioning, 'poethics' remains on the page "to remind us of the secrets of life" (1993:18).

6 'Nachtflug' by Ingeborg Bachmann recites, in original, "Unser Acker ist der Himmel,/im Schweiß der Motoren bestellt,/angesichts der Nacht,/unter Einsatz des Traums -//geträumt auf Schädelstätten und Scheiterhaufen,/unter dem Dach der Welt, dessen Ziegel/der Wind forttrug - und nun Regen, Regen, Regen/in unserem Haus und in den Mühlen/die blinden Flüge der Fledermäuse./Wer wohnte dort? Wessen Hände waren rein?/Wer leuchtet in der Nacht,/Gespenst den Gespenstern?//Im Stahlgefieder geborgen, verhören/Instrumente den Raum, Kontrolluhren und Skalen/das Wolkengesträuch, und es streift die Liebe/unsres Herzens vergessene Sprache:/kurz und lang lang ... Für eine Stunde/rührt Hagel die Trommel des Ohrs,/das, uns abgeneigt, lauscht und verwindet.//Nicht untergegangen sind Sonne und Erde,/nur als Gestirne gewandert und nicht zu erkennen.//Wir sind aufgestiegen von einem Hafen,/wo Wiederkehr nicht zählt/und nicht Fracht und nicht Fang./Indiens Gewürze und Seiden aus Japan/gehören den Händlern/wie die Fische den Netzen.//Doch ein Geruch ist zu spüren,/vorlaufend den Kometen,/und das Gewebe der Luft,/von gefallnen Kometen zerrissen./Nenn's den Status des Einsamen,/in dem sich das Staunen vollzieht./ Nichts weiter.//Wir sind aufgestiegen, und die Klöster sind leer,/seit wir dulden, ein Orden, der nicht heilt und nicht lehrt./Zu handeln ist nicht Sache der Piloten. Sie haben/Stützpunkte im Aug und auf den Knien ausgebreitet/die Landkarte einer Welt, der nichts hinzuzufügen ist.//Wer lebt dort unten? Wer weint.../Wer verliert den Schlüssel zum Haus?/Wer findet sein Bett nicht, wer schläft/auf den Schwellen? Wer, wenn der Morgen kommt,/wagt's den Silberstreifen zu deuten: seht, über mir .../Wenn das Wasser von neuem ins Mühlrad greift,/wer wagt's, sich der Nacht zu erinnern?" (Bachmann, 1982).

‘Under the Earth’: A Common Mourning

> In times of war, who are the ones worth of living and who are the ones who are not worth it? What life do we consider worth being respected, defended and mourned?
> (Judith Butler, “ ‘We’ and ‘They’: Language in These Times of War”)

> Brother, how can anyone not mourn
> Seeing you set out to death
> so clear before you go
> with open eyes to death?
> (Sophocles, *Antigone*)

Fidelity, the subordination to the process, the love and the respect for ‘life’ – and what about ‘death’? In her performative philosophy, Judith Butler has repeatedly gone back to the question of ‘Human Rights’. In 2002, her article entitled “Guantanamo Limbo” complained “our failure to expand our conception of human rights to include those whose values or affiliations may well test the limits of our own” (Butler, 2002http). She added, “It matters to our humanity that we treat offenders according to standards that we recognize as just. Justice is not revenge, it is deciding for a solution that is oriented towards peace, peace being the harder and more human way of reacting to injury. That is the very base of the idea of rights” (ibid). In her work Butler has extensively written in the name of the justice to be granted to the queer community. After 9/11, however, she has expanded her notion of ‘sexual’ alterity to what she now names ‘the less than humans’ – an extension, a corollary to the notion of ‘gender’ that she articulated in another interview, given one year later:

> Early on I felt - and I suppose in my book *Gender Trouble* I wrote this explicitly - that our notions of what a human being is problematically depend on there being two coherent genders. And if someone doesn’t comply with either the masculine norm or the feminine norm, their very humanness is called into question.
> So I suppose the corollary to that is to say that those who are challenging traditional ideas about what gender is are also challenging us to refashion our notion of what is human. I think our current political

> dilemmas are also challenging us to refashion what is meant by the term "human" so that it becomes more encompassing and more capacious, and finally more human, perhaps in a sense we have only begun to imagine (Butler, 2003).

Butler begun her political carrier by demanding respect for those who refuse to comply with the authoritarian norms of heterosexuality and blood kinship. In the becoming of her critique, she has moved her critical attention to the 'public sphere' – it is the same demand urged by G. Ch. Spivak[7] – where to re-think 'responsibility' to the 'others' as the elaboration of (the performativity of) a new sense of 'social kinship'. In this respect, Butler's questions are:

> ..am I responsible for myself alone? Are there others for whom I am responsible? …some others or all others? And how do I determine, in general, the dimensions of my responsibility? Am I responsible of every other or only to some, and upon what bases can I trace this limit?... Can it be that, when I assume responsibility, it becomes clear that 'I' is inevitably linked to others? … Is it possible that, in truth, through the process of assuming responsibility, 'I' becomes, at least partially, 'we'? What is our responsibility towards the ones we don't know?… Maybe, our responsibility towards them is not based on a concept of similitude….in truth, we face the challenge to rethink and reformulate a concept of global responsibility… (Butler, 2008)

'Global responsibility' differs from any war carried out in the name of 'common good', sovereignty, 'imposed democracy', or the arrogant politics of imperialistic appropriation. It differs from all existing forms of ideological interpretation; 'global responsibility' will, rather, provoke us to invent a new concept of the pronoun 'we'. Invention, here, signifies the articulation of a new kinship that exceeds totality, proliferating through displacement, as a future chance enabling the emergence of forms of social life (vs. exclusion and pathologization) by radically reforming the existing notions of kinship (blood ties might be replaced, for instance, by consensual affiliation). It means the invention of a radical kinship, which might be legitimized in various forms, without reducing them to the family or the state-nation, but supported by 'love' – here it comes back the ethical element, what persists

7 See the dialogue between G. Ch. Spivak and J. Butler in *Who Sings the Nation-State* (Butler and Spivak, 2007).

in spite of its foreclosure in an ontologically suspended mode, a melancholy as a shadowy form of signification deprived of ontological certainty and durability within a publicly constituted spacialized sphere. To accept these norms as coextensive with cultural intelligibility might signify to reproduce the same social melancholy; at the same time, in its repetition, in the unspeakable which is nevertheless heard, lies the very chance to overcome melancholy.

It is the logic of 'performativity': if in Spivak it sounds as 'unstabling destiny' and, in Cixous, it is the 'caring for a common destiny', in Bulter's philosophy, it means 're-writing' human destiny by repeating and deviating it. How can we envision this epistemological turn? For Spivak, we can do it thanks to 'education'; for Cixous, it means the common language of 'poetry'; in Butler, it becomes the 'political reading' of classical texts that stage the centrality of literature at the service of a new politic of responsibility: her *Antigone's Claim. Kinship between Life and Death* has the intent to analyse the 'unconscious demand' – the ethical 'love' – that marks the limits of the sovereign and universal authority, the Law, as "the trace of an alternative legality that haunts the conscious, public sphere as its scandalous future" (2000:40). Antigone has a long history of interpretation: in Hegel's view, she is expressive of the perverse law of the feminine; for Lacan, she interprets the fascinating inaugurer of the symbolic order (an image of irresolution, the unresolved image as being itself); for Irigaray, she proves the alterative female imaginary. Differently, for Butler, Antigone represents the 'unconscious' of the public Law, the unknowing feminine condition of its possibility. She wants to cover the body of her brother, carrying the love for her brother 'too far'; in so doing, she challenges the terms of liveability in an unanticipated appropriation and perversion of the mandate of the public sphere (op. cit.:54). She materialises the unlivability of her desire outside cultural intelligibility; still, by providing a critical perspective, she urges for a re-writing (in fact, the writing for the first time) of the very terms of livability, in view of new grounds for communicability and life (op. cit.:55).

How does Antigone achieve this? She 'performs' the burial of her brother in her act of repeating the norm not as a formal law but as a contingent law-like regulation of culture. The tragic character repeats and deviates, answering the call of the other, the call of her brother, whose words turn into her deeds – Hölderlin would call this, "the murderous force of the word in Sophocles"; "the word becoming fatally factic" (*tödlich faktisch*), words and deeds entangled through the force of repetition, a reiteration of a norm, a "wayward, temporal echo" (Butler, 2000:65). This process works as a post-

ponement, running the risk of going off course and be exposed to fragility and fracture:

> She acts, she speaks, she becomes one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime, but this fidelity exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social form of its aberrant, unprecedented future (Butler, 2000:92).

Performativity, transgression, intervention, promise and future: this is what we learn from Antigone, from her literary text – we learn to assert the legitimacy of loss, 'reclaiming' the power to confer public legitimacy on grieving, against all edits of criminality and exclusion (for those who are negated, dead, or slowly dying for lack of recognition). The political realm must be expanded in order to include the status of population for 'the less than humans' who are not permitted into the interlocutory scene of the public sphere – the slaves, the women, the children, the not property-holding males. In such renovated, 'enlarged' and inclusive space, we might have the 'right' to act without permission; upset language; formulate new questions; finally and justly, gather the voices of 'the less than human' who speak as humans.

In this respect, for good or for bad, America is an exemplary case: after September 11, public mourning has translated the thousand images of the victims, their names, stories and families, into general icons of a nation in pain; still, 'non-Americans' or 'clandestines' have received no consideration whatsoever, setting up a 'differential distribution' of mourning as the most important political questions of today: differently from any nationalistic pride confirmed in exclusion, this question claims for the necessary witnessing of the names of 'all' the victims, including those killed by us, in the testimony of their lives and stories. The imperative now becomes the responsibility to see, touch, know and acknowledge the 'humanity' of the ones who do not 'fit' and who, because they do not fit, are kept in a no-man's land. This is the ultimate sense of 'knowledge' that we must claim today: learning to live with vulnerability, grief and loss – that we inflict on others, that others inflict on us. This implies the acknowledging of our depending on others, the interrelationship, a state of common fragility and vulnerability that all people – as humans – share. Knowledge starts 'becoming responsive' to common suffering, to the claims of and the needs of our shared endangered ecosystem, to the evisceration of the conditions of life itself. It is the final and necessary acknowledgement of our permeability, the world affecting

and being affected by creatures who, being near or far away, share certain conditions of existence: "Grief equalizes us", states Judith Butler.

Butler's conclusion hints at a future which we need to articulate today, here and now, by requiring a vastity and variety of stories: our own stories, and the stories of others. I hope our future will truly produce the witnessing of 'more stories', so as to make Judith Butler happy; I myself have been happy to share with you the notion that the legacy of the 'past' and the condition of the present call for specific 'future' events: the praxis of a postcolonial pedagogy, the invention of a language, the demand for global responsibility. These 'gifts' signify the utopia, drama, and performance of a female investigation into the limits of existence, so as to instantiate forms of life 'yet-to-come' but open to the 'à-venir'. It is the theoretical, poetic and political effort I am trying to convey in my profession and in my engagement in the world, in my teaching pedagogy, in my literary teaching, in the political dimension of my existence – with the support of my inspiring guides, in the legacy of their textualities, and in their precious influences upon my life and my action in the world…

Literature:

Akhmatova, Anna. 1983. *Poems*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Bachmann, Ingeborg. 1986. *In the Storm of Roses: Selected Poems,* Princeton: Princeton U.P., pp. 59-61.

Bachmann, Ingeborg. 1982. *Sämtliche Gedichte*. München: Piper, pp. 62-63.

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

Butler, Judith. 2002. "Guantamano Limbo". *The Nation*, 274 (12), 20-24. (http://www.thenation.com/article/guantanamo-limbo)

Butler, Judith. 2003. "Peace is a resistance to the terrible satisfactions of war". An interview by J. Stauffer, *The Believer*, May 2003. (http://www.believermag.com/issues/200305/?read=interview_butler)

Butler, Judith and Gayatri Ch. Spivak. 2007. *Who Sings the Nation-State, Language, Politics, Belonging*. London, New York: Seagull Books

Butler, Judith, 2008. "Noi e loro: la lingua in questi tempi di guerra", *L'Unità*, 17 September. (http://www.partitodemocratico.it/59248/noi-e-loro-la-lingua-in-questi-tempi-di-guerra.htm).

Carotenuto, Silvana. 1997. "'Reading historically': *Excitable Speech* and *The Psychic Life of Power* by J. Butler". *Anglistica*, 1/1-2; pp. 231-245.

Carotenuto, Silvana. 2000. "Una storia sui generis: la filosofia di Judith Butler". In: Bellagamba, A.; Di Cori, P.; Pustianaz, M. (eds). *Generi di traverse*. Vercelli, Mercurio, pp. 227-246.

Carotenuto, Silvana. 2001. "Una auto-biografia in-diretta: *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* di H. Cixous". In: A. Arru, A.; Di Michele, L.; Stella, M. (eds.). *Proprietarie*. Napoli: Liguori, pp. 555-562.

Carotenuto, Silvana. 2003. "Il consumo della foresta. La 'cacciatrice' di Mahasweta Devi". In: A. Arru, M. Stella (eds.). *I consumi, una questione di genere*. Roma: Carocci, pp. 279-289.

Carotenuto, Silvana. 2009. "Traduzioni culturali". In: Carotenuto, S. *La lingua di Cleopatra*. Milano: Marietti, pp. 44-53.

Cixous, Hélène. 1993. "We Who Are Free, Are We Free?". *Critical Inquiry* 19/2.

Cixous, Hélène. 2002. *Tre passi sulla scala della scrittura*. Roma: Bulzoni, translated by Silvana Carotenuto.

Devi, Mahaswheta. 1995. *Imaginary Maps. Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi*, translated by Gayatri Ch. Spivak. London: Routledge.

Kristeva, Julia and Catherine Clément. 2001. *The Feminine and the Sacred*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Spivak, Gayatri Ch. 1996. "Cixous without Borders". In: M. Calle (ed.), *On the Feminine*. New Jersey: Humanities Press.

Spivak, Gayatri Ch. 2008. *Other Asias*. Oxford: Blackwell.

LAURA SARNELLI

Antigone's Legacy. Some Feminist Readings

The myth of Antigone

This paper aims at offering different theoretical readings of the appealing and contradictory figure of Antigone. She has often been considered a feminist icon of defiance embodying a fundamental division between conflicting orders of values: politics and ethics, state and family, public and private, man and woman. Furthermore, Antigone proves to be a more ambivalent figure for feminism than has been acknowledged, as she represents, at one and the same time, the fate of the tragic woman forced to succumb to the laws of state and patriarchy and the strength of a heroine who challenges those laws subverting their intrinsic structures. Following the feminist readings and revisions offered by Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, who redefine the relationship between woman and law beyond the logic of tragic immanence and false dichotomies, I intend to address the issue of Antigone's legacy for contemporary feminist politics where new conceptions of gender, sexuality and kinship can be envisaged and acknowledged, without risking social exclusion and loss of subjectivity.

Before going into these issues, let's start from the beginning: who is Antigone and how does she defy the law? In Greek mythology and in the eponymous tragedy by Sophocles, Antigone is the daughter of Oedipus and his mother Jocasta. She commits the crime of burying her brother Polynices

who died in the clash with another of her brothers in his attempt to oust the king, thus contravening Creon's edict, maternal uncle and king of Thebes, who had forbidden the burial. Because of her illicit act, Antigone is condemned to be buried alive in a cave, where she commits suicide by hanging herself.

Antigone thus became the symbol of a woman's right to defy the state over matters of conscience. She, indeed, challenges the law in different ways: through the physical act of burying her brother's corpse, and also by linguistically affirming her act and refusing to deny having committed it. She is opposed to her sister Ismene for whom a woman is "by nature" "unable to act against the will of the city", because, as Ismene states, "we were born women, so that we cannot fight against men". Even in her death, Antigone embodies a sacrifice outside the norm: she turns execution into suicide and, as has been pointed out (Loraux, 1991:31), she kills herself like the mourning mothers of ancient Athens by hanging herself with a veil. This is an act which proves to be paradoxical since the only position Antigone does not occupy is that of the mother; at the same time, she condemns Creon to the contamination with his private sphere, by making him witness the loss of his family with the suicide of both his wife Eurydice and his son Haemon, Antigone's cousin and future husband.

Antigone's trace in Simone de Beauvoir

According to Hegel's reading, Antigone would be the emblem of femininity, kinship and private sphere as opposed to the male public law of the polis of which Creon is the symbol. In Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Antigone hovers like a ghostly shadow in the philosopher's interpretation of the rereading of the myth proposed by Hegel. Actually, in *The Second Sex* Antigone is never mentioned. She appears instead in a previous essay, "Idéalisme morale et réalisme politique", in which Sophocles' tragedy represents an irreconcilable conflict between ethics and politics: in her blind willingness to follow the sacred rite of her brother's burial and sacrificing her own life, Antigone embodies the moral idealist who acts solely in the name of justice regardless of the consequences. On the contrary, by sacrificing the morally right for the pragmatically useful, Creon embodies the political realist concerned only with the interests of the state and with the achievement of immediate goals. The fundamental wrong of both these opposing positions

lies, according to de Beauvoir, in their absolutism: the idealist is tied to a subjective need to claim his/her own moral obligation toward a predetermined principle; the realist, on the other hand, is bound by some inner necessity decreed by the circumstances. Moral purity and political effectiveness are, therefore, two questionable attitudes, as human action in both cases is determined by need instead of free will.

On the concept of freedom analyzed from a gendered perspective – completely unexplored in her essay – de Beauvoir returns in *The Second Sex*. There, she depicts the female condition of being as an ambiguous "freedom-in-situation": she, in fact, recognizes that women (and men) are, paradoxically, free subjectivities and subject to socially produced destinies, but although women are as free as men, they have found themselves in a condition of subordination and have chosen to be the Other of men. There is the "other" (lowercase 'o') which means difference rather than subordination, and there is the "Other" (with capital letter) which implies the choice of being the second sex, the functional sex. Therefore, women have been stabilized as object and doomed to immanence, that is, to a role of dependency and inferiority and, most of all, have been made accomplice to men in keeping such position unchanged. On the one hand, women have chosen immanence decided for them by men, on the other, men have chosen transcendence for themselves, which allows them the privilege of shaping and changing the world. The figure of Antigone emerges indirectly in de Beauvoir's discussion of the Hegelian paradigm of the clash between divine law (or ethics) and human law (or politics), family and state, particular and universal. The first series of opposition is associated with the feminine sphere, hence with Antigone, the second series is connected with the masculine sphere, therefore with Creon.

According to Hegel, the only task for women is that of having children to benefit the state, those very children who will leave their family in order to become citizens, ready to fight on behalf of the state. De Beauvoir recognizes that the only roles accorded to women – those of wife and mother – remain nevertheless general (that is, connected to the exercise of their female functions) rather than individual (and therefore experienced in complete freedom and autonomy of desire). Only men are allowed to transcend to the universal as "workers and citizens" and enjoy "before the wedding and on the margins of marriage contingent pleasures". Woman, therefore, although responsible for the reproduction of the family, can enjoy neither the right of citizenship nor contingent pleasures, as she has been denied the possibility to transcend herself. De Beauvoir agrees with Hegel's statement that "the

female remains wrapped up in the species" to a greater extent than the male, that is, she passively undergoes a biological destiny by remaining closely bound to her body. Even though woman is necessary for the perpetuation of the species, it is man who ensures the right balance between reproduction and production; by risking life rather than giving life the male is raised above the female; indeed, unlike woman, throughout history, he has put his life in jeopardy in "warlike expeditions". As de Beauvoir remarks: "superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills" (Beauvoir, 1989:64). The French philosopher finds in this paradox "the key to the whole mystery" lying at the heart of the asymmetrical relationship between the male and the female.

As a trace in the text, Antigone appears again, invoked as an exemplary expression of an alternative model of womanhood. Antigone's drama embodies "the drama of woman" which, according to de Beauvoir, "lies in the conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject – who always regards the self as the essential – and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential". Given this condition, de Beauvoir wonders, "how can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment?" (1989:xxxv). As suggested by the etymology of the name, Antigone means "anti-generation"; in the wake of Hegel, de Beauvoir herself recalls that "woman is basically an existent who gives life and does not risk her life" (64). Instead, not only does Antigone not become a mother, she actually puts her own life in jeopardy, she "goes to war" by performing a political act of rebellion, thus escaping her specific fate that would make her "the prey of the species" (65). In addition, Antigone metaphorically kills the power of the law and patriarchy represented by Creon. She neither submits to the law of the community, nor to that of the sovereign, nor even to that of the head of the family; indeed, she chooses to die a virgin, without getting married. It is Creon himself who affirms: "Now verily I am no man, she is the man".

Then, in her criticism of the role imposed upon women as mothers and wives, de Beauvoir implicitly invokes Antigone who appears as a phenomenological body (a body-in-situation), that is, produced by the sedimentation of experience, who struggles for her own transcendence and freedom, who chooses, in other words, to become the other (small 'o') rather than being the Other (with capital letter).

Antigone comes to embody the form of existential ethics heralded in *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) and proclaimed in *The Second Sex*: if the laws of state and patriarchy doom her in the narrow confines of immanence condemning her, by walling her up alive, to live an experience of death in

life, Antigone becomes a free female subject transcending and justifying her existence by choosing life in death. More broadly, she symbolizes the tragic ambiguity of existence as proper to the human condition which is determined by constitutive oppositions: between life and death, essence and becoming, being at once subjects and subjugated to others.[1] From this perspective, de Beauvoir anticipates Judith Butler's reflections on Antigone as a tragic figure hovering between life and death, being and non-being, human and non-human.

Judith Butler's contemporary Antigone

As suggested by American philosopher Judith Butler, "Antigone does emblematize a certain heterosexual fatality that remains to be read" (Butler, 2000:72). Even though she is not properly a queer heroine, as she does not perform any homosexuality, Antigone upsets the institution of heterosexuality by refusing to become both mother and wife, by "scandalizing the public with her weaving gender" (76), by "embracing death as her bride chamber", and also by showing an ambiguous, almost incestuous, feeling for her brother. But how is it possible to articulate the logical space which resists the reduction of women to the second sex, the reactive gender subdued to the male one? How does Antigone embody the space of the other with a small 'o', claimed by de Beauvoir and unrecognized by Hegel and Western thought *tout court*? From this perspective, Judith Butler's discussion of Antigone develops what in de Beauvoir risks being a mere intuition.

In Butler's theoretical elaborations, Antigone is shown to be a political heroine and also a potentially *queer* figure that undermines the dominant regimes of representations. As Butler remarks: "as a figure for politics, she points somewhere else, not to politics as a question of representation but to that political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed" (2000:2). Butler draws on Antigone to tackle the contingent political discourse of the regulation of kinship and family

1 According to de Beauvoir, human existence is always an ambiguous blend of the inner freedom to go beyond the given conditions of the world and the weight of the world which imposes itself on the individual outside his/her control and choosing. In order for the individual to live ethically then, one must assume this ambiguity rather than try to flee it. Ethics, therefore, stands for the ambiguous condition of the human being who has to gain freedom for itself and for others. Here, freedom means liberation from any form of subjugation.

structures in contemporary society where the law does not reflect the deformations that have occurred within them, such as, for instance, the presence of single mothers, same-sex couples, the blending of families already formed after divorces and second marriages, the separation of families due to migrations. These occurrences embody the legacy of Antigone who stands for what is not represented by any symbolic law. Thus, Antigone coincides with the political action of those who are opposed to the codes already fixed and judged as necessary, in an attempt to create a possible place of political action for those subjects whose juridical and ontological status is suspended.

In Agamben's words, Antigone would embody a womanly "state of exception", the embodiment of a triple logical contradiction: she is a dehumanized human being, as she is already considered dead in life; she is a woman who, in more than one occasion, is defined *anér*, male; she is her father's sister, the disturbing result of an unwitting incest. Hence, Antigone is a scandalous figure as she challenges anthropological, gender and kinship categories of Greek society. Her story fully embodies the question of the "subject before the law" (Butler, 1990:5), when she affirms proudly in front of Creon's imperative order to admit her crime, "Yes, I confess. I will not deny my deed" (Grene, 1992). Antigone defies the law twice; not only does she commit the illicit acts of burial and mourning but also she has the audacity to *say* she has done it. As Butler argues: "Because she is not a citizen, she is not allowed to speak; she is prohibited from speaking, and yet she is compelled by the sovereign law to speak. So, when she does speak, she defies that law, and her speech exceeds the law that governs acceptable speech" (Antonello and Farneti, 2009). Not only does she embody the ethical conscience that suffers the guilt, she is already beyond the guilt, she has gained access to the realm of politics the very moment in which her claim takes on the verbal form of a reassertion of sovereignty through the appropriation of Creon's language (the language of the law) from which she is excluded.

As Butler points out, if that which produces dehumanization is a refusal of discourse (Butler, 2004:57), then Antigone produces with her speech a "mimetic excess" that questions the legitimacy of those naturalized norms governing the public discourse of the law whose juridical power forejudges, through prohibitive and exclusive practices, subjects worthy of social recognition. Thus, this non-human subject who speaks like a human destabilizes the symbolic structures of kinship and gender, as well as the regulatory practices of cultural intelligibility.

However, Antigone dies. As Nicole Loraux highlights (1991:31-32), her death does not correspond to the subjugation to the law, since Antigone

chooses to die by committing suicide. Nevertheless, we cannot remove the paradoxical nature of freedom expressed through suicide. The figure of Antigone is pervaded with a melancholy and mournful aura: doomed to death, condemned by the death of her brother, she leads to extreme consequences the drama of her father Oedipus.[2] According to Butler, Antigone would embody "the melancholy of the public sphere", what Hannah Arendt has defined the "shadowy realm" of the community haunted by the voices of those who are excluded by the public constitution of the human through a norm, while keeping on coming up on stage asking for social recognition at the same time.[3] The melancholic character of Antigone is her glory, namely, the capacity to short-circuit Creon's rules, but also a blind spot, namely her misery. Actually, her story seems to suggest that we can escape the established law or its reactive denial only by choosing death (in both its literal and metaphorical meaning).

We might wonder, then, how it is possible not to die like Antigone, crushed by a cursed fate, but rather to live like Antigone by cultivating life, hopes, desires and rebelling against our own imposed destiny. She becomes the figure through which we may reflect upon the precariousness of life and human rights; more specifically, what it means to consider certain lives more precarious or more worthy of living than others, which is the precondition of the human, and how these issues may work for an ethical and political feminist agenda.

Simone de Beauvoir seems to suggest a possibility in *The Second Sex* when she affirms that only "recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an *other*" (Beauvoir, 1989:717), thus allowing that the individual freedoms of different people, bound to each other, can create "laws valid for all" (Beauvoir, 1948:18). From this perspective, ethics and politics join in a common project so as to outline what Ranjana Khanna, in her discussion of transnational feminism, has defined an "ethics of coalition" based on the acknowledgement of the difference of the other while unity and reciprocity are proffered (Khanna, 2003:224-26). Antigone's legacy would be a feminist ethics of coalition that recognizes a sense of acting

2 Actually, Antigone tragically suffers the fate of her parents who before her rebelled against pre-established norms. As Butler points out: "Between life and death, she is already living in the tomb prior to any banishment there. Her punishment precedes her crime" (Butler, 2000:77).

3 More broadly, this issue is relevant to all those people who are in minority positions or are excluded from official public discourse, but somehow are still talking, including new immigrants, the *sans-papiers*, those who are without health insurance, those who are differentially affected by the global economy, religious minorities, and the physically challenged (Antonello and Farneti, 2009).

usefully or in accordance with both one's desire and the desire of the other, grounded as it is on historical and economic circumstances that lead to "a notion of the future as potentially free."

Literature:

Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attel. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Antonello, Pierpaolo and Farneti, Roberto. 2009. "Antigone's Claim: A Conversation With Judith Butler." *Theory & Event* 12/1. Accessed May 20, 2011. (Project Muse signature: DOI: 10.1353/tae.0.0048.)

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

Butler, Judith. 2000. *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.

de Beauvoir, Simone. 1945. "Idéalisme morale et réalisme politique". *Les Temps Modernes* 1/3.

de Beauvoir, Simone. 1948. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. New York: Citadel Press.

de Beauvoir, Simone. 1989. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage.

Grene, David, and Lattimore, Richmond (trans.) 1992. *Sophocles I: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Irigaray, Luce. 1975. *Speculum. L'altra donna*. Translated by Luisa Muraro. Milano: Feltrinelli.

Khanna, Ranjana. 2003. *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. Duhram and London: Duke University Press.

Loraux, Nicole. 1991. *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*. Translated by Antony Foster. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Durre Ahmed

The Perpetually Receding Horizon: A Feminist View of Quranic Interpretation[1]

Speak only of God, the rest is mere chatter
For scholars and priests have confused the matter
Bulleh Shah

In contrast to Christ as the pivot and miracle of Christianity, the miracle of Islam is not the Prophet Muhammad but the Quran. Both are manifestations of the Divine *Logos* ('The Word') and constitute the primary psycho-religious core of Christian/Muslim (un)consciousness entailing different interpretive trajectories. Strictly speaking, the Quran can only be interpreted, not translated, not least because Arabic is a wholly contextual language, based on a tripartite system of sound-letter-roots which interconnect in multiple ways to form words yielding multiple possibilities of meanings. As such, there are no standardized formats for distinguishing translation/interpretation/exegesis. Depending on the translators there can be narrow literal versions or annotated interpretation, brief or voluminous exegesis based on 'hadith' or various historic and linguistic contexts.

From the 17th century onward the Quran has been translated numerous times by non-Muslims motivated by Christian polemics and was first translated into English (from French) in 1649. The first Muslims to translate

1 First published in Dutch in *Een derde Testement*. Dewitte, Rooze etal. Antwerp, Garant. 2011. ISBN 978-90-441-2737-9

the Qur'an into English were Urdu-speaking Indians, who produced three translations between 1905 and 1912 (Kidwai 1987). Irrespective of quality, the number of translations in English is now enormous and continues growing, the phenomenon indicating consistently the multiplicity of interpretations.

Assessing English Translations

An article in the *Middle East Quarterly* (Mohammed, 2005) is useful for identifying certain critical areas that emerge around questions of Quranic translation, generally ignored not just by non/Muslim scholars but also by the majority of otherwise well-educated Muslims. "Assessing English Translations of the Quran" selects fifteen "widespread" translations and locates them in five broad categories: '20th Century Classics', 'Saudi-endorsed' translations, 'Counter Saudi' ones, and 'Sectarian', for example, Shiite and Sufi versions. Finally, there is a sampling of those that from the point of view of the author 'fall short'. After briefly assessing each text, the main conclusion is that the Quran is a "difficult document" because of various "impediments". Foremost among these is its archaic language, which adds "further complexity to translation". Another major "impediment" is the number of cumulative generalizations derived from the Quran by medieval scholars, a trend accentuated today.

These assessments and criticisms are entirely valid. But the main reason for selecting this article is the implication in the conclusion: "in order to make itself acceptable to a world torn by Islamist terrorism, Islam faces … the hurdle of a proper English translation of its main document". Unfortunately, this 'hurdle' seems to be insurmountable, since "sectarian differences within Islam have undercut any Muslim consensus on a translated version. Increasingly, it looks like the quest for the perfect rendition will be endless".

The question is, first, why the desire for what is clearly a perpetually receding horizon of a "consensus" on the "perfect rendition", "proper English translation"? On surface this need seems logical 'common sense' as does the implicit notion that, second, only the scholar of archaic Arabic has the authority/competence to take us towards this elusive horizon. I believe that unless this deeply entrenched worldview is scrutinized Muslims, particularly, will remain hostage to all types of extremism. Before discussing the Quran in this context, however, it is vital to deconstruct how this change

has impacted on individual 'common sense' and its view of religion, including approaches to scripture in the present modern world.

I have suggested an initial, detailed outline of such a deconstruction elsewhere (Ahmed, 2010). Here, it is enough to underline the conclusions of that analysis in connecting fundamentalist extremism with post-Enlightenment modernity, principally through an internalization of Descartes' mind-body split and a Christianist (as opposed to a Christian) worldview. Drawing on post-Jungian analytic psychology, it focuses on the self-reflexive distortions in the dominant western understanding of both the psyche and religion, and the transforming of Christianity into Christianism. Reduced to a literal, exclusivist 'mental belief', religion became psychologically resonant with the Cartesian dictum, 'I think therefore I exist'. Split from the body, this 'I', irrespective of religion, is masculine, literalist, positivistic, Apollonic, and Protestant-Christian. It is thus, usually unable to deal with, and reacts strongly to, that which it considers different from itself including the feminine, the intermediate, ambiguous and the symbolic/metaphoric (Hillman 1985).

A decade before 9/11, Hillman's observations on Christianism and the modern person remain relevant today, noting how "terrorism and nihilism are inherent to the (modern) western world view and system of thinking," which is rooted in the west's "religious unconsciousness". The world-conquering force of Christianity was not inspired by love but by successfully mobilizing "the will, which needs fundamentalism or it does not know what to do…there (has to be) only one meaning, one reading of the text, for instance, the one meaning of Christ's suffering"(1983: 81-82). From a psychological perspective, fundamentalism may be expressed in a religious or secular idiom but is imbued with Cartesianist-Christianist principles that insist on singularity of meaning. It suppresses psycho-theological diversity, for example, as expressed earlier in the ancient mythic pantheons, which were a projection-reflection of the psyche and the transcendent. With the advent of modernity, this diversity has been wiped out in favour of a scientific rationalism, and the dominance of Protestantism as a paradigm of 'religion'. The issue then, is not Christianity, but the modern psyche and its approach to religion. To quote Jung, "I do not combat Christian truth, I am only arguing with the modern mind." (Post:234)

As Karen Armstrong has observed, "western civilization has changed the world. Nothing - including religion - can ever be the same" (2000: xii). Thanks to by now globalized (western) modernity, Hinduism today is increasingly Cartesian-Christianist-Hinduism. Similarly, we have Cartesian-

Christianist-Judaism or Buddhism, and of course Cartesian-Christianist-Islamism (Ahmed, 2010).

Cartesian-Christianist-Islamism

The (implicit) psychodynamics in the article assessing English translations, and the desire for one 'perfect rendition' of the Quran is, thus, part of a very modern, Cartesian 'common sense'. This syndrome of wanting a literal unity ignores the fact that with a text such as the Quran and an extremely dispersed and decentered religion like Islam, the problem will not end. A 'proper translation' in English cannot preclude similarly 'perfect renditions' in Urdu, Spanish, Swahili and the innumerable languages the Quran has been (and may be) translated into, since these too will contain divisive problematics of numerous linguistic and cultural contexts. The unconscious modern model for a 'proper' Quran is perhaps the 'Standard Revised' or 'King James' version of the Bible.

The author of the article assessing Quranic translations urges Muslims to "divorce themselves from medieval exegetical constructs", and come closer to the same "world" of the "Judaeo-Christian entity that has known reformation and enlightenment". While Muslims must of course abandon their medieval ways, does the future of Islam need to unfold along a similar trajectory? It is vital to remember that the Reformation and Enlightenment came primarily as a reaction to a single, strongly centralized Church in the west (of Christendom). Islam has never known such a large scale, longstanding institution. While terrorists and the pathologies of modernity including how we conceive and think of religion certainly require to be reformed, that is very different from implying that an Islamic Reformation-leading-to-Muslim 'Enlightenment' is needed in the current situation.

Culture, Islam and Reformation

To place the contrast in historical context, it may be noted that Islam gave birth to at least five major, distinct yet undeniable 'Muslim' civilizations within a short period (Spain, North Africa, Turkey, Iran, India). The cultural diversity across these civilizations draws its impetus from the central and powerful position given to the individual in matters of faith, not only to perform all 'sacraments' but also via the core Quranic psycho-theological premise of "there is no coercion/compulsion in matters of religion/faith"

(2:256). The self-reflexive interaction of individual and culture which occurred in Islam's encounter with the 'other', enabled early Muslims to live with difference and simultaneously propelled the emergence at the local level of innumerable Muslim sects, sub-sects, communities. To reduce the expansion of Islam to simply military conquest does not explain the existence of numerous Islams, which nevertheless kept emerging even in contexts of military force. If enforced 'by the sword', it would be logical to assume that the conversion would be towards a clearly 'defined' Islam rather than a multiplicity.

'No compulsion in matters of religion' can also be seen as the core psychological drive underlying the Reformation. In Islam, the absence of a Church over millennia, and an *a priori* spiritually empowered individual, thus points to an inherent tendency towards what were in fact, endless, localized, mini-reformations challenging the legitimacy/authority of attempts at making it into a singular 'organized' religion.

Soon after the death of the Prophet, starting with the Shiia, over the centuries Islam dispersed into infinite numbers of sects and communities. Alongwith how the Quran was interpreted, the psychological propellant of this diversification was the individual choosing to submit to (local) spiritual authority in matters of faith. Refracted endlessly in the Muslim encounter with different cultures, it set(s) in motion a self-reflexive process which result(ed) in innumerable Islams. The prime example is what is today loosely called 'Sufism', which until recently was not an 'esoteric' sect but the normative form of Islam (Armstrong 2005: 101). Motivated primarily, though not exclusively, by an inner spiritual quest, it was not uncommon for people to enter more than one Sufi order by 'submitting' to the spiritual authority of its founder/leader. Each order, thus, is a *style* of relationship with the Divine. Like Islam itself, Sufism is extremely complex, "multifaceted, and what applies to one order may not apply to another" (Winters 1995: 41).

This pro-diversity, anti-authoritarian, anti-monolithic impetus, the locus of which is the individual, is Islam's greatest strength since it ensures that no single vision prevails over all others. Today, it requires that the individual Muslim recognizes the distortions created by the modern Cartesian-Christianist-Islamist lens and the way her Islam(s) is being constructed and directed towards a different sort of Re-formation in which the individual, silenced by 'experts', is coerced into accepting just one form (Salafi/Wahabi) that is virulently anti-Sufi. It is akin to demanding that all dialects and accents of a language be replaced by one dialect/accent.

Orality, Literacy and Culture

The exclusive, solution-seeking emphasis of textual academic discourse on religion – modern and medieval – needs to remember that the Quran was revealed to a non-literate person in a primary non-literate milieu. We know today that post the Council of Nicea there are 'lost' or 'forgotten' gospels of the New Testament. Additionally, the vast majority in the Christian world do not have even a rudimentary familiarity with the original languages of the Bible such as, Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic. The situation is different with Muslims for whom there is the Quran in (archaic) Arabic and then translations/interpretations of the Quran, the former much more widespread than the latter. For almost 1500 years, one Arabic version has remained fundamentally unchanged and till now no Muslim has suggested another. On this there is absolute consensus.

There is no doubt that Arabic (of the Quran) remains central to Islam principally through a short liturgical prayer and the Quran itself. But while Arabic may have a linguistic, that is literal, impact on some cultures, this is variable and secondary in comparison to its indirect symbolic/spiritual and cultural role. As the word of God, for Muslims, the enormous diversity in style of the Quranic arts of calligraphy and recitation across the Muslim world, again testifies to the strong influence of culture and its relationship to this religion and its sacred Text. Thus, whereas arts related to Quranic Arabic were major connective seams running through these civilizational fabrics and provided a sense of unity to Islam, this is not the same as claiming supremacy of, or theological interpretive inspiration from, (Saudi) Arabia as a central authority, simply on the basis of its archaic linguistic and symbolic geographical links (the Kaba) to the origins of Islam.

Oral and Literate Cultures

Existing long before literacy, religions can be considered languages of the soul and, like language itself, have many dialects and accents. For a non-literate person, not understanding the written religious word does not mean that the word(s) per se is insignificant. The Arabic Quran remains a deeply meaning-full text for almost a third of humanity in ways having little to do with questions of linguistics, grammar, historical contexts etc. It is important therefore, to examine some psychodynamic aspects of its human audience and their resonance at different levels within the Quran itself. Discussing these human psychological contexts of the Quran is to move into a

different interpretative framework beyond the confines of linguistics, theology and jurisprudence, into the arena in which all interpretation occurs, namely, the human psyche.

Studies of visual, i.e. print/literate, cultures show interesting psychological and cognitive differences with oral/aural/non-literate cultures. The latter, for example, are characterized by a highly developed sense of rhythm as a mnemonic aid. In contrast to textual memory, oral memory goes beyond just a verbal context and has a high somatic (bodily) component. Its expression is aggregative, circular and multi-associative rather than analytical and subordinative. Thus, in sharp contrast to literate expressions, oral thought/expression tends to have a 'copious', formulaic and repetitive quality (Ong, 1982).

These epistemological differences between the psychodynamics of orality and literacy can be best understood by comparing some paradigmatic principles underlying vision and sound. Literacy involves eyes/sight, which functions in a unidirectional, outward and linear manner. Sound moves inward and is multidirectional. In a field of multiple stimuli, sight functions by separating and excluding, enabling focus (object-ivity). In contrast, sound is inclusive, multidimensional, interiorized (subjective), functioning by unifying, synthesizing and harmonizing (ibid).

Locating a sacred text such as the Arabic Quran within its fundamental oral/aural context enables a shift towards some counter perspectives on translation/interpretation: Emphasizing the aural is not to dismiss the analyses of high literacy, but to restore a balance between the eye and ear. Neither is better than the other, both vital for psychological and physical health as part of the human sensorium.

Reciting the Arabic Quran: Words as Presence

The interiorizing force of the (oral) 'word' has a special relationship to the sacred. A sacred liturgical language remains a crucial part of *all* major religions even though the majority of their modern adherents may not understand it. The one exception is Protestant Christianity and by the 1960's even the Catholic Latin Mass was replaced by the vernacular for reasons of 'common sense'.

Underlying the liturgical use of Sanskrit (Hinduism), Pali (Buddhism), Hebrew (Judaism) or Arabic is the notion that word-sounds have a *sui generis* 'mantric' power and can evoke presence(s). The universal significance of the aural as sacred in the lived experience of humanity indicates that the

'meaning(s)' of such texts has as much, if not more, to do with form as with content. In this aural domain, the sound of the individual word, phrase and even single letters is loaded with a particular *type* of meaning and this 'mantric' power of words is capable of evoking presence(s) which are experienced inwardly.

Innumerable differences in how the Quran was interpreted contributed to the potential perpetual mini-reformations in Islam, but there has been complete consensus about the oral/aural significance of the Arabic Quran per se. As Islam(s) spread across different languages and cultures, over the centuries Arabic alphabetic primers evolved which efficiently enable a child to 'read' the Quran (phonetically) without understanding it. The great value placed in recitation of the sacred text in all religions is expressed on a massive scale in Islam, whereby the Quran is 'read' and memorized by thousands of millions who may remain completely non-literate in their native language nor understand Quranic Arabic. Till today, among more than a billion Muslims, 85% of whom are not native speakers of Arabic, a person who cannot 'read' the Quran remains the exception, not the rule. Frequently it is also memorized, 'written' so to speak inerasably on/by the heart.

The Quran repeatedly urges its (own) recitation and it is in response to this that most Muslims (must) learn to 'read' it, i.e. to recite it. Again, this empowers the individual at various levels. Open, almost compulsory, oral access to the sacred text by all automatically enables the individual to participate in community and to perform the 'sacraments' (birth, death, marriage, etc.), all of which are very short and simple. This unifying factor is also present in the liturgical prayer albeit with variations in texts and performance by different sects. Innumerable styles of writing, recitation and accents not withstanding, it is only the Arabic Quran that remains always and completely invariant and unchanged. In short, whereas Muslims/translations reflect natural diversity, the Arabic Quran reflects its (comm)unity. This trope of unity and diversity is a leitmotif of Islam from the macro to the micro level, but mediated by the idea(l) of balance, which is one name the Quran gives itself (*Meezan*). Finally, one should note the feminist critique of religion whereby textual sources dominate discourse at the expense of the more 'feminine' oral, culturally grounded expressions of religion as lived experience.

Literacy and the Quran

Let us now turn to those who are literate and can read a(ny) translation. While in a longer analysis I examine seven popular translations, for now just one example illustrates the argument. Consider the very first word of the Revelation addressed to the Prophet, the exclamatory command '*Iqra'*. Four translations claim it means "Recite!" and three "Read!" The latter meaning is justified on the basis of historical reports, on which there is a consensus. Namely, that the first response of the Prophet to the command "Read!" was that he was not literate, unable to read.

So what can we make of the (seeming) contradictions in translations of just one, highly significant word? 'Common sense' dictates that contradiction is undesirable, a problem requiring a resolution to one meaning. And not just in human translations of the Divine Word. If the Prophet could not read, why the command? Outside the usual frames of scholarly 'proof', true/false historical/linguistic etc., and between the etymological structure of Arabic and the human psyche of the translators (and readers), both meanings are actually correct. That is, both apply when '*Iqra*' is understood as an imperative pertaining to orality (Recite) *and* to literacy (Read), highlighting the differing states of awareness and knowledge they engender in lived experience. Especially for the literate mind, this framework for meaning can only emerge if both Recite/Read are simultaneously retained as equally valid. As exemplified in the Prophet, in fact, both are retained simultaneously and reconciled.

Consider the sentences following this opening command. Reading both translations in tandem opens the subtle nuances in each without any loss of common meaning. The translation is by Asad, and Arberry's is in parenthesis (all emphases are mine):

> *1. Read (Recite) in the name of thy Sustainer (Lord) who has created.*
> *2. Created man out of a germ-cell (a blood-cell).*
> *3. Read (Recite) for thy Sustainer (Lord) is the Most Bountiful One (Most Generous).*
> *4. Who has taught man the use of the pen (Pen).*
> *5. Taught man what he did not know (knew not).*

From its very onset then, the Quran is about knowledge as mediated by 'the Pen', that is literacy, by which a person can (come to) know what he did not know earlier. Literacy profoundly changes consciousness and empowers humans, creating individuals who can think for themselves. It enables analytic,

singular focus, conceptualization, not to mention accumulation and generation of vast quantities of information/knowledge. The Quranic emphasis on knowledge can be gauged by the fact that it is the only capacity humans are told to ask "more" of in the Quran (20:114), and the frequent reiteration that it is a book for those who "observe", "think", "reflect" (45:13-14, 6:50).

However, today one no longer has to be a "believer" to recognize the meaning of what follows in the Quran regarding the pitfalls of literate knowledge.

> *6. Nay, verily man becomes grossly overweening (No indeed, surely Man waxes insolent).*
> *7. whenever he believes himself to be self sufficient (for he thinks himself self sufficient)*
> *8. for, behold unto thy Sustainer all must return (Surely, unto thy Lord is the Returning)*

Today many are aware of the environmental crisis precipitated by techno-scientific progress and an implicitly arrogant attitude towards the earth that sustains all life. But the worldview underlying the crisis has not changed, Muslim or otherwise. Whereas the environment demands a more holistic approach, overwhelmingly we still tend to think of issues in a visual-literate style of linear, separative, single foci and remain locked in conceptual cul-de-sacs of true/false, either/or. We continue to behave not as *homo sapiens* but still primarily as arrogant patriarchal *homo rationalis*. Reason and will-power still rule, whether in desperate attempts of now controlling humans through 'carbon taxes', or still insisting that religion is only about a 'mental belief', and there can be only one 'right' meaning of the word.

The Open Work

The Quran is a very different 'read' from any standard narrative (structure) to which the literate modern mind is attached, including the scriptural, the unconscious model being the Bible. Such a logocentric mind insists on certainty and, hence, singularity of meaning, wanting to 'get to the point' with a 'straight forward' (linear) story/message. Additionally, the meaning 'should' be clearly located in human-historical terms.

The absence of a narrative/historical structure in the Quran has long confounded the modern western(ized) reader. R.A. Nicholson's comments about the Prophet not being a great "raconteur … most of the stories … are

narrated in a rather clumsy and incoherent fashion", and Carlyle's response can be considered typical "… a wearisome, confused jumble … endless iterations … long-windedness … incondite… Nothing but a sense of duty could carry a European through the Koran … one feels it difficult to see how any mortal could consider this … as a Book … as a well written book, or indeed as a *book* at all" (Brown 1987: 149). Jung too saw the Prophet having a "primitive cast of mind", and therefore the Quran lacking in logical sequence (9:147). Most notably however, even the Muslim author of the journal article assessing English translations claims that its "verse structures are difficult hurdles to cross".

These comments are typically modern responses to a literary style, which is more post-modern than modern. The former is exemplified in the writings of James Joyce who was the harbinger in English of this changing form of the novel/text-as-linear narrative story, into a more 'stream-of-consciousness' narration. Whether in fiction, film or art, this non-linearity is today a defining feature of the post-modern sensibility. Psychologically speaking, the stream of consciousness style refers to the psyche in its phenomenological state, how we experience and inhabit it, and is most evident when we are alone 'with one's thoughts'. This is certainly not a linear, rational experience, but rather as multiple 'streams' of recursive emotions and ideas which enter/exit, frequently independent of our reason and will-power.

Interestingly, it is now established fact that in terms of literary style and allusions, Joyce was directly influenced by the form of the Quran (Atherton 1974: Chapter 12). In "The Poetics of the Open Work", the semiotician Umberto Eco has discussed how the form of texts such as Joyce's *Ulysses*, can simultaneously be a 'closed' form in its "uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, and constitute an *open* product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity" (Eco 1979: 63). That is, each reader brings to the text his/her own existential credentials, a defined culture, personal inclinations/tastes, and prejudices. As such, its validity lies precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can viewed and understood. Anyone who has read the Quran will find that Eco's analysis of Joyce can equally apply to the Quran. Actually, given Joyce's inspiration, it is the Quran that is the primary Template in that "the work is finite in one sense, but in another sense it is unlimited. Each occurrence, each word stands in possible relations with all others in the text… Here are no privileged points of view, and all available perspectives are equally valid and rich in potential" (pp. 54-65).

Thus, the Quran can be seen as a quintessentially 'open' text and this can only be the case if it is to be considered as both a universal and eternal message. Rooted in the etymological complexity and the ensuing ambiguity that is inherent to the Arabic language, its character is even more 'open' since the complete and transparent intention of its 'author', God, can never be fully fathomed. It is precisely this 'open' nature of the text that has enabled its message(s) to be interpreted variously (and variedly) across the centuries in different languages.

Like a hologram in which every part reflects/contains the whole, the meaning and significance of such open texts is similar to what Eco calls 'simultaneous totality' and which ultimately has to do with an individual reader and his/her subjectivity. Long before Eco and semiotics, Hodgson (1960: 61) noticed these dimensions of the Quran: "almost every element which goes to make up its message is somehow present in any given passage."

Meditation on Themes

As an aural/oral text, a recursive style, and absence of a central linear narrative(s), the Quran is more of a series of meditations on different *themes* and less about history as we know it. For example, while it frequently refers to certain Biblical accounts around Moses, they are dispersed across the text. Stripped as they are to their bare essentials, the short 'stories' (if at all) are basically illustrative of archetypal themes. Thus, the Moses motif may appear in the context of Pharaoh whose arrogance makes him the archetype of Evil and then suddenly reappear in the context of a different (esoteric) knowledge and its relationship with the Law (Sura 18). Similarly, many Biblical prophets, including Jesus, enter/exit in no particular historical order, the textual structure suggesting an indifference to the details of stories that from its (the Quran's) perspective were/are already known. In any case, even if a reader does not know the details, what is important about such stories is their meaning(s). In short, it is the archetypal theme(s), the message(s) and not the messenger(s). Which is also, perhaps, why the final form of the Quran is de-linked from the chronology of the Prophet's life. As a recursive meditation on themes this is the only way the Quran can be taken: as a whole; it is not any Prophet/person, but the Divine to whom all themes return to proclaim Its Glory and Omnipotence.

The Quran and the Ummah

In the context of the Quran, as on earth, what we see are forest(s) of innumerable translations in numerous languages. Most of us can only enter one (language) or, if lucky, a few more. Entering a forest may evoke different responses. Trying to understand the 'science' of different trees is one possibility. For most humans, however, as in Nature, beyond individual detail, it is the total experience of being in the forest and all that it encompasses which matters. In all circumstances, and as in Nature, to say that certain trees are 'wrong' and should be cut down, is both foolish and dangerous, especially when the forest has existed and matured over centuries. If anything, our present, recently (re)emergent ecological awareness should sensitize us to the need for more forests and the (re)generation of diverse ecological niches which enable continued flourishing.

Reframing the 'problem' of multiple translations/interpretations into what it actually is - a gift - changes the scenario. Muslims need to be grateful by celebrating the present forest of diverse Quranic translations in their languages.

The Ummah and Heretics

One should remember that this is not the first generation of Muslims who have struggled to understand the 'problem' of variant meanings. Intense debates have always existed even within (divergent) Arabic interpretations/exegeses, and everywhere in the translation project. The history of Islam has its share of pogroms, persecution and violence against perceived heretics. However, the question is the balance of power variant translations exercised as a whole, over what has been for centuries, a widely disparate yet loosely unified Muslim world.

Long before Derrida and Eco, it was recognized that the context of a text is the individual translator/reader's capacities that restrict or expand meanings. For the Andalucían Ibn al Arabi (1165-1240) the only difference, in the (con)text of the Quran, is how one views its origins. Rejecting its divine origin can lead to other discussions, but not about what God means or does not mean in the text. But if seen as Divine Speech, then, in light of Divine omnipotence, not only does It know all possible meanings but also intends them, although not necessarily for all individuals (Chittick 1989: 244).

Today, choosing to spend decades studying classical Arabic remains an option for those individuals who feel the need and have the resources. But

it is no longer a mark of having a privileged 'understanding' of the Quran. In principle, given the widespread availability of information technologies today, any reasonably literate individual can have access to *all* translations of the Quran in a given language and engage with the entire spectrum of possible meanings as elicited by individual translators into the present/future. Scholars of translation should always remain and are needed. But new translations will just be another drop in this ocean without a shore.

The de-centering of knowledge today has the potential to (re)empower the individual on many levels. First, the sheer scale of number of translations/interpretations/exegesis should dilute the *hubris* (arrogance) of thinking that one's understanding of this Text is decisive. Simultaneously, secondly, in the face of such fecundity, present and potential, one can exercise the God-given choice(s) of there being "no compulsion in religion" and choose accordingly. By thus reclaiming the Centre of Islam, which is the Quran, the individual Muslim, as in the past, can continue to ensure that the Islam's centre is everywhere.

As more and more contexts, from the theo-historical to emergent interdisciplinary ones are considered, more interpretations will emerge. But the role of the individual reader and the consciousness s/he brings to the (con)text is today more important than ever. To be confronted with abundant choice today is not only a gift but also a burden. Keeping in mind that the word 'heresy' in Greek means to 'choose for oneself', exploring the gift of multiple translations depends on our individual desires and capacities for coping with (y)our choice(s).

Mother and Child(ren)

In a physical context, the Kaba provides an overarching theme of unity-diversity within Islam. For something to be symbolically true, somewhere it must be also literally true. In the case of the Kaba, it is today primarily a symbolic geospiritual unifying centre, an 'invisible reality' for most Muslims, but which nevertheless exists in concrete space and time. The Quran provides an equally strong sense of Unity with a multileveled significance spanning the literal and the symbolic. As an (un)'read' book, it exists with and within the Muslim individual everywhere. Memorizing, different styles of its recitation and calligraphy notwithstanding, the immutable Arabic Text remains. Similarly, when read in translation, whether within or between different languages, every version remains umbilically connected to the

Arabic Quran. In short, there is the Book (in Arabic) and there are 'its' books (translations).

Among its self-descriptions, the Quran refers to itself as the "Mother" of (all) books (*Ummul Kitab*: 43:4). This is usually translated as 'source' or 'matrix'. The word '*ummah*', which most Muslims understand as the Muslim community, that is, the 'brotherhood of Islam', actually literally means the "children of the mother". As also the matrix and source of all Its translations, the *Ummul Kitab*, that is the Quran in Arabic, has given and continues to generate its *ummah* of translations/meanings in every language and sect. Wahabi, Sufi, Shia, Ismaili, etc., speakers of English or Swahili, mystic or rationalist, literalists or historical contextualists, flawed, forgettable, handicapped, believer or infidel etc., each and every translation/translator/reader is its 'child'. And like a child does, each sees its mother from its own perspective and capacities.

The *ummah* then is not a patriarchal brotherhood but a vast family of translations/interpretations consisting of individuals (readers-translators) of different languages, genders and capacities, as they exist in a world of multiple contexts. It is impossible for any individual to claim that s/he 'knows' his/her mother completely, or to dismiss a sibling's experience/understanding of their mother as 'wrong'. All are 'correct' but none is, nor can ever be, sufficient for everyone.

Such a vision of the *ummah* can liberate the Quran and its translations/interpretations from the increasing stranglehold of the singular vision of 'priests' and scholars over the heart and core of Islam. Underlying all forms of religious extremism is a fear of modernity and the negative ways it has changed the world. This article too has been critical of the conceptual underpinnings of the modern psyche and its dominant view of self, other, religion and the transcendent. Emphasizing the oral is not to imply a prescription to return to some utopian 'traditional' non-literate past. Rather, one is simply urging balance and caution against all prescriptive paradigms.

Literature:

Ahmed, Durre. 2010. "Penetrations: A Psychocultural View of Modernity, Fundamentalisms and Islam". In: *Islam and the West*, Marie Claire Foblet (ed.). Leuvain University Press.

Armstrong, Karen. 2000. *The Battle for God.* New York: A. Knopf.

Armstrong, Karen. 2005. *A Short History of Myth*. New York: Penguin.

Asad, M. 1980. *The Message of the Quran.* London. E. J. Brill.

Arberry, A. J. 1964. *The Koran Interpreted.* London. Oxford University Press.

Atherton, J. S. 1974. *The Books at the Wake.* Carbondale and Edwardsville.

Brown, Norman O. 1987. "The Apocalypse of Islam". In: *Facing Apocalypse,* V. Andrews, R. Bosnak and K. Goddwin (eds.). Dallas. Spring Publications.

Chittick, William C. 1989. *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination.* State University of New York.

Eco, Umberto. 1979. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts.* Bloomington.

Hillman, James. 1983. *Inter-Views*. New York: Harper and Row.

Hillman, James. 1985. *Archetypal Psychology.* Dallas: Spring Publication.

Hodgson, M. G. S. 1960. "A Comparison of Islam and Christianity as Framework of Religious Life", *Diogenes* 3.

Jung, Carl Gustav. 1967. "A Study in the Process of Individuation". In: *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious.* Volume 9 of *The Collected Words of C. G. Jung. (cw).* Read, Fordham and Adler (eds). Translated by RFC Hull. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Kidwai, Abdur Rahim. 1987. "Translating the Untranslatable: A Survey of English Translations of the Quran", *Muslim World Book Review*, Summer, pp. 66-71.

Mohammed, Khaleel. 2005. "Assessing English Translations of the Qur'an", *Middle East Quarterly*. Spring

Ong, Walter J. 1982. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.* New York: Methuen.

Post, Laurens. 1978. *Jung and the Story of Our Times*. London. Penguin.

Winters, Michael. 1995. "Islamic Attitudes Towards the Human Body". In: *Religious Reflections on the Human Body.* Jane Marie Law (ed). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

II.

Trauma, testimony, embodied narratives of the past

NATKA BADURINA

Testimony Between Historiography and Literature

Testimonies about traumatic experiences from World War II, in particular those derived from the experience of concentration camps, might provide interesting material for the study of autobiographical and testimonial discourse, particularly in the sense of their specific position between literature and historiography. My research focuses on two aspects of autobiographical and testimonial discourse. One facet is the meaning of traumatic experience for the autobiographical testimony. I seek to explore how this testimony is articulated, and how trauma is expressed. Rather than dealing with the therapeutic implications of narrating trauma for the traumatized, I focus, secondly, on the implications of a testimony for the audience, i.e. "secondary witnesses", particularly the professional audience, such as historians: what can be learned from such testimonies, and who exerts power over the text of a testimony, that is – what kind of *knowledge* and what kind of *power* are therewith involved.

The moment when the academe became interested in the questions above is symptomatic in itself. One could say that the past two decades have been marked by an intense historical and theoretical interest for the testimonies about traumatic experiences. The historical investigation is related to the intellectual history of the Western attitude towards the Holocaust. According to Ricoeur[1] this attitude has undergone three phases: the phase of

1 I draw on Traverso (2004) who proposes an excellent overview of the various phases of the

suppression (the 1940s and 1950s) when the Holocaust was nearly invisible, shadowed by the post-war amnesia and the Cold War atmosphere in general; the phase of anamnesis, i.e. the return of the suppressed (the 1960s and 1970s), marked by the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem (1961) and the American TV series *Holocaust* (1979), and finally the phase of obsession (from the 1980s onward). Since the 1980s the Holocaust has become a center of a new field with Holocaust Studies departments and documentation centers being established around the world, and an increasing number of publications. The Holocaust has also become part of popular culture through films, TV series, graphic novels, etc. As a result of the obsession with remembering, the Holocaust has come to be recognized as the central event of the 20th century, crucial for the understanding of modernity and the destructive face of progress of Western civilization. Indeed, Adorno's dialectical questioning of progress had been one of a few rare voices of conscience in the aftermath of World War II.

The theoretical condition for the change in the status of testimony within literary history is the new status of autobiography within literary studies. In Postmodernism, autobiography drifted away from a strictly defined genre, becoming instead an all-pervading discourse. The claim that every statement, even the most strictly scientific one, is conditioned by the speaker, could be called the "autobiographical turn"[2]. Postmodern theories of autobiography are based on two apparently contradictory assertions: on the one hand, the awareness that one cannot speak without speaking about oneself, and, on the other hand, the thesis of desubjectification which warns that, when we express ourselves, we are forced to betray our intimate identity because we use the means – language – that belongs to all.[3] Desubjectification occurs because the subject of the utterance is fully established within the discourse and by the discourse, thus being unable to say anything about itself. This is partially contained in the post-narratological view of the split personality of an autobiographical subject – the one that experienced an event in the past and the one who speaks of it. According to Mark Currie (1998), if there were no such division there would exist neither story nor

intellectual history of the Shoah

2 The idea of an imprint of subjectivity in every type of discourse was shaped for the first time by Emile Benveniste in the 1960s. About the theory of the autobiographical discourse before the 90s, see Velčić (1991:11-44).

3 After the first intuitions of George Stein, the idea of desubjectification in autobiographical discourse can be found in Benveniste (cf. Velčić, 1991:23). The circular paradox mentioned above reflects the ideas expressed in Paul de Man (1984:67-81).

identity.[4] Desubjectification is a recurrent theme also in Agamben's study about the phenomenology of testimony and integral witness (Agamben, 1998). Agamben emphasizes that the mute traumatized subject and the articulate narrative 'I' do not coincide in the act of witnessing. Their non-coinciding is precisely the difference, or the remainder, in which, according to Agamben, a witness is born. This, however, does not happen only in the testimony of a traumatic experience, nor only in autobiographical discourse in general. It is quite common in any verbal act: at the moment of speech language is alienated from the subject because being a system it exists only as a collective sum of possibilities that the subject can realize through speech. In the moment when it yields to speech, the subject renounces its extra-lingual identity; it takes over the identity of a linguistic *shifter* 'I' and becomes *desubjectified* (Agamben, 1998:108).

I will attempt to illustrate the thesis of desubjectification with some examples. While reading camp testimonies we often have the feeling of uniformity, not only because of the similarity of experience, but also because they tend to adhere to a specific code. Witnesses who read other testimonies may adjust their own experience to the narratives of others with similar experiences. It is evident from many testimonies collected in Turin during the 1980s that the witnesses had read Lidia Beccaria Rolfi and Anna Maria Bruzzone's book *Le donne di Ravensbruck* of 1978, which introduced a particular type of a collective testimony influencing their personal stories (Chiappano, 2009:90).

An extreme and disconcerting example of desubjectification can be found in the unpublished remembrances of Milojka Mezorana, whose manuscript is held in the City Museum of Rijeka. Mezorana was a young woman when she was detained in Auschwitz in 1945 as an anti-fascist. She wrote her reminiscences upon her return from the camp. While her remembrances are valuable, frank and authentic, a reader may find herself astonished by small portions which are literary copied from another testimony. Indeed Mezorana took some sentences about her imprisonment in Auschwitz from the then recently published recollection of Zora Matijević, a political detainee confined not in Auschwitz but Ravensbrück. Mezorana skillfully incorporates passages from Matijević, without any sign of quoting. How can this be explained? The work of Zora Matijević of 1945 established a kind of canonized form for narrations of suffering in the concentration camp by communist youth and women, a cannonization which was particularly

4 See particularly the chapter "True Lies: Unreliable Identities in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" of the Mark Currie book *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998:115-135).

observed by women members of the SKOJ - League of Yugoslav Communist Youth, and AFŽ – Antifascist Women's Front. Mezorana had had a similar experience, yet she told it using somebody else's, canonized, form, even though she was in a different camp. She borrowed the words of the other to convey her grave story – as we must borrow words and language to speak of ourselves.

Turning back to the question of the nature of these texts positioned between historiography and literature, my interest in concentration camp testimonies, as anticipated in the title, lies in tension between terms *history* and *literature* – in the sense of *the truth* of history and *the lie* of literature. If literary quality is ascribed to a testimony, then a testimony can as well be positioned on the side of the lie, causing a tension between the truth of *traditional historiography* and the lie of a *testimonial text*. It must be noted here that the balance between truth and lies which, in a classical sense, corresponds to the dichotomies of science and mythos, historian and poet, history and tale, has been undermined after the linguistic turn in favor of lies and tales, so that history itself nowdays gravitates to this pole. Historiography is taking into account its susceptibility to discourse. We can reach the past, either collective or personal, only through our language and from our own position. We are submerged in a discourse with which we create history. The performative function overcomes the referential one, and if the documentary quality is based on the referential function of the historical text, then it is seriously threatened by our awareness of our own textual creation of the past. Tending towards the pole of the discourse and the fictional, both history and literature are thus subjected to the laws of rhetoric.

Another issue concerns the susceptibility of the testimony to discourse. In relation to testimonies of traumatic experiences, I wonder whether trauma can be transferred into words at all. The theories of traumatic testimonies give a 360° range of answers to this question: trauma can not be related at all, can be related in one way only or, as the third option, can be related in countless ways. The majority of theoretical approaches to trauma rely on the psychoanalytical terms describing the two main kinds of traumatic memory: *acting out* (i.e. the traumatic memory in which the subject lives the trauma again and again in the form of drama, being subdued/subjected to it, and unable to "put it into words", so that all we can have is the manifesting of the unconscious bodily or vocal/semi-linguistic symptoms that evade the disciplinary power of linguistic syntax) and, on the other hand, *working through* – which refers to a narrative consciousness able to elaborate the experience by giving it the form of a story, which demands the establishing

of the self-conscious subject of a discourse.[5] This reminds of the already mentioned double subject in an autobiographical testimony: the silent subject who has experienced events and can only live through and act them out repeatedly and non-verbally, and the subject who has not seen the events but can now speak in the name of the silent one.

Let us first look at the thesis that there is no way in which a trauma can be related. According to the theory of trauma by Cathy Caruth, who draws on deconstruction and psychoanalysis, consciousness is not capable of working trough a traumatic experience; it can only act it out through various unwarranted symptoms. A trauma cannot be expressed by language, while it is expressed through body motorics or in iconic fashion. According to Cathy Caruth, *acting out* is the only appropriate manner of (non)expressing of a trauma. Connecting the discontinued experience to a story inflicts additional violence as the victim is unable to take the position of a sovereign subject of his/her story. For Cathy Caruth the ethical imperative is to testify the impossibility of testifying. Thus all talk about trauma must constantly remind us that it speaks the unspeakable, that it suppresses something that it cannot work out. This is also the task of the secondary witness, i.e. the one who collects and mediates the testimony. We must not take over any organizing of the narrative. Such processing is implied in editing testimonies for print and includes omitting questions posed to the witness; introducing a chronological order; organizing the narrative towards a happy ending with a message for further generations and the faith in new life – from this point of view any interfering is seen as violent and treacherous. This point of view stands in diametric opposition to the *traumatic realism*, which prefers to reference events with precision, whence the term *traumatic poetry*.

The second assumption, holding that there are numerous ways of narrating trauma, coincides with the postmodern/performative understanding of historiography. After the linguistic turn, historiography is understood as a construct; namely, facts are subsidiary, while the primary interest turns toward the performative, rhetorical and ideological factors constituting a discourse. In this perspective, anything can be related in any fashion, as was shown by Hayden White (1973). The linguistic turn has pointed out the rhetoric nature not only of the historiographic elaboration but also of its sources, both written and oral; everything is ultimately interpretation. According to this point of view, the narrator's present-day politics or ideology can impose any type of narrative structure to a traumatic experience,

5 The application of these two terms to the theory of trauma can be found in LaCapra (1994:198-200) and Bal, 1999.

thus recounting a concentration camp experience in a range of ways from tragedy to comedy or melodrama.

This point of view conceals severe risks, which I will try to illustrate with the example of Frida Misul (Padoan, 2009), who stated for the Jewish archive in Milan that in the Birkenau camp the prisoners were given uniforms on which red stripes were drawn in blood drawn from other women prisoners. Her fellow sufferer from the same barrack, Goti Bauer, accused her of a lie, saying that the red stripe was painted with colour. Goti Bauer demanded the testimony to be excluded from the archive. The archive responded negatively: in their view, every witnessing is of equal importance. The problem has serious theoretical implications. The historian who had examined Misul's case stated that all testimonies were of equal value, because all of them were literature. According to her, these women could not reconcile with the fact that they were not able to relate the truth about their experience. The historian argued that she knew Frida's life story, and that her interpretation of the camp's experience could be related to her difficult childhood and to the fact that her father was an opera singer. Having lived in the world of opera, it is clear that she looked on her overwhelming experience through a lense of the opera - she expressed it in her most intimate genre, the one of the operatic libretto. She insisted on blood as a stage prop (Padoan, 2009:142).

This is an obvious example of the extreme historiography constructivism. The problem of an exaggerated emphasis on the literarity of a text is that it can lead us to disrespecting a witness and her need to be believed. By understanding the narrative construct of a testimony we should not ignore the need that a witness has for testifying. The witness is someone who, also by legal definition, is telling the truth. Camp prisoners demand the admission of truthfulness to their statements, which is a typical claim made by testimonial literature, classifying it as traumatic realism.

In the third point of view, there is but one way of speaking of trauma. This thesis was argued by Hayden White who – when trauma is concerned – establishes limits to his constructivism in the understanding of historiographical discourse. White claims that in the case of a traumatic experience, the *past* determines the speaker's narrative strategy more than his/her contemporary narrative patterns. According to Hayden White, the traumatic experience should be related in a special grammatical pattern capable of expressing the difficulty of a traumatized witness in taking a position, becoming the subject of his/her own narrative. White calls this confused state of the victim, which is neither passive nor active, the *middle voice* (cf. Biti,

2005a:9-29, 2005b). He borrows the term from Barthes, who used it in his *Écrire – verbe intransitif?* essay of 1966 to speak of writing in general (not of trauma): everyone who writes a story about oneself is simultaneously written by it. The author is ruled by discourse. White applies this on trauma: trauma rules over the author and by its inexpressive nature it directs the author's speech. Here we are close to the Cathy Caruth's thesis on the impossibility of verbal testifying.

The middle voice relates primarily to the unclear actantial role, to the unclear understanding of guilt and innocence and to the loss of subjectivity. This occurs when witnesses have a hard time recalling their complex experiences, or when these experiences are modified with each new testifying. In the text of a testimony the middle voice is sometimes manifested by something similar to the postmodern narrative procedures (which, through experiments, attempt to present precisely their passivity in relation to their own medium). Some writers deliberately use it for narrating traumatic experiences. For Walter Benjamin, literary modernity, which he studies on the example of Baudelaire, has precisely the structure of a trauma (Newmark, 1995).

So much for the closeness of trauma testimony and literature. With this in view, what can historiography do of a testimony? What is the attitude of historiography to the documentary/literary character of testimony? It seems that a certain mistrust prevails, an attitude that testimony cannot be useful to historiography. Following Marc Bloch, who claimed that "there is no such thing as a good witness", Anette Wieviorka wrote *The Era of the Witness* in 1998, in which she does not conceal her irritability with the avalanche of testimonies in the past two decades. Wieviorka presents the tension between a witness and a historian as rivalry and struggle for power, with the professional fearing that the amateur might take away his credibility.

The problem stems from the fact that the historian who feels a sense of unease in face of a testimony, does not question the literary nature of *his* interpretative categories; and he is convinced that the literary aspects of a testimony are its *weak* points.

Let us turn back to the young witness Mezorana, who in her reminiscences copied sentences from someone else's memoir. What can a historian do with such a discovery? Does the plagiarism make the whole testimony unreliable? Or will the historian, precisely because of that discovery, believe the witness when she speaks of the difficulty in narrating her trauma, lamenting that "it cannot be expressed in words", as does Mezorana?

The historian whom Mezorana entrusted her notebook, before handing it over to the Museum, selected and commented on certain fragments and had them published in an article (Sobolevski, 2006). He did not notice that some sentences were from the book by Zora Matijević. Using the traditional historiographical method, he did not pay the slightest attention to the textuality of these recollections, but only to the historical data that he could draw upon. But even when autobiographical texts are used in this way, they are not something beyond question as a source of information for any historian. Nor can they be treated as pure literary texts. Contemporary theory shows that witnesses answer precisely what we ask of them; the metaphorical turn from which this theory arises also presents the very historiography as being subject to narrative structures emerging from the historian's contemporary position. History cannot tell us what we have not asked. But if we can indeed approach history with the selected genre in advance, can we treat a testimony in the same way? In the case of the modus of talking about major events like the Holocaust, the constructivist theory of historiography must be double-checked. With his thesis of the middle voice, White has shown how traumatic events affect the way of narrating them. This does not apply only on the witness but also on the person who mediates the testimony. Can this middle, unspecified, trauma-related discourse truly be the most suitable to use when discussing testimony? LaCapra's criticism of the middle voice and its reproduction by secondary witness, accurately points out the ethical problem that thus emerges: the endless replica of a performance does not only impede the process of working through, but also blurs the distinction between the perpetrator and the victim (LaCapra, 2001:26). LaCapra's moderate approach warns that, while on the one hand it is utterly pointless to search in testimonies, for example, for an accurate number of how many chimneys were burning during the Auschwitz uprising (as an example from Dori Laub in Feldman and Laub, 1992:59-63), on the other hand we cannot drown in the hypnotic imitation of a witness who has difficulty speaking – we cannot grow silent with her. The narrative thus always has a double relation towards the traumatic experience, i.e. pre-subject (silent) imitation and subject (discursive) line of narration (Biti, 2005a:23). LaCapra urges the theory to overcome its post-traumatic numbness and discursive impotence and to show the respect towards the realistic intention of a witness as a speaking subject (as witnesses talk to us so that we could believe them); at the same time, however, LaCapra insists on asking about the performative conditions of those testimonies (LaCapra, 2001:15). These conditions can teach us about the limits that the experience of the Nazi camps pose

to historiography, marked by the non-coincidence between facts and truth, between verification and comprehension (Agamben, 1998:8-9).

The late handing over of Mezorana's testimony to the archive, could result from caution on the side of the owner of the manuscript concerning the archive's determining role in national and European history. According to Derrida, an archive is not merely a place for storing and preserving valuable documents and contents of the past which would have existed even without it. With establishing an archive, there occurs a revolutionary act of determining the criteria and foundations of the past. "Archiving produces an event in the same measure that it records it" (cf. Jambrešić Kirin, 2005:37). Does that mean that journals, and written or recorded recollections, are events? In order to assign a testimony the status of an event, there must exist the trust in the witness. For the witness has no proof for what she is telling us. "Testifying is an act of belief, not of knowledge, a gesture of confidence in subjective, not objective truth. It cannot exist without the 'bona fide' trust in the witness" (Jambrešić Kirin, 2005:36).

Respecting the specific nature of the testimonial text means listening to witnesses, trusting them, taking the role they beg us to take. Moreover, it requires of us that, while we are transferring it, we do not disappear or drown in the witness' inability to elaborate trauma. A scholar's task is to look at the narrative working through as a process without an end that teaches us about the modes of creation of a testimonial text. This approach requires certain conditions. For this reason I believe that establishing special archive collections is of utmost importance. Until suitable collections are established, there is no proper place for a testimony, and thus no proper way of reading of them[6].

Literature:

Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Quel che resta di Auschwitz.* Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

Bal, Mieke. 1999. "Introduction". In: Bal, M.; Crewe, J.; Spitzer, L. (eds.). *Acts of Memory. Cultural Recall in the Present*. Hannover – London: University Press of New England, vii-xvii.

6 I would like to thank Mojca Šauperl for the proof-reading of the English version of this paper.

Biti, Vladimir. 2005a. *Doba svjedočenja*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska.

Biti, Vladimir. 2005b. "Historiografija, teorija i medijalno glagolsko stanje". *15 dana*, 1, 6-7.

Chiappano, Alessandra (ed.). 2009. *Essere donne nel lager.* Firenze: la Giuntina.

Currie, Mark. 1998. *Postmodern Narrative Theory.* New York: Palgrave.

De Man, Paul. 1984. "Autobiography as De-Facement". In: De Man, P. (ed.). *The Rhetoric of Romanticism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 67-81.

Felman, Shoshana; Laub, Dory (eds.). 1992. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History.* New York – London: Routledge.

Jambrešić Kirin, Renata. 2005. "Tko svjedoči za svjedoka". *15 dana*, 1, 34-41.

LaCapra, Dominick. 1994. *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma.* New York: Cornell University Press.

Mezorana, Milojka. 1945. *Incasso!* [Manuscript, The City Museum of Rijeka].

Newmark, Kevin. 1995. "Traumatic Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and the Shock of Laughter". In: Caruth, Cathy (ed.). *Trauma – Explorations in Memory.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 236-255.

Padoan, Daniela. 2009. "La costruzione della testimonianza fra storia e letteratura". In: Chiappano, A. (ed.). *Essere donne nel lager.* Firenze: La Giuntina, 135-144.

Sobolevski, Mihael. 2006. "Dnevnik Milojke Mezorane – sušačke Anne Frank". *Sveti Vid* XI, 151-188.

Traverso, Enzo. 2004. *Auschwitz e gli intellettuali. La Shoah nella cultura del dopoguerra.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

Velčić, Mirna. 1991. *Otisak priče. Intertekstualno proučavanje autobiografije.* Zagreb: A. Cesarec.

White, Hayden. 1973. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Wieviorka, Anette. 1999. *L'era del testimone.* Milano: Raffaello Cortina.

NEJRA NUNA ČENGIĆ

Noise, Silence, Voice
Life Stories of Two Female Peace Activists from BiH

> *Expect from me no word of my own. Nor should I be capable of saying anything new; for in the room where someone writes the noise is so great […] let him who has something to say step forward and be silent!*
>
> Karl Kraus, quoted in Benjamin, 1999: 436.

The unspeakable nature of painful experience (often referred to as traumatic) has been at the core of academic thought for years. A particular focus exists on war experiences, usually considered experiences beyond the concept of 'life', that resist exposure within customary dimensions of life. Particularly challenging seems to be their integration into language, the most extensive medium of human life. The usual response is a turn to silence, like Walter Benjamin's silence after World War I (Felman, 1999), Meša Selimović's *Silences* after World War II (1990), and the silence of the Vietnam veteran in Javier Cercas's *The Speed of Light* (2006). Each of these authors mark a boundary of (un)speakability, a silence that warns, complains, outlines its reasons, but also refrains from speaking, and thereby rendering that what is silent further and further, more distanced, even sacred.

In his *Storyteller*, Benjamin warns us that it was not always like that, that storytelling skills ceased to exist with World War I (Felman, 1999). Experiences changed, but even more importantly, the contexts of speaking

changed. However, studies based on testimonies, extensively used in feminist thought to uncover these subaltern experiences, give them a temporal dimension, having the potential to empower their actors and thereby create new epistemic communities. Such efforts target both kinds of obstacles that Dan Bar-On (1999) identifies as hindering the reconstruction of human discourse after painful (traumatic) experience: an inability to attach words to feelings (the 'indescribable') and a lack of public discourse on a certain issue (the 'undiscussable').

The recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH, 1992–1995) is a significant, if not the main, topic of daily-political discourse, which neither encourages heterogeneity, nor invites speaking up. Instead, it presents undifferentiated 'noise', perhaps akin to Kraus' terms. Against the background of this noise, for this study I turned to a specific community in Bosnia and Herzegovina – that of peace-building – assuming that it allows the proliferation of voices. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to explore how people narrate their war experiences and how they integrate this within their overall life story. This will be investigated through the life stories of two young female peace activists from BiH (who were adolescents during the war of the 1990s), which serves as the main research material. Additionally, two stories of their female ancestors (mother and grandmother) with whom the two peace activists conducted individual interviews will serve as auxiliary research material. The life stories of the two peace activists, who currently live and work in Sarajevo, were recorded within the frame of the course "Life Stories and Dialogues"[1] that I ran in 2007/8 in Sarajevo, and that specifically targeted BiH peace activists. Participants were presented with three main tasks: (a) telling their own life story in a group context, which consisted of seven female peace activists from BiH[2]; (b) conducting a life story interview with a member of their own family of an older generation (and discussion about that material and process); and (c) drafting a research proposal using life story interviews as a method. The proceedings related to those three steps are used in this paper.

1 The course was structured as a set of three workshops (realized during a period of four months). The aim of this activity was twofold: to research how participants narrate their war experience, and to teach them about storytelling and the life story method for potential use in their peace building work.

2 Although participation in this research project was open and free to both men and women, no male participants registered. The research project can therefore not compare war experiences among men and women, where one would expect significant differences. On the other hand, the project benefited in some other completely unscheduled ways, whereby some degree of solidarity among the women was created, which really resulted in a special and very open setting.

In this educational and research activity, all the life story interviews started with the initial question: "Tell me your life story?" This question is intentionally left very wide in order to see whether war experiences will be mentioned at all, and if so, in what way: what is told, what is untold (what is missing), and what role does it play in relation to other life experiences (Rosenthal, 1993). The analysis takes into consideration the group setting in which these life stories were told and discussed.

The stories used for this paper cannot be taken to be representative of the BiH peacebuilding sector. The study does not tend to generalize, but rather to outline some unknown and unexplored phenomena.

I

Tanja[3] was born in Sarajevo at the beginning of the 1980s. The most influential person of her childhood until the age of eleven was her maternal grandfather. At that stage, Tanja presents herself as an insecure and shy girl, with her grandfather trying to teach her that she was the only person responsible for her acts, for what she was, and that she did not have to be afraid of anybody, since nobody could hurt her as much as she could hurt herself. She remained insecure until the age of sixteen. Tanja has lived in her grandparents' family house in Sarajevo suburb Ilidža almost all her life. After the divorce of her parents when she was seven, Tanja remained living in Ilidža with her mother, sister and grandparents. Her mother, at this stage, was presented as a very busy professional who spent very little time at home.

Tanja describes this entire part very clearly, fluently, with lots of details. Her childhood memories up to the war take about one third of the main narration[4]. The age determination posed in relation to her grandfather (in the beginning of her story), who she called the dominant figure in her life until the age of eleven, foreshadows her potential loss of him. Moreover, a quite extensive description of their relation at the very beginning of the story supports this hypothesis.

3 To protect the personal identities of direct and indirect research participants, pseudonyms are used throughout for proper names. For the same reasons some other data has been modified in minor ways as well. Emphasis within quotes are made by the interviewees.

4 The main narration is the main part of the story – the answer to the first, main question: "Tell me your life story?", according to Rosenthal, G. in Bar-On, 1995.

When the war started, Tanja was an eleven-year-old girl, living in her family's house in Ilidža[5]. Her mother decided that her children "were not packages to be packed and sent elsewhere, but that they needed close people who would love them, and that they would stay together". Later on, they made some attempts to leave Ilidža, but without success. Tanja and her sister spent that whole year (1992) locked inside the house, where her mother organized school activities in the cellar for her own and a couple of neighbours' children. In Tanja's words, with the war her mother finally became a "full time mama". Interestingly, her mother also uses that term in her story, indicating it is part of their communication within the family. Both of them express joy regarding that term, despite the negative circumstances that led towards its creation.

Tanja presents this period as a very difficult one. This description mirrors that they felt quite uncomfortable and alien on the territory ruled by Bosnian Serbs at that time. Although at this point Tanja does not refer to her family as non-Serbs who stayed in Ilidža, their threatened and subjected position is clearly articulated.

Tanja proceeds by saying that the most difficult event related to this period was the killing of her grandfather. For her, this meant the loss of the basis of her life. Explaining her emotional state in relation to this event, she said she completely lost her memories of other events. This lasted for a while, before she felt better again. At this point, Tanja recalls:

> …I remember that I said that I will <u>hate</u> the people who killed my grandfather… and I remember that my mother, in a completely calm way said: "No, you will not hate anybody. Think about who that person is, who did not know whether your grandfather was a soldier or not. He had a military jacket, what, he could have been a soldier… Whom did that person lose?... No, you will not hate anybody".

Tanja considers this, together with her grandfather's statement that she should not be afraid of anybody except herself, as two key sentences from her childhood that made her the person she is now. It is interesting to note that she does not mention who the "people" who killed her grandfather are. This could be considered as deductible from the context, or, from her perspective, in reaction to that loss, as completely irrelevant. Tanja's mother's efforts to pass on a "no hate" attitude, which is mentioned during her own story as

5 During the war, Ilidža was under the rule of Bosnian Serbs forces.

well, can be understood in light of the concept of 'generational work', used by Lena Inowlocki (2001) to describe the formation of continuities between mothers and daughters of certain sets of beliefs, attitudes and values that persisted through conflict.

Tanja's narration describes her survival in life-threatening circumstances. She barely escaped rape, and she describes this with a lot of details. She found the situation at school that she started to attend in 1993 particularly difficult. At a certain point during the war people around her became aware that her father was "not a Serbian soldier", but that he was "Alija's Serb" and that he was in "Alija's army"[6] for a certain period of time. People also resented her mother, a "Croat", whose behaviour was criticised. This is the part where Tanja mentions the presumed ethnic identity of her parents, a coincidence that in the given circumstances made her life even more difficult.

In response to this situation and to the additional suffering, her mother made the decision to tell everybody that she had sent her children to relatives in Vojvodina[7]. She did not actually do this, but the children were locked in the house again. Tanja describes this situation as follows: "…again we were locked up in a box for a couple of months…". This situation, in which she could not even approach the window, but also the overall conditions after almost four years of war, led her to try to commit suicide, which she fortunately survived.

Although Tanja describes how childish the plan was in terms of the way how she planned to do it (which ended up only injuring her leg), it may be presupposed that the intention behind it was serious. It also has to be noted that the way in which she talks about this today reflects how the most terrible things can be said in a quite comic way.

Tanja says that after the reintegration of Ilidža into the city of Sarajevo her life changed. The rest of her story reflects a simultaneity of *biographical action schemes* (studying, travelling abroad, working), but also some *creative metamorphosis*. These two biographical process structures, along with an additional two[8], are identified by Fritz Schütze (2007: 11) as the most

6 This means that he was in the Army of BiH, which controlled most of the Sarajevo municipalities.

7 Vojvodina is a region in Serbia.

8 The four biographical process structures identified as the most important ordering principles of life stories are as follows: "**biographical action schemes**, by which a person attempts to actively shape the course of his life", "**trajectories of suffering**, in which persons are not capable of actively shaping their own life anymore, since they can only react to overwhelming outer events", "**institutional expectation patterns**, in which persons are following up institutionally

important ordering principles of life stories. In Tanja's case, these processes meant the start of her own shaping the course of her life, which turned her into an open and communicative personality. Throughout her life story, war topics predominate alongside 'biographical work', defined by Schütze as "an inner activity of mind and emotional psyche and this inner activity is essentially constituted by conversation with significant others and oneself. In life situations of biographical crises biographical work can become the explicit and central action scheme of cognitively and emotionally ordering one's life…" (Schütze, 2007: 7). Tanja's main narration finishes as follows:

> To me, personally, my voice shook a bit, but the reason why I was able to tell my life story without crying, is that somewhere around the year 2000 I discovered that suppressing all the bad things that had happened to me in life, filtering out only the good things, editing only that specific tape, that specific film of my life… that this would not help me... and I started to tell everybody about myself, all the people who wanted to hear me, who were at least a little close to me, I wanted to tell my story, or at least some parts of it, which were important to some. In that way, by retelling my story, by retelling each of its parts, I got one small step closer to myself, and one step better.

This confirms that this is not the first time Tanja tells her life story. This can be felt during the narration, which went so smoothly, with perfectly structured sentences, etc. It represents her biographical work and should be understood in that way.

She demonstrates significant efforts to deal with her own painful past and to mobilize others to do the same. Her way of doing it is in verbal communication, in dialogue to which she gives similar meaning as Bakhtin did (Bakhtin in Morris, 2009) – giving meaning to our lives and becoming 'closer to herself' through dialogue with some other. Tanja finishes her overall story underlying dialogical process of storytelling where the recognition of pain plays an important role:

> And one possible way for young people, whom I mainly choose to tell my own story, is the importance of recognizing in my story their own

shaped and normatively defined courses of life, e.g. careers in organizations or the family life cycle that opens up family life in the first part of adulthood", "**creative metamorphoses** of biographical identity by which a new important inner development is starting in one's own biography" (Schütze, 2007: 11).

> pain, but that they see my pain as well, and also to consider the role of somebody else in my story, of somebody who on my behalf did something against me. And I think that from that side, my story, when I tell it, helps people a lot.

Her further account gives importance to the fact that speakability on a certain issue in great measure depends on whom we speak to. She refers to the empathetic and safe context in which the story can be told[9], reflecting how important it is to show an interest in it, not to judge, but also to be able to share some experiences with others. Within the first day of the course, a very safe atmosphere had already been created, which was the merit of all participants, including myself.

Tanja continues explaining how she listened to many life stories after the war, particularly of women, who in her terms "suffered precisely because of the fact that they are women". She did this as part of NGO engagements, and sees her own role as expressing a positive attitude towards others, giving them courage. Yet the benefit is reciprocal since she thus works through her own experience and strengthens herself as well. Continuing to explain the purpose of her work, she says:

> ...help [people] by telling them that there is no pain of Muslims, Croats, Bosniaks, but only a person's pain; that it is not important in which box they put you, but what you survived, that you succeed to identify yourself as a victim, but also that you succeed to identify yourself as a person that has enough strength to cope with it, to survive.

This part re-affirms Tanja's need to be perceived as a person with all her pain and experience, regardless of ethnic identity. It could be understood as a revolt against the overvaluation of ethnicity present in the socio-political life of BiH throughout the last twenty years, but partly also as a reaction to a possible devaluation of her own experience. In other words, it could be viewed as a certain revolt against a "hierarchy of stories"[10] (Albeck and Bar-On, 2002: 11), often present in post-war contexts.

---

9 It is important to note that the participants did not know each other before, at least not intimately.

10 Albeck and Bar-On refer to the subjective scale of suffering, whereby after WWII among the survivors those members who were in Auschwitz had a kind of priority talking about their experiences in the presence of others (2002:11).

It is precisely in the universal nature of pain and human vulnerability that Judith Butler (2007) sees an important feature of humankind. Here she finds a source of solidarity and political action (2007). We trace this pattern in Tanja's empowering engagement with other people. Likewise, it is precisely in survival, 'bare life', or this extreme status of living (Agamben, 1998) that Jasmina Husanović (2007) sees the potential of solidarity and political action in contemporary BiH.

The theme of war takes up almost half of Tanja's overall main narration. Her adolescent years are situated within it, and it constitutes a very emotional dimension of the overall story. Within the war topic the only biographical scheme is that of a trajectory of suffering and hardship, while for the post-war period action orientation is dominant with creative metamorphosis.

Tanja is a person who brought herself to talk about her war experience in a way that is bearable for her. It is her own biographical work – an ongoing process – and she is aware that she cannot do this alone. However, that does not mean that there are not parts in her war experience which are unspeakable/hardly speakable (at the time of telling her story). It is quite similar with some other life situations, relationships. One of them is the relation to her father. She mentions him and her attitude towards him at several points during her story, but this is the only theme of the story that is not as detailed as the other parts, with some important parts missing. At one point, mentioning this painful relation and her disappointment she suddenly breaks the line of narration and says: "Well, did I run out of time? [10 seconds silence]. If you have questions, just ask me…". This is almost the end of the main narration, a part in which her voice is shaking, where the story is not controlled in the same way as in the other parts. The relation to her father is quite conflictual, painful for her, although she copes with it, trying to find some temporary ways to manage it.

Her mother is maybe not so much explicitly mentioned within the story, but implicitly she is very much present, helping her to make all crucial decisions in life, which Tanja does not question. Generally, it can be argued that her story and the story of her mother, whom Tanja interviewed, reflect how much they are connected, and how intensely they communicate with each other.

Analogously to Tanja's, her mother's story displays a strong attachment to her own grandfather and emphasises the great impact he had on her. The predominance of action orientation is also something that renders these two stories very similar. Both stories contain references to early social en-

gagement, a concern for social issues, and the fight for the better position of women. What differs most is the general structure of the stories, which is somewhat logical due to the generational differences. The most obvious difference is their way of addressing the war period. While in Tanja's story this theme takes up the major part in terms of length and importance, it only takes 10 lines within her mother's 16-page life story. Within just one sentence she briefly mentions the killing of her father, the wounding of her mother, all witnessed by the children. She then concludes by saying that after all they succeeded in retaining humanity without resorting to hatred. Having in mind that Tanja also mentions this message of "no hate" passed on to her by her mother, this is indeed a marker of generational work (Inowlocki, 2001: 20). For the socialist period, Tanja's mother describes all her affiliations, actions, educational and professional achievements in great detail, reflecting a high level of enthusiasm and strength with a high degree of positive self-perception. Although in her professional and social engagement the post-war period contains much continuation, here the level of enthusiasm changes in the narration. Maybe the best illustration of this can be found in the three sentences from her mother's story selected by Tanja for understanding that story:

> "And I actually wanted to change the world immediately and now" (when describing the period of her university studies).
> "I somehow prefer working, then writing" (when talking about the post-war period).
> "It goes hardly and slowly. I do not give up. As long as I am alive, I want … to do something to make life more beautiful for people that I like, to those that surround me and to those who somewhere else, live more beautifully and more humanely" (end of the main narration).

II

Amela was born in Višegrad[11] in the late 1970s. When the war started and the town fell under Bosnian Serb rule, her family fled to Sarajevo. She spent the entire wartime period in Sarajevo and remained there after the war.

11 Višegrad is a town in Eastern Bosnia, close to the Serbian border. In 1992 it came under the rule of Bosnian Serb forces, which lasted until the end of the war. Today, it is part of Republika Srpska with a predominantly Serb population. Very few Bosniaks, who represented the majority there before the war, returned to their homes.

War as a theme appears at several points in Amela's story, prior to her own experience of the war of the 1990s. Describing her paternal grandfather at the beginning of her life story, she explains how he, as a young partisan, was arrested and spent some time in a forced labour camp in Germany. Upon his return at the end of WWII he lived very much in line with the history of revolution and with socialist values. Amela fondly remembers her childhood in the house next to her paternal grandparents, who had a great impact on her.

In 1992, she was a fourteen-year-old girl. She describes very extensively how the war started in Višegrad. She describes how the situation developed at school, how it impacted on her friendships. At that time these sorts of things were not unusual to her, but now when she remembers certain things, they seem to be symptoms of something going wrong. When she mentions the war for the first time, she says:

> And now that, what do I know, that war. Actually, I do not know how much I was aware of it… uh... it is more connected to what I found out later on, in the war, and after it and with the story of my parents…

Her negation of the war is expressed by her distance to the war as a foreign element that does not have anything to do with her, whereby she uses the term "that war" almost every time when she mentions it. Further, her narration of this period is full of references to the partiality of her memory of that period, and to her inability to distinguish between her own recollections and family conversations about it. This is even more clearly expressed in the part explaining their flight from Višegrad[12]. She re-expresses her unawareness of what was happening. Moreover, her mentioning of the war always conveys a confused sense of "something is happening".

The family moved to Sarajevo with a refugee convoy. Amela would prefer to go somewhere further (abroad), but due to the fact that they had relatives in Sarajevo, they decided to go there. She mentions that the same happened during WWII to her grandparents. Their travel towards Sarajevo, which meant crossing many checkpoints of the Bosnian Serbs, is described with many narratives, describing the crisis and clash of identities. For example, her grandfather, a retired Yugoslav Army (JNA) soldier, showed his JNA booklet at each checkpoint, saying "I am yours, I am yours", as well as

12 It has to be noted that they are a Bosniak family, and that those non-Serbian families who did not succeed in or who did not want to flee Višegrad were mostly killed (in many cases accompanied with prior rapes of the women).

"Don't you have to defend us?" According to Amela, he really lived in that illusion[13].

The second part of her war experience, which lasted for a couple of years, was the experience of being a refugee in Sarajevo under siege. In addition to sharing siege conditions with other people in the city, Amela was an adolescent and a refugee at the same time, facing difficulties in adapting to her new situation. There was a period when she hardly communicated with other children, regretting that they had not fled somewhere else. She felt revolt "I did not deserve to be here and this to happen to me". She empathized with all other children who for different reasons felt disadvantaged. In her words, she felt bad being a refugee. This lasted up to a certain point, when she gradually started to communicate with other children, socialize and create a small circle of people close to her. It is interesting to note that with this turn, there is no clear account when the war ended in her story, but she continues describing her activities related to studies, socializing, starting to shape her own life. Later on in her interview, she comes back to this topic, saying how she overcomes her difficulties of adaptation in Sarajevo, although sometimes some memories return. She is not sure how she will eventually raise her own children in relation to this and what to tell them about it. However, she concludes that this is not something to which too much importance should be attached since at the end of the day it is something a person can cope with. However, it is not by chance that as her research project Amela proposes to collect war stories of people who were children during the war in BiH.

The description of her life in Sarajevo contains many phrases similar to "I really do not remember", or "I cannot fully remember it", or "what I remember is that this and that happened". Although the trajectory of suffering can be understood as her predominant biographical scheme against the background of her war life history (Schütze, 2007: 11), she often presents the position of her family as being more advanced in relation to others, with a certain degree of dignity persisting despite circumstances of poverty: "we passed this war well, compared to others", or "we [family] all survived".

Amela does not systematize her way of dealing with her own war past as Tanja does. Rather, she makes some efforts to organise her life, in terms of education, employment and marriage, which helps her heal some painful parts. This actually reflects the importance of an institutional biographical

13 When the war started in BiH, the Yugoslav People's Army took the side of the Bosnian Serbs forces who were against the independence of BiH, but wished to preserve this former republic within Yugoslavia, already reduced after Croatian and Slovenian independence.

scheme (Schütze 2007, Part I: 11) within her overall story along with action orientation. With respect to her motivation to work in a peace-building organization, she says:

> I had the feeling that I owe this to myself, and, I do not know, to everything what had happened during the war, that hmm... to be here, in that […], that I do not know, to find out more, since I had thousands of questions to myself, but I think I would not mainly...

While what happened during the war was something outside of her control, her employment choice is her own way of shaping her life course. This choice is probably crucial for understanding her biographical work, which she may not completely be aware of.

The first sentence of her narration provides additional indicators for understanding how the war impacts on her identity: "My name is Amela. My surname is Humo, or to be more precise, I used to be Humo long ago. I was born 15 April 1978 in Višegrad, in a small, beautiful town that I treasure in fond memory". The first association regarding confusion with the surnames is that she refers to her marriage and the consequent change of surname (Đuliman). However, it is interesting to note that although she only got married recently, she describes it as if it happened long ago. A possible interpretation could be that she connects her maiden name to the place where she was born since she mentions it in the following sentence. Having in mind that she left this place more than fifteen years ago, this time distance, "long ago", refers to her leaving her hometown. Placing it in memory could be a re-affirmation of the distance, but also of her wish to keep it unchanged in her memory. It is a beautiful memory that she wants to keep as such, but at the same time it is connected to her painful experience. Thus, we could interpret this by saying that her new identification (by name) reflects not only her marital status, but a newly created life. Partial support for this can be found in her answer to the question whether she visited Višegrad after the war. She gives a positive answer and describes it as a completely different place which has very little in common with the place she knew before. Similarly to her description of her flight from Višegrad, she reverts to evocations of a confused sense of "something happening", of some other reality which is not hers.

"I cannot say that I had some feeling, you know, that my heart started to beat faster, it was no feeling like in the movies, really, I liked coming here, well...". She continues how "… it is not what it used to be anymore…".

Amela prefers to keep her beautiful memories of the place and how it used to be. She hopes that one day the house will be reconstructed and maybe somebody will return. Thereby, she completes her impression of Višegrad saying that there are still some dear people living there who "did not choose what happened, it was that kind of destiny ... well. But there are… I have on the other side some really great… I love that Višegrad, no matter…" She proceeds by saying that she does not know why that identification with the town still exists, but does not question it further.

Apart from the fact that Višegrad is her hometown, there are some possible additional factors that strengthen this kind of self-presentation. Although she spent half of her life in Sarajevo, in her adolescent years Amela came there as a refugee, having to adapt to the new city within the context of the war. It was quite difficult for her – maybe the most difficult aspect of the whole war. Additionally it has to be noted that during and after the war many refugees came to Sarajevo, thus completely changing the demographic structure of the city. In that respect, one can observe the emergence of hostility on the part of pre-war Sarajevo citizens against the city's more recent inhabitants, particularly against those (the majority) from Eastern Bosnia. Amela supports this argumentation with several stories. It is quite possible that this kind of context influenced Amela to the extent that, in response, she feels a reinvigorated sense of belonging to her hometown. Another very important factor is the post-war socio-political situation, with Višegrad being part of Republika Srpska, where basic favourable socio-political conditions have not been created for large-scale refugee return. Thus, only a small number of the non-Serb population have returned, which makes the attachment to this place amongst refugees even stronger.

The kind of double identification (by name) is also present in the story of her grandmother, with whom Amela conducted her interview. Her grandmother introduces herself in the following way: "I am, I was Deović Sutka, Suada, from the parents Muhamed and Mubera Deović" (Suada Humo). Unlike in Amela's narration, where this division may be attached to pre-war and post-war life, the division in Mrs. Suada Humo's story reflects a break between pre-marital and marital life within a strong patriarchal context. So, she introduces herself with her maiden name in order to tell us the story of her primary family, of World War II, and of the post-WWII reconstruction of Višegrad, which all happened before her marriage.

Amela's grandmother fled twice from Višegrad: during WWII she ran from the Chetniks and in 1992 she had to flee again when the Bosnian Serbs took control of the city. Both times she found shelter in Sarajevo. The largest

part of her main narration consists of very detailed descriptions of her own as well as her family's experience during WWII. She presents herself as an agent during some situations in WWII, but particularly during the post-war reconstruction of Višegrad. It is evident that this is something which she is able to talk about. In general, there are many similarities between these two women's stories, even their arrival to Sarajevo (during WWII and the war of the 1990s) is described in a very similar way. What differs most is the reference to the recent war. While it forms a central theme within Amela's story, her grandmother describes it in only one paragraph, and even then in a very report-like way: she says that in 1992 the war started in Višegrad, that she and her family fled to Sarajevo; that they all survived; that they made it through better than some other families; that her husband was wounded in Sarajevo; that her sister who remained in Višegrad was killed together with her husband (said in tears); that all that was very difficult, but that they survived. While her memories of WWII are presented in detail as a difficult experience, but (now) a speakable one, she is not able or willing to talk about the recent war in the same way[14]. Moreover, in relation to the recent war, there is no clear-cut line in terms of when it finished and what happened later. With regards to post-war life she only mentions the death of her husband, who she says died of sorrow for Višegrad, and the fact that they did not return. The trajectory of suffering prevails in contrast to the time when, she says, the happiest things in her life happened (return to Višegrad after WWII, renewal of the city through participation in labour actions, getting married, the birth of her children, harmonious family life, etc.).

Like Tanja, Amela demonstrates great admiration for her grandfather. She describes him as a person who remained committed to socialist ideals and values of antifascism. She admires his calmness and capacity for keeping his dignity in situations that were not easy for anybody. He was wounded during both wars, but fortunately survived. He recently died in Sarajevo, and with that information, as well as with a reference to the extent to which this story reminded her how much he meant to her, Amela finalises the main narration. The relation to her grandfather is the one where generational work is the most present.

14 This can partially be ascribed to the fact that this part of life is already known to the interviewer (her granddaughter), since they passed through it together. The same can be applied to the relationship between Tanja and her mother. However, the way of mentioning the war outlines that this is in general for them a hardly speakable topic, even explicitly framed by Tanja's mother as something "she does not like to talk about, not even to think about".

Describing her current life, marriage, job, relation to parents and friends, Amela describes herself as a satisfied person, who is learning to find balances, compromises and to be happy with that[15]. In general, she demonstrates good capabilities at finding coping mechanisms, for which certain institutional biographical schemes (marriage, employment, etc.) give her space to heal painful experiences. Family as such plays a very important role for her, and as in Mrs. Suada Humo's story, an optimistic attitude prevails when she tries to present her own and her family's situation as much better than it could be or than it is for some other people.

Amela's and her grandmother's stories contain lot of references to World War II. However, it is something they talk about only now. Only recently did Amela find out that her maternal great-grandmother was killed during WWII, as well some other relatives on the maternal side. Nobody had talked about this before. She also mentions that she thinks that the person who killed her great-grandmother was sentenced to only a few years of prison after the war. Amela perceives the lack of discourse about this as a mistake. This statement raises interesting questions on the correlation of undiscussable facts and a non-supportive context rendering them indescribable (Bar-On, 1999).

III

Nowadays everyday politics in BiH are full of 'noise' about the recent war. In general terms, the war of the 1990s is a very much discussed topic in BiH. However, if we examine it more deeply, we notice that behind this 'noise' there is quite a uniform war discourse, setting up a pattern in which individual narratives should fit. Personal war experiences are in general difficult, and their narration reminds people of an impoverished and terrible period of their life, a reduction to "bare life" (Agamben, 1998). It recalls what people do not want to talk about, or even think about. However, war is never only violence, but a "social condition of war" (Lubkemann, 2008) in which in the midst of fear and violence some life dynamics persist, human relationships are maintained, established, changed or broken. Yet insufficient support exists to integrate this side of war into public war discourse. I see a potential exception to this in the peace-building community (among some other communities as well): an alternative epistemic community capable of

15 In early childhood Amela presents herself as an assertive, perhaps even bossy child.

integrating pain, weakness, but also joy and hope and human relationships, voicing them and attributing them an agentive role. As Veena Das notes on the basis of her research in India, "survivors of riots also showed me that life was recovered not through some grand gestures in the realm of transcendent, but through a descent into the ordinary" (2007: 7).

Tanja and Amela are young female peace activists who were adolescents during the war. While Tanja spent the war in her family house in Bosnian Serb-held Ilidža, Amela moved with her family from her birth place Višegrad to Sarajevo, where she spent the war and remained up to the present. Both experienced great difficulties during the war, feeling unaccepted by their immediate surroundings. Neither attended the school they wanted due to the war. Both present themselves as very attached to their families, particularly to their grandfathers with whom they used to live, and whose lives were attacked during the war.

Tanja and Amela have found bearable ways to talk extensively about personal war experiences, voicing many undiscussable topics within a supportive and empathetic setting. They also succeeded in integrating those experiences within their overall life stories. War is the central theme in both their stories, the ground on which they both base their overall life story, and their present engagements in particular. For Tanja the link between her peace engagement and personal war experience is very clearly connected through her efforts to re-tell her experience to many people and motivating others to do so. Amela, on the other hand, presents her engagement as something she owes to herself and to everything that happened, but also as a way of searching for answers to many questions. So, while Tanja mostly presents herself as one who talks to others, Amela mostly listens to others' stories. The speakability of their war experiences, however, does not mean that there are not parts of this experience that are silenced in their stories. Indeed, it would not be possible to encompass everything in a life story, or to make it identical to lived events. Yet some systematic gaps emerge that are not necessarily related (only) to the war: the best example of how some life dynamics and relationships are hardly speakable is Tanja's relationship with her father.

Both Tanja and Amela describe a post-war metamorphosis in their personality in relation to pre-war life. From a shy girl with a quite passive attitude, Tanja transformed after the war into a very outgoing personality, with action orientation as a dominant biographical scheme. Amela, on the other hand, who spoke of herself as a self-assured, perhaps even self-centred, and rebellious child, now presents herself as a person who is trying to find ba-

lances in human relationships. Although this self-articulated transformation is a discontinuity in the *idem* dimensions of their narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1991), the narrators offer us a reasoning behind it. In both cases it is directly or indirectly connected to the process of dealing with war experiences, which is not only about surviving violence, but embedded in relationships that extend before and after that violence (Lubkemann, 2008). While for Tanja mobility and communication were crucial for this coping process, Amela found it more in biographical schemes of studies, marriage, family (or even before when she started socializing during the war). Besides linking, in temporal terms, their present (peace building activism) with the past (war), they achieved a form of continuity of self, a presence in time or *ipse* (Ricoeur, 1991) through generational work within their stories, in which they attribute meaning to the continuity of values and beliefs: e.g., the role of their grandfathers' attitudes whom they admired greatly (particularly due to their consistency in attitudes and values), analogies in attitudes and practices between the stories of Tanja and her mother Nada Frenc, and Amela and her grandmother Suada Humo, respectively.

In contrast to previous peace activists' stories, Mrs. Suada Humo and Mrs. Nada Frenc's stories do not really include narrations about the recent war. Their accounts are short and take the form of reports. In comparison to the narrated pre-war life, rich in efforts, achievements and self-satisfaction, their war experience appears as a defeat, not worth mentioning. However, Mrs. Suada Humo experienced WWII as well and a very detailed narration about it takes up a significant part of her story: she describes the war in Višegrad – quite proudly referring to her helping role to the Partisans – escape, reunion with the family, war in Sarajevo and return to Višegrad. The latter can be interpreted as a crucial difference in relation to the war of the 1990s. While after WWII Mrs. Suada Humo returned to Višegrad and actively participated in the renewal of the city, this time she did not return. The only, but very important, referent of her account of the recent war is her *family*: "we all survived", "we, all together" – a continuity in time: before, during and after the war – for what she possibly sees as her own agentive role. Mrs. Nada Frenc, who reports about her father's death, her mother's injury, and other difficulties of the war, finishes her account of the war saying that in spite of everything, they (her family) succeeded in retaining humanity. Without voicing her war experience, "retaining humanity" becomes the way of being present through the time.

Oral sources:

All interviews were collected for the purpose of the Life Stories and Dialogues course (2007/2008), chaired by course leader/researcher, Nejra Nuna Čengić. Informed consent provided for all interviews.

Sarajevo, November 15, 2007, the interview was made within a group setting, transcript, researcher's personal archive.

Sarajevo, November 16, 2007, the interview was made within a group setting, transcript, researcher's personal archive.

Sarajevo, December 2007, personal interview taken by Amela Đuliman, transcript, researcher's personal archive.

Sarajevo, January 4 and 6, 2008, personal interview taken by Tanja Kovačević, transcript, researcher's personal archive.

Literature:

Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer*: *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Albeck, J.H., Adwan, S. & Bar-On, D. 2002. "Dialogue groups: TRT's guidelines for working through intractable conflicts by personal storytelling in encounter groups". *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology,* 8/4, 301-322.

Bar-On, Dan. 1995. *Fear and Hope*. Cambridge, MA: HUP.

Bar-On, Dan. 1999. *The Indescribable and the Undiscussable: Reconstructing Human Discourse after Trauma*. Budapest: Central European University Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 1999. *Selected Writings. 1931–1934, Volume 2, Part 2* (edited by M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland and G. Smith). Cambridge: Harvard UP.

Benjamin, Walter. 2006. "The Storyteller". In: Hale, Dorothy J. (eds.). *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 360-378. Available at: http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/Colleges/College%20of%20Humanities%20and%20Social%20Sciences/EMS/Readings/139.105/Additional/The%20Storyteller%20-%20Walter%20Benjamin.pdf. Accessed 4/10/2012.

Butler, Judith. 2007. "Nasilje, žalovanje, politika". *Treća*, 9/1, 69-84.

Cercas, Javier. 2006. *The Speed of Light.* London: Bloomsbury.

Das, Veena. 2007. *Life and Words. Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary.* University of California Press.

Felman, Shoshana. 1999. "Benjamin's Silence. 'Angelus Novus': Perspectives on Walter Benjamin", *Critical Inquiry*, 25/2, 201-234.

Felman, Shoshana. 2008. "Benjaminova šutnja". *Odjek: Revija za umjetnost, nauku i društvena pitanja*. Autumn 2008, http://www.odjek.ba/index.php?broj=15&id=01, accessed 4/10/2012.

Husanović, Jasmina. 2007. "Etičko-politička zaviještanja lica i ožiljaka: Bosanske priče i trauma kao imenice ženskog roda u množini". *Treća*, 9/1, 57-68.

Inowlocki, Lena. 2001. *Grandmothers, Mothers and Daughters. Intergenerational Transmission in Displaced Families in Three Jewish Communities.* [Habilitation Thesis, Ottovon-Guericke-Universität Magdeburg, ch. 3].

Lubkemann, Stephen C. 2008. *Culture in Chaos. An Anthropology of Social Condition in War.* London – Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Morris, Pam (eds.). 2009. *Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov.* Bloomsbury USA.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1991. "Narrative Identity". In: Wood, D. (ed.). *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. London: Routledge.

Rosenthal, Gabriele. 1993. "Reconstruction of life stories. Principles of selection in generating stories for narrative biographical interviews". *The narrative study of lives*, 1/1, 59-91.

Schütze, F. 2007. Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of the Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews. Part 1 and 2. INVITE – Biographical Counselling in Rehabilitative Vocational Training. Further Educational Curriculum. EU Leonardo da Vinci Programme. Available at: www.biographicalcounselling.com/download/B2.1.pdf [15 April 2007].

Selimović, Meša. 1990. *Tišine.* [Jubilarno izdanje – osamdeset godina od rođenja Meše Selimovića]. Belgrade: BIGZ – Sarajevo: Svjetlost.

Jasmina Lukić

The Language of the Body as the Language of Trauma in J. Žbanić's Feature Films *Grbavica* and *Na putu*

The two feature films that Jasmila Žbanić has made until now have seemingly very distinct topics. The first one, *Grbavica*, is the story of a mother who raises her daughter alone in the post-war Sarajevo of the early 2000s. She carefully keeps from her daughter the difficult secret that the child was born out of mass rapes in a war camp. The film tells a story of the daughter's traumatic search for identity, and of the mother's deeply traumatic experience of war rapes. The second film, *On the Path*, speaks of a couple in post-war Sarajevo whose life gradually changes after the young man becomes a practicing believer, accepting religion as a solution for his personal problems; the film follows the profound changes that strict religious requirements impose on the couple, revealing the gap between religious and secular points of view.

And yet, despite thematic difference, the two films share a deep similarity of interest in traumatic experiences that enables me to talk about them within one interpretative framework. This interest in trauma is contextualized in the realities of post-war life in Sarajevo and in Bosnia, but it should not be seen as only related to this concrete historical frame. Jasmila Žbanić's careful and subtle analyses of the ways in which traumatic experiences shape lives of survivors, and moreover, how old traumas inflict new ones upon the members of survivors' immediate communities, are not necessarily Bosnian, but apply to all post-conflict societies. At the same time, it is not societies, but individuals that Jasmila Žbanić is primarily interested in,

those who with their lives defy calls of collectivity and collective identifications. Following the distinction between individual trauma and collective trauma, as defined by Kai Erikson (1995: 187), we can say that Žbanić speaks of individual traumas and the ways her characters are forced to face them against the background of a collective trauma which has profoundly scarred the social tissue.

Trauma defies representation as it defies rational explanation. Speaking of problems with representation, Cathy Caruth gives an example of French film *Hiroshima mon amour* which "explores the possibility of a faithful history in the very indirectness of this telling" (Caruth, 1996: 27); instead of speaking directly of Hiroshima's devastation, the film tells the story of a French actress and her tragic love for a German solder, who happens to be killed just before their planned escape, on the day when Paris is liberated. Thus a story of a tragic love and loss in France becomes the other side of the story of Hiroshima, which for Alain Resnais, the film director, was impossible to tell in a direct way.

> The filmmaker Alan Resnais had originally been commissioned to take a documentary on Hiroshima, but after several months of collecting archival footage he had refused to carry out the project, claiming that such a film would not significantly differ from his previous documentary on concentration camps (*Nuit et brouillard*). In his refusal to make a documentary on Hiroshima, Resnais paradoxically implies that it is direct archival footage that cannot maintain the very specificity of the event. And it would appear, equally paradoxically, that it is through the fictional story, not *about* Hiroshima but taking the place at its site, that Resnais and Duras believe such historical specificity is conveyed (Caruth, 1996: 27).

The strategy used in *Hiroshima mon amour* to face the trauma in a mediated way, recognizing its presence, and at the same time recognizing the impossibility of approaching it directly, is not unlike the strategy that Jasmila Žbanić uses much later in her films, where the war in Bosnia of the 1990s is the ultimate trauma behind the apparent normalcy of everyday life years later. Following Kai Erikson, we can say that the war is present in her films both as individual and as collective trauma, where individual trauma is understood as "a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively", while collective trauma is "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that

damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson, 1995: 187). Thus both her films look into the complex processes of the belated effect of traumatic experiences and the ways they structure the social and personal lives of her characters.

In a particular way, traumatic experience is deeply paradoxical; while on the one hand it resists being revealed, on the other it is yearning for articulation. Trauma "is always a story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, 1996: 4). This urge to speak the unspeakable, to give a voice to an experience that evades being approached in memory, is a real challenge of representation. For trauma to be understood, its 'immediacy' must be studied as it unfolds according to its own dynamic, at once *outside* and yet *inside* the same moment, as a kind of index of historical reality – a historical reality "to whose truth there is no simple access"[1] (Baer, 2002: 10-11). In persons suffering from trauma, this paradox becomes translated into mediated forms of communication, where body language often tends to replace or supplement verbalization. Jasmila Žbanić is aware of this, and she extensively uses the body language of her characters in building her filmic narratives on the work of trauma, and on its survival. Through body language what is repressed becomes visible, and thus representable and recordable.

Referring to the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, who has extensively used the medium of photography in his exploration of hysterical subjects, Baer claims that "[a] theory of trauma was thus born from the will to see" (Baer, 2002: 14). In Charcot's case, as Baer points out, the use of photography was problematic because of the way he was using his patients, and because of his trust in documentary value of recorded images. "[R]epresentation of trauma cannot constitute evidence; it documents precisely the abolition of referential systems on which the notion of evidence depends" (Baer, 2002: 117). Contrary to this approach which treats trauma as an object to be approached through presumably proper observation, Baer emphasizes a deep, structural similarity between photography and traumatic experience:

> this odd circumstance – that human perception, unlike camera, views reality as coherent, except when it has suffered a devastating shock – points to the hidden matrix linking trauma and photography. Unless it has been traumatically disrupted, and thus cannot be properly

1 Baer refers here to Caruth, 1996, p. 6.

> called 'memory', memory lacks a rewind button, the capacity to relay instants of experience without aligning them with meaning; it arranges things according to a *then* and *now*, a *before*, *during*, and *after*. Everything seen is praised out of its singular occurrence and reviewed as part of a series of events unfolding through lived time (170-171).

If the work of memory is compared to work of the camera or the unfolding of a movie, then the question is how to represent the disruption caused by traumatic experience in this flow of events which re-produces lived experience. In both feature films of Jasmila Žbanić, memory work and traumatic experiences have particular importance since she focuses on the post-conflict social reality. In order to address trauma Žbanić uses visual devices, putting the emphasis on the body language of her actors. Body language thus becomes the language of trauma and the way to approach the unspeakable "in a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (Caruth, 1996: 5).

In both her films Žbanić focuses on individual traumas which are inseparable from a collective trauma of the war in Bosnia. In *Grbavica* the collective trauma of the war is introduced through implied history of mass rapes of Moslem women, which was a war strategy of Serbian forces (on the use of body in ideological and war battles in former Yugoslavia see Žarkov, 2007). *On the Path* points to the link between repressive religious ideology and the vestiges of war which open the space for such an ideological intervention exactly because the social tissue has been so profoundly damaged by the collective trauma; the female body is again at the core of the ideological project, this time as an object of control.

In *Grbavica* we can even say that the story unfolds through the points of disruptions in which trauma of sexual violence keeps intruding into seemingly ordinary reality of everyday life; these instances of intrusion are visualized in the body language of Mirjana Karanović as Esma, the mother of a girl born out of mass rapes. As the story unfolds, there is a progression in the intensity of disruptions, which go together with the expression of Esma's traumatic experiences, from silent repression to outward verbalization. The first such moment, at the very beginning of the film, is a scene in which Esma and Sara, mother and daughter, play in their flat in a rather physical way. The game involves a lot of laughter, starting from a pillow fight and tickling, to end up abruptly when Sara pins her mother down, holding her hands rather tightly to the floor. At that moment, Esma's body tightens and her voice changes and she insists on stopping the game. Her voice is still low,

but there are hints of serious disturbance behind it, which will become clear to the viewer only later; at the first sight the whole scene still reads as the mothers decision to stop the game for whatever reason. But soon after that scene, Esma is seen in quite a crowded tram, surrounded by sweaty bodies. When a particularly big man with his shirt half open comes too close to her, and Esma suddenly decides to leave the tram, her body becomes visibly tensed making it becomes obvious that her reaction is not only motivated by some usual dislike of crowds.

The following scene also seems to be very ordinary. Esma enters a small shop to buy a fish for lunch, asking for a bigger trout, as her daughter loves to eat them. Later in the film, once we get to know the deep trauma that is related to Sara's birth, this simple scene looks like a statement of love, which has to be related to another important detail: Sara gets the whole fish, while her mother eats a simple potato. This detail suggests a common sacrificial attitude of a single mother without much money who offers the best to her daughter. But the later development of the plot shows that Esma's devotion to her daughter is deep, highly complex and sacrificial in a particular way. And yet, when Sara starts asking about the certificate confirming that her father died as a war martyr (as she was told by her mother), Esma's body becomes rigid, while she becomes even aggressive to her daughter: while cutting Sara's fingernails, she slips and cuts too deep. In real life, such mistakes occur, and they do not have to carry the meaning I ascribe to it here; but *Grbavica* is a text in which it becomes one of the early signifiers of complex relations between Esma and Sara, which cannot be seen through the usual range of problems that characterize mother-daughter relations. As viewers only get to know later, Esma was not only a victim of mass-rapes in war, she was also intentionally impregnated and forced to give birth. Esma's story and personal trauma is directly related in the film to the similar stories of other women in a series of scenes which occur in a support group, obviously an NGO Center, which is also a place where Esma in the end finds the strength to speak about the violence she was exposed to.

Esma's traumatic memories keep coming back in everyday life in a number of ways and the film is saturated with such moments, out of which I want to emphasize one that is significant for understanding her views. When attacked physically by her violent boss, Esma is saved by her male colleague Pelda, who risks his life to protect her, but also uses violence on that occasion. Unexpectedly, Esma is not grateful, but horrified, and screams at Pelda in rage: "You are all animals", and this cry obviously does not refer primarily to the given moment, but to her previous experiences. Since

Esma is obviously thinking of men here, this is a point in which violence is radically gendered, both in the war and in the post-war context. In this scene it becomes finally clear that for Esma the post-war reality of Sarajevo translates into two separate realities. One is the sphere of aggressive, violent behavior, occupied mostly by men. It is the sphere where violence continues to be reproduced, both as sexual and as criminal violence; the night club where Esma works, with its aggressive music, sex workers and wild party atmosphere is a highly persuasive picture of that sphere of social life.

The other sphere, opposed to the first one, is the sphere of female friendship and support. The women in the film create among themselves a number of alternative, protective spaces and networks of mutual support which permeate society. Women do many small services for each other, like sewing, sharing what they have, or offering emotional support. It is Esma's best friend who helps her to work late shifts by coming round in the evenings to look after her daughter. When Esma desperately needs money to pay for her daughter's school excursion, she is refused by all (her employer, her family, her female NGO, that is an official institution which is supposed to help her) but her female friends and acquaintances: the money is collected among female factory workers who give small sums, apparently all they have, to help a woman in need. Thus a female workplace, in this case a small factory, manufacturing ugly, absolutely unfashionable shoes which nobody would ever buy and which look like some forgotten remnant of the socialist times, becomes a place of support.

But Jasmila Žbanić does not go in for simple statements, and while Esma's world is rather strictly divided into two gendered spheres, the film as a whole does not operate with simple divisions between presumed models of aggressive masculinity and supportive femininity. Žbanić is not oblivious to the fact that both women and men are victimized by the war, and how hard it is to find the way back into the normalcy of everyday life. Former soldiers like Pelda cannot become civilians overnight; in the post-war reality they cannot simply go back to their pre-war lives. Many of them, after fighting bravely against the aggression, end up being exploited by the new, often criminalized business elite, or leave for good in search of a new life in some distant country. Pelda himself is a warm person, who is desperately searching for the body of his killed father, and gently cares for his elderly mother, mentally trapped in the horrors of the war. In contrast, Esma's aunt does not belong to the protective network of women; instead, she represents a repressive patriarchal logic which tends to further humiliate victims of sexual violence. When Esma meets her in a shopping mall, this obviously rich older

woman in an expensive fur coat refuses to lend Esma much needed money, but manages to offend her deeply with her false compassion, which is articulated in such a way as to show that Esma's daughter and motherhood are shameful and a disgrace to the whole family.

Trauma of Esma's victimization get at one point to be inscribed into Sara's body as well, but she attempts to defy it. The way Jasmila Žbanić uses the motive of hair is indicative of these processes. At some point, while still not knowing the truth, Sara asks her mother what she has inherited from her father. Obviously distressed, Esma at first denies any similarity, and then identifies Sara's hair as a point of resemblance. A while later, in a violent scene in which Sara points a gun to her mother asking for 'the truth,' Esma finally breaks down and starts hitting her daughter while telling her the actual story of how she was raped and forcibly inseminated. After initial shock and denial, Sara goes and shaves her head, thus cutting off her hair in a dramatic, and yet a positive move which means a symbolic dissociation from her unknown, violent father (Lukić, 2010).

For Jasmila Žbanić, motherhood is not an issue of biology, it is about choice, love, care, and dignity. When Esma finally tells her story, and speaks about her initial decision to reject the child she was forced to have, she also remembers how she changed her mind. As she says, when she was brought the baby for the first time, it was "so beautiful", and there was "so little beauty" in her life. Thus the nameless baby, who is to become Sara, is associated with beauty and happiness, and not with biological, predetermined love. Esma's decision to keep the baby and her ability to open herself to deep and unselfish love for her daughter, powerfully transforms the history of violence into *her*story of love and devotion. Thus Sara was at first dissociated by her mother from the logic of war rapes, where the masculine principle is assumed to have power over the female body and is using it as a territory to conquer, or as a vessel to introduce 'foreign blood' into an otherwise assumingly 'pure national body' thus 'polluting' it. But as the film shows, it is not a simple decision; Esma does remain deeply scared by the violence she lived through, and her trauma gets to be continually evoked in a number of ways by the society. But when Sara cuts off her hair, she confirms her mother's refusal to be overpowered by the logic of violence. It is also her way to face the trauma and free her body from its inscription.

The story of Jasmila Žbanić's second film *On the Path* is once again located in contemporary Sarajevo, where two young people live a seemingly ordinary life. Luna is a stewardess, and Amar a flight controller. They live together, and hope to have a baby, which seem to necessitate artificial in-

semination. They seem to be a happy and rather well functioning couple. But it soon becomes clear that Amar has a serious drinking problem, which leads to suspension from his workplace and a search for a new job. After he starts cooperating with a religious Moslem group as a computer specialist, he gradually comes closer to their teaching, finding in faith the consolation and support to reorganize his life. But for Luna this change is unacceptable, since it goes together with Amar's acceptance of very rigid religious imperatives which, if she were to obey them, would in the end change profoundly the way she is supposed to see herself. In the end, Luna gets pregnant, but she is not sure if she wants to keep the baby, and the couple split up. The final scene in which the two protagonists part with the mutual invitation to the other party to 'come back' from the divergent paths they are taking is a very good image of the conflict between the two views, Luna's secular liberal position and Amar's normative religious one. The religious denomination in question is Islam but the way the film approaches the problem is definitely not limited to Islam; moreover, since both protagonists are coming from the Moslem background, growing misunderstandings between them do not translate into one more simplified replica referring to the 'clash of civilizations'. In dealing with religious norms, Žbanić is rather interested in effects that any social dogma can have on the life of individuals if taken literally. A number of issues Jasmila Žbanić raises in her film can appear in any other comparable context (thus the camp on Jablanica Lake in which everybody calls each other 'brothers' and 'sisters,' where the day is strictly organized for everybody, and communication with the outer world is restricted, can strangely remind older viewers of repressive communism).

Amar's statement "I only want to be a better man", which sums up the essence of his religious conversion, is of crucial importance here. Amar turns to religion at the moment when he is lost, and the model of life he was following has failed him. He loses his job, the anti-alcoholic therapy does not work for him, and he does not know where to turn for real help. His former fellow-soldier Bahrija comes at the right moment, telling him about his personal post-war crisis and how religion (he became in the meantime a follower of a radical Islam movement) saved him from committing suicide. In that encounter it becomes clear that both Bahrija and Amar were solders who have to fight PTS and its aftereffects. Bahrija offers religion as his answer to war traumas, and when Amar starts to work for Bahrija's religious community; he gradually adopts the teachings of the group. The problem arises when the changes Amar goes through start to affect the other people around him, Luna in the first place, but also his friends and extended

family. And again it is important to note that Jasmila Žbanić points to different ways of practicing religion, that is, of being a follower of one idea. Contrasted to Amar's slowly developing radicalism is a more relaxed understanding of what it means to be a Moslem, represented in Luna's family by her grandmother and grandfather. It is a more open and merrier way of understanding the world, where Bayram is celebrated with food, liquor and music. Offended in his newly found asceticism, Amar attacks the hosts and the guests, telling them that they are betraying the Koran, even claiming that the war and genocide in Bosnia came as a punishment for such a behavior. Apart from general consternation, his words provoke Luna's grandmother's answer, which is worth quoting here, as a strong statement of woman's power, and an indication of the tradition that Luna comes from:

> Shut up! Don't you try to tell me whether I am a good Moslem or not. And my man, if he drinks, he can drink. He has earned enough praise with Allah. And you, if you do not like it, just go. Here I am the one who rules, not mullah, nor Reis.

These are the words of an obviously strong woman who affirms her agency, which is important since she offers very different model of facing trauma then the one adopted by Amar; Luna's grandmother is a woman who has lost in the war her only daughter, Luna's mother, and was forced to leave her house in Bijeljina becoming a refugee. She cannot walk, and this physical handicap appears in the film as one of the visual indications of her deep war traumas. But she is in control of her life, which is focused on people around her. Luna is also traumatized by the war, in which she lost both her parents. Her reaction to trauma is also very different to Amar's. While he searches for support in religion, Luna remained disappointed in such a consolation; at some point she explains to Amar that she prayed for her parents not to be killed, but it did not help. Luna's attitude is more similar to that of her grandmother; she wants to go on with her life, and be in control of her choices. At one point she even goes back to Bijeljina to see the family house she was forced to leave, and finds there a little girl playing in the street; when the girl understands that Luna used to live there, she tells her at first assertively "I live here now", but then also asks her a seemingly naive question: "Why did you leave?". Bijeljina, now belonging to Bosnian entity Republika Srpska, is known as one of the places where war-crimes over Moslem population were massive. Obviously born after the war, the girl playing in front of the house does not know anything about its history,

and her question is an indication of the way in which recent historical events are interpreted and represented there. But for a viewer with hope it can be also an indication that after that first question to which the girl does not get an answer, she might in the future ask her parents and neighbors that inevitable, second one, "and what have you been doing in the war?". The scene is also important since Luna also recognizes herself in that little girl, whom she just caresses gently on the cheek.

As it was the case in *Grbavica*, *On the Path* also puts an emphasis on the body as the site of trauma, which in this case is not only related with the war, but also with the failing relationship between the two main characters. The film starts with a scene in which Luna is carefully recording images of her own body; the eyepiece of her mobile phone camera functions like the eye of a careful observer who wants to understand the object of its examination, and it seems as if her own body is both close and distant to her. The scene is important as the first characterization of Luna and her attitude towards her body and her sexuality. On the formal level, the scene also points to Luna's body as a site of ideological negotiation. The key points in the unfolding of the narrative in the film are related to changes in the way Luna invests her body in the relationship with Amar, and the changes in the way Amar sees her body. At the very beginning there are several scenes in which physical closeness between Luna and Amar is emphasized, not only in the act of making love, but also in everyday communication. The way they share the bathroom, including the sentence "flush the toilet; it stinks", expresses this particularly well. But when Amar starts changing, his attitude towards sexuality also changes; spontaneity is replaced with his wish to codify their relationship and get married in a religious ceremony. He begins to refuse sex outside marriage, proclaiming that a child should not be conceived out of wedlock. If Amar's war trauma previously led him to alcoholism, religion interferes with his sexuality, and makes him less comfortable in his own body, which has to follow a set of new restrictions in communication with other bodies (like the restriction on shaking hands with women). While the first love scenes between Luna and Amar indicate physical closeness and mutual joy, the sexual act after Amar's return from Jablanica Lake resembles much more a violent taking over and possession of Luna's body rather than an act of love. Luna's answer to this new situation is to gradually distance herself from Amar. For some time Luna 'tries to understand', but it is hard since the new situation threatens her integrity. She recognizes that the system of values that Amar has adopted ultimately aims at controlling her body, and thus in denying her agency.

Since the changes in Amar's life are so dramatic, for a large part of the film it seems as if the title refers primarily to him, and his quest. But Luna is also on the path on which she has to make hard choices. Luna's decision to leave Amar and to terminate her pregnancy can be interpreted in view of Sara Ahmed's rereading of the concept of happiness, where the happiness is not seen as fulfillment of some life project, but as a decision to be in control and to keep open possibilities. "We might need to attend to bad feelings not in order to overcome them but to learn by how we are affected by what comes near, which means achieving a different relationship to all our wanted and unwanted feelings as an ethical resource" claims Ahmed, adding later that "[i]t is important to avoid creating a romance or duty out of feelings that can be experienced as unbearable" (Ahmed, 2010: 216-7). When in the parting scene Luna attempts to kiss Amar in answer to his claim "I love you, what more is needed?", it is her body that decides, it recognizes the distance and the impossibility of this relationship, which was supposed to make her happy, but which is threatening to become a long lasting trauma.

If following Caruth we look at the story of Luna and Amar as an indirect narrative on the war and its traumatic effects on the post-war realities, it is the impossibility to speak about the war and its continuous presence that make the paradoxical reality of the post-conflict reality. Luna and Amar do not talk about the war, and Amar only mentions it when talking to Bahrija, whom he fought with. Luna does not talk about her war experiences either, only shortly with her best friend, when her friend speaks with a bitter humor about the way she saw Luna at that time. The war is present everywhere, but as the life goes on it is at the same time more and more repressed into the silenced trauma, the one which would for the long time have power to "blow to the basic tissues of social life" and to "damages the bonds attaching people together". This is the perspective shared by both films of Jasmila Žbanić.

Literature:

Ahmed, Sara. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Baer, Ulrich. 2002. *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press.

Berger, James. 1997. "Trauma and Literary Theory". *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 569-582

Caruth, Cathy. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.

Erikson, Kai. 1995. "Notes on Trauma and Community". In: *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. by Cathy Caruth. London: The John Hopkins University Press.

Lukić, Jasmina. 2010. "Engendering Closure: Reading *Grbavica* in a Feminist Perspective". In: *Gender/Genre*. Ed. by Kornelia Slavova and Isabelle Boof-Vermesse. Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press.

Žarkov, Dubravka. 2007. *The body of war: media, ethnicity, and gender in the break-up of Yugoslavia*. Durham: Duke University Press,

Filmography:

Jasmila Žbanić. 2010. *Na putu* (Eng. transl. *On the Path*). Sarajevo: Deblokada.

Jasmila Žbanić. 2005. *Grbavica* (Eng. transl. *Grbavica, the Land of My Dreams*). Sarajevo: Deblokada.

Irina Novikova

Post-Socialist Politics of Memory and Women's Narratives of their Past: Baltic Contexts

I.

In the former socialist and Soviet nations the power of the past has been increasingly called upon to offer "each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage" (Lefebre, 1997: 139). Models of a 'consensus' upon the past were expected to manage the continuation of a past into the present as a point of radical historical impact upon the future, "a crucial test of what is left of our capacity to imagine change" (Jameson, 1991; xvi). Forging a postsocialist consensus required a meticulous selection of *lieux de mémoire* and *textes de mémoire* that would sublimate political imperatives of re-imagining nation, identity, history and generate mnemonic communities and their cultural engagement with what Kiril Stanilov calls "the phenomenon of the path dependency (the ability of the past to impact the future)" (Stanilov, 2007: 6).

The late 1980s–1990s in the Baltic societies were a time of launching the mobilization of oral and written memory narratives about the loss of independence in 1940, exile in 1944, deportations of 1941 and 1949, political and ideological repressions, resistance and dissent. They were seen as giving meaning to the Baltic experiences in the Soviet past as historical dislocations of the nations, thus explicitly catalysing nationalist narrativizations of

the past, which centred on the discourse of historical trauma. The narratives of loss, exile, deportation were claimed in their mnemonic function directing individual and collective consciousness back to the nodal points in what makes a common history and social memory.

In Estonia such narratives could be found in the published volumes (1989–1997) *Life Stories for the Association for Estonian Life Histories*, as well as *Do you remember your life story? Estonian biographies* (1989) and *The fate of me and my kin in the turns of history ('My destiny and the destiny of those close to me in the labyrinths of history')* (1996). As Ene Koresaar points out, the proportion of men's biographies is very low in these collections of biographical interviews (Koressar, 2004). Several collections of life stories followed, e.g., 1995 – *Women's Biographies*, 1996 – *Biographies about Love, Marriage and Sexuality*, 1998 – *Life Stories of the Teachers of the Baltic Countries*, predominantly women's narratives. One of the most popular projects of the 1990s was *A Hundred Biographies of the Century. Estonian Life Stories* (1999), edited and translated by Tiina Kirss and compiled by Ruut Hinrikus, with the blurb stating that the collection:

> (…) contains 25 selected life stories collected from Estonians who lived through the tribulations of the 20th century, and describe the travails of ordinary people under numerous regimes: (…) The autobiographical accounts provide authentic perspectives on events of this period, where time is placed in the context of life-spans, and subjects grounded in personal experience. Most of the life stories reveal sufferings under foreign (Russian) oppression. (…) very few of the so-called Russian Estonians' life histories have been collected in comparison with the life histories of the deported (Kirss, Hinrikus, 2009).

The volume *She Who Remembers Survives. Interpreting Estonian Women's Post-Soviet Life Stories* (2004) was compiled by Tiina Kirss, Ene Koresaar, Marju Lauristin. Represented in this volume are "survivors of deportation to Siberia, those who lived in Estonia through and beyond the Soviet occupation and the Western Estonian diaspora", and Koresaar points out that the "relation with the Great History is central in the life stories of older Estonians. The fate of oneself and one's family is represented as exemplary with regard to the history of the whole nation" (Koresaar, 2004).

Tiina Kirss points to a discursive framework sustained in the proliferation of the life-story genre in ex-Soviet Estonia:

> … horizon of interpretation needed sacred icons to justify their own destiny and a sense of group identity. One of those sacred icons was the horror of Siberia; a rather undifferentiated martyrological image of Siberia based on the deportations of 1941 took root in diaspora literature, journalism, and the rhetoric of speeches at public commemorative events such as Estonian Independence Day and 14 June, the anniversary of the 1941 deportations (Kirss, 2005).

The figure of the Siberian survivor and diaspora torchbearer (Kirss, 2005) overwhelmed memory discourses, and even more, the symbolic capital and political currency of Siberian survivorship became a focal narrative element in re-writing the past. At the same time, as Estonian researchers note, "the Estonians throughout the Soviet era, the least coherent of the three in terms of a perceived group identity, have been understudied, even silenced" (Kirss, 2005).

In Latvia, the large-scale Oral History project *My Father's Home* (life stories) was organized in the 1990s, and its introduction gives a marshalling statement for the readers:

> A prisoner's psychology does not disappear when the prison gates are opened, and a free human consciousness does not come when society comes out of a totalitarian system. Thus, we look at life-stories in terms of information as well as a source of renewed values, important for the society's life (Zirnite, 2001: 3).

Generally, the *textes de mémoire* genres of the 1990s in Latvia consisted of: life stories (women); interviews of the repressed people (mostly women); publications about the deportation and repression period; women's autobiographical novels and poetry.

Since 1991, publications of life stories of the deported and repressed (women prevailed among the postwar deported groups) were defined as *likteņstāsti* (or *tales of destiny)* – representation of one's own life story turns into a real tale of national destiny. Vieda Skultans argues in *The Testimonies of Lives* (1998): "Each spoke of an individual life and yet rested on a common structure. (…) similarities between these life histories derive both from Latvian history and from membership of a symbolic and textual community" (Skultans, 1997: 181). Skultans also emphasizes the collective nature of these narratives assuming a responsibility for representing Latvian destiny gene-

rally, and women framed their accounts as typical of other Latvian women's lives.

From 1990, the extensive publication of the lives of deportees and prisoners unwittingly provided literary models of story-telling in Latvian women's writing of the 2000s, as for example, Laimdota Sēle: *Māte man teica* (My Mother Told Me, 2004), Māra Svīre: *Orhidejas zem zilām ziemas debesīm* (Orchids under a Winter's Blue Sky, 2004), Terēze Svilāne, *Marianna Zariņa: Bezpavalstniece ar diplomāta pasi* (Stateless Woman with a Diplomat's Passport, 2004) and others.

Lithuania, however, provides us with a challenging perspective on ex-Soviet women's life-stories and their importance for nationalist politics of memory – in Dalia Grinkevičiūtė's *Lithuanians by the Laptev Sea* published in 1988, before the Soviet implosion, later translated into English. The nationalized reading of this text still persists, and the preface by Vitautas Landsbergis, a prominent nationalist intellectual and politician, tells us that the text offers the true version of what happened – an eyewitness account: "Dalia Grinkevičiūtė's mission was to testify about what happened." Landsbergis's reading of the memoirs, in the spirit of representational realism, encourages Lithuanian identity to be re-claimed by using the trauma of deportations as a departure point along a chronological timeline towards independence. His preface provides the frame of reference for securing a privileged political reading of the text. But, as Jarilyn Sambrooke argues, this reading of the narrative implies a problematic cause and effect logic of history:

> The text is seen to give a departure point from which Lithuanians now move. The text becomes a 'cause', representing the deportations and violence of the Soviet regime, against which contemporary Lithuanians are encouraged to react. By supporting an independent, free Lithuania, in which such deportations would never again occur, one is seen as responding appropriately to the violence of the past. If the deportation is the 'cause', then a free Lithuania is the 'effect'. Grinkevičiūtė's text, then, is useful in as far as it furthers the political agenda of an independent Lithuania, but the experience of deportation is then subjected to this narrowly functional reading. All details of the experience that do not relate to this political narrative are forgotten, or at least deemed less significant. The logic of cause and effect simplifies both the experience of deportation and the role of the narratives in the Lithuanian community. Reading the memoirs as a

> statement of national identity – as was done both at the time of their publication in 1988 as well as in current discussions – encourages Lithuanian identity to be developed by using the Soviet past as a departure point along a chronological timeline towards independence (Sambrooke, 2008).

A popular view upon these life stories and memory narratives still persists that their value and meaning is in their *realist* expression of the deportations as they were truly experienced (Skultans, Landsbergis). Viktorija Daujotytė, on the other hand, suggests that this emphasis on realist documentation and truth-telling limits the potential of the text, as in the case with Grinkevičiūtė's narrative which actually invites its readers beyond the dominant model of 'testimony' or 'truth-telling' and reduction to the sameness:

> Documentation is an important feature of her texts, but no less important are other features, like the aspects of the writing that relate to the quality of the texts, and a phenomenally down-to-earth participation of the writer in the narrative structures. The text is based on dialogue; it conveys creativity and a striving for one's language (including that of the narrator) to connect with the thoughts and words of others (quoted from Sambrooke, 2008).

This case is quite telling of how the post-Soviet politics of remembrance culture has been intensively struggling with the non-linearity of social and individual memory, how the multivocality of memories on women's spaces, experiences, interactions and controversies through the Soviet regime was epistemically defused. Meike Wulf, for example, used the metaphor of 'peeling-off' the past: "Estonians peeled off, layer by layer, the interpretations of the past, which had been forced upon them, until their private or countermemory became a part of the new official national memory in 1991" (Wulf, 2000: 43). In this narrative construction of a nation-time's ideal temporal linearity, 'historical memory' was primarily understood as the destiny of a small nation, who "has been great in its sufferings" (Mart Laar for Estonians, 1988, quoted from Budryte, 2005; 181), and "The narrative of fate and image of deportations have become a central 'voice' of national identity in postsocialist Latvia" (Zelce, 2011).

A discursive grid of fate/suffering/trauma contributed to generating a sense of social and political proximity and intimacy when suffering and

survival become major determinants in one's ethnic and cultural belonging: "It is also characteristic that if one's own family was untouched by more serious trouble, the revolutionary events of history are described on the basis of the tragic life of an acquaintance, neighbour, schoolmate or a relative. ….The main line is the suffering of the nation and the survival of the nation" (Koresaar, 2004). For example:

> I have often thought what a miraculous power it is that keeps alive and living this tiny nation, whose distant ancestors chose to live in this harsh, stony and windy, but still beautiful place – Estonia, Maarjamaa. Probably this power is the Estonians' great toughness, vitality, hard work and thirst for freedom. Like no storm can destroy a juniper on the rocky ground of an island, neither can the small Estonian nation be turned nonexistent, because its roots are too deep to reach them. When 2 hard wars, 3 occupations and several Stalinist 'spring cleanings' swept over Estonia in just a couple of years, at first it felt as if now there would not be even the sound of the Estonian language heard on the shores of the Baltic Sea. But what a surprise – in spite of all the devils, the Estonians survived. Like a bug in a crack, no fire or water could damage them (Koressar, 2004).

The selected narrative focalization and dominant narrative template of women's life stories generated a dominant image of Soviet pastness through memories addressing predominantly the Stalinist period – repressions, ideological pressure and persecution, nationalisation and collectivisation, etc., and the social present was looked at through the binary of past perfect/past evil. An individual life course within this collectively lived past was narrated as endangered by external forces and unable to control one's life as the Soviet public sphere is constantly and threateningly existent and alien (Koresaar 2004). A strong rhetoric of *victimization* accompanied the image of the historical 'rupture' both in the public discourse and in life stories.

This 'competition of victimhood' (a phrase coined by Lithuanian philosopher Leonidas Donskis) allowed for resorting to the dominant ideological discourse of ethnic nationhood, in its purity subjugated to the two occupations of the 20th century. Thus, the issues of the Holocaust and collaborationism were implicitly framed as the problems of individuals and their responsibility for crimes and collaboration, having nothing to do with the ideality of an occupied state and subjugated nation. This proliferating tendency of developing 'competition among victims' in the 1990s-early 2000s

dominated in the ex-Soviet politics of memory that actually "turned into an arena of domestic and foreign politics in which the claim of retribution for sufferings caused to these or those groups in the past, has become a solid argument, used for providing the interests of today" (Вельцер 2005).

The older generations of women were attributed the symbolic role of carriers of the national-narrative continuity in having retained the fundamental values of the pre-Soviet 'past perfect' all throughout the Soviet occupation period, and the narrative focalization on 'past perfect' actually implied devaluation and the abjection of women's (their daughters') life experiences and stories in the Soviet period. In the shared narrative formula of older women's stories, their childhood becomes a national childhood in the society of pre-traumatic (pre-1940) patrimonial harmony and well-being, peasantlike wisdom of the state and ethnonational values, which *would have permanently remained, had they not been robbed from us* (quote from a story). The pre-war central social force in the Baltic countries was the peasant. The national ideology of rural life promoted by agrarian nationalists in the three Baltic nation-states turned into the authoritarian state ideology of the 1930s. At the centre of society there was no individual any more, but the state as an independent value. The doctrine of this national order was ethnic solidarism, as a norm for both the state and the individual, a continuity to be reclaimed in the post-Soviet bucolic narrative scape of women's childhood stories.

Historical nostalgia was at the core of post-Soviet national revivals in the Baltic societies – it signified "a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment" (Boym, 2001: 49). This kind of nostalgia fed by linear historical imagination, or restorative nostalgia, stresses 'nostos' and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home and protects the absolute truth. This nostalgic ordering of a past into a 'past perfect' is a potentially destructive and intolerant kind of nostalgia (Boym, 2001). Restorative nostalgia is an ideological product of a cultural apparatus dictated by authority (*nostos*), and it suppresses the diversities and complexities of more personal, emotional responses – reflective nostalgia (*algia* – longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance) (Boym, 2001).

On the one hand, the Baltic societies failed to agree "about the meaning of the later Soviet period in its history, which in its turn put the pressure on the older generation, who had lived their fruitful working life during the Soviet occupation" (Koresaar 2004). On the other, the narrative *Bildung* formula of childhood and its rupture employed in women's memory narratives was ideologically important for re-claiming the view of history as

a unilinear evolutionist progress. This view re-evolved as an undisputable rationale of ethnic identity, a fundamental, pre-discursive 'core', individual as well as national, over possible digressive ruptures in national history (e.g., Soviet occupation).

Furthermore, this narrative chronotope became a frame of reference to generate the social intimacy/distance/polarization relations (e.g., the title of the competition project run by the Estonian Life Histories Association, *My Destiny and the Destiny of Those Close to Me*). Narrative constructions of social proximity, intimacy, distance and agency emotionally facilitated the emergence, proliferation and acceptance of the alienating cliché of 'former Soviet migrants' (or colonists) in the media, popular and political discourses, and later the political category of 'aliens' in Estonia and Latvia, among them thousands of women, having turned a potential demographic into a political threat to the re-born ethnic nation.

The narrative politics of memory – either in life stories or in other textual/visual genres – had a long-term impact on the social behaviour of women in the immediate post-perestroika period, on their interactions and networking, and on their political agency. The 'unwanted past' (Young and Kaczmarek, 2008: 53) should be if not abjected and eliminated, then obscured – 'A Time Ignored', as Ene Koresaar called this component of memory politics in Estonia. Possible proximity nodes and solidarity spaces among women were dissolved vis-à-vis an emerging subaltern condition beyond re-imagined 'identities' and proliferating destiny narratives.

As Alexander Kiossev argues for Bulgaria:

> … more or less everyone who is anyone in public life has written memoirs or autobiographical novels – very few public figures reckoned that it might be better to remain silent, and not even one tried to write something in the 'repentance' genre…. The two types of narratives – one normalizing (sometimes even nostalgic or heroic) narrative of 'the glorious socialist years', the other self-victimizing and demonizing the communist crimes – were so different that it sometimes seemed as though they were about another country and other times. (…) That is also why twenty years after its historical collapse, communism still cannot turn into a 'legacy', it cannot become an unquestionable, rationalized fact from the past which the former socialist countries can regard from a distance and of which they can have an indisputable picture/evaluation – as was the case with German Na-

zism, Italian fascism and Japanese racist militarism after the Second World War (Kiossev, 2011: 655).

This condition between 'stories not told' and 'more truth than ever' in the Baltic politics of memory – among other discursive and political factors – generated a high degree of social distanciation and political de-solidarization among women of 'incompatible differences' (Us, national women, and Them – migrants, occupants, unloyal, postimperial, reproductive threat…). The interaction between women's memory narratives and dominant conservative ideologies of women's agency in the ex-Soviet Baltic societies inflected an overwhelming tendency among women towards anti-feminism. The anti-feminism of the 1990s had three pillars, namely the hegemonic discourse of the 1930s national ideal of womanhood (memory of our 'strong grandmothers') or childhood, a media-sustained conservative backlash against Soviet sex equality policies (mothers' experiences and memories compromised by the alien regime) and a neoliberal advance that brought about the feminization of poverty and deterioration of the former social policy frameworks.

Furthermore, the double temporal conception of the nation was re-activated when "the nation presents itself as a project of the future, and, on the other hand, as a project grounded in a mythically original past as well" (Wenk 2000: 69). Women's micro-history emerged as a historical contingency, a story of survival, victimhood and trauma. Men's macro-history – either in its gloriously transcendent Hansa glory in Latvia and in Estonia, or in its royal genealogy in Lithuania, or in its Nordic proximity – as a 'stargate' entry into the valorised 'torrent' of corporate global capital. Restorative nostalgia provided an 'affective turn' of post-socialist futurist imaginations, a shared passion for a linear and teleological imagination which seemed – before the crisis dawned upon us – to celebrate Utopia as "compulsive repetition" (Žižek, 2001) instead of heterotopic imaginations of liminality and change.

Thinking about *textes* as *lieux de mémoire* created to commemorate tragic events of the past we enter a complex interrelation between the 'event' as a referential correspondence, and the statements of truth claims upon its meaning and significance, as well as their rhetorical and ideological aspects, and we have to draw a sharp distinction between history and commemoration, between the actual historical record and the mythological appropria-

tion of the past (Caruth, 1995: 8).[1] A temporal interval between a traumatic affect (emotion during an event) and the return of the repressed (memorialisation) has a consequence – the resistance of the traumatizing experience to its historicization (LaCapra, 2001). As Cathy Caruth argues that to "be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (…) and the traumatic experience has affect only, not meaning. It produces emotions …" (in: Caplan 2005: 5). However, the meaning of a collective traumatic experience can be processed into the political affect of this experience as an overwhelmingly national trauma reflected in *lieux de mémoire*. Such politics of acting out trauma as possession by an image or an event results in "a melancholic possession of the subject by the repressed past" (ibid.). Thus, as Dominic LaCapra points out, the belatedness of the return of the repressed makes the structure of traumatic experience resist historicization as it becomes the representation (*lieu de mémoire*) of recovery from the effects of trauma that marks not only a past event, but the fear of its recurrence in the future, thus turning into an "open wound" (La Capra, 1998: 125).

The question remains, however, if practices of 'de-historicized nostalgia' ('acting out,' that repeat traumatic events) have been in any visible ways gearing to 'working through' and allowing space for critical self-reflection (ibid., 512) and cultural and symbolic practices that allow for historicization, mourning, and transformative memory work (La Capra, 2001).

As Jeffrey Alexander argues, events themselves do not create a collective trauma, but trauma is a socially mediated attribute of the event or experience. It turns into a totalizing 'national affect' and a view upon the past is constructed exclusively and dogmatically in terms of suffering, loss, trauma and nostalgia. The unwanted past turns into a totalizing image of the annihilation of subject and subjectivity, thus, inferring an affect of absolute victimization of a nation and an individual, unable of own/ed value judgements about his/her past and its memories. In this affective logic, the processes of democratization and *perestroika* in the late Soviet period, national movements for restoring independence and Singing Revolutions in the Baltic societies should be prescribed as purely derivative of external geopolitical battles. The statics of the binaries colonist-colonizer, occupant-occupied, migrants-core nation, that have structured the post-Soviet political development of the country exempts women from own(ed) memory and politics

1 It is this interrelation that makes Cathy Caruth argue that the experience and concept of trauma highlights the difficulties of writing history from within, but on the other hand, unveiling the possibility of a history "indirectly referential" due to the very "inaccessibility of its occurrence" (Caruth, 1995: 8).

beyond ethnic and historical identity discourses, and this overwhelming exemption validating the only and one view upon their experiences and agencies in the independent and Soviet Latvias actually facilitates their marginalization, if not exclusion, in deliberations and decisions on gender inequality after joining the European Union.

II.

The book by Latvian American author Agate Nesaule *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* (1995) is based on women's memories of immigrant and exile experiences about which families "may have silent images, but they tell no stories" (Nesaule 1995: vii). Agate Nesaule wrote a memoiristic piece when it was still painful to remember, not "all right to talk about it now," not the time when most of "principals are dead". The experience of pain can be "radically subjective, and thus generally incommunicable" (Lionnet, 1995: 109). For Agate Nesaule all memories, "but especially traumatic ones, are originally wordless" and memoirs are their authors' attempts at "inventing the truth" (Nesaule, viii) about painful experiences and their "language-destroying" effects (Elaine Scarry, cit. from Lionnet, 1995: 109).

Together with her family, Agate Nesaule, from the age of 7, was exposed to several experiences of displacement. The family fled Latvia when the Red Army came to liberate it from fascism and, at the same time, to incorporate the Baltic region in the USSR, after its annexation in 1940. Then, stuck in an internment camp in Germany, she, with other women and girls, tried to escape but was entrapped in the cellar to witness the collective rape of women by Soviet soldiers. After escaping to the American zone, her family was among those who were admitted to the camps for displaced persons. Finally, her family was allowed to go to America. Agate's life and career of a university professor in women's studies could be viewed as an exemplary 'American melting-pot success story' of a woman from the postwar Latvian diaspora.

In the Soviet period, the Latvian diaspora worldwide – not uniquely – viewed itself as not only a legitimate successor of the interwar independent state, but as an originator of the authentic nation in emigration. The Latvian diaspora worldwide became the trajectory of the nation's continuity, coherence and belonging to the world, and, very importantly, to the 'West.' The

role of the diaspora in the post-Soviet political imagination was extremely important, as it gave access to the West. The American Dream was represented as the imaginary space of belonging to the West in individual success stories of the melting pot. These stories became textual capillaries of the political imagology in the times of the populist movement in the late 1980s and the restoration of the state in the 1990s.

The essentialism of the nation-reconstruction as its reunification found its narrative of historical continuity in the multiple success plots of émigré Latvians and their offspring. Re-conceiving the nation was conceptualized in employing the bonds with the 'authentic' nation in whose post-Soviet political geography the normal and normative centre is the West. The integrity and unity of the autobiographical subject crystallized in different memory narratives published over the period of the 1990s have been serving "micropolitical practices" (Lauretis, 1987: 9-10) to sustain the very identity of culture and nation. To put it metaphorically, the nation-rebuilding process has been re-birthing another 'amber' image of the 'nation.'

The narrative of Agate's journey and her conversion plot into a citizen of America transcend the boundaries of a 'specific experience' constructed in a 'particular memory' of a Latvian woman. Agate Nesaule's book tells us about various experiences of finding a home as her family fled Latvia in 1944. However, an internment, detention camp, displaced persons camp emerge in her narrative as a repetitive pattern of enclosures and boundaries enforced upon people in circumstances perceived by them as historically specific and particular. Nesaule describes how the 'homing' journeys of Latvian exiles after 1944 re/produced alienation, otherness, hatred between those who are 'at home' and those who are in 'exile': "Verfluchte Auslander, damned foreigners, the German children shouted on the rare cases when my sister and I were allowed past the barbed-wire gates of the camps. The boys would throw stones or snowballs with rocks in them" (Nesaule 1995: 145).

With the loss of their former social habitus, exilic people have no choice but to live together calling it an ethnic community and transform a recurrent 'homing' enclosure into an exaggerated form of the 'nation.' Nesaule's narrative explores this experience of multiple displacement in terms of how the perceptions of displacement shape the invention of personal and collective exile identity.

Nesaule describes a subtle psychological process of the boundary-building of a nation in exile and how it translates itself into children's 'knowledge', how and whom to hate: "Shitty Russian girl, they shouted. Don't you

dare walk with that shitty Russian. Jews sucked Latvia dry" (121-22). In the verbal delineation of children's belonging to the 'nation,' recent experiences of fleeing the Soviet Army are mixed emotionally with anti-Semitic sentiment obviously picked up from their family conversations in private. The production of hatred and fear against the collective Other ("I didn't care at all what happened to Russians," says Agate, 125) is as powerful as it becomes mutual ("You're one of the filthy Latvians, all of you always sticking together. I hate you," says Galina, 125). However, both girls at the same time share the complexity of their origins: "A wave of even greater protectiveness rose in me. Galina was like my mother, who was Latvian but had also been born in Russia, and so was different from others" (122). Only in daydreaming together with Galina could Agate pretend "that we were living anywhere but in the camp" (124).

In contrast to hatred, humiliation and repression, inflecting a boundary-construction of an exile identity and national belonging, the feeling of love does not filter into the 'homes' which are never one's own. A repetition of re-homing experiences produces helplessness, personal insecurity, inertia, desperation. These feelings are concealed behind gradually fetishized rituals of national unification in exile that begin to mask the absence of 'homed' space and 'homing' emotions. Loss of familial feeling is privatized so that the community works out its rules and rituals of familial belonging to 'unwritten histories' to deal with a split self: "So many secrets to keep" (181).

Masking becomes the strategy of invisibility for the narrator in *A Woman in Amber* to safekeep this other, private self in all enforced enclosures. Nesaule powerfully describes how the desire for invisibility is produced in women's bodies and minds during war. Serial exposures to different and extreme forms of violence, terror and rape 'birth' a woman's longing for disappearance into silence as well as for erasure of unbearable memory. How far can she go in her writing her memories about other women? How realistic and authentic and representative should her memory narrative be?

Agate Nesaule's narrative goes beyond the authenticity imperative at the moment when she comes 'home' in her memories and thus invokes challenging questions about the meanings and values of the re-unified nation. In Nesaule's narrative, the melting pot as an intertextual construct, a privileged metaphor, transports its meaning beyond the known to expose the differences in the 'molten' package, and differences left over the conditions for accepting the rule of the 'pot'. She replays the image of amber into the symbol of invention of memory, not only a token of belonging and nostalgia.

She rewrites the mythic qualities of the melting pot that hide its mappings of differences as a symbol of the nostalgic home in the memories. In the image of amber the national and cultural melting evolves into a more complex trope hidden behind the American nationalizing metaphor of the melting pot. When a tourist comes to Riga, the capital of Latvia, s/he tries to buy a souvenir made of amber. The most precious, or valuable and treasured, is a piece of amber with an insect in it. It was so popular that they learned how to forge an insect (or a substitute – how can one know?) into molten amber, and sell it as an authentic piece from another exotic tiny place. A forge, or authentic 'enclosure,' is a totally fixing space in which one can see an insect only when one uses a magnifying glass to enjoy the beauty of a dead minute body molten for eternity. Amber is evoked in the text as a token of 'home' and nostalgia on Agate's mother's neck and, later, on her own. The token is a nostalgic moment, an identity to be on the body and an ornament that signifies belonging to the nation-at-home.

The image that connotes the presence of the eye enjoying a beautiful object evokes a more complex interpretation of the trope. How an eye sees and constructs a woman in amber is a reversible perspective into the question of how a woman in amber blindly 'sees' the world out of her enclosure. The trope implies the fixed borders of identity. It also articulates the position of the produced text and knowledge in the politics of location when the text of a cultural minority is a fixed, bound 'body' categorized to delineate the margins of the enclosing canon.

Moreover, how much can a woman be 'transparent' in her testimonial narrative, but not come to the level of a more traumatizing self-exposure? Rape is the extreme gesture of enforced penetration as sexual possession. Memory, thus, encloses it so that it becomes wordless and effects silence, as Nesaule writes in the beginning of the book. But more importantly, rape is represented by Nesaule as homologous with other forms of enforcement and enclosures hidden behind the text. Violence is not limited to the bestiality of soldiers. Meticulous representation of objectification, violence, enforcement, internment is troped with the oppositions (transparency/darkness) and couplings of images (woman/insect) and curves into purification of the physically dirty (detention camps) and mentally defective (Nazi exterminations).

Purification and cleansing go further as the narrator describes how Agate is showered in a German detention camp for refugees. Remembering the smell of a special detergent, she identifies it as DDT later in America, in the

smell of an insecticide. DDT brings us the reverted perspective of an insect in amber, which is better seen if the piece of amber is lucidly transparent.

Becoming a Displaced Person, she is supposed to feel fortunate in being displaced in contrast to an Estonian boy fixed next to the gate, outside the checkpoint into the American zone:

> We had stood all day. Without water or food. . . . We had to tell the truth, and we were then judged by mysterious, arbitrary standards. These soldiers too could have decided that we were not worth feeding. And we had nowhere to go if we had been found unworthy. An office motioned us into the camp, past the table where others were being questioned. After we entered, two soldiers got up and pushed the wrought-iron gate shut, then secured it with a lock and chain. . . . I could feel despair and anger behind me. I was afraid to turn around and look at all the others being kept out. A seven-year-old Estonian boy and his grandmother had been in line right behind us. The boy did not have any parents, his face had lit up when we were called forward. I did not want to see their faces now. . . . I could feel the disappointment of the hundreds in the outer darkness, their murmurs followed me, their anger burned my back as we walked to the dining hall of the camp (101-102).

The dynamic of inclusion/exclusion translated by Nesaule into the oppositions of dirt/cleanliness, darkness/transparency exposes her growing anxiety of what Hungarian American author Richard Teleky calls "details, endless details" (Teleky 1997: 172) in making up 'ethnicity'. As Teleky puts it in his *Hungarian Rhapsodies: Essays on Ethnicity, Identity and Culture*: "Exploring my ethnicity became a way of exploring the arbitrary nature of my own life. It was not so much a search for roots as for a way of understanding rootlessness – how I stacked up against another way of being" (175). Agate is also not the one to choose; she has never learned to choose in her conversion journey embodied in the American Dream. A medical examination exposes her body in an X-ray procedure:

> In my family everyone tested positive for TB, which was rampant in the camps and was grounds for exclusion from the United States. We had X-rays next, without being told what they revealed. Then the loudspeaker called only me back for more X-rays, then more. More silence followed. . . . In groups and individually, we were asked whether

> we knew that the United States was a democracy and whether we approved of democracy. We were asked whether we were insane, homosexual, alcoholic, criminal or immoral (136).

The disciplining route out of 'contamination' and 'impurity' goes further into the hygiene of American immigration sifting policies. The doctors' suspicion that Agate has tuberculosis, or darkness in her lungs (not transparent, not lucid), points to her potential contaminating danger for a country that needs healthy women for future melting reproductions, future transparent molten bodies of their children.

Actually, the conversion out of contamination and impurity is grounded in St. Augustine's claim to wash oneself and be clean before the sacred moment of writing about one's self, the metaphor of spiritual conversion and the right to confess about one's own impurities in an autobiographical statement. The interwoven tropes of amber, smell and insect evolve as a means of self-representation in addressing the ambivalences of refracting silenced memories into a text. Agate Nesaule illuminates ethnic authenticity and purity as a problematic representation of the diaspora as a politically functional totality in drawing its politics of differences and its mythic narrative of national purity.

Fear, violence and silence are part of the memories from the DP camps taken to America:

> Bitter ironic jokes about D.P.'s were common. Many people were silent and lethargic. Drunkenness was rare because of the scarcity of liquor, but there were occasional alcoholic outbursts by men weeping and wishing for death. Once, a father viciously beat his eight-year-old son with nettles on his bare legs before women and men came running to pull him away. A mute, shell-shocked young man, deaf to the orders of the British sentries to stop, was shot and killed as he desperately continued running. And for months on end. Brutally tortured cats and squirrels appeared hanging on fence posts, too often to be the work of only one person. A twelve-year-old boy named Karlis . . . started cornering girls, . . . attempting rape. . . . But the vigorous screening process for emigration did not single him out, and he went to Canada, where he later murdered a ten-year-girl (133).

Once, already in America, Agate had to testify against a man suspected of stalking women, "a foreigner," as the police called him, who should be im-

prisoned or expelled from the country: "we don't need any foreign scum in this country"(169), although Agate was never sure that she identified him correctly.

America did not bring her a happy marriage as she had to confront her husband's alcoholism and violent behaviour. Moreover, as she writes: "My marriage has exiled me in all the ways I predicted and more" (218). It was unusual for her "to participate or to feel I belong if I do" (218).

In the territorial dissociation of the diaspora from its native land, the mother becomes a symbolical figure of association with the past to resort the lineage to the ideal national identity. In the diaspora narrative of the nation, women remain silent when the community asks the question: "Who had the hardest time during the war, men or women?" (Nesaule, 182):

> And anyway, everyone knows that more men are killed in wars than women. Where are her statistics? Where is her proof? . . . In the awkward pause, my mother said loudly, "Other things happen to women, terrible things, more destructive in their own way." "What can be more terrible than being wounded and killed?" someone interrupts her. "Terrible things," my mother repeats. It sounds lame, even to me. 'Rape' is an unsayable word in mixed company; people have been shocked that it has actually been printed in a recent controversial novel. I hope my mother does not say it out loud, I hope she does not *tell* anything. . . . But even as I wish my mother had stayed silent, I feel an overwhelming desire to speak myself. . . . I do not say anything, but only because I would be shouted down too. I am ashamed of the basement; everyone would despise me if they knew what soldiers did. They would ostracize my mother too. I will never tell (182).

In Nesaule's narrative of how silence draws women's ideal picture for the sake of the exile community, the mother, central to the nation-discourse, its origin, purity and authenticity, looms as subversive embodied difference and hybridity. In describing the above-quoted discussion, Agate remembers how she wishes that her mother could be different: "As much as I would then resent my mother's inattention to me, I prefer her previous compliance to men to this bitter resistance" (183).

Nesaule's narrative is a sad story of the mother-daughter relationship – the mother as a figure of difference looms as the abject in Agata's exilic conversion plot. Her mother is never an instructor, but a strange, dissociating, monstrous figure, and the maternal presence is articulated as a site of

contamination. Julia Kristeva describes the abject as "that which shows me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live . . . Abjection is caused by what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva, 1998: 229). Dissociation needed for the completion of conversion fully inscribes the abjection of a mother into a split self of her daughter.

I would like to focus more on the theme of motherhood and abjection in Nesaule's narrative. The text of an American Latvian immigrant woman is expected to be more than 'exotic'. It is expected to be politically important in times of the restoration of the state and nation as the exile diaspora represents national continuity and coherence. The book was published in the period when Latvia was going through the controversial experiences of the restoration of independence, when so-called 'new minorities' were constituted by Russian-speaking people. The themes of unified and single origin, trauma and contamination with the 'East' emerge in the narrative as the mother's difference and otherness.

This context is important for reading Nesaule's mother-daughter story as her challenging vision transcending the mythic ideality of the mother-figure. The composite nature of her mother, named Valda, remains beyond the homogenizing national narrativization in exile community. The story of Valda's birth and childhood in Siberia (as 'Oriental' as Japan) before the Revolution of 1917 remains her never compromised origin. She, a Latvian girl, was born and brought up in Siberia, and her story as a hybrid is explicitly different from other political exile stories of monstrous 'Siberias'.

Valda's life story re-territorializes the homogeneous nation-narrative into a multiplicity and hybridity of origins in the modern Latvian nation. Moreover, the message goes beyond the historical complexity of relations between Latvia and Russia and its colonizing memories. The relationship between Valda and Agate as a mother-daughter story is imaginatively embraced in the pun soul/sole emphasizing the centrality of body to the memory process. Once in her Siberian childhood Valda cut her *sole*, and a speck of soil lodged under a scar. She never agreed to have an operation on the scar to withdraw the contaminating speck of soil. As her family moved back to independent Latvia after 1918, it seemed to her that she was leaving her soul in Siberia and taking instead a speck of soil in the bodily scar:

> The summer before the Revolution, she cut her foot on a sharp stone in one of the icy rivers that she swam in with her brothers. Some soil got trapped in the wound, then the skin healed over. My father and

> uncle Jasha, her younger brother who was a surgeon, used to urge her in Latvia to have the sand removed, but she never did. "It's the soil of Mother Russia," she would say. No one refers to the scar now (19).

The scar on Valda's body is articulated as a memory beyond the choice of remembering or forgetting. In contrast, her daughter Agate's life was conditioned with the dramatic turn in Latvian history of 1940-1944, expressed in the Russian pun "And the *soul* went down into *soles* because of fear" (italics mine). It reflects the condition of many families with the coming of the Soviet troops in 1940 (deportation to Siberia), and in 1944, en route to emigration to the USA. How can Agate situate her mother's story in the exile narratives of collective solidarity?

Moreover, Valda obviously seeks an identity outside the socially defined ideal of motherhood. Even in the 'paradise' of Agate's childhood, there was no feeling of longed oneness with the mother. The narrator describes the feeling of separateness that her mother 'nurtures' in their relationship. Indifference towards Agate, even cruelty, are far from the idealized images of motherhood. She is rather detached from her daughter and her marked difference does not conform to the code of maternal behaviour. On the one hand, she explicitly trains her daughter to enjoy separation and independence. She insists that the family go to the States where her daughters could receive education, thus, social security and economic independence. She splits with her daughter when Agate marries at the expense of educational perspectives. However, even with these rationalizations of her unmaternal behaviour, Valda is never clear, never understandable behind her subtle masking of an 'unhomely' life and memory of her own, although she pays the high cost of emotional absence and repression.

Valda's different story somehow remains to be silenced in the common exile experience, as Agate herself says: "The list of losses is unbearable, I am glad she does not talk about it" (19). What unites Valda with Agate is the feeling of loneliness and mutual separation. Agate is not aware of this repetition in her life. She only misses "the Displaced Persons camps in Germany, where at least I was among people like myself, rather than among strangers for whom I will always be different, as I now am in America" (19). However, in terms of her dreams, Agate's 'coming home' is as retrospective as it is projective. It is not just an exercise of nostalgia in order to gauge authenticity. Agate – like many others – is an exile, and exile means waiting. At the same time, they are immigrants, or people who come to a country to start over. This is an entrapping condition between an exile passing through

and an immigrant starting over a new life. In this controversial psychic location, amber is saved as a piece of 'frozen memory,' but the origin remains complicated in the body beyond the fixed 'home' for nostalgia. Her mother's in-between positioning shatters the forming of a stable and whole past.

Agate re-performs her mother's life in own memories, effecting more imaginary spaces into the narrative. Thus, she displaces her own story in this imaginary space of multiple women's pasts, or what Homi Bhabha calls "the Third Space of enunciation" (Bhabha, 2004: 54). Valda's hybrid origin – in her daughter's retelling-imagining – interrupts pure origins and gives awareness of a different history that lends shape to diverse kinds of cultural hybridity, incommunicable in Agate's story but communicated through her mother's 'abjected' space, peripheral, intermediate 'border zone' that brings unavoidable tensions with the dream of purified origins in the West.

It is not Valda but Agate herself who tells us the story of her mother, explicitly woven into the interface of personal memories and dreams. Beyond their assumed particularity, Agate Nesaule constructs her personal 'dream' by telling/imagining her mother's story and redeems the trauma in her faith "that language can save" (to use Maxine Hong Kingston's expression). The Nesaule-narrator tells us Valda's story as an emancipatory act of valorising the still marginalized transversal past, the shared border in the vision of Gloria Anzaldúa. Her reworking the past abjections brings a radically new meaning to conversion as the way back into the 'in-between,' composite, into recognition and acknowledgement of the hybrid past that would empower the nation that she belongs to and would give it agency.

Questioning the national construction of identity across its home and exile experiences is evoked from how and what the daughter remembers in her mother's life. Nesaule makes her narrative into a confluence of mother-daughter memory narratives. They are textual enclosures until transformed into a re-memory narrative in which the daughter's journey/nation's exile is differently imagined and interpreted. This re-memory of a mother's life takes a diasporic community to its composite origins beyond the emphasis on binary oppositions as "the basis of political cleavage and social division" (Brah 1996: 184).

Literature:

Bhabha, Homi. 2004. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge (Classics edition).

Boym, Svetlana. 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

Brah, Avtar. 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge.

Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States.* Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.

Caplan, Anne E. 2005. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Caruth, Cathy. 1995. "Introduction: Trauma and Experience". In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* ed. by Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

de Lauretis, Teresa. 1989. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Jameson, Fredric. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kāprans, Mārtiņš, Zelče, Vita. 2011. *Pēdējais karš: atmina un traumas komunikācija (Last War: Memory and Communication of Trauma)*. Rīga: Mansards.

Kiossev, Alexander. 2011. "Crimes Against Everyday Life, or On the Patho-Anthropology of Socialism". In *20 Years after the Collapse of Communism. Expectations, Achievements and Disillusions of 1989*, ed. by Nicolas Hayoz, Leszek Jesien, Daniela Koleva. Peter Lang Publishing, 647-668.

Kirss, Tiina. 2005. *INTRODUCTION to She Who Remembers Survives*. Available at: http://www2.kirmus.ee/elulood/introduction.html.

Kirss, Tiina, Hinrikus, Rutt (eds.). 2009. *Estonian Life Stories*. Budapest: CEU Press.

Kirss, Tiina, Koresaar, Ene, Lauristin, Marju (eds.). 2004. *She Who Remembers Survives. Interpreting Estonian Women's Post-soviet Life Stories*. Tartu: Tartu University Press.

Koresaar, Ene. 2004. *Memory and history in Estonian post-soviet life stories: Private and public, individual and collective from the perspective of biographical syncretism*. Tartu: Tartu University Press.

Kristeva, Julia. 1997. *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. by Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia University Press.

LaCapra, Dominic. 1998. *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

LaCapra, Dominic. 2001. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1997. "The Production of Space". Leach, N. (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture. A Reader in Cultural Theory*. London: Routledge.

Lionnet, Françoise. 1995. *Postcolonial Representations. Women, Literature, Identity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Nesaule, Agate. 1995. *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile*. New York: Penguin Books.

Sambrooke, Jerilyn. 2008. "Narratives of Identity: A Postcolonial Rereading of Dalia Grinkevičiūtė's *Lithuanians by the Laptev Sea*". *LITUANUS. Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences.* Volume 54, No 4 – Winter 2008.

Skultans, Vieda. 1997. "Theorizing Latvian lives: The quest for identity". *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Volume: 3, Issue: 4, pp.181-192.

Smith, Sidonie. 1987. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Stanilov, Kiril. 2007. *The Post-socialist City: Urban Form and Space Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after Socialism*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Stanley, Liz. 1992. *The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Teleky, Richard. 1997. *Hungarian Rhapsodies: Essays on Ethnicity, Identity and Culture*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Wulf, Meike. 2000. "Theory Building: Dynamics of Collective Memory in Estonia". *Working Papers, Uppsala University, Department of East European Studies*, 54, pp. 29 -51.

Young, Craig, Kaczmarek, Sylvia. 2008. "The Socialist Past and Postsocialist Urban Identity in Central and Eastern Europe. The Case of Łódź, Poland". *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 15.

Zirnite, Mara. 2001. *Spogulis. (Mirror)* LU Filozofijas un socioloģijas institūts, izdevums.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2001. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real – Reflections on WTC – third version.* At: http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/welcome-to-the-desert-of-the-real/

Вельцер, Харальд. 2005. "История, память и современность прошлого. Память как арена политической борьбы" (Harald Welzer: "History, Memory and Contemporaneity of the Past. Memory as Arena of Political Struggle"). *Неприкосновенный запас*, 2-3-6.

III.

Autobiographies and graphic self-expression between activism and art

Vita Fortunati

Memory as a Complex Act in Women's Autobiographies: Four Case Studies

My paper is divided into two parts: in the first I want to raise some theoretical issues about autobiography often tackled by feminist criticism. In the second I will analyse four autobiographies to exemplify why autobiography is so closely connected to the history of European feminism in different geographical and historical contexts.

1.
The first question is what are the reasons autobiography is such a complex genre. Autobiography is a hybrid, contaminated genre, set at the interface between several genres: biography, diary, memoirs and letters. A borderline genre, then. This feature, which has long been considered a drawback, a limitation, today instead renders biography an extremely intriguing subject for women, and above all a useful tool for feminist theory and practice. From many quarters it is thus declared that: "To arrive at any strict definition of autobiography, or clearly to mark it of from autobiographical fiction, or to make absolute distinction between fiction and truth is quite impossible" (Wilson, 1988: 23).
2.
Studying autobiography from the point of view of gender also entails highlighting how it has followed the various stages of feminist critical theory from structuralism to post-structuralism, from deconstruction to neo-historicism (Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield, 2000; Anderson, 2006).

3.

In my contribution I intend to deal with the issue of autobiography and women from the point of view of "memory studies" (Fortunati, Golinelli and Monticelli, 2004; Agazzi and Fortunati, 2007). One of the central concepts emerged from recent studies on memory is that it is not a fixed, monolithic entity, but a dynamic, fluid one: it changes in relation to the different phases of a woman's life. From this important concept there emerges the idea that autobiography spotlights how the moulding process of woman's identity, of her subjectivity is not only stratified in time, but depends upon the different political and socio-historical contexts in which the reminiscing woman is set at the time. Memory, the "work of memory", challenges the notion of a stable and uniform subjectivity. Memory has "its own modes of expression: these are characterized by the fragmentary, non-linear quality of moments recalled out of time" (Kuhn, 1995: 8). Those who have studied autobiography have highlighted the tension existing in the writing of one's own life between the two selves. The self of the past and the self who is writing in the moment in time when writing is ventured upon. Between "the self then and the self now, doing the writing" there intervene two temporalities: the past and the present. From this point of view, memory is the "necessary fiction of autobiography" (Smith, 1987: 45). The work of memory is then a powerful tool in the hands of the woman writer, because through the means of memory she chooses, selects, not only the facts of her personal life, but also those of the community she lives in. In the four case studies I have chosen, there exists a very close link between individual and collective memory, between the private and public sphere. For this reason, as Nancy K. Miller (1991) has acutely remarked, autobiography becomes, for women, a way of also recounting, by means of their existence, the history of feminism, or in any case the history of her generation of women. In *Getting Personal* Miller reflects on how the memories of her personal life in the Fifties intertwined with the history of feminism and on how, for her, her private story is closely connected to public history. There exists, then, the attempt, on the part of women, to find a mediation between their memory and collective memory, because sometimes the two are in conflict. This is especially true as concerns the memories of women and in general the memories of marginalized groups (Monticelli, 2007). In this sense, memory plays an important role for the shaping of women's identity,

> which is also moulded by interpersonal relationship. Feminist critics stress how fundamental the concept of "inter-subjectivity" is, that is the ways in which all the selves are structured by interactions with the others. They also stress the ways in which the self is framed and created by the social context.

Four ways to approach perplexities of women's autobiography

To tackle autobiography from the point of view of gender and memory studies is to take into consideration the two possible modes that autobiographical writing acquired in the second half of the 20th century: confession and remembrance (Radstone, 2000). Both these types of writing use the first person narrative, but while

> in confessional writing it is memory that arguably sutures over the break between the writing I and the I that is written about, in remembrance it is memory's relation to subjectivity coherence that comes under scrutiny. Instead of suturing the division between the writing I and the I that is written about, texts of remembrance tend rather to undermine the resilience of that suture, by emphasizing memory's tenuous relation to the past (Radstone, 2000: 205).

Furthermore, one can also add that while in confessional writing one tends to search for truth, in writing as testimony, as has been highlighted in particular in relation to the testimony of traumatic acts, what is stressed is the difficulty of reaching a type of truth endowed with absolute value. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have underlined that there is a move from one–dimensional interpretation of truth. Both critics emphasize that testimony is an occurrence in the present, to do with the meaning of the past now and facilitated by specific situations and interchanges (Felman and Laub, 1992).

Autobiography is a complex genre, because the relationship to life, to history is always not only filtered by memory, but also by language, by words. Just like memory is a construct, also autobiography presents this uncanny blend of fact and fiction.

Her own life is something, then, that a woman writer construes and it is interesting to note that women writers do have models to look up to. For this motive autobiography presents itself to women writers above all as a

kind of *Bildungsroman* of their own careers. On this subjects it would be interesting to compare autobiography and female painter's self portraiture since both in literature and in painting autobiography and self portraiture have become a way of affirming one's role and one's identity as women artists. In this process of self identification there is an urgent need felt to relate to models, to have a "memory of a tradition" and, as regards women writers, a strong intertextuality.

To exemplify what I have just said I chose four cases: Simone de Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, Rossana Rossanda and *Baby Boomers* that collects the biographies of four women (Serena Sapegno, Rosi Braidotti, Annamaria Tagliavini, Roberta Mazzanti) and it represents an interesting experiment in autobiographical writing. On the one hand there are two women writers Simone de Beauvoir and Doris Lessing, who have tried their hand both at autobiography and autobiographical novels. They wrote their autobiographies in different moments of their life, foregrounding how autobiography is a complex act and how difficult the work of memory is. Rossanda and the four Italian intellectuals belong to different generations of women and their private life intertwines with the history of feminism. Women who led different lives, which were, however, all shot through by feminism.

Simone de Beauvoir

De Beauvoir's two autobiographies: *Mémoirs d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958) or *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* describe the author's childhood and adolescence, and ends as she is on the verge of adulthood, when she is twenty. The signs of her entry in adulthood are the meeting with Sartre and passing her *agrégation* in philosophy examination, qualifying her to teach. *La force de l'âge* (1960), translated as *The Prime of Life*, describes the years from 1929 to 1944. Her first teaching experiences and her encounters with the intellectuals of the period, Paul Nizan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Albert Camus, together with the Spanish War and World War II are described. *La force des choses* (1963) or *Force of Circumstance* comprehends the twenty years from the Liberation of France to the Algerian independence. These are the years of her maturity, in which she writes and publishes her major works: *Les mandarins* (1954) and *Le deuxième sexe* (1949). *Tout compte fait* (1972), translated as *All Said and Done*, is her last autobiographical work, which covers the years from 1962 to 1971. In the prologue de Beauvoir sta-

tes: "The more I approach the end of my existence, the easier it becomes for me to embrace in its entirety this strange object that a life is. I will try to do so at the beginning of this book".

In an interesting essay dedicated to Simone de Beauvoir, Hewitt (1990), starts from the hypothesis that Simone's autobiographies are only apparently traditional, because despite her Cartesian, clear style, and the desire on the part of the first person, authorial narrating voice of controlling the narrative, the text reveals cracks and fissures. Such cracks and fissures derive from the rift between the narrating voice and the characteristics of the persona described, a rift that often creates ironic effects in her style. "Lurking in the interstices of de Beauvoir's texts is the unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) question of how the feminine subject chooses (creates) her gender and becomes a woman, within the framework of received social constructs that traverse all subjects" (Hewitt, 1990: 21). As Judith Butler acutely pointed out, the choice of one's gender is "an impulsive yet mindful process of interpreting a cultural reality laden with sanctions, taboos and prescriptions (…) rather than a radical act of creation, gender is a tacit project to renew one's cultural history in one's own terms" (Butler, 2004: 26).

In this sense even de Beauvoir's autobiographies spotlight the important concept she expresses in the *Le deuxième sexe* that "one is not born a woman, but becomes one". Consequently, in de Beauvoir's biographies one witnesses not just her becoming a woman through the painful struggle she engaged in from a young age with the stifling bourgeois milieu in which she lived, but also her desire for independence which ripened by means of her cultural upbringing.

Simone de Beauvoir's autobiographies are texts that highlight how, even for her, autobiography is an impure genre, a genre that is on the borderline between autobiography, autobiographical novel, diary, letters and memoirs. She herself plays amongst these genres shuffling them inside her works. On the other hand, according to her interviews and some passages of her own autobiographies, she is aware that autobiography moves in a difficult and never resolved balance between life and reality on one side, and literature and fiction on the other. De Beauvoir's texts are illustrative of this tension in the way they move in and out "literature" and "experience", continually transgressing the neat boundaries between genres, and confusing the distinction between remembering and creating. Sometimes, in fact, the writer seems to subscribe to the traditional conception of autobiography as a faithful transcription and portrait of real life experience, with the author fully controlling the textual representation. Regarding this aspect, the metaphor

she uses to describe the task and the role of the writer of autobiographies is indicative: "The autobiographer has to be like a policeman writing his report: accuracy is paramount" (Tidd, 2004: 104). But other times, on the contrary, she prefigures autobiographical writing as a creative fiction whose truth escapes the predetermined designs of the author. In a 1960 interview to Francis Jeanson she stated that: "there is no truth anterior to the one language expresses" (Hewitt, 1990: 24). Moreover, in her last autobiography *All Said and Done* she states very explicitly that the "I" created in an autobiographical work is necessarily a fictional construct that never totally corresponds to the living person.

Even about a theme that was much debated of the sixties and the seventies, i.e. if there is or not a specificity of female writing, the so-called *écriture féminine*, Simone de Beauvoir expresses opinions that it is never dogmatic, but rather questioning ones, leaving the issue open. If, because of her style, she seems to lean towards a neutral, transparent language, actually many of the statements found in her autobiographies reveal a lucid awareness of how difficult it still was for a woman to write autobiographies in a patriarchal society that sometimes obliged her not only to imitate masculine strategies and techniques to please the public and sell, but also to repudiate all that in her was different from the male sex. Above all, the charge levelled at women who attempted writing autobiographies was that of being narcissistic. Confirming this, in her autobiography *Force of Circumstance*, she relates the things critics accused her most of were being mad, eccentric, trying to be a man. She says that in France "if you are a writer, to be a woman is simply to provide a stick to be beaten with".

De Beauvoir establishes a fertile dialogue and intertextuality with other women who attempted to write autobiographies. In her inexhaustible passion for reading, ("I'm a bit of a bibliophagus"), she reads autobiographies, diaries, the letters of women writers who have struggled to describe their growth, emotions, relationship with writing, their public/private spheres. These are George Sand, Anaïs Nin, Virginia Woolf, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Gertrude Stein; they constitute an interesting grid and an important point of reference.

From what we have said it appears evident that the interest in Simone de Beauvoir's autobiographies as an act of writing derives exactly from their being hybrid works in which features drawn from low literature are blended with those from high literature, private sphere is mixed with public facts, elements drawn from the masculine literary tradition mate with those of the female one. From this point of view Simone de Beauvoir's autobiographies

reveal the hybridism of this genre, an aspect which is now widely accepted by contemporary feminist criticism, and which she was already amply aware of.

As further proof of how de Beauvoir's writing was complex I will analyse her first autobiographical book *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958) which, in spite of being the most structurally balanced book, is perhaps the one that better shows the contradictions and paradoxes of her autobiographical writings. There is, as a matter of fact, a rift between the form and the motivations of the writing, between the narrating I and the fictional persona. The actual title the author uses, "memoirs" highlight how, for her, the two terms, "autobiography" and "memoirs" are interchangeable because her personal life and her role as a historical subject are inseparable. *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* was written in her maturity, when she was fifty and at the peak of her career. It begins very traditionally: the narrating voice tells the reader: "I was born on the 9th of January 1908, at four in the morning, in a room furnished with white varnished furniture, looking out on boulevard Raspail". But this beginning is only deceptively traditional because the reader soon realises the omissions that constitute the transgressions to the canonical type of autobiography. In this work she offers a wide overview of the social and historical context in which she was born and bred, but the present of the writer remains shadowed, as the intentions and the genesis of the work do. In fact, Philippe Lejeune in his *L'Autobiographie en France* (1971) quotes de Beauvoir's autobiography as an emblematic example of an autobiography that does not follow the rules establishing the autobiographical pact. Simone de Beauvoir does not explicit the act of narration and the genesis of the work, together with her intentions, elements constituting the autobiographical pact and the structure of autobiographies. There also exists a fracture between the assertive will of the narrating voice to create her character and the complex psychology of the character itself: young Simone struggling to separate herself from the binding family environment and in particular from the models and the roles her father and mother want to give her. So she first stages, before becoming the protagonist of her own existence, a plurality of identities with which she plays: sometimes the lost (or about to be lost) girl, at other times the future governess, often the model student in which to carefully guards her own wholeness. Memoirs is a singular, anomalous autobiography because de Beauvoir, in the creation of herself as an adolescent character first, and young woman later, re-evokes adolescent doubts and hopes, without anticipating what will come, and not commenting, retrospectively, the emotions felt at the time.

Another omission is the silence on the historical moment in which the writer starts writing. This *Memoirs* was written in a particular moment of the author's life and of France's history, when both Sartre and herself had been emarginated from public life due to their critical position towards France's policy in the Algerian question, and because they did not condone the violent actions of the National Liberation Front. Banned by the political and social milieu of the time, and in particular, not wanting to become a shadow in the wake of Sartre, who had already expressed his opinion on France's position in the Algerian question, Simone found refuge in the memory of the past and in the creation of a past she could control. Confirming what we are saying, she would later state in *Force of Circumstance:* "I kept at this work of resurrection, of creation, for it made as many demands on my powers of imagination and reflection as it did on my memory".

These are the reasons that, in my opinion, still make de Beauvoir's autobiographies interesting today: they are a challenge to the rules of autobiography, highlighting how impossible such a genre actually is. And this is a feature that makes de Beauvoir's operation feminine and feminist, because it reveals the strength of her own impasse. In 2008, on the occasion of the centenary of her birth, there have been a series of interesting debates in Europe on the value for feminism today of de Beauvoir's imposing work. I think that rereading her autobiographies is important for the young generations for at least two reasons: the first a reminder of how important it is to accept responsibility both for one's own destiny and that of the common world. Simone de Beauvoir does not just live, on the contrary, she reflects, plans, acts and accepts the honours and the onus of her choices. She shoulders the responsibility of making choices, of pursuing a goal, of opening to change. The second the brave freedom with which she has ranged across all types of *savoirs* in order to cross over again, deconstructing them, recounting them in the light of a different gaze.

Doris Lessing

The second writer is Doris Lessing who has had a very controversial relationship with feminism, despite her novels, in particular *The Golden Notebook* (1962), have been important for the emancipation movement of women concerning especially their sex life.

Doris Lessing represents an excellent example of conscious female autobiographical writing. Within her autobiographies she has asked a series of questions: first, how memory functions, especially when one is about to write one's autobiography at an advanced age; second, on the delicate relationship between truth and fiction; and third, on the relationship between autobiography and autobiographical novels. Furthermore she tackles some recurrent themes in autobiographies written by women: for example her difficult relationship with her mother ("Impertinent Daughters", *Granta* 14, 1984, and "My Mother's Life", *Granta* 17, 1985).

Doris Lessing wrote two autobiographies: the first, *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949* (1994), at the age of seventy-five, and the second, *Walking in the Shadow*: *Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949-1962* (1997) when she was seventy eight. Those who have studied autobiographies have stressed that often, when on the threshold of old age there comes a need to take stock of one's life. Lessing, as the successful author, has often claimed she felt the need to travel with memory to her past life, to reorder the events of her life in order to understand them once again, because those had been the ones making her the person she was. It was that past that made what she was in the present, and it was for this reason that it was important for her to review it, mediate it and recount it. So, almost eighty, Lessing, through the filter of time, which means undergoing a process of distancing, managed to retrace the thorniest aspects of her existence: her relationship with her mother, her two failed marriages, the difficult relationship with her children, the disappointment in communism.

In her autobiographies there are a lot of digressions on the problem of time, of memory and of truth. If it is true that temporal mediation allows for a better detachment, it is also true that time, being, as Lessing calls it, tricky, "the tricky question of time" (1997:172), it makes a total faithfulness to the facts of life impossible. Time radically changes the perspective that one has of one's past, because in each phase of life there is a different perception of time. Moreover, one remembers how one was in the past on the basis of how one is in the current moment of trying to remember. Lessing clearly underlines one of the key concepts in "memory studies", namely, context:

> I could with equal truth say I spent my childhood, girlhood and youth in the world of books. Or, wondering about in the bush, listening, and watching what went on. Here we are at the core of the problem of memory. You remember with what you are at the time you are remembering (Lessing, 1994: 185).

The retrospective gaze obliges the writer to analyse it with new eyes, to transform it and mould it in a completely new way:

> The main reason, the real one, why an autobiography must be untrue is the subjective experience of time. The book is written, chapter one to the end, in regular process through the years. Even if you go in for sleights of hand like flashbacks or Tristram Shandy, there is no way of conveying in words the difference between child time and grown-up time, and the different pace of time in different stages of an adult's life (Lessing, 1994: 109).

For Lessing, too, the autobiographical act is deconstructive and interpretative. Lessing retraces her steps over the weave of her life, fixes aporias, blocks, traumas, but also turning points and moments of self-awareness, key events, giving a new and different image of this process compared to the linearity of chronological life, tied to the labour and direction of interpretation. Hence the awareness that memory not only has a selective character, but tinges the tale with a particular rhythm: time, as Gusdorf (1988: 38) says, undergoes a torsion, becomes less linear, it proceeds by leaps: events of the past mix with facts of the present and sometimes the writer ventures into the future from the perspective of the past, in other moments remembrance generates such a feeble image that the writer is obliged to invent a period of her life. The alternation of complete recollections with nebulous images of one's own life causes Lessing to be aware of using the possibility of reconstruction what has been with her own creativity. In the first pages of *Under my Skin* the author wonders about the motive of the selection of remembered things memory carries out:

> As you start to write at once the question begins to insist: Why do you remember this and not that? Why do you remember in every detail a whole week, month, more, of a long ago year, but then complete dark, a blank? How do you know that what you remember is more important than what you don't ?…And then – and perhaps this is the worst deceiver of all – we make up our pasts. You can actually watch your mind doing it, taking a little fragment of fact and then spinning a tale out of it (Lessing, 1994: 12-13).

Moreover, the writer realises that memory operates in different ways in each single person and that there might be contrasting memories of the same period:

> This experience which was shocking to me, began my attempt to understand the extraordinary slipperiness of memory: before that, I had taken it for granted that people with the same experiences would remember the same things (Lessing, 1997: 61).

Lessing also has a full awareness of how difficult it is to render in words the experience of remembering because of the various meanings this term has in different languages. Remembering in the sense of re-evoking, of giving voice to memories, remembering, which in the etymology of the Latin word means bringing back to the heart, it means re-evoking strong emotions, remembering in the sense of recomposing, putting back together what is scattered, remembering in the sense of commemorating together with someone else.

The real memory is the one that takes you back in the experience preserved in your mind, the one that brings back to the present all the sensations, the atmosphere, the climate of that particular moment: "Real remembering is – even if for a flash, even a moment – being back in the experience itself. You remember pain with pain, love with love, one's real best self with one's best self" (Lessing, 1994: 218). Remembering is thus plunging oneself for a second time, even for just a second, into an experience, remembering is reliving it, not so much in the details, but in the perception of the atmosphere surrounding it. Reproducing the atmosphere of an event, of a particular historical moment vividly and effectively is an arduous undertaking for the writer:

> It is hard to convey the flavour of this encounter, because the atmosphere of that time is utterly gone. This is always the difficulty, trying to record the past. Facts are easy: this and that happened; but out of the context and atmosphere, much behaviours – facts – social and personal seems, simply, lunatic (Lessing, 1997: 286).

One of the problems at the centre of Lessing's autobiographies is the delicate issue of the truth. In some moments the writer expresses her need to strictly adhere to the truth of the facts, in other occasions the reader perceives her will to keep secrets, of hiding deeper truths and maintaining a space of her own. Thus her biography is characterised by an alternation of reserve and

ruthless truthfulness. How not to wonder at the reasons for such bluntness in talking about sex, compared to her firm reserve in the treatment of other matters, such as the relationship with her first two children, whom she abandoned at a tender age?

The answer is given by Lessing herself: only she has the right to talk about her life, deciding what to show and what to hide. The idea of writing her own monumental autobiography was born of the urgency to defend herself from all those who, taking the cue from the contents of her works, had published her biographies. From this point of view, it is she who decided to construct the image of herself to present to the public. With great sincerity she affirms that in order to protect herself from the intrusions of journalists, of the press and of the media who feel they have the right to unhinge her personal space, her privacy, she decided to assume a "hostess personality", of showing herself available, open, ready to "play" her part. This is a form of defence, where no one is entitled to access:

> But behind all that friendly helpfulness was something else, the observer, and it is here I retreat to, to take refuge, when I think that my life will be public property and there is nothing I can do about it. *You will never get access here, you can't, this is the ultimate and inviolable privacy*. They call it loneliness, that here is the place unsharable with anyone at all, ever, but it is all we have to fall back on. Me, I, this feeling of me. The observer, never to be touched, tasted, felt, seen, by anyone else (Lessing, 1994: 20).

Perhaps in these words there is the explanation of the reason why Lessing endows her novels with the power of expressing truth more effectively than in biographies. "There is no doubt fiction makes a better job of the truth" (Lessing, 1994: 314). Her final message is that narrative is a more direct way to tell the truth that bothers, that shames, that each of us prefers keeping to ourselves.

Rossana Rossanda

Rossana Rossanda's book, *La ragazza del secolo* was published in 2005. It is a book of memories and as cognitive sciences teach us, it is well known that older people tend to remember, better and preferentially, the positive

aspects of their life. Rossanda's autobiography is an exception. In fact she reconstructs with a critical attitude the various phases and experiences of her life: her childhood in Pola, then in Venice and finally Milan, with the meeting with Antonio Banfi; and then the Italian Resistance, the post war years, Hungary, China, Cuba, the spring of 1968 and, finally, 1969, the year of her expulsion from the Italian Communist Party, and there the book ends. A difficult book of remembrances, in which public and private life intertwine, a reconstruction characterised by a measured, ironic and self depreciating style. It is an autobiography against oblivion that wants to keep the discussion going on some unresolved cruxes of Italian, and not only Italian politics of the twentieth century, and as such *La ragazza del secolo* is addressed to more than one generation of women.

I would like to take my cue from some metaphors: the first is what Rossanda calls **rheumatic memory**. She says that hers is not a book on history, but rather a book that emphasises the difficult task of re-memorising, characterised by the skilful use of tenses between the past and the present:

> After running through more than half a century, tripping, starting over with yet a few more bruises, memory is rheumatic. I have not cultivated it, I know its indulgencies and traps. Even those in giving it a form. But memory and form are a fact amongst other facts, too, neither more nor less (Rossanda 2005: antetesto).

This is not a history book. It is what memory sends back when I catch the doubting glances of those around me: why were you a communist? Why do you say that you are one? What do you mean by it? (Rossanda 2005: antetesto).

The second metaphor is that of **the grey girl**, and concerns the initial period of her adolescence and youth during the Fascist era. In fact, beyond being a political autobiography, this book appears as a sort of first person *Bildungsroman*:

> One could avoid it, make one's own way amongst poverty and serious issues, to which politics did not belong, I don't know what they told each other, I know I did not get worked up to know it. I was a grey girl (Rossanda, 2005: 43).

Up to then Fascism was a vista that had been found, not chosen. I was a grey girl. Those whom Renzo de Felice defines compliant to Fascism, those of the

great rallies where a few shreds of identity could be scraped together, had to be for the most part grey, the great colourless of the country (Rossanda, 2005: 47).

The third metaphor is that of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) as **the keyboard of life**. The PCI as the great love giving sense to the weave of life from a political and universal perspective:

> The Party, that living body I had tied myself to in 1943, that had crossed those years with me, what was the level of suffering, or desire or impotence that it had reached? I was used to moving in it as on a great keyboard that responded and sent me messages, I had been separated from that keyboard and there was little that interested me of that elsewhere of my mind I had always kept to myself; my youthful garden had remained secret and was, by then, full of weeds (Rossanda, 2005: 371-372).

The fourth metaphor is that of the robust illusion, that is, the **great utopia of communism**:

> How to make it understood that for us, the party gave us an extra edge? It gave us the key to enlightened relationships, those we could never have achieved on our own, to different worlds, to ties to people that tried to be equal, never chain produced, never dependent, never commercialised, never utilitarian. It might have been an illusion, a blunder as a friend of mind said a while back, but it was a robust illusion and a solid blunder, very little distinguishable from human reality (Rossanda, 2005: 213).

It is the great utopia that memory records, giving the reader the sense of what has been the deeper meaning of a party of which many of us didn't share the choices, the behaviour, which has bound so many in an anguished love-hate relationship.

The fifth is that of the **Party's triple morality** and concerns the first deep distancing that Rossanda experienced regarding the Party:

> Communists would apply a triple morality: Puritanism for the benefit of the press, family values for the benefit of Catholicism, male chauvinism and playing around in private, but the female partners were

> strenuously protected, in the South of Italy with a XVIII century attitude (Rossanda, 2005: 212).

The sixth metaphor is that of **puff pastry**, that is the complex relationship between private and public life, but also the ambiguous relationship Rossanda had had with feminism:

> The need of being completed is suggested to any girl, a millenary code takes hold of her as she leaves childhood and it is a miracle she is not driven mad (…), it is as stratified as puff pastry, female identity. Of the bride and mother model, the only one displayed, there was a sacrificial inclination (…) a whole life is needed to understand what being a woman means (Rossanda, 2005: 37-38).

The robust illusion of the party is prodigiously intertwined with the adventure of her existence that also holds, amongst its multiple mutations, the female condition, on which Rossanda does not linger, which she doesn't investigate, but of which she reports contradictions and concerns:

> For my own personal voyage there was less and less space, but I'll be damned if I can pinpoint the day I noticed it. I was going on thirty and I was between the public and private spheres like a sickly mangrove tree between land and sea (Rossanda, 2005: 148).
> Each day held the features of the day after it. In my private life I met with frustrations that I credited all women with: we were liberated, but not everything went smoothly on its way: I had no maternal impulses and gave sex mitigated importance (Rossanda, 2005: 148).
> It isn't easy to short-circuit family and maternity. Not being the norm is also an incongruence. Where was the wholeness of the person? Nowhere (Rossanda, 2005: 149).

Her writing does not say, what it had meant to her, to be able to free herself from female models that she had been proposed, which were often made of and by strong, ancient women, women who had reached their own havens: to a "room of one's own", she explains, she has preferred the world. "One is never as realised as one is with others" (Rossanda, 2005: 223).

Yet if feminism seems not to have touched her, or only glancing, as a marginal event compared to that other universe which the world is for her, if she only lets the problems of the female question be guessed at, it is femi-

nism that "makes her hackles rise like a cat's" (Rossanda, 2005: 214). Doubts regarding the Great Party, her ties to men and women whose changes and doubts she cannot understand, the shock waves arriving from a South compelled to emigrate, with its women "tall, straight, black robed, with shawls on their heads, standing like Irene Papas, like Ecuba: they did not cry, they stood at the microphones as if in their own homes, angry and reasoning" (Rossanda, 2005: 146).

The last metaphor is that of **the blind kittens** as the fundamental criticism aimed at the party, at the base of her distancing from the Italian Communist Party:

> If I do have any resentment, it is towards the tendency of Communist Parties and all avant-gardes of looking down at the 'masses' as blind kittens (Rossanda, 2005: 186).

Not telling was the greatest mistake, and amongst these the gap between what was known and what was distilled for the benefit of the mass of the party members, considered too fragile. That was real duplicity, not the double reality between obedience to Rome and obedience to Moscow (Rossanda, 2005: 175).

From the years of the great post second world war urban expansion there began a misunderstanding destined to become dramatic in 1956 with the events of Budapest, in 1968 with Prague, with the silence about the hot autumn of 1969. In *La ragazza del secolo* Rossanda registers the silence on the storms in Eastern Europe, on the revelations by Nikita Sergeyevich. Khrushchev at the XX congress of the Soviet Communist Party (PCUS), the silence of the communist press, of the Italian communist daily *L'Unità*, Togliatti's belated admissions to the Central Committee, the lie of that "we didn't know, we couldn't imagine". Thus there began, for Rossanda, a distancing process, the slow breaking down not only of the idea of the USSR, but "of oneself, of that being and feeling a Communist that had give meaning to life"; leaving "meant not only turning one's back to the USSR, but to ourselves, reconciling ourselves to merely existing" (Rossanda, 2005: 177, 179).

The autobiography ends in 1969 with her leaving the Party and the founding of the newspaper "Manifesto", but this, as Rossanda says, "is another story". Training and politics as a sentimental education were finished. I think that Rossanda could have finished her book with a sentence of her father, a possible key to the reading of her book and life, that goes like this:

"One can do what one likes, but one must pay the price for it" (Rossanda, 2005: 146).

Baby Boomers: collective autobiography

As the last case-study I have chosen **Baby Boomers** because it seems to me a good example of autobiographical writing that tries to meld the feminist technique of "self-consciousness" with autobiographical writing, between collective and private writing. Our four writers would meet every two months to outline and discuss their tales and then each one would return to her own writing. They made an effort to reconcile two very different moments: the effort of communal self-analysis and the difficult work on memory and writing. They managed to carry out this difficult writing strategy because they were united by their common passion for words and their feminist conviction that the word can become an important political tool to shape new human relationships. Another important characteristic, common to the other autobiographies we have examined so far, is that their private lives intertwine with their public ones, and that they decided to write about their lives in a difficult phase of their existence, at the time of their reaching fifty. They consequently strongly felt the need of taking stock of their lives. They are women who have had different lives and have made different choices but the element they do share is having lived in Italy as it speedily went, after World War II, from a pre-modern and pre-industrial past to a future made of technological revolutions, globalisation and new economies. The heroines in *Baby Boomers* are Annamaria Tagliavini, involved in the Associazione Orlando and in the Centro di Documentazione Ricerca e Iniziativa delle Donne, of which she was one of the founding members, and the director of the Biblioteca Italiana delle Donne in Bologna; Serena Sapegno, professor of Italian Studies, and expert in women's and feminist writing; Roberta Mazzanti, who created the ground-breaking series *Astrea*, dedicated to the world "as lived in and narrated by women" for the prestigious Italian Giunti publishing house, a series of books which has had the merit of going beyond the usual western ethnocentrism to search for significant female witnesses in the whole world. The fourth voice in the books is Rosi Braidotti, who has been the director of the University of Utrecht's Institute of Research on Women's Studies, who recounts her life in Friuli, Australia, Paris, and finally in Utrecht. It was from her multiple and various experien-

ces that her theory of the "Nomadic Subject" was born: "Italian, immigrant, intellectual, catholic by upbringing although secular and very, very restless. From the awareness of this complexity I have drawn the deep felt conviction that the individual is a network of multiple, dynamic and incurably contradictory complexities. Ant it is in this that his/her strength lies."

They were little more than teenagers in 1968, and became feminists in the seventies, their single stories highlight the different political and personal motivations of their choice to take part in the feminist movement. Common to all of them is the conviction that the worlds they belonged to and in particular the milieu in which their education was formed was constituted by a practically unchallenged patriarchy. In them there is, consequently, the awareness of being the product of the so called feminist revolution, a revolution that has deeply changed their lives and the society in which they found themselves living. As Rosi Braidotti declares: "Feminism constitutes a heritage without testament whose transmission is an open, vital, and critical project involving each and every one of us."

Marked by an education whose motto was "no waste, no excess, no glaring", run through years of rebellion, crisis, a not foregone search for their identity, the four heroines have reached their *middle youth* with a desire to rethink themselves, to take stock, to communicate their life course. A course that has taken them through the feminist revolution, the only 20th century revolution – according to Eric Hobsbawm – which achieved its goals without making victims. Four individual life courses which are marked by idiosyncratic attitudes and experiences (their different origins, from metropolises such as Rome and Milan, or, instead, provincial towns such as Reggio, in the heartland of the communist region of Emilia, or Latisana, in Friuli; three of them are married, with spouses of the same of the opposite sex, one is not; two have chosen to become mothers, two have not), but also marked by many affinities: the invisible alphabet of affection, intellectual passion, the love for important books. Common cipher of the four different life courses is the desire to act on the world, and in the world, with passionate involvement, to carve reality and build up something lasting, whether concrete objects, writings, or taking part in collective endeavours.

In the brief four-hand introduction, the authors openly mention the works that have been a source of inspiration for them and that well represent, the various theoretical issues I have tried to spotlight as important in women's autobiographies: Simone de Beauvoir's texts, an example of autobiography as a *Bildungsroman*, Anne Frank's diary as a testimony diary, a heritage to be left for future generations. Finally, Luisa Passerini's *Autoritratto*

di gruppo (1998/2007) a multi voiced autobiography, a text that is a sort of written autobiography of a whole generation. In fact, Passerini weaves together her voice and that of various people who took part in the events of '68 in an extremely innovative and experimental way. Methodologically, this is a continuous confrontation between the various points of view and the diverse and contrasting memories of a crucial event of Italian history.

The issue that remains open and unsolved in *Baby Boomers* is how to reconcile the experience of self awareness with autobiographical writing. Self awareness is rooted in the discursive mode, in the living words, circulating amongst women, while autobiography is the retelling of one's life by means of the written word, always implying some distance. In fact, if it is true that the four writers want to use words as close as possible to personal experience, it is after all true that their autobiographical tale is a reconstruction of their lives where truth and fiction are inevitably blended. In this work, too, the act of memory appears as a complex operation, it is imagination and invention, filtered by memory, which manage to fill the blanks of memory.

Literature:

Anderson, Linda. 2006. "Autobiography and the Feminist Subject". In *Feminist Literary Tradition*, Cambridge University Press.

Baby Boomers. 2002. *Vite parallele dagli anni Cinquanta ai cinquant'anni* (Rosi Braidotti, Annamaria Tagliavini, Roberta Mozzanti, Serena Sapegno). Firenze: Giunti.

Butler, Judith. 2004. "Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, Foucault". In: Salih, Sara (ed.). *Judith Butler Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 21-38.

Cosslett, Tess; Luria, Celia and Summerfield, Penny (eds.). 2000. *Feminism and Autobiography*: *Texts, Theories, Methods*. London: Routledge and Kegan.

De Beauvoir, Simone. 1958. *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*. Paris: Gallimard.

De Beauvoir, Simone. 1960. *La force de l'âge*. Paris: Gallimard.

De Beauvoir, Simone. 1963. *La force des choses*. Paris: Gallimard.

De Beauvoir, Simone. 1972. *Tout compte fait*. Paris: Gallimard.

Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. 1992. *Testimony Crisis of Witnessing in Literature*, *Psychoanalysis and Literature*. New York and London: Routledge.

Fortunati, Vita; Golinelli, Gilberta and Rita Monticelli (eds.). 2004. *Studi di genere e memoria culturale*; *Women and Cultural Memory*. Bologna: CLUEB.

Gusdorf, Georges. 1988. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography". In: Olney, James (ed.). *Autobiography. Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hewitt, Leah D. 1990. *Autobiographical Tightropes: Simone de Beauvoir, Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig, and Maryse Condé*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Jay, Paul. 1984. *Being in the Text: Self Representation from Wordsworth to Barthes*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Kuhn, Annette. 1995. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. London and New York: Verso.

Lejeune, Philippe. 1971. *L'Autobiographie en France*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Leonelli, Silvia. 2010. *Dal Singolare al Plurale. Simone de Beauvoir l'Autobiografia al femminile come percorso di formazione*. Bologna: CLUEB.

Lessing, Doris. 1984. "Impertinent Daughters". *Granta* 14, 51-68.

Lessing, Doris. 1985. "My Mother's Life: Part two of Impertinent Daughters ". *Granta* 17, 225-238.

Lessing, Doris. 1994. *Under My Skin***:** *Volume one of my Autobiography to 1949.* London: Harper Collins Publishers.

Lessing, Doris. 1997. *Walking in the Shade*: Volume two of my Autobiography, 1949-1962. London: Harper Collins.

Lessing, Doris. 2005. *Time Bites. Views and Reviews*. London: Harper Collins.

Miller, Nancy K. 1991. *Getting Personal. Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*. New York and London: Routledge.

Monticelli, Rita. 2007. "Contronarrazioni e memorie ri-composte negli studi di genere e delle donne". In: Agazzi, Elena and Vita Fortunati (eds.). *Memoria e saperi: percorsi transdisciplinari*, vol. 35. Roma: Meltemi, 605-624.

Passerini, Luisa. 2007. *Autoritratto di gruppo*. Firenze: Giunti.

Radstone, Susannah. 2000. "Autobiographical Times". In: Cosslett, Tess; Lury, Celia and Summerfield, Penny (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography. Texts, Theories, Methods*. Routledge, 201-219.

Rossanda, Rossana. 2005. *La ragazza del secolo scorso*. Torino: Einaudi.

Tidd, Ursula. 2004. *Gender and Testimony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, Elizabeth. 1988. "Tell it Like it is: Women and Confessional Writing". In: Radstone, Susannah (ed.). *Sweet Dreams: Sexuality, Gender and Popular Fiction*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Tina Pavlović

Negotiation of Identities: An Analysis of Nawal El Saadawi's Autobiographical Texts[1]

The role of autobiography in the reconstruction of social life, especially that of women, is of great importance both for feminist theorists and for everyone else. Feminist theorists consider autobiography as a way of understanding subjectivity and its forms, as well as the place of women in history. Inside the feminist discourse, autobiography, in the political sense, is used as a strategy of empowerment and as a way in which women autobiographers can use their experiences and construct themselves as subjects. Feminism, however puts up many challenges to the genre of autobiography, and with its involvement in the genre it contributes to the critical re-evaluation of its main settings, which include subjectivity, knowledge and power, differences and collective identities. Beverley Skeggs (1995, qtd. in Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield, 2000) points out how feminism was deeply interested in autobiography when attempting to connect the "personal" and the "political", and in trying to emphasize the importance of women's experience as the key element in creating women's knowledge. Autobiography[2] became the

1 This paper is a short version of my master's thesis under the title *The construction of identity in Nawal El Saadawi's autobiographical texts*, defended in November 2010 at the University of Zadar, Department of Sociology.

2 I follow the definition by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson who make a distinction between the terms life writing, life narrative and autobiography (Smith and Watson, 2001). Life writing is a broader term, which gathers different writings in which life is the subject, and such writings can be biographical, novelistic, historical, but can also discuss the author. Life narrative

meeting point of different types of feminist approaches which 'revolutionized' the research of autobiography, expanded its definition so it would include practices that pervade different fields of our life, not just the literary genre or a body of texts (Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield, 2000). The study of women's autobiographical discourse in different cultural and historical situations is a demanding and long-term process which supports the development of feminist critique and theory as it opens numerous questions related to women's experience, women's consciousness, as well as the construction of womanhood. What do our women's voices express as a specific type of experience? What, how and why do we memorize? How do we write about our own life path and our experiences in a specific cultural and historical context? What is the autobiographical consciousness of a woman, and how is it constructed?

Through my previous study of autobiography, it infrequently appeared to be a powerful tool for insights into the analysis of society, social relations, attitudes, customary and traditional codes of law expressed through personal experience. In addition, the special significance of women's self-referential experiences should in no case be denied. This work aims to analyse those thematic places around which the construction of woman's identity takes place, and which represent woman's life through an autobiographical text, being a common place of theoretical dispute as well. The texts intended for this purpose are the two autobiographies of Egyptian writer, psychiatrist and feminist Nawal El Saadawi: *A Daughter of Isis: An Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi (2009), and Walking through Fire: A Life of Nawal El Saadawi* (2002). Through an analytical frame of feminist critical theories, this writer's experience will be analysed by means of autobiographical discourse, which is primarily a template for the contextualization of her identity in a social context. Equal importance will be put on the articulation of woman's experience, as well as on sources for the articulation of feminist theories. This paper will more deeply discuss the question of education and the way that class and gender consciousness is developed, the problem of

is a narrower term which includes different types of self-referential writing, including autobiography as well, while the term autobiography, according to the authors, relates to special practices of life narrative which arose in the Enlightenment and it is connected to ideas of coherently framed self ontologically identical with the other "I". Traditional concepts of the autobiographical subject are tied to Enlightenment's ideals of authenticity, but also with race, class and gender privileges, which are left behind in the figure of the "universal human subject" (Smith and Watson, 1992: XVII). The authors see women's autobiographical writing as an explicit resistance to this kind of universal model. However, the idea of authenticity perceived as a specificity of woman's experience and places of differences related to universality is not abandoned; it is only altered in line with the specificities of woman's experience.

choice and tension between writing and medicine, anti-colonial and feminist activism, and placing El Saadawi in the context of local and global, that is Arab and transnational feminism.

The questions that this paper opens up are about the position of Nawal El Saadawi within the local, national context and Arab feminism on the one hand, and in a wider, global context, her relation to transnational feminism in particular. Does her local, Arab and national position prevail in her theoretical thinking against all other general questions of feminism? How does Nawal El Saadawi relate to certain questions about Islam? How do identities position or overlap themselves in these texts? What is more important, the woman's or Arab's identity? What are the key places on which Nawal El Saadawi builds her own identity in her autobiographical texts?

Born in 1931 in Kafr Tahla, near Cairo, where she grew up and pursued her education, Nawal El Saadawi became a leading Egyptian writer, psychiatrist, feminist and Arab women's rights advocate. In 1955 she graduated in psychiatry at the Faculty of Medicine at Cairo University. From 1963 to 1972 she worked as the general director for public health education at the Ministry of Health.

I found El Saadawi provoking for several reasons. She is one of the most productive and most quoted Arab feminist writers of the 20th century, and her works have been translated into over 30 languages. She is the author of numerous short stories, novels, plays, research papers and critical essays, all which deal with the contemporary problems of Arab societies. Her way of life has shown that social engagement can change and solve the problems of the Arab society of her time. Furthermore, she is one of the first Arab women who put forward the issue of sexual oppression and spoke publicly and wrote about sexual performance and female sexuality, sexual abuse and genital mutilation. For these reasons she has constantly been at the centre of controversy and conflicting interpretations, attacked by many critics, her works banned, eventually ending up on the death lists of Islamic extremists. Amal Amireh (2009) emphasizes her (ambivalent) reception in the Western world, rather different from the reception and context within Arab societies. From the perspective of theories of reception, what El Saadawi says or writes is less important than the place from which she speaks or writes, the context in which her words are received, from the audience that listens or reads her works, or the context in which her words are used. The relationship between text and context becomes very interesting primarily because she does not take a fixed location. On the one hand, she is an Egyptian novelist who writes in Arabic to Arab audiences, but on the other hand,

she is a "travelling" intellectual of the so-called Third World who addresses English-speaking audiences through numerous translations of her work and through her lectures and interviews (Amireh, 2000). Her feminist critique was crucial for the public discourse on sexuality and women's rights and the popular language of her writing differed in accessibility from the academic writings of radical feminists. This resulted in her extraordinary influence on her compatriots, especially women, and her direct impact on social awareness. Furthermore, her fiction writing differed from the Egyptian feminist mainstream writing of the time primarily because it focused on impoverished women emphasizing their exploitation. Amireh (2000) states that although the emphasis fell under the parameters of the general leftist intellectual discourse, it was subversive in the context of Egyptian feminism, interested in middle and upper class women and articulated by the members of these classes.

Feminism and autobiography

Smith and Watson (1998) claim that the status of autobiography has changed severely inside as well as outside the academic community in the last few decades, and that women's autobiography now has a privileged place at the crossroads of feminist, postcolonial and postmodern theories[3]. In the 1980s feminist critics started to understand that academic scientists were observing women's writing only as compared to men's writing, that is, as "other" writing, and thus seeing traditional reading practices by which they assume that the autobiography is written by a man, consequently making cultural stereotypes that differed men from women.

In her work, Irina Novikova (1997) posed a very important question: "Which of the reading and writing tradition, and which of our discourse practices and strategies intersect with the problems of feminism? How do we, from our cultural place, answer the argumentation from Shari Benstock: How does writing intermediate the space between "self" and "life" which autobiography is trying to cross and overcome?" Novikova (1997) further claims that by definition an autobiography is about trying to recapture yourself, that is, from Hegel's point of view, understanding yourself through "consciousness" and thus being self-conscious. This way of think-

3 An overview of works on women's writing, women's autobiographies and the theories of autobiographies in Smith and Watson, 1998.

ing supposes that there is a "self" and that it can be "understood", and that self-understanding constitutes passion, which encourages the act of autobiography. Further, the author claims that with the help of writing that passion can be fulfilled (Novikova, 1997). In fact, Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991, qtd. in Novikova, 1997) ask themselves: How are the concepts of "self", "knowledge" and "writing by memory" historically rooted and socially and symbolically constructed so that they are intervened into the "complex implications of cultural functions" that surround the autobiographer?

Awareness as a process: On gender and class-consciousness

El Saadawi points out that she grew up in a family atmosphere which encouraged education and knowledge both for men and women:

> Both my father and my mother realized the importance of education. Were it not for education, my father would not have risen from the class of poor peasants to become a middle-class intellectual. He felt that my future as an educated woman would be better assured than if I became just a wife (El Saadawi, 2009: 186).

She is especially grateful to her father who provided her with a kind of freedom and encouragement for her education. Her father was a deep believer in education, as is evidenced by the fact that all of his nine children were sent to school. El Saadawi was educated in public schools before she began to study medicine, meaning that she gained her formal education in Egyptian schools in the Arabic language, and not in schools in foreign languages or outside the state, as was the case for many Arab intellectuals.

Feminist identity theorists indicate the identification of women and men with the father figure in the process of socialization more than the figure of the mother because the father is a symbolic place of the public, success, freedom, and power. It can be seen that even for El Saadawi her father is a kind of ideal to which she looks up to, but he also represents a man who does not discriminate her for being a woman. Although in the patriarchal Arab world in which the father is the head of the family, and possesses power, freedom, law, and thus functions as an ideal, for El Saadawi her father was also her support in emancipation. Her identification with the

father supposes a step away from the female figure in the family, potentially elevating the father's symbolic height.

Although her father's family belonged to the working class, her father was an educated man. El Saadawi often refers to them and their problems, including problems related to education accessibility. From her early childhood she was class-conscious, especially regarding the situation in her family.

> Class differences played a role in the balance of power at home. Mother was conscious of the fact that she came from a higher-class family than my father. She never said so much, but her behaviour gave the impression that she belonged to the nobility (El Saadawi, 2009: 186).

Recent feminist theory confirms that consciousness is not the result but rather the process itself and its quality. According to Teresa de Lauretis (1986), the consciousnesses of oneself as a woman, the consciousness of class and of race constitute a special configuration of subjectivity created at the intersection of meaning and experience. In other words, these three different forms of consciousness are based on personal history that each of us interprets or reconstructs within the field of meaning and knowledge available in the culture at a particular moment in history, a field that includes ways of political commitment and struggle. Self and identity are thus caught and understood within a specific discursive configuration. Consciousness is never fixed, because discursive boundaries change according to historical conditions.

> In those days girls were rarely encouraged to enter the sciences, or attend schools of medicine or engineering, or pure science. The word 'sciences' in Arabic was a masculine noun and had a masculine ring to it but aadaab (literature) was feminine, and its letters were similar to those of adab, which means good manners, well-behaved, docile. An oft-repeated saying was "Good manners are preferred to science" (meaning knowledge). Good manners and good behaviour were expected of girls, but not necessarily of boys. For boys the common saying was, "Nothing shames a man but his pocket" (in other words, not to have money is the only thing which a man need be ashamed about!) (El Saadawi, 2009: 312).

She develops her feminist consciousness through the personal experience of struggle for women's education, particularly during the period of attending Saneya high school that the first pioneers of Egyptian women's education attended. El Saadawi (2010c) believes that education, government, constitution, culture, art, and all laws, including family law, should be secular. When we talk about education, the question is what kind of access within the Arab societies is offered to whom? Or rather, who has access to knowledge and what kind of knowledge? Knowledge and power are highly correlated, and for El Saadawi knowledge is power that is needed in the feminist struggle, both at the local and global levels. Hoda Elsadda states that the thread that unites her work is her belief that knowledge is power. On the other hand, possession of knowledge does not necessarily entail the possession of power that justifies the knowledge itself or acting in accordance with it (Elsadda et al, 2010). Her involvement in activist campaigns as well as structures that combine activism and research point to both awareness and the importance of insidious acts of power and domination in tangible terms, a fact that resulted in the constant reflection of the strategies of resistance on practical and theoretical levels (Elsadda et al, 2010).

Choice and/or tension between writing and medicine

One of the important aspects in the construction of identity in these autobiographical texts is the problem of choice manifested in the tension between writing and medicine: "I had continued to write short stories, and keep a diary. In my dreams I saw myself as a writer rather than as a medical doctor" (El Saadawi, 2009: 332).

After finishing high school, El Saadawi was in a dilemma on what to study, whether literature, which she liked, or medicine.

> I thought of choosing the School of Fine Arts, or alternatively the School of Literature. I was not sure whether writers graduated from the School of Literature or not, but in my dreams I kept seeing myself as a literary scholar, or a writer, or as a musician playing the lute or the piano, or as a painter with a brush in my hand and a canvas stretched on a wooden easel in front of me (El Saadawi, 2009: 220).

However, although her dreams of becoming a writer prevailed, she enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine and finished it within six and a half years, while at the same time she continued her writing and her activism. By doing so she proved to herself, to her father, and everybody else that a woman can do the same as a man.

Fedwa Malti-Douglas (1995) states that many sophisticated and important writers of the Arab world were doctors as well, and that there is a social reason for that. In the Egyptian educational system the best high school students (and El Saadawi was one of them) often enrol in the Faculty of Medicine, i.e., they choose the career path that is the most demanding and prestigious. Her mother said:

> You know, Nawal, who seeks admission to the School of Literature. Those who are no good at school or have low grades. But you got the highest grades. Go to the School of Medicine. You may become a famous doctor like Ali Ibrahim [one of the first and foremost surgeons of Egypt] and you'll be able to look after us free (El Saadawi, 2009: 304).

This advice can be interpreted on three levels. The first one would be the career path as mentioned by Malti-Douglas, but medicine also represents power and control over life, thus being predominantly a man's domain. Furthermore, it functions on the social level in a very specific context where elements of class and the social become obvious, i.e., a place where she can help her people in a direct way. Medicine is both a career and a question of male prestige, but, nevertheless, a profession and 'mission' in which El Saadawi can prove caring about life or the lives of her countrymen and women in practice.

> As a rural doctor I lived close to village people, shared their experiences, learnt about their lives, witnessed what the triple scourge of poverty, ignorance and sickness did to them. Women bore a double burden since they also suffered from the oppression exercised on them by fathers and husbands, brothers and uncles and other men. I saw young girls burn themselves alive, or throw themselves into the waters of the Nile and drown, in order to escape a father's, or a husband's tyranny. I tried to help them but the men with power in the village in agreement with the state authorities had me transferred somewhere else, accusing me of not respecting the traditional values

> of their community, of inciting women to rebel against religion and its laws (El Saadawi, 2009: 351).

Her relation towards religion is tightly connected with the last sentence of this quote. Even though she was accused of being against Islam, and religious and traditional values, El Saadawi always claimed that religion should be a private and personal matter. This idea is also apparent in her feminist activism, which she connects to secularism.

> Religion is a political patriarchal class ideology. With the increasing horrors of religious fundamentalisms, we are struggling today to separate completely between religion and state in our countries. Religion should be a very personal private matter. The state, the constitution, education, culture, art, all laws, including the family law, should be secular. Neo-colonialism and religious fundamentalisms are two faces of the same coin. They co-operate or quarrel according to their changing interests. Religion is used to divide and rule (El Saadawi 2010c: 115).

Obviously, medicine gave her plenty of material for writing, as well as an insight into the human body and mind or, in other words, her medical knowledge and medical practice have given her the opportunity to experience different people and their problems, afterwards discussed in her investigation of the oppression of Arab women. Writing for El Saadawi also represented an act of resistance, which she used to oppose the traditional norms and patriarchy. In that way she became self-conscious and by that she encouraged the desire for the creation of autobiography, or as Novikova (1997) says, "with the help of writing this desire can be fulfilled".

Writing can be interpreted as a political issue when it is seen as a threat to the conservative regimes. Lindsey Moore (2008) states that Arab women were subject to restriction and to different types of violence both as women and artists, including censorship, imprisonment, death threats, the limitations of translation, and reductive criticism both inside and outside the Arab Muslim world. El Saadawi's situation was also similar. The topics she chose brought about problems in her medical and writing career, respectively. Thus, after the publication of the book *Women and Sex* (1969), which deals with the issues of sexuality and gender, she lost her job at the Ministry of Health. Then in 1981 she ended up in prison because she publicly spoke out against the political corruption of President Anwar El Sadat. Also, her

works were censored and banned in many Arab countries. Her name ended up on a black list of Islamic extremists, which is why she had to go into exile.

For El Saadawi writing is essentially a human cultural activity which expresses the hidden truth and real hidden person (El Saadawi, 2010b). Hélène Cixous (1993, according to Kowalcyk, 2002) underlines the significance of women writing about their experiences, thoughts, and their womanhood and calls for self-expression, arguing that a woman is defined by her body and also identified with it. By writing a woman again becomes a body and re-establishes herself as a subject, or as Cixous urges: Write yourself. Your body must be heard (Cixous 1993, according to Kowalcyk, 2002).

> In my life writing has remained my sole refuge. Nothing can replace the words I write on paper, can compensate me for them. For me it is like breathing. Through writing my self breathes, expresses itself. My pen breaks down the wall of isolation between my body and the world. I create words but words create me. Words are all I possess, yet I am possessed by them. Between words and me there is a love relation built on equality. Neither of the two partners dominates the other (El Saadawi, 2002: 16).

The social position of women becomes evident through the act of naming, which is controversial for El Saadawi, and here her criticism towards the patriarchalism of the Arab world occurs. She finds it unjust that she has to wear her grandfather's instead of her mother's last name; she even goes so far as to write her mother's name beside hers in school, which upsets her teacher. El Saadawi (2010a) claims that she never loved the last name El Saadawi, because it felt like an alien body attached to her. However, because she had to use it, people started to recognize her by her last name, but deep down she never felt as if it belonged to her. She mentions that all her life she had a secret diary in which she wrote her real name: Nawal Zaynab (Zaynab was her mother's name), and by writing it she wanted to erase the foreign name imposed on her. The need for naming that connects her directly to another woman – her mother – was very important for her subjectivity. The role of the mother is highly celebrated and respected in Islam, and the prophet Muhammad himself says: "Paradise is at the feet of your mother!"

The discriminatory restrictiveness imposed on a woman's entering into the public sphere once again becomes obvious when confronting the matter of women's involvement in the armed forces:

> But armed struggle was only for men. Women were not eligible for the honour of freeing their country. If a woman volunteered, she could go as a nurse, or to entertain the fighters. If she died in a battle, she was never described as a martyr. Her only glory was to be sought in nursing the wounded, or entertaining the men who fought. These two vocations seemed insulting to a young girl who, when still a child, had dreamt of carrying a gun rather than a chamber pot, wearing fatigues rather than dancing tights. I loved my country and was prepared to sacrifice my life for it. But my self-respect, my pride, was more precious to me than my life. I could not sacrifice that for anything, even my country, could not think of carrying chamber pots full of urine and excreta, or of dancing to entertain the fighters (El Saadawi, 2002: 39).

Gender/sex roles and differences are especially sharpened in social areas and situations such as war, where man has the power, and the woman is not favourable, where man is the actor or the subject and the carrier of higher causes like the national liberation, and the woman is the one who serves his causes, because she, as El Saadawi says "could go as a nurse or to amuse the fighters".

Political activism: The intersection between anti-colonial and feminist activism

When speaking of her anti-colonial consciousness and resistance, El Saadawi's experience of working and living in the countryside are of utmost importance, as well as her battle with the effects of poverty such as disease and lack of treatment under colonial British rule, something she herself witnessed. The situation in the rural areas was indeed problematic; medical facilities were poorly equipped, some did not even have vehicles necessary for emergency patient transfers to the hospital. This all led to the worst possible consequences. The rural folk were not educated in disease prevention or about the problems of superstitious beliefs which also influenced their perception of health and relation to life in general. In her village, El Saadawi organized a work group which informed and educated the villagers about superstitions, something which the village elders disliked as they drew their power from the superstitious beliefs and "devils". El Saadawi states that

in medical school they had not learned about so-called unhealthy habits and traditional rural practices and urban practices such as circumcisions of both male and female children. The injustice which afflicted primarily women but also villagers and impoverished people motivated El Saadawi to record and convey the Egyptian women's stories, whose history is not written down but orally passed on from one generation to the next. The decision to write out this history in her own language implies a tie between her feminist and anti-colonial consciousness. To her, using the Arabic language meant resisting British colonialism, and all her works, fictional or not, were written in Arabic.

In her deliberations, El Saadawi poses key questions of Arab feminism which can certainly be linked with women's solidarity on the international level and with transnational feminism. Some of these questions are: "Can women in Arab regions (or any other part of the world) be freed from the militaristic capitalistic patriarchal system, either Christianity, Judaism, Islam or any other? Can these efforts free women from patriarchal, religious and classist oppression?" (El Saadawi, 2010c: 115). The author believes that religious political-fundamentalist groups keep gaining more and more power in the region known as the Middle East. On the other hand, The Arab Women's Solidarity Association, to which she belongs, has been banned in Egypt. The reasons she gives for this is her involvement against the Gulf War in 1991 and her feminist and critical position by which female genital mutilation, the covering of faces with the hijab and other women's problems must be linked with the political, economic, religious and other social problems and issues. In their battle against the oppression of women on all levels, globally, locally and personally, and with their involvement in the national, pacifist, anti-colonial, anti-imperial, anti-capitalist and anti-racist fights, the members of the aforementioned organization connect feminism with secularism. El Saadawi advocates for the complete separatism of religion and state in Egypt. Religion should, according to her, be a personal and private matter.

Miriam Cooke (Elsadda et al, 2010) considers the important problems of the Arab world to be somewhat different than those facing women elsewhere in the world, and that being the growing power and violence of politically motivated religious activists who turn women into "moral barometers of their societies", and as such, must obey the norms and values that are harmful for their wellbeing. She believes that there is continuous tension between feminists and fundamentalists so that the success of one group provokes the response of the other group. In the interview she says: "I am part

of an organization that Nawal El Saadawi recently set up (Global Solidarity for Secular States) whose goal is to reach out to all those who believe that religion is a private matter in which the governments should play no role". (Elsadda et al, 2010: 125).

Despite the unique context of women in Arab societies, according to El Saadawi it cannot shadow women's fight for the common platform. It fuels this fight with power. El Saadawi's position in relation to Arab and transnational feminism is clear in the following statement: Global and local solidarity are important to fight back, we need to unveil our mind and organize. Unity is power, and knowledge is power. We need power to fight power glocally (globally and locally) (El Saadawi, 2010c: 116).

These are the discourse practices and strategies in El Saadawi's work that intersect with the problems of feminism, and are important to both her construction of identity and Arab women's identities in general. Some of the most prominent theoreticians of Arab feminism mentioned above have answered the question about the most burning women's issues in the Arab world regarding, on the one side, the focus on local problems, and on the other side, involvement with the transnational discussions on sex, women's problems and feminism, and these answers are in accordance with Nawal El Saadawi's views as well. Hoda Elsadda believes that for Arab feminists it is in fact impossible to separate the local from the global. The colonial heritage of most of the Arab countries inevitably connects local challenges with global ones, which can be seen from El Saadawi's thoughts in the preceding passage. A challenge which affects feminists all around the world is the way in which they can present and criticize dominant local and global everyday situations which complicate women's lives (Elsadda et al, 2010: 125).

The analysis of the autobiographical texts of Nawal El Saadawi showed the importance of autobiography for the articulation of female identity and for analysing the key women's problems in the Arab world. It presents several thematic spaces which are important for the construction of women's identity, i.e., for the construction of the identity of Nawal El Saadawi, and these are the issue of education and the way in which class and gender consciousness is built through emancipation, the problem of choosing a profession and/or the tension between writing and medicine, as well as anti-colonial and feminist activism which posits the author within the context of the local and the global, or in other words, Arab and transnational feminism. The analysis also shows the reasons for the author's political position, which is primarily working with women and villagers in rural areas, witnessing genital mutilations and many other social practices connected with it, as

well as a number of social injustices which pushed her into feminist activism and writing.

Writing is a special category in the construction of Nawal El Saadawi's identity. To her, it is profoundly intertwined with her life and actions, as well as with her identity, and at the same time it presents a resistance against traditional values and patriarchal common practices, as the rewriting and articulation of one's self and as placing one's self as a subject, as a woman who defines herself and acts through writing. Writing for her is, as it is for many other feminist authors, a metaphorical "home". Besides writing, medicine is also within El Saadawi's identity conflict, which was meaningful for her in several ways and which enabled her to have direct contact with women and their lives, and the ways in which hierarchy and the shapes of patriarchal power and traditional laws in the Arab world are built. Through these conflicts between writing and medicine, which shaped her identity and her positioning toward the world and feminism, we can attempt to map out the complexities of women's social problems in the Arab context, as well as the sources of Nawal El Saadawi's engagement and resistance.

To the question of El Saadawi's role, i.e., whether her local, Arab and national positioning has contextual primacy over all general feminist issues, I would respond affirmatively, as she deals with problems related to the Arab world, but then also connects all the Arab issues with women's solidarity on an international level. Also, El Saadawi does not only advocate for the complete separation of religion and state (secularism), but she also connects feminism with secularism in her fight against women's oppression on all levels.

The problems and issues of identity construction in these texts must not be isolated as they are connected with one another and articulated through one another, which was shown through the analysis of the texts. Also, it is important to stress that these are not the only conflicts around which El Saadawi constructs her identity in these autobiographical texts, as some of them have been left out due to the length of the paper. This is only one of the possible readings and a different interpretation of these elements is doable and welcome, especially if some other analytical framework is used.

Literature:

Amireh, Amal. 2000. "Framing Nawal El Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 26(1): 215-249.

Astore, Mireille. 2007. "Art, Autobiography and the Maternal Abject". In: Golley, Nawar al-Hassan (ed.). *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity through Writing*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Biti, Vladimir. 2000. *Pojmovnik suvremene književne i kulturne teorije*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska.

Cosslett, Tess, Lury, Celia and Summerfield, Penny (eds.). 2000. *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*. London and New York: Routledge.

De Lauretis, Teresa. 1986. "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts". In: Teresa de Lauretis (ed.). *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1-19.

El Saadawi, Nawal. 2002. *Walking Through Fire: A Life of Nawal El Saadawi*. Translated by Sherif Hetata. London and New York: Zed Books.

El Saadawi, Nawal. 2009. *A Daughter of Isis: An Autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi*. Translated by Sherif Hetata. London and New York: Zed Books.

El Saadawi, Nawal. 2010a. "Preface". In: Adele Newson-Horst (ed.). *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi: A Reader*. London and New York: Zed Books, xi-xvii.

El Saadawi, Nawal. 2010b. "How to Write and Why". In: Adele Newson-Horst (ed.). *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi: A Reader*. London and New York: Zed Books, 7-9.

El Saadawi, Nawal. 2010c. "Foreword", *Feminist Theory* 11(2): 115-116.

Elsadda, Hoda; Moghissi, Haideh; Cooke, Miriam and Valassopoulos, Anastasia. 2010. "Dialogue section: Arab feminist research and activism: Bridging the gap between the theoretical and the practical", *Feminist Theory* 11(2): 121-127.

Gordon, Linda. 1986. "What's new in women's history". In: Teresa de Lauretis (ed.). *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 20-30.

Hiddleston, Jane. 2010. "Imprisonment, freedom, and literary opacity in the work of Nawal El Saadawi and Assia Djebar", *Feminist Theory* 11(2): 171-187.

Khaleell, Homa. 2010. *Nawal El Saadawi: Egypt's radical feminist*. http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/apr/15/nawal-el-saadawi-egyptian-feminist (visited 16 Oct 2010).

Kowalcyk, Izabela. 2002. "Pregovaranje oko ženskog identiteta u Poljskoj", *Treća* 4(1): 148-159.

Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. 1995. *Men, Women, and God(S): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Marcus, Laura. 1994. *Auto/biographical Discourses*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Millman, Marcia and Moss Katner, Rosabeth. 1987. "Introduction to *Another Voice*: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life and Social Science". In: Sandra Harding (ed.). *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 29-36.

Moore, Lindsey. 2008. *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film*. London and New York: Routledge.

Nead, Lynda. 2002. "Uokvirenje ženskog tijela", *Treća* 4(1): 160-173.

Newson-Horst, Adele. 2010. "Introduction: The world of Nawal El Saadawi *or* Nawal Zaynab (*the name she would prefer to take*)". In: Adele Newson-Horst (ed.). *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi: A Reader*. London and New York: Zed Books, 1-4.

Novikova, Irina. 1997. "Žena i rat/rod i žanr/autobiografija i istorija u *Dalekoj tutnjavi* Elene Rževske", *Ženske studije* 10, http://zenskestudie.edu.rs/index.phpoption=com_content&task=view&id=270&Itemid=41 (visited 16 Oct 2010).

Smith, Dorothy E. 1987. "Women's perspective as a radical critique of sociology". In: Sandra Harding (ed.). *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 84-96.

Smith, Sidonie and Watson, Julia. 1992. *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Smith, Sidonie and Watson, Julia (ed.). 1998. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Smith, Sidonie and Watson, Julia. 2001. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith

Lives in Outline: Women, Autobiography, and Recent Graphic Memoir[1]

Today I want to reflect on the field of women's self-presentation in autobiographical media during the last decade. My project is two-fold: first, to identify three concepts important for theorizing women's autobiographical practice at this moment –performativity, positionality, and relationality; and, second, to consider a major site of its production, women's graphic memoirs.

I begin by noting that the topic "women's lives or autobiography" has an antiquated ring to it, as a Second Wave feminist project assuming the fixed position of 'woman' and the fixed attributes of femininity. Many theoretical challenges have eroded the signifiers 'woman' and 'women': first, the critique of the universalizing effect of 'woman' has redirected attention to the relational, dynamic, and complex analytic of 'gender.' A second intervention has involved fracturing the notion of a unified signifier 'woman' through intersectional analyses of differences and asymmetries of power among women. A third productive area has been the contesting analyses of the relationship of bodies, genders, and sexualities; that is, no single argument for

1 Versions of this paper have been given at the Dubrovnik feminist course "Women Narrating Their Lives and Actions" (IUC Dubrovnik, 23-27 May 2011), at Halic University, Istanbul, and at the University of California, Los Angeles. An extended version was published in *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 58 (April 2009), 13-40. Parts of this essay condensed from *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, second expanded edition, 2010, appear courtesy of University of Minnesota Press.

alignment sufficiently accounts for the complexities and contradictions of people's experiential histories, multiple positionalities, and desiring bodies.

Moreover, in life writing studies the concept of 'autobiography' as a fixed genre of reference has been challenged by the increasing attention paid to popular genres of contemporary life narrative, including online forms, graphic memoir, testimonial writing, autoethnography, film and video, and installation art. In the wake of these autobiographical genres, the gendered positionalities they engage have proliferated. To frame this explosion of possibilities for self-representation, three theoretical concepts are particularly useful.

First, *performativity*, in postmodern theory, designates autobiographical occasions as dynamic sites for the performance of identities that are constitutive of subjectivity. In this view, identities are not fixed or essential attributes of subjects. Rather, they are enacted and reiterated through cultural norms and discourses, and thus remain provisional and unstable.[2] For Judith Butler, performativity "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993: 20). Responding to Butler's assertion that "the 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of . . . gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves," Sidonie Smith asserts that "the interiority or self that is said to be prior to the autobiographical expression or reflection is an *effect* of autobiographical storytelling" (1995: 18). Theorizing performativity, then, offers a vocabulary for describing the complex relationship of regulatory discourses of identity to material bodies, as well as autobiographical agency.

Second, the concept of *positionality* in narrative studies designates how subjects are situated at particular axes through the social relations of differential power. Foucault's analysis of "technologies of the self" as imperatives for constituting the 'disciplined' self through multiple confessional practices established a vocabulary for specifying subject positions as discursive locations (Foucault, 1997). Leigh Gilmore's reading of the 'autographics' of women's life writing focuses on the subject positions negotiated by narrators within the constraints of discursive regimes as they present themselves within genres that both invite and prohibit that speaking (*autobiographics*). Issues of positionality and the geographics of identity are especially complex in narratives of de/colonization, immigration, displacement, and exile, encouraging the use of multiple terms for autobiographical subjects in pro-

2 Much contemporary discussion of life narrative as performative is informed by Judith Butler's deconstruction of a binary gender system and her assertion that gender is performative.

cess, such as *hybrid, border, diasporic, nomadic, migratory, cosmopolitan, glocal,* and *transnational*.

A third useful concept in life narrative theorizing of gender is relationality, which argues that autobiographical narrative is not a solitary but a relational story. It offers, in Paul John Eakin's phrase, not only "the autobiography of the self but the biography and the autobiography of the other" (1999: 58); see also Nancy K. Miller's discussion of "Representing Others" (1994). That is, a narrating I's story is refracted through the stories of others, at times producing an autoethnographic community of identification, or a confessional drama of familiality and familiarity.

Relationality is narratively incorporated through what Bahktin terms "heteroglossic dialogism," that is, the multiplicity of "tongues" or polyvocality through which subjectivity is enunciated.[3] Polyvocality enables us to regard the subject as always a subject of the other, of social discourses. That is, the words through which a story is told employ the language of the other; autobiographical subjects cannot express themselves outside of social discourses (though they may experience themselves extra-linguistically). Rhetorically, relationality is implicated in the addressee(s) posited by a narrator, those others to whom the narrative is directed and through whom it is circulated. Relationality, then, points to the ways in which the subject is always in process and in relation, never autonomous.

Relationality also implies the subject's vulnerability within the context of the ethics of self-narration. Butler (2005) has more recently elaborated on the self's opaqueness to itself arguing that the self is founded in the vulnerability inherent in its embeddedness in social conditions, its engagement with others, and its recourse to cultural norms of narration in telling a story of itself. "The 'I' who begins to tell its story," writes Butler, "can tell it only according to recognizable norms of life narration . . . to the extent that the 'I' agrees, from the start, to narrate itself through those norms, it agrees to circuit its narration through an externality, and so to disorient itself in the telling through modes of speech that have an impersonal nature" (2005: 52). Autobiographical subjects thus are multiply vulnerable, to their own opaqueness, to their relationality to others, and to the norms through which they externalize themselves. This vulnerability, according to Butler, is the ethical condition for giving an account of oneself. Agency derives from the

3 Françoise Lionnet in her *Autobiographical Voices* (1989) turns to Edouard Glissant's concept of creolization to propose a theory of autobiographical textuality as a métissage or braiding of disparate voices in subjects whose cultural origins and allegiances are multiple and conflicting.

willingness to narrate one's opacity, fragmentation, and limits of knowability, that is, to narrate "the way in which we are constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us" (2005: 64). In this view, the idea of agency shifts from the subject's exercise of control over its interpretation of its life to an openness to its opacity and vulnerability, and to its ethical obligation to the other.

In sum, theorizing *performativity* contests the notion that autobiography is a site of authentic or pre-discursive identity. Theorizing *positionality,* with an eye to situatedness, contests the normative notion of a universal and transcendent autobiographical subject, autonomous and free of history. And theorizing *relationality* contests the notion that self-narration is the monologic utterance of a solitary, introspective subject that is knowable to itself. Using these terms to decenter the notion of the unified, stable, autonomous individual previously assumed as a masculine subject of privilege, critics now speak of a subject in process, a subject in context (historical, social, geographical), and a subject whose self-knowing is implicated, discursively and dialogically, in "the forms of ideological environment" (Wong, 1998: 169). These concepts enable more flexible reading practices and inclusive approaches to the new genres and emergent subjects that are both sites of contestation about what constitutes a 'life' and ways in which subjects narrating and imaging their lives are projecting new contours of subjectivity.

Graphic Lives

Graphic memoir, in Gillian Whitlock's term, "autographics," has become a rich site of self-representation for reimagining gender relations. While comic books and the 'funny pages' of newspapers have existed for a over century, since 1972 their focus, and uses have burgeoned (see Gardner, 2008) throughout the Americas, Europe, South Africa, and elsewhere, producing new kinds of stories. Some graphic memoirs, because they link the cartooning form of popular culture to narrative practices and theoretical debates, can intervene directly in socio-political debates and tell complex stories of gender, sexuality, family, and nation as they circulate worldwide and "open up new and troubled spaces," as Whitlock notes (2007: 976).[4] Subject positi-

4 Autographics are not simply translations of written memoirs; rather, Hillary L. Chute and Marianne DeKoven argue that "the medium of comics is cross-discursive because it is composed of verbal and visual narratives that . . . remain distinct" (2006:769).

ons are differently negotiated in comics, with the drawn portraits of cartoonists functioning as avatars that "engage with the conventions of comics" (971) and address readers differently. Because of their visual directness, we identify in reading comics and imaginatively "complete the narrative" (Gardner, 2006: 800).[5]

Two recent autographics by women author-artists suggest the potential of this multi-modal form to circulate widely and address potent issues of gender, sexuality, and nation. Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis I* and *II*, first published in French and subsequently also made into a film (with different graphics) in 2007, are autographics about growing up in revolution-era Iran. The Persepolis comics entwine the coming-of-age story of the only child in a Marxist-leaning, multi-generational bourgeois family descended from the kings of Persia with a narrative of the tumultuous and often tragic national events (late 1970s to early 1990s).[6] Through the stark abstraction of black-and-white cartooning, Satrapi visualizes the psychic life of Marji, her childhood and early adulthood selves, the communal struggle of the family against and in the midst of the Iranian revolutionary masses, and the complexities of Iran's struggle to forge an Islamic national imaginary. Throughout, *Persepolis* reflects on how the subject positions of young women, their mothers, and grandmothers are undermined by a repressive regime that, paradoxically, stimulates resistance from within Iran and the circulation of Western cultural values. Her autographic, involving readers in co-constructing a coming-of-age story that is public and shattering, offers a transnational communicative circuit for Western readers to engage in adjusting their misperceptions about Iranian history, Arabic as the language and legacy of Iranians, and Iranian women as "either hav[ing] no place in our society or [being] hysterical black crows," in Satrapi's ironic phrase.[7]

5 Scott McCloud has suggested that, because the cartoon is a "vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled," we do not just observe the cartoon, "we become it" (1993: 36).

6 In the embedded multi-temporality of *Persepolis,* Satrapi interweaves the long history of Iran in the twentieth century from the ascension of the Shah to his overthrow, to the ascendance of an Islamic fundamentalist regime which took power after months of factional struggle and the assassination of dissidents; then the long war with Iraq which led to brigades of teenage martyrs and the cultural revolution. This last introduced rigid gender separation, which has had severe consequences for the rights of women and girls: it imposed laws that required women and girls to be veiled, forbade unmarried women to associate publicly with men, and restricted girls' and women's education and ability to engage in public debate. In this memoir, the family's history is entwined with the history of the nation.

7 "I wanted to put a few things straight," explains the narrating Marjane from her studio at Place des Vosges, one of the oldest districts of Paris. "When I arrived in France, I met many people who expected me to speak Arabic. So many Europeans do not know the difference between Arabs and Iranians. They don't know anything of our centuries-old culture. They seem to think

Although there is not time to discuss the link between *Persepolis* and what may be called narratives of modernist citizenship and the state, I would note that the West's "war on terror" and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism have contributed to a spate of narratives by or about women from Islamic nations that circulate internationally and are taken up as what Whitlock (2007) terms "soft weapons" in conflicts about the status of women in Islam and internationally. Such autobiographical narratives by Iranian women have attained global prominence in literary and popular culture, often making a substantive critique of both British and American imperialism and the revolution's establishment of a dictatorial regime in Iran. Notable are Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) and *Things I've Been Silent About: Memories* (2008), and Iranian-Californian Azadeh Moaveni's *Lipstick Jihad* (2005).[8]

If Satrapi's graphic memoir thinks back through a genealogy of mothers, as Nancy K. Miller has argued, different possibilities are mobilized in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006). Bechdel is a lesbian artist who has for over two decades published a biweekly comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* (1986). *Fun Home* is a provocative exploration of sexuality, gendered relations in the American family, and Modernist versions of what Bechdel calls "erotic truth," is deeply invested in imaging and imagining memory and the intersubjective acts of storytelling that create family bonds

---

Iran has always been a country of religious fundamentalists, that Iranian women either have no place in our society or that they are hysterical black crows. In fact, Iranian women are not downtrodden weeds: my mother's maid has kicked out her husband, and I myself slapped so many men who behaved inappropriately in the street. And even during the worst period of the Iranian Revolution, women were carrying weapons", Marjane declares with conviction." From "Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis, The Iranian Revolution seen through the eyes of a 10-year old girl." www.ChrisKutschera.com

8 Nafisi, daughter of the mayor of Tehran, before the revolution was a professor of English literature at its University of Tehran but was expelled in 1981 for refusing to wear the veil and did not teach again until 1987. Her memoir chronicles how, in 1995, under surveillance by the authorities, she left the university and held regular secret meetings with seven of her female students at her house to read and discuss great novels of the Western tradition, such as Nabokov's *Lolita*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and the works of Jane Austen, from a post-revolutionary Iranian perspective. In 1997, Nafisi left Iran for the US, where she wrote the memoir and where she currently teaches (Johns Hopkins). "I left Iran, but Iran did not leave me," Nafisi notes in her first memoir, which entwines the pleasures of reading Western novels with nostalgia for a world and culture left behind.

Moaveni is also a writer for *Time* magazine whose family moved to California when she was a child; she relocated there for over a year to write a memoir of discovering post-revolutionary Iran during the days of the short-lived pro-democracy movement around 1997-2001. Moaveni critiques the regime as a "culture of lies," but is also drawn to life in Tehran and assesses the complex mixture of resistance and fundamentalist ideology that informs young people's views of themselves and the world.

and binds. Its story concerns a family in 1960s rural Pennsylvania whose father is by profession a high school English teacher and funeral home director, by temperament a fanatic interior decorator and landscaper, and, by desire and perhaps family legacy, a repressed homosexual who has furtive liaisons with the family's babysitters and his students. That is, he practiced what Bechdel calls attention to as heteronormative society's notion of "perversion." This repressed American climate may suggest why he committed suicide when Alison was 20—unless his being run over by a truck was an accident, an ambiguity that the memoir probes.

Fun Home, a memoir of both coming-of-age and coming-out for "Alison," Bechdel's young autobiographical persona, entwines the story of being formed as feminine by her repressed father with the discovery of her own transgressive desire. It routes both their stories through multiple private and public archives: the high Modernist novels of Proust, Joyce, Fitzgerald and others, but also popular lesbian feminist manifestos, from *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (Johnston, 1973) to *Word Is Out* (Glacer, 1994) and classics of erotica such as Colette's *Earthly Paradise* (1975); letters between her parents during their courtship and her teenage years; newspapers pages, some announcing personal events, such as her father's death, others the Watergate hearings occupying the US during the Nixon presidency; and her own childhood diaries, kept since she was 10. As Ann Cvetkovich (2003) has argued, Bechdel's "archival mode of witness" . . . "reconfigures the relation between the visual and the truthful" in showing the power of autographics to provide "forms of truth that are emotional rather than factual" (2003:115), what Cvetkovich elsewhere describes as "an archive of feeling" (2003).

Thus, the autographic becomes a space of collage and counterpoint, nowhere more than in Bechdel's careful drawings of family photographs. For example, the narrator contemplates the interplay of gendered positions that both mime and subvert heteronormativity by juxtaposing photos of her father and her teenaged self. In focusing on their bodies and gestures as sites of gender performance in drag, however subtly, she locates their relational bond as a connective tissue that both exceeds and displaces the contours of separate "selves" in their shared homosexual identification (119). This page, like many others in the comic, returns reader-viewers to the origin of her and perhaps their own self-stories in a recursive gesture. In studying those images and inviting readers to see her and her family through the sexual tensions and reversals of gendered positions, Bechdel creates a new kind of family album—as both an homage to her dead father and a register of shifts

in the practice of gendered relations in later-twentieth-century America. Moreover, in making a counter-biography to her father's obituary, Bechdel redirects the Second Wave feminist injunction to women to think back through their mothers as she queers the narrative of genealogical recovery.

As graphic memoirs and novels are being produced internationally by multi-modal artists such as Julie Doucet, Phoebe Gloeckner, and Bobby Baker, ideas of autobiographical subjectivity will increasingly be shaped by their ability to register and archive gendered styles and practices and elicit the viewer's relational identification in co-constructing narratives across the frames.

Prospects for Future Research

What is at stake in raising issues of gendered difference in the presentation of lives? I have traced some ways that early 21st century memoirs and witness narratives by women are contributing a shift in the terms of gendered representation and gender relations. In conclusion, I want to raise a few questions for further inquiry.

- How might the articulation of gendered relationships in visual/verbal media shape new formations of subjectivity? In graphic memoir, for example, the visual marking of gender in the narrated 'I' may be at odds with the narrative. If different media of self-representation register gender dissonantly, how are codes of intelligibility and social meaning multiplied or fractured?
- How does gender intersect with multiple axes of difference to produce, inform, contest, and transform transnational identities and relations? And how does the transnational feminist subject address the asymmetries of access and power among women, as well as between men and women, amid global circuits, institutions, and processes? What genres of life narrative can encompass and embody new transnational formations?
- What new narratives of the citizen and the nation in late modernity are emerging from locations around the globe, whether the narrating 'I' is a prominent public figure, a refugee, or a diasporan subject of post-immigrant generational return?

- How are gender and sexuality materialized in relation to the textualized body? How might the materiality and meaning of women's bodies in specific arenas, such as food or the environment, be reconceptualized?

Arguably, the commodification of feminism and the stories that ground and energize its circulation have linked women and women's stories with mass audiences in ways that prompt and circulate new relations and new knowledge. New genres of women's life storytelling, from dispersed locations and differently situated subjects, in old and new media address what Ella Shohat has described as "[t]he challenge . . . to produce knowledge within a kaleidoscopic framework of communities in relation without ever suggesting that all positions are identical" (Shohat, 2006: 3). The inherent relationality of personal narrative, with women enacting and positioning themselves as subjects of contested histories, offers sites for constructing what Shohat has characterized as "relational maps of knowledge [to] illuminate the negotiation of gender and sexuality. . . with an emphasis on . . . linked historical experiences and discursive networks across borders" (Shohat, 2009:427) .

Literature:

Bechdel, Alison. 2006. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Boston – New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Bechdel, Alison. 1986. *Dykes to Watch Out For.* Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books.

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

Butler, Judith. 2005. *Giving An Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Chute, Hillary L. and Marianne DeKoven. "Introduction: Graphic Narrative." *MFS (Modern Fiction Studies*) 52/4 (Winter 2006): 767-82.

Cvetkovich, Ann. 2003. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Cvetkovich, Ann. 2008. "Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36/1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008), 111-128.

Colette, Sidonie-Gabrielle. 1975. *Earthly Paradise*: *An Autobiography of Colette Drawn from Her Lifetime Writings*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Eakin, Paul John. 1999. *How Our Lives Become Stories*: *Making Selves*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.

Foucault, Michel. 1997. "Techologies of the Self". In: *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984,* Vol. 1, ed. by P. Rabinow). New York: The New Press, 223-252.

Gardner, Jared. 2006. "Archives, Collectors, and the New Media Work of Comics." *Modern Fiction Studies* 52/4 (Winter 2006), 787-806.

Gardner, Jared. 2008. "Autobiography's Biography, 1972-2007." *Biography* 3/1 (Winter 2008), 1-26.

Glacer, C. 1994. *The Word Is Out: The Bible Reclaimed for Lesbians and Gay Men. 365 Meditations*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Johnston, Jill. 1973. *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution:* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Lionnet, Françoise. 1989. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

McCloud, Scott. 1993. *Understanding Comics.* New York – London: HarperPerennial.

Miller, Nancy K. 1994. "Representing Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography." *differences* 6/1:1-27.

Moaveni, Azadeh. 2005. *Lipstick Jihad*. *A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran.* New York: PublicAffairs.

Nafisi, Azar. 2003. *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. New York: Random House.

Nafisi, Azar. 2008. *Things I've Been Silent About: Memories.* New York: Random House.

Satrapi, Marjane. 2003. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Satrapi, Marjane. 2004. *Persepolis II*: *The Story of a Return*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Smith, Sidonie. 1995. "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance." *A/B: Auto/Biography Studies* 10/1 (Spring 1995), 17-33. Shorter version reprinted in *Women, Autobiography, Theory.*

Shohat, Ella. 2006. *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Shohat, Ella. 2009. "Area Studies." In: *A Companion to Gender Studies,* ed. by Philomena Essed, David Theo Goldberg, and Audrey Kobayashi. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 40-50.

Watson, Julia and Sidonie Smith. 2009. "New Genres, New Subjects: Women, Gender and Autobiography after 2000." *Revista Canaria de Estudios Inglese,* 58 (April 2009), 13-40.

Watson, Julia and Sidonie Smith. 2010. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, University of Minnesota Press. (Second, expanded edition).

Whitlock, Gillian. 2006. "Autographics: The Seeing "I" of the Comics". *Modern Fiction Studies*, 52/4 (Winter 2006), 965-979.

Whitlock, Gillian. 2007. *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wong, Hertha D. Sweet. 1998. "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Women's Autobiography." In: *Women, Autobiography, Theory,* ed. by Smith and Watson, 168-78.

Slađana Mitrović

Transgression as a Form of Female Expression[1]

The basic meaning of the word transgression is to exceed the limit, go beyond the permitted, commonly with regard to what is morally or legally acceptable. According to the general explanation found in the Oxford Dictionary this attribute is often used with a negative connotation. In opposition, the philosophical thought challenges this negative aspect, as can be clearly seen in Foucault's statement: *"La transgression n'est donc pas à la limite comme le noir est au blanc, le défendu au permis, l'extérieur à l'intérieur, l'exclu à l'espace protégé de la demeure. … Rien n'est négatif dans la transgression. Elle affirme l'être limité, elle affirme cet illimité dans lequel elle bondit en l'ouvrant pour la première fois à l'existence."*[2] It is possible that contemporary philosophy is attempting to mitigate the negatively accepted gesture of the pure cut and complete separation by inaugurating the possibility of affirmative transgression; transgression as an entry to the path of critical thinking. If we expand its meaning in this way transgression could be regarded as a complex suture that produces fuel for thought – by transcending the limit it can be designed as a decisive break in the established system of ideological

1 The text in front of you could be read as an evident extension of certain theoretical concepts that were presented in my article "*L'Origine du monde* and the emancipation of sexual visual explicitness" (Mitrović, 2011:61-72).

2 "Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. … Transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being – affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time." (Foucault, 1963:755, 756).

continuity. It is the intensification of thought provoked by a transgressive potential that is of interest to us in this text, and from the perspective of anthropology of visual art one could go further and ask the following question: how does transgression change the perception of certain art objects – the female body.

Our intention might find certain theoretical frames in a debate with Bataille's writings. For him transgression can be found in the intimate relation with the prohibited and sacred, it goes beyond the law, shatters the limits and brings violation into our lives. In its basic sense, one might imagine that transgression is a simple return to animality or nature – however, its real meaning is to "consecrate and complete an order of things based on rules; it goes against the order only temporary" (Bataille, 1993: 90).[3] The essential significance is found in the break constituted by transgression – the temporarily produced circumstances, which bring "the culmination of a movement toward autonomy", i.e. "the same thing as a man himself" (Bataille, 1993: 91). Transgression culminates the regular course of events and might mark the beginning of a new order. In these terms transgression is an explosive liberation and invention that announces a new possibility with the breakdown, with the interruption of the rules that constitute the order of events. If transgression could be understood as a force that transfigures the established order and servility of mind then this process holds something unfamiliar and disconcerting through which something unthinkable and unsayable comes into being; in this way the potentially excessive, overwhelming, breathtaking transgression projects life into a richer world. According to this we could propose the following formula: with a radical break transgression initiates our thinking and changes it from the outside.

In our days thinking transgression is not an easy task, moreover, this debate raises a problem of neutralization and nullification. The decisive cut that constitutes transgression has been paralyzed in the spectacle of the capitalistic machine[4], which means that we are living in a contemporary cultural religion that divides everything, every space, every human activity from itself in order to produce a sphere for consumption. In this process the passage that deals with the transmission from the sacred to profane

3 The power of exceeding the limit is meaningful only in the context of human existence and cannot be taken as a bare act of animality.

4 It is not our intention to problematize 'the capitalistic cult' in this paper. Such topics were profoundly discussed by the following authors: Walter Benjamin, Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek and others. We use it merely as a passage that will bring us to our real problem: transgression as a mode of thinking in contemporary art.

or reverse is the most afflicted. As such it is recognized as a symbolic site, which detects and regulates the transgression disturbances. We could call this caesura, a site that separates and connects the divine and the profane. Capitalism adopted a special mechanism that neutralizes and deactivates the transgression apparatus – that which was once separate and unavailable has lost its power and aura, and has returned to everyday, common use. For the best description of the situation we could use Agambens's term "absolute profanation" as a process through which everything has been completely emptied to such an extent that nothing is left to transgress. It is a new creation of the "absolutely unprofanable"[5] sphere, a unique capacity within which transgression is already incorporated and experienced in the prevailing capitalist order.

In this case our real problem is not how we remark upon or experience transgression; at this stage we are actually dealing with the question as to how is transgression still possible? Where do transgressions occur? Or, if we were to use Agamben's words: how do we think about the profanation of the unprofanable? We will continue our discussion by focusing on the transgressive issue of the female body in the artworks by Tanja Ostojić. Our aim is to connect the reading of contemporary art with historical references in order to reflect an art object as an event in-between a set of associations and the transformation effect in which the transgressive form of femininity is played out.

Let us consider our analysis on the following postulations:

Firstly, there is an analogue connection between art and transgression. Art derives from something excessive, unpredictable, we could describe it as a kind of disturbing force that puts our thinking into a revolutionary act of seeking for something else, something new, something more, for experimenting and inventing; it is an operation that elaborates the possibilities of the new. In this sense art is intensely political. Secondly, the intimate kernel of the female body, incorporated in the idea of the artist, has the possibility to indicate transgressive sites which we want to evoke throughout the analysis of Ostojić's work.

Through the visual art Tanja Ostojić often tackles a sensitive fissure between the female body and authority. In the performance entitled *Personal*

5 Agamben (2007) argues that pornography is a precise example of absolutely unprofanable. The most extreme genre of female body exposition penetrates where it has no place: it shows the woman's face as inexpressive, flat material, which is not aware of her own nudity. The awareness of being exposed is nullified of expressivity to the extent in which the porn-star displays absolute indifference, a stoic ataraxia as regards her exposition - she shows nothing but the showing herself.

Space, which was presented at the Vršac Biennale (Serbia) in 1996, Ostojić exhibited her own body, cleared of bodily hair and covered in marble powder, as a living art-object in a gallery space. She remained naked and motionless throughout the entire happening, essentially reducing herself to a tableau vivant, or to put it better, the artist's body was transformed into a living monument. *Personal Space* is composed as a direct communication channel between the artist's bodily practice and the spectator, hence, the viewer is authorized to penetrate into the core of the artist's own intimacy and this opens and redefines the traditionally established boundaries between the private and public space. Her nude, immobile and silent body raises several questions as regards the woman's availability that is essentially connected to historical and symbolical knots. The inert, inactive, almost frozen nakedness not merely denotes complete accessibility; moreover, the living material was left to the tolerance and cruelty of the beholder. Ostojić formed a personal space as an interruption, a transgression through which the viewer has become a measuring apparatus for the general question dealing with the vulnerability of human life when completely exposed and stripped. Ostojić's performance shows how the role of the viewer is silently empowered to react – not only to experience the epidermal surface or to touch the restricted innermost parts of intimacy such as the sexual organs (which is a common hidden response to attractive nudity within a gallery space), but to go as far as wounding the body.[6] Ostojić's performance evokes the most notorious iconoclasm in recent history, namely, on 10 March 1914 Mary Richardson attacked Velázquez's canvas with a meat cleaver in the National Gallery in London.[7] Wounds inflicted on the depicted female nude have a suggestive connection to the real body; there is an associative similarity if we consider the impression evoked by flash painting.[8] The reminiscence of the cruel wound to the neck, as well as the incisions on the shoulders and back of the Venus, lead us to rethink how the exposure of Ostojić's

6 A directly exposed naked female body can arouse various hostile reactions, if it poses a threat to the conventional system or order. This thought is especially recognizable in the Serbian context which is aggressive towards ideas that oppose values of national and patriarchal politics.

7 The attack on "the Rockby Venus", an outstanding example of the finest depicted female nude and a crucial symbol of high art, has been interpreted as "a particular perception of feminist attitudes towards the female nude" (Nead, 1992: 34-43).

8 David Freedberg claims that the images seem to be more than merely images, inert, flat, lifeless objects, as the act of looking enters the problem of arousal and life-enhancing. The depicted bodies are regarded as fleshy and beautiful, they are seductive, they show elicit sexual interest, in short, we respond to them as if they were alive. See Freedberg. 1989: 317-344.

body is a mute statement of the problem of how an artist can react within a hostile environment.

Ostojić's web project *Looking for a husband with an EU passport* (2000-2005) was presented as an advertisement consisting of the title and a photograph of her naked and shaved body, striped of all eroticism. The project was formed as a dispersive web advertisement accessible by all, which consequently meant that anyone could penetrate her intimacy. Ostojić explained her action: "Provocation is a specialty of mine... sometimes I radically sacrifice my intimacy to confront certain existential, social or political subjects" (Ostojić, 2004: 63). Her naked and exposed body, reminiscent of female bodies from Auschwitz, is a radical cut in our established western idea of marriage and partnership. Ostojić performs a complete transgression according to our conventional expectations and attitudes towards the romantic ideal. Within the art frame she revealed an active political goal: the artist presented a woman from a non-European country – a migrant, and thus she transformed an idea of a happy marriage of love into a problem of visa and economical security. Through this project Ostojić highlighted how female bodies, reduced to their bare existence, have to appear on the bride market, be a part of sex trafficking or "marriages of convenience", and at the same time circulate freely and simply within the EU. Ostojić transgressed the borders of her own intimacy in order to unveil how hypocritical the only performative form of democracy within the EU politics is and how it parasites on the exchange of new 'women slaves' from different Eastern European countries. On the other hand, by advertising her naked body - the body of the artist, she actually poses the following question: Who is the real "prostitute" in terms of EU conditions? A migrant? A female artist? An intellectual? Someone who produces an idea?

After Courbet, another art piece by Ostojić, could be seen in the streets of Vienna in late December 2005. This was an art happening that was a part of an organized group exhibition (EuroPart 25) which took place when Austria took over presidency of the European Union. The Austrian audience was shocked and the happening led to a public media scandal, for her presentation was obviously inspired by Courbet's painting *L'Origine du monde* (The Origin of the World, 1866) – the most famous example of a vulva depiction in Western European art. Ostojić turned Courbet's remake into a jumbo poster with a twist: the pubic hair, which is reserved for the pornographic genre and represented a polemic detail already on Courbet's painting, was transformed into a symbolic sign of democratic Europe in the shape of blue panties with 12 yellow stars. After the artwork was on view

for two days, the authorities demanded for it to be removed from the public space and declared it a pornographic piece, offensive for public morality and women's rights.

Let us examine the true point of Ostojić's transgressive act in relation to Courbet's painting. In the sphere of traditional Western European art (at this art is understood in its narrowest meaning - as a museum activity) we might still get the impression of how provocative the depiction *L'Origine du monde* is today, not to mention how provocative it was for the conservative and moral 19th century society[9]. Today a part of Courbet's public collection in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the painting was commissioned by the Turkish ambassador and art collector Khalil-Bey[10] (1831–1879). It is an honest, realistic portrait of a naked female torso that directly represents her gender with wide open legs. We could easily describe the painting as a marked, exposed, emancipated vagina without a head, arms or legs, all of which are missing not due to mutilation but were intentionally omitted so that the spectator's gaze is directly drawn into the female genitals. The tendency to see more and fully observe the organ is clearly reflected within the painting, which is why the torso is placed in a supine position so that the gaze is directed from the bottom upwards, while the composition of the painting rises diagonally from left to right and marks the painter's intent: to familiarize the spectator with the vagina in the foreground, where the realistic tension of the portrait object is most intense while the rest of the body moves away into the illusionary depth of the linear perspective foreshortening.

9 In the 19th century the rules of society rigorously controlled and criminalized the production or circulation of lewd images; realist painting and photography were castigated not only by the critics, but also by the Parisian police force.

10 The painting was initiated by Courbet and Khalil Bey's meeting in 1866. With the assistance of Saint-Beuve, Khalil-Bay wished to purchase Vénus et Psyché (1863) for his art collection; he discovered the painting as a tableau refusé at the Salon in Paris. As the painting was already sold, Courbet agreed to paint a different variation of female homosexual content, in the same year as he made the *L'Origine du monde* he also came up with *Le Sommeil* (The sleepers) - one of his most famous paintings that is currently a part of the Petit Palais collection in Paris. Michèle Haddad stated that *L'Origine du monde* originated because Khalil-Bay fell ill with syphilis, which brought him to Paris in search of treatment. Her thesis is based on the existing testimony of the written memoirs by the singer Marie Colombier which date back to 1898 in which she recollects Khalil-Bay confessing to getting the disease because of his licentious sex life. In Haddad's interpretation, this kind of image is a type of ex-voto. Khalil-Bay's art collection included over one thousand paintings and in addition to Courbet's work it included Ingres' *Turkish bath* (1862), as well as works by Delacroix, Chassériau, Daubigny, Rousseau and Corot. Due to his gambling passion, he found himself in financial difficulties which made him sell his collection at an auction in 1868. Due to their inappropriate themes, neither *Le Sommeil*, nor *L'Origine du monde* were mentioned in the exhibition catalogue (Haddad, 2000: 57–59).

The painter has transformed an exclusively isolated organ into content that speaks for itself.

It is well known that the painting has an unusual historical background, since it had been painted in 1866 but was part of various private collections until 1995. It should be noted that the object was primarily made for a secret client and was intended for private viewings. In this regard it has been stirring the imaginations with its play of visible-invisible existence for over a century. It dwelled in the privacy of the *Musée sécret* and came to public attention as a phantom through fragmented remarks, particular testimonies of eye witnesses and appearances in the form of poor reproductions, just so it could be said "it was seen" (Nochlin, 1986: 76–86). The precise facts related to the painting's subversive history remain unclear to this very day.[11] In the 19th century this history was mentioned in the *Journal* by Edmond de Goncourt when he compared it to Correga's work.[12] Its first public presentation dates back to 1988, when Linda Nochlin and Sarah Faunce prepared an exhibition of Courbet's work in the Brooklyn Museum in New York.[13] It is important to point out that before it was presented in Musée d'Orsay, the work had a special mechanism which revealed the painting through a veil. The shocking image was concealed behind the artificially and newly created layer in the form of a veil or more sophisticated painting panels. However, the history of masking and concealing has to be added to its identity as historical documents reveal individual testimonies of spectators' confrontations with *L'Origine du monde*.[14] In 1955, the painting was bought by an

11 See also: Metken, 1997; Depelsenaire, 1991; Le Men, 2007; Hentschel, 2002.

12 "Memories from literary life: 'Have you ever seen this?' and with a key he unlocks a painting, of which the external panel represents a village church under snow, but it also has a hidden panel, painted by Courbet, and which represents the belly of a woman and the parts under her belly. Contemplating this painting that I have never seen before, I have to apologize to Courbet for my previous misjudgment: 'this belly is as beautiful as is the skin painted by Correggio'" (Goncourt, 1889: 996).

13 *Courbet reconsidered: exhibition at Brooklyn museum, 4. November 1988* – 16. January 1989. Brooklyn museum, Brooklyn, 1988.

14 In his diaries, Maxime Du Champ describes how he saw the painting for the first time in the restroom in Khalil-Bey's apartment: "In the cabinet of the person I mentioned before, one could see a painting that was hidden under a green veil. If the veil was disturbed, one would remain enchanted in front of it, looking at a woman in her natural size, seen in profile, in an extreme emotional state, in convulsion, and remarkably painted, set into shape con amore, as the Italians would say, thus having the final say in the matter of realism. However, the artist who reproduced the model, had, by inconceivable forgetfulness, neglected to reproduce the feet, the legs, the thighs, the belly, the hips, the breasts, the hands, the arms, the shoulders, the neck and the head. There is a word used to refer to people capable of such obscenities, and this word could easily be found in the collected works of Marquis de Sade; however this word is far from being employed anywhere but in butchery" (Du Champ, 1878:263–264). A similar

unknown French connoisseur and only forty years later was it revealed that this was Jacques Lacan and his wife Sylvie Bataille. It was kept at Lacan's countryside residency "la Prévôte" in Guitrancourt, the house he worked in. The screen for the painting was created by André Masson who masked it with an over-painting that evokes the female body in a landscape through abstract basic lines.[15]

Even though *L'Origine du monde* makes it impossible not to notice the iconographic resemblance with the general form of pornography it today fails to appear shocking as we live surrounded by an omnipresent and attainable porn-culture. The almost life-size *mons veneris* representation, virtuously hidden behind pubic hair, creates a rift, an interruption in the 19th century academic nude painting[16]. Courbet's radical subversion of the traditional craft norm code is based on including a vile, lewd image reserved for pornography into the system of masterfully created, highly sensitive painting gestures. This is why the painting was a phantom of the unrepresented and unnamed for a century and demanded a different manner of showing. Through militant realism Courbet declared the return to the *Origin*

model of observing the painting was repeated with the following owners, and thus the manners in which it appeared as a hidden image were added to the existence of *L'Origine du monde*. In the first art-history note written by Charles Léger in 1929, who saw the painting at baron Ferencz Hatavany's estate, hidden behind a panel with a landscape motif of a church in a snowy landscape, Léger wrote: "*The Origin of the World* was kept in the dark by an unknown merchant. The amateurs didn't give in to temptation. Around 1910, a refined foreign collector staying shortly in Paris, Baron François de Hatvany from Budapest, saw it at the Bernheim-Jeune house. The painting was locked in a double frame, hidden by a panel representing something that was not merely a "church under snow", as Goncourt had written, but rather a Castle under snow" (Léger, 1948: 116).

15 We can read about this "étrange diptyque" in a historical overview by Elisabeth Roudinesco: "With a view of the garden, in a spacious room entered through a huge window, he arranged for his needs a library filled with pieces of art and a table. He calls this place his "Workroom". In the loggia overhanging this solitary room, a strange diptych outclasses the entire room. This, namely, is the "double" painting, its inner part composed of a canvas painted by Courbet representing the open genitals of a woman, and its outer part, e.g. the visible one, a wooden hideout manufactured by Masson, upon which the elements of the first painting are reproduced in an abstract manner. A secret system enables the wood to slide along and reveal Courbet's painting" (Roudinesco, 1986: 305).

16 *L'Origine du monde* is very similar in terms of composition to the pornographic photographs by Auguste Belloc (1800–1867), who was a trained painter, but learned about photography in the 1840s. In 1860, a police search was conducted in his Paris apartment because he was suspected of dealing in pornography. The police confiscated the following: 1200 obscene images, 3000 obscene photos on paper, 307 negatives with obscene content and 120 large format photos on paper portraying lascivious female poses. Photos of female sex organs were also found in Belloc's opus. We can see from Courbet's correspondence that he also owned a collection of such photos, of which only a few postcard format images are known and were attributed to Belloc (Burkhard, 2008: 84).

– *Source* by rending a woman's body, instead of representing the sleek ideal forms of flawless beauty.[17]

In contrast to Courbet, Ostojić's work is not formed as a visual limit, but as a conceptual work; she examines the origin of the name of Europe's body. With this work Ostojić clearly follows her previous interest in criticizing exclusive politics, emigration problems and bio-politics in the European Union as she states: "The body of the woman in the picture – my own – is the body of someone who does not belong to the EU territory, someone who speaks from the perspective of a migrant woman and has been discriminated against because she is not a citizen of this elitist politic and economic space" (Gržinić and Ostojić, 2009: 166).

The essential part of Ostojić's work can be found in the demand for it to be removed from a public space, a demand that came from political authorities and the general public. Vienna's rolling billboard was not the first location where *After Courbet* was shown. In 2004 it was displayed in the international exhibition: "Double Check: Re-Framing Space in Photography: the Other Space, Parallel Histories", which was primarily shown in the Gallery for Contemporary Art in Celje, Slovenia and soon afterwards in Camera Austria, Kunsthaus in Graz in 2005. Within these presentations, the work passed almost unnoticed; at least, it did not arouse a polemic reading. It is remarkable that within the EuroPart exhibition on the streets in Vienna *After Courbet*, which was supposed to be a decorative, accompanying element of the moment when the Austrian Prime Minister was about to take over the Presidency of the EU, stimulated so many scandalous reactions[18]. In fact, *After Courbet* was less sexually explicit than *L'Origine du monde* or any contemporary main-stream pornography that is considered publicly offensive, however its real function served as a mirror to the political obscenity. What came out of it is the assumption that it is today possible to create something even more pornographic, something even more explicit than exhibiting genitals. Moreover, Ostojić demonstrated a new "public voyeur" dimension, i.e. citizens, who were given critical glasses to look and rethink what they were not willing to see or what they were incapable of seeing otherwise. Ostojić's work does not depict what we simply see, but it makes the invisible inner relations become visible. Could this artwork be regarded transgressive because it moves the viewer to the other side of thought or, to word it bet-

17 Smooth as marble, without a bruise, hair, a mark or a wrinkle, were the words used to describe the body in the mid-nineteenth century western art protocols (Burkhard, 2008).

18 *After Courbet* was discussed in over one hundred articles and more than one thousand readers' comments in daily newspapers.

ter, it invents something in front of the spectator that he/she is not ready to confront? As Foucault formulated: *"La transgression porte la limite jusqu'à la limite de son être; elle la conduit à s'éveiller sur sa disparition imminente, à se retrouver dans ce qu'elle exclut (plus exactement peut-être à s'y reconnaître pour la première fois), à éprouver sa vérité positive dans le mouvement de sa perte."*[19]

In this regard, we could compare Ostojić's "public voyeur" with Duchamp's "artist voyeur". The so-called "public voyeur" opens an analogical similarity with Marcel Duchamp's last installation entitled *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage* (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas) from 1946–66. The central image exposes a headless naked female body and a peep hole, which makes it explicitly address not only *L'Origin du monde,* but also the forbidden look. If Courbet marks the final frontier of representation in art with the use of the maximal visibility rhetoric and exposes genitalia separated from the body in an isolated, pornographic view, than Ostojić's and Duchamp's real intention is to transform the viewer, whose meaning is intentionally incorporated in the structure of the artwork. In this case, unity and integrity of the viewing subject, a traditional enlightenment model of the contemplative viewer, has been broken with the transgressive body without the borders which leads and arouses the viewer towards a critical discourse. In his lecture "The Creative Act", which he held at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York on October 19th 1961, Duchamp stated that an art piece is constituted within a spectator: "Millions of artists create; only a few thousands are discussed or accepted by the spectator and many less again are consecrated by posterity. ... All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act" (Duchamp, 1975: 138–140). Let us examine the viewer's position in Duchamp's essential work *Étant donnés* as a model for the irruption of the spectator. The art object consists of two central images that serve as installation documenters. First we come in touch with the surface of a massive old door that has no meaning on its own, unless one possesses the knowledge that the permeability of the door is represented by two smaller openings functioning as peep holes. The door functions as a visual barrier, preventing anything

19 "Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to the face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall." (Foucault, 1963: 755)

penetrating it in any other way but by looking through the peep holes. In the second part of the installation, the viewer faces the shocking image of a naked female body lying in the grass, with a glimmering light held in her left hand, set against the background of a distant landscape. The body is an anthropomorphic doll that discloses her intimate parts with the legs spread out (the left one is lifted); she is exposing her genitals however, her identity remains unrecognized, as her head is placed into the background - outside of the viewer's visual perception. The image has a strong associative meaning. The body displays its artificiality, its mortified headlessness and unrecognizability while lying in a pose typical for coitus. The two layered division through which the viewer gains an unusual position in terms of the gallery space is a crucial element of the artwork: instead of an ordinary gaze the viewer is forced to peep, thus having to transform into an 'art voyeur' as Duchamp called the viewer of *Étant donnés* in his "Manual instruction". In the installation the artist sets a strategic place for the spectator; a position from which a single viewer can stand and observe at any given time, while the rest have to wait their turn in the gallery space which is thus transformed into a waiting room. Duchamp's separated viewer in the scene of the limited gaze of obscene content gives an impression of a peep-box show. However, Duchamp complicates the situation even further when he exposes the gaze of "an ordinary artwork spectator" to the exterior participant, the so-called second spectator who is established in the gazing sequence: the viewer in front of the artwork is placed in the situation of peeping, while the other visitors are observing him in his action. The tension is created by the common ground of the two spectators: the viewer observes the exhibited sexual object and at the same time becomes aware that he is being observed by other participants. Rosalind Krauss described her viewing experience as follows: "I don't know how I felt looking through that peep-hole, but I know that I thought to myself: My God, I wonder who is watching me doing this. I've never felt uncomfortable looking at anything in a museum except for that" (Haladyn, 2010: 53).

The mutation of the gaze is Duchamp's real invention; the spectator's gaze decentralizes with the emergence of the other, which simultaneously creates comfort and anxiety. Duchamp's system of interactive exchange between the one who sees and the seen can be compared to Jean-Paul Sartre's voyeur in his essay *L'être et le néant* (Being and nothingness). As the voyeur is secretly observing something through the keyhole, he hears footsteps in the hallway and realizes he is being observed. This moment of revelation creates an irruption; a disturbing presence of another in the spectator who

later realises "I see myself because somebody sees me" (Sartre, 1992: 349); my view dwells at the background of another viewer's interruption. Duchamp's work reveals an important idea: the outside gaze determines subject on a profound level; we – as the carriers of the gaze – are constantly viewed from the outside; the gaze surrounds us and turns us into observed beings. In the installation *Étant donnés,* Courbet's well-known display of sexual content is unified with the sensation of feeling uncomfortable, which stems from the realisation that an artist materialized and explicitly revealed the spectator's obscene desire, something that was supposed to remain hidden, unknown. By including the observer, Duchamp perverts the traditional comfort of the gaze which rests on a naked female body. With the simultaneous demonstration of the exhibitionistic (female) body and the (male) voyeur, he defines the idea of *L'Origine du monde* as a bare historical sexual experience of the view that is changeable, elusive and continuous.

From the viewer's perspective Ostojić's EU symbol conceals and reveals at the same time, it censures as well as provokes. The political body is disguised as a sexual one and thus explicitly reveals how the female sex and gender economy is generated into the integration of non-European citizens in the European Union. The removal of her work exposes this with even greater and piercing clarity – the place for explicit female sexuality in art does not merely offer satisfaction in the manner of daily consumption and is not once and for all historically defined by known predicates, as is the case with mainstream pornography. Instead, the artistic extension of exposure carries the function of *transgression,* of inventing and reshaping everything that cannot exist in everyday reality. With this project Ostojić has tackled the very thinness of the internal link between political authority, censorship and restrictive regulation of the apparently free speech in art. In other words, she has revitalised the association of political disorder with obscenity.

Let us conclude our analysis with another project by Tanja Ostojić. During the four days long performance entitled *I will be your angel* the artist transformed herself to a companion, an escort, an angel to Harald Szeemann, the director of the Venetian Biannual in 2001. With this project she exposed the potential ambiguous narratives concerning the relationship between the artist and the curator. However, the real art-object was hidden in one of the most intimate places of the body – Malevich's *Black Square on White* was made from Ostojić's pubic hair on her *mons veneris*. Only Szeemann – as a private spectator and authority who declared it an official part of the 49th Venetian Biannual – had the right to see this mystical Malevich. Her performance provoked a fragile debate on the power structure

and moral speculation in the art world. On the other hand it questioned the channels of possession and dependence – the curator can be seen as the master who defines and appropriates the future of art-objects, while at the same time appropriating the most intimate look of the woman's body. As we can see, Ostojić constantly uses her own sexuality and bodily transgression as a crucial way to exercise and regulate the power to operate with political and cultural boundaries.

Our analysis could lead us to the following conclusion: art is a form of intensification; it transmits transgressive movement from conceptually composed bodies (in the case of paintings, we could talk about the vibratory force of material stimulation) to the spectator. In the history of art the female body has been an important reference – these are not merely perfect, smooth bodies that serve for the (male) visual pleasure, they also lead to destruction, a decisive cut in the postulated norms. Connecting Ostojić to historical references (such as the concepts of Courbet and Duchamp) provides us with the opportunity to rethink how is transgression still possible not only as a form of critical thought on the contemporary political and social systems, but also as an indicator of the contingency in the transformation of established representative models of the female body. It manifests a space with no fixed coordinates, but it moves the living material of the body into the process of permanently becoming something else.

Literature:

Agamben, Giorgio. 2007. *Profanations*. Translated by Jeff Fort. New York: Zone Books.

Bataille, Georges. 1993. *The accursed share*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Zone Books.

Burkhard, Balthasar. 2008. *Gustave Courbet*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz.

De Goncourt, Edmond. 1956-1958. *Journal des Goncourt. Mémoires de la vie littéraire*: *1858-1860* (Volume II). Monaco: Les Éditions de l'Imprimerie nationale de Monaco.

Depelsenaire, Yves. 1991. "L'Origine du monde – beau comme une S". In: *Les amis de Gustave Courbet.* Paris, Ornans: Bulletin Amis de Gustave Courbet, n° 86 (no pages).

Du Champ, Maxime. 1878. *Les Convulsions de Paris* (Volume II). Paris: Librairie Hachette.

Freedberg, David. 1989. *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, Michael. 1963. "Préface à la transgression". In: *Hommage à Georges Bataille,* Paris: Editions de Minuit, 751-769.

Gržinić, Marina, and Ostojić, Tanja (eds.). 2009. *Integration impossible?: the politics of migration in the artwork of Tanja Ostojić*. Berlin: Argobooks.

Haddad, Michèle. 2000. *Khalil-Bey: un homme, une collection*. Paris: Éd. de l'Amateur.

Haladyn, Julian Jason. 2010. *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*. London: Afterall Books.

Hentschel, Linda. 2002. "Pornotopic Techniques of the Observer – The Origins of the World (1866) by Gustave Courbet and the Pleasure of Scopic Penetration". In: Härtel, Insa (ed.), *Body and representation*, Leske + Budrich, Opalden, 59-68.

Léger, Charles. 1948. *Courbet et son temps*. (Lettres et documents inédits, Microfilm, No. MFILM 8-LN27-84203), Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Le Men, Ségolène. 2007. "L'origine du monde: du tableau secret au muse". In: *Courbet,* Paris: Éditions Citadelles & Mazenod, 229-248.

Metken, Günter. 1997. *Gustave Courbet, Der Ursprung der Welt: Ein Lust-Stück*. München, New York: Prestel.

Nead, Linda. 1997. *The female nude: art, obscenity, and sexuality*. London and New York: Routledge.

Nochlin, Linda. 1986. "Courbet's 'L'origine du monde': The Origin without an Original". *October,* vol. 37 (Summer, 1986), 76-86.

Nochlin, Linda. 1988. *Courbet reconsidered:* (Exhibition at Brooklyn museum, 4. November 1988 – 16. January 1989). Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum.

Mitrović, Slađana. 2011. "L'Origine du monde and the emancipation of sexual visual explicitness". In: Adam Alja and Mitrović Slađana (eds.), *Love and sexuality: anthropological, cultural and historical crossings*. Zagreb: Red Athena University Press, 61-72.

Ostojić, Tanja. 2004. *Strategies of Success: Curators Series, 2001-03*. Belgrade: Student Cultural Centre.

Roudinesco, Elisabeth. 1986. *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France 2, 1925 – 1928*. Paris: Seuil.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1966. *Being and nothingness. An essay on phenomenological ontology*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. London: Methuen.

IV.

Narrating our work, questioning ourselves

Ulla Vuorela

Brothers and Sisters as Significant Others

I have been working on Hilma Granqvist's[1] biography for years but a narrative turn in my thinking of her story happened by accident. I was sitting in Helsinki and somebody called me by phone asking if I was interested in her. It was a person who had been going through a long round trying to find somebody who would be interested in her. It turned out that there was a young couple who had moved in an old house in Helsinki centre and, in the cellar, found a cardboard box full of files dealing with Hilma Granqvist. As they were nice people, they wanted to deliver the box to somebody who could make use of it. I went to collect it and found out that it was a huge box with quite a number of files that belonged to her brother. It was from her brother's old house and contained not only brother and sister correspondence but also many photographs of her that I have never seen before.

Among other things, I found a photo of Hilma Granqvist taken at her fiftieth birthday in 1940. It shows her sitting at the writing desk surrounded by the metaphors representing her interests such as the photos taken in Palestine, some newsletters from Egypt and things like that. She looks very nice and very happy, like a woman who has a standing in this world. By this time she had already made a career which rested on the work that had been done in the village of Artas near Bethlehem in Palestine where she did anthropological research in 1920s. Between 1925 and 1931 she was living there and had villagers as her helpers as she appointed three women from the vill-

1 Hilma Granqvist (1890-1972) was a Swedish-speaking Finnish anthropologist who conducted long field studies of Palestinians.

age to be her research committee and didn't publish anything that was not accepted by at least two members of the committee. By her fortieth birthday she had published *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village* (1931) which was her PhD. Later she published other various marriage conditions in volume II[2] in 1935 and a book on family life in Palestine in Swedish for which she got a Scandinavian prize because it was telling in a nice language about life in a Muslim village. In 1947 she published a book about birth and childhood in Artas village[3], in 1950 the one about child problems among the Arabs[4], and in 1965 she published her last book about a Muslim village[5]. Her volumes on the marriage conditions were reviewed in 72 reviews in international literature.

On July 17th, on her 50th birthday, she was happy, but soon a shadow appeared. In August she heard the shocking news. She had two brothers one of which was a business man who travelled a lot and in whose house the picture was taken on her 50th birthday. He asked the other brother to tell her that he was going to get married. She was fifty years of age and had been living all her life in Finland. She never married and lived with either one or both of the brothers. Shocked, she wrote in her diary:

> Today I have taken the Master's ring[6] off my finger, and I'm not going to use it any more now that I become again a Miss. I will not use my agony to type this any more. I have dared to think until now that society will bear responsibility for people who are not married and who do well, and that they will not be left on their own. Now I feel that I've been left on my own and I can't take it any longer if I can't live a life that is worthy of my achievements.

I was startled as a researcher. How could a woman with such international fame and solid achievements get so depressed by her brother telling her that he was going to get married? I couldn't understand how a modern woman who wanted to be equal with men in all aspects and be independent could live together with her brother. Hilma wrote that she then went to the grave of her mother where she wept saying among other things:

2 *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village, vol. II.*
3 *Birth and Childhood among the Arabs: Studies in a Muhammadan Village in Palestine.*
4 *Child Problems among the Arabs: Studies in a Muhammadan Village in Palestine.*
5 *Muslim Death and Burial: Arab Customs and Traditions Studies in a Village in Jordan.*
6 A simbol of her Master's degree in anthropology.

> It's not their fault. The brothers have done all they could for me and God knows that I have done my part, but I can't take the fact that now the sister-in-law will come to the house and look down on me because she will be above me and just despise me because I'm not married.

I was puzzled and unable to comprehend this as it happened in Finland in 1940. She further told her mother that only *nur durch den Mann kommt das Weib zum Himmel, zum Gott* which in German means that only through the man a woman comes to God. She knew that she had to move out, and then, being a very active and practical person, she looked at the announcements for rooms in the newspapers. As I was going through the announcements, too, I realized that the rooms were offered only to women with solid funding, women who had employment, and during all her research career Hilma Granqvist had never be employed by anybody. She was a free researcher and had little income from a flat that she had inherited from her parents which she was renting out, but otherwise, she didn't have an income.

Instead of asking why Hilma Granqvist, who had such an international career, was not given a job at the Finish university I asked myself how her career was possible at all. At first, I was going to write that it was a case of discrimination of women in the academia, but, instead of making her a victim, the story of her brother made me think more of her career.

In order to present herself as an employed woman with regular income Hilma decided to tell the room owner that she was a typist because that's what she was doing, typing a book. She promised to pay within the first three days of the month and if she did not, she agreed to leave. There are other indicators which show that she does not consider herself to be a normal person because she is unemployed. Namely, when she thinks of what her brother did to her she says that her brother Walter Granqvist did more to her as a brother than it was legally expected from men at that time. In 1864 a new law[7] was passed in Finland allowing unmarried women to seek employment and work for compensation but, in reality, it was the liberation of the families from the responsibility of supporting the unmarried sisters and daughters. However, in the case of Hilma and Walter and the other brother this did not apply because they loved each other dearly. I found out from the files in the box that Walter Granqvist was actually the one who

7 The 1864 legislation on the full legal rights and independence of unmarried women alleviated the maintenance obligations of the established classes, as the number of unmarried women was considerable and their maintenance was regarded as a growing social and economic problem.

had sponsored her trips to Palestine. He was her mentor in many ways and supported her in various ways. He was a businessman who was working for Stockmann Warehouse, a part of the north-south chain of warehouses, and therefore was able to establish connections with German scholarships which enabled her to study in Germany for a while. While thinking about how Hilma's career was possible, having in mind that she was a person who was in a way outside academia, I came to think that we have to look at who the significant others are. The issue with Hilma's brother Walter made me look at the gender system in a different way and I realized, as an anthropologist, that we can not deal with the gender system if we do not include siblings within it. We need to look at both the relationships between brothers and sisters and significant others.

In the box, I found a photo of Helena Westermarck[8], a painter who never married. She was twenty-two years older than Hilma Granqvist. When Helena became an author and needed a typist, her sister, who was Edward Westermarck's[9] aunt, suggested that Hilma could help her, so that when Hilma come out of school at the age of 18 she went to Helena Westermarck to write down her novels about pioneer women in Finland. During her stay Helena painted a picture of young Hilma Granqvist. I also found a photo of Edward Westermarck, Helena's younger brother, who never married either. Edward and Helena were very close and their correspondence consisting of 600 letters is kept in the archives. When Edward Westermarck was sitting in the British Museum making notes for *The History of Human Marriage* (1925) Helena was sitting next to him writing and collecting material for a story of George Eliot. Edward was in the agnostics circles and influenced on how Hilma thought about religion while Helena introduced her to feminism. I noticed that there are two unmarried siblings in each family, Edward Westermarck and Helena Westermarck who were of the previous generation, and Hilma and Walter Granqvist. Walter was 84 years old when he got mar-

8 Helena Westermarck (1857–1938) was a Finnish painter and writer. As a painter she was radical for her time: depicting maids and servants naturalistically, to the utter dismay of some. As time passed, the writer in her took the upper hand. Her considerable literary production encompasses art historical essays as well as women's rights and other social issues. She is better known as an author and advocate for women's rights.

9 Edward Westermarck (1862–1939) was a Finnish philosopher, sociologist and anthropologist who denied the widely held view that early humans had lived in a state of promiscuity and instead theorized that the original form of human sexual attachment had been monogamy. He was a lecturer in sociology at the University of Helsinki (1890–1906), professor of moral philosophy (1906–1918) and professor of philosophy at the Åbo Academy (1918–30). He was also professor of sociology at the University of London (1907–1930).

ried and was still single when Hilma was 50, which was very important for her career.

Gunnar Landtman was a supervisor of Hilma Granqvist's doctoral thesis who was very friendly and very supportive at first. He had given her a topic of *Women of the Old Testament* but instead of studying the archives in Berlin she did field work in Palestine and came back with stories of Muslim women in the village of Artas in Palestine. Consequently, he refused to accept her thesis.

There was another incident with a German theologian who wanted to translate her thesis from Swedish to German. When it was almost ready he asked her for permission to put his name on her work so that he could be coauthor explaining that translation was a big work and that he had not published enough because he had been translating her work for the past two years. Shocked, Hilma wrote to Florence Fitch from the Oberlin College complaining about how her supervisor rejected her thesis and about the incident with the translator. In the meanwhile, Florence Fitch has made a tremendous career, both as a professor of philosophy and religious studies and as the president of the American Association for University Women. She suggested her to apply for the scholarship with them which Hilma did and got the scholarship. This enabled her to do a bit more free work. Her work was then translated into English instead of German making her whole story different.

When in 1935 she, with all her achievements, applied for a docentship in the University in Helsinki, her supervisor regretted that he had rejected her thesis and said that she deserved to be a colleague. As he was then a professor of practical philosophy, he explained that although her work was within the field of sociology she was still fit for the docent position. Rafael Karsten, a professor of sociology, agreed that she was prominent for the docentship, but added that her work was more in the field of practical philosophy. In 1935 the University of Helsinki got a new professor in the study of oriental languages and cultures who said that both of these professors were partial and unfit to make a statement on Hilda's work and that the University should dismiss them. He also claimed that it was the research committee, the Palestinians, who actually wrote Hilma's thesis, and that she never went to the village of Artas but spent all the time in Jerusalem. I think that similar things might be happening even now. As a result, she was not given a docentship and decided to become a free researcher. She continued writing and lived in her own place. She moved to that house in 1965 because the house the siblings inherited from their parents was purchased

by the Helsinki municipality and as compensation they got a house in a little ordinary place. The house was interesting in the sense that Hilma had her own studio there. It was 1960s and both brothers lived in the same house. The sister-in-law, who she didn't want to live with, ended up cooking for all of them because Hilma had never learned to cook. That was the first time that she had her own kitchen and as they were seeing each other daily she became a nice aunt. She received a scholarship from the Elim Foundation in Sweden which enabled her last trip to Jerusalem. She then wrote a book called *Muslim Death and Burial* (1965).

As for the more theoretical part of my paper, I think we need to think about the significance of including brothers and sisters in the feminist story. Patriarchy has always been the archenemy of ours but when I think of the significant others in Hilma's life I can see that her brothers stand out. There were others who were favorable also but then retired. The question is what the significance of either the patriarchy or brotherhood is and also what the significance of sisterhood is. Professor Landtman was supporting her at first but then withdrew. I'm interested in why he withdrew and refused to accept her thesis? I do not think that it was because he was not sympathetic of what Hilma was doing but because he was a professor of the University and what mattered to him more was the brotherhood as a corporate body in the University. He had to choose between supporting a nice student and a nice PhD and the corporate brotherhood, and he chose not to help her, and even today I so often see things like this happening.

Even Edward Westermarck was her opponent in the sense that he was opposing her PhD[10] when he was actually 70 years old and very sick. Although he wrote a very flowery statement and gave her a nice grade for her thesis he was not able to do anything to promote her position in the Finnish University. Professor Aapeli Saarisalo managed to change the opinion of the corporate brotherhood at the faculty although it was already decided that Hilma could be given the docent position.

Thinking of academic life makes me believe that brotherhood is not one or global, and that it does not necessarily signify inequality, but it becomes obvious when politics sort of calls it forward. When I look at the English universities I have visited, I can see that the brotherhood, the club of the professors, meets there and that is where the brotherhood decisions are

10 As Hilma's relationship with the supervisor was severed she could not present her thesis at the Helsinky University but Westermarck allowed her to defend it at the Åbo Academy in January 1932 when he acted as her opponent even though he was retiring from his professorship there.

made. Therefore, patriarchy for me is also not a kind of composite monolithic entity but something that becomes active in the form of decision-making corporate bodies. In the case of Hilma Granqvist, sisterhood became also very significant and appeared incorporated in the person of Florence Fitch who suggested Hilma to apply for the academic associate in the United States. Sisterhood then came to help her, so that, in a way, I see Hilma's case a kind of tug-of-war between brotherhoods and sisterhoods, and brotherhood seems to be winning. Sisterhood can sometimes win, but it, also in her case, was mostly able to correct some of the wrongs and does not necessarily always have the power to change things too much. In the world, there is now more than ever a problem of corporate thinking and corporate police. We need to be very active in sort of taking care of our significant others, of our sisters and brothers, in order to make sisterhood win in the difficult situations.

As for Hilma's story, I think it's an oversimplification to say that she didn't get the docent position because she was disciplined mainly because of her gender. There are many aspects we overlooked such as her position of a Swedish speaking female in the Finnish speaking University as well as various orientalists not wanting to have sociologists looking at Middle East.

The transcript of Ulla Vuorela's lecture held on May 23, 2011 was edited and accompanied by footnotes by Mirna Jakšić.

Natalia Pushkareva

"We Don't Talk About Ourselves": Women Academics Recall Their Path to Success

The study of professionals, including academics, is a new branch of cultural anthropology. It lies at the intersection of ethnology, and qualitative sociology, with its in-depth interviews, participant observation, and case studies. Although the application of the term "ethnology" to professional academics may seem odd (Varenne, 1988; Wacquant, 1989: 4), their traditions can be analyzed in the same manner that we analyze other subcultures that are defined by their signs, symbols, attributes and folklore, social and behavioral norms, forms of communication and stereotypes. In this essay I explore the environment of women scholars, the official standards and the unofficial codes of behavior, lifestyles, attributes, and practices (Schepenskaya, 2003).

Because of its focus on gender my research project examines power relations in the academic environment. By emphasizing power, my project draws upon feminist theory for methodological approaches. Specifically, my analysis relies upon the opposition between *traditional* and *feminist* research, as enunciated by the American cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo. Traditional science is marked by: *objectivism* – the claims of scientific objectivity, political and emotional neutrality; *imperialism* – the objectivization of the subject, in which the researcher 'looks down' upon the observed phenomenon, in the imperialist manner that the 'white traveller' observed barbaric aborigines); and *monumentalism* – the assumption that such phenomena as the structural parameters of social equilibrium and

ethnoculture are unchanging. Feminist anthropology adopts a different methodological stance. The claims of objectivity are replaced by empathy and involvement, recognizing that ethnographic and social-psychological information of respondents has its own worth, as do the personal experiences of analysts, even though traditional scholarship tried to marginalize them. It eschews imperialism and the denigration of the culture under study in favor of a thorough analysis of the superstitions and prejudices the analysts bring from their own culture (Rosaldo, 1989: 33; Rosaldo, 1980: 400).

Investigation of the everyday life of women academics provides fertile soil for validation of the methods adopted in the feminist anthropology. Responding to the appeal of German historians researching "everyday life," to dig in the soil on which you stand ("Grabe, wo Du stehst!") (Lindquist, 1984), Belarusian and Russian researchers have developed a project focusing on the routine realities of women scholars in the socialist and post-socialist periods. The project focuses on women employees of the Russian Academy of Sciences who have enjoyed professional success.[1]

A proper understanding of the everyday life of contemporary women scholars in Russia requires a few introductory clarifications. First, since the eighteenth century knowledge production in Russia has been divided between scholarly research organizations (in the institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences) and the universities. People who work in research institutions are not required to perform teaching duties, although many do nevertheless work half time in institutions of higher education. People who work in the institutions of higher education have fewer research demands than do scholars in the Academy of Sciences and, indeed, may have none at all once they reach a particular rank. The focus group for my study consisted primarily of women scholars in the humanities and natural and mathematical sciences who were employed in institutes of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, Petersburg, and Novosibirsk. These cities are the most important research centers in the country. More than half of the scholars in the Academy of Sciences work in these cities. We conducted extensive life interviews with these women scholars. A portion of the material for my study was also gleaned from another source, namely "personal stories" published in the popular press by women researchers at institutions of higher education. For comparative purposes I also drew on a handful of life interviews with male scholars, which likewise appeared in the popular press.

1 Chikalova I.R. (Belarus), Pushkareva N.L. (Russia). *Women-scientists in Belarus and Russia in Post-Soviet Period. Comparative Study of Social Identity, 1991-2001*. Russian Foundation for Humanities. 2004-2005. Moscow-Minsk, 2006.

Secondly, it is also important to point out that the recruitment of women into academic life in Russia occurred in three phases. The first phase came in the 1920s, when the Soviet leaders sought to eliminate gender asymmetry in science. The second took place in the 1960s, when additional employment opportunities in academic institutions were created. The third was a feature of the post-Perestroika period and was connected with the outflow of men into more lucrative activities and to positions abroad. At present, women make up 33.7% of academic employees, although this overall figure includes the overrepresentation of women in humanities institutions, where they exceed 50% (Мирская Е.З., Мартынова, 1995: 67).

This project seeks to gain insight into the mechanisms of change, utilization of time, and modes of the replication of gender asymmetry. For that purpose, researchers have compiled both typical and atypical cases. We address the following questions: How are the routine realities of women scholars constructed? What meanings are assigned to the activities of women scholars in specific social interactions? How does the academic community treat women's labor and scholarly success? How do other women treat such women? We focus on details of everyday life and the opinions of women scholars about their life experiences.

The primary respondents were women of the educated urban elite. The project was based on several dozen oral interviews, which were taped and later transcribed. The questions presented to the respondents did not take the form of a tightly structured questionnaire, and the time allotted to the interviews was not limited. Respondents who provided the most complete answers about their life experiences were selected for follow-up interviews in which they could recount in greater detail the stories about themselves. Although these parameters may have limited opportunities for generalizing from the results, the advantages outweighed the possible drawbacks.

Interviewers prompted respondents only to "talk about yourself, about your life experience," and respondents divided these two options into primary and secondary categories on their own. The researchers helped to establish the progression of events, their cause-and-effect connections, suggesting that the interviewees think about the means of physical or social survival in the situations they recounted, emotions and perceptions about what had happened. A particular group of questions concerned the actual life of the respondent: her familial situation, her relationship with her chosen profession, her satisfaction with it, and her expectations for the future. Through an analysis of the conditions of life and the direct answers of respondents, we strove to clarify the following:

1. What psychological factors and types of interactions help women to construct individual life strategies and gain confidence that they will be successful?
2. What values and life circumstances, arising from the family and the culture, turned out to be useful or detrimental to them?
3. What family resources were transmitted from grandparents to parents and then to children?
4. What emotional or psychological price did the women pay for their success in life?

Because I did not want to lose an integrated portrait of the cause-and-effect connections in women's life histories, I decided not to disaggregate the written interviews at first; the separate sequences seemed too simplistically schematized. Thus the complete transcripts of the extensive interviews came to have a value of their own. They were literarily complete, ready-made biographies. They contained coherent, relatively complete and comprehensive histories of the lives of my respondents.

We did not have a control group; the major comparisons were drawn from within the ranks of those who were questioned. Their answers were based on their own memories, impressions, knowledge, and experiences relating to the events of their own lives and the lives of persons close to them.

Work on this project revealed how important a gendered symmetry between respondents and researchers was for maintaining contact and mutual understanding and for recognizing the similarity of experiences on both sides. The respondents and researchers conversed on an egalitarian basis, and for both sides, the recitations about life experiences and reflections on them played a therapeutic role. Here is a segment of the conversation between a respondent and a researcher:

> Respondent: My grandmother knew a lot of poetry, and many different stories about them. She was of great value to the village—she was tactful and educated. And obviously, she knew a lot.
>
> Researcher: You could be talking about my own grandmother—she was just like that. Even without any special education, she knew a lot of poetry. She read Pushkin… I took that as a given.

The shared experience in roles could serve as a basis for understanding because the respondent and the researcher were of the same sex, the same

generation, and were similarly affected by the political and social changes the country was experiencing.

I compiled a cross-section of the life of a generational cohort of women scholars who are now about the age of 40-45. As I reviewed the stories of their lives, it became evident that they abounded in equivalent phrases, similar judgments about cause and effect, the same reading in youth and maturity. In keeping with that approach, rather than seeking a typical representative of the cohort or insisting upon a large sample (as in quantitative sociology), I was interested in uncovering the typological characteristics of life practices surrounding significant events, as well as models or patterns of interpretive activity. I thus set the goal of reconstructing history through the eyes of female representatives of a specific referential group, clarifying the specifics of their recollections and the unforeseen connections between the societal experiences of the informants.

The utility of oral testimony about everyday life lies in the fact that other sources often fail to record information about quotidian experience, regarding it as inconsequential. Although a superficial view might cause someone to ask what personal difficulties such a fortunate social group as academic women could have encountered, oral accounts of their subjective experience reveal that their achievements were not easily won.

The majority of autobiographical accounts exhibit the usual characteristics of oral historical testimonies, namely that they were not infrequently adjusted in keeping with what an account of one's life is **supposed** to be. The thematic of daily life appears in all accounts, even though tales of the difficulties of everyday living did not stand at the center of the narrative. The details of the ordinary life for academics are like the thread between the beads of important transformational events such as graduation from an institution of higher education, enrollment in graduate study, defense of one's candidate dissertation, and the publication of one's first monograph. They create a narrative base and allow the listeners (the women researchers) to assimilate the events the respondent is relating and to sense the empathy between the respondent and the person to whom the account is told.

It was the ordinary that evoked in listeners the emotions that allowed them to become alter egos of the narrators, empathizing with or disregarding their stories of their lives and careers. However, it was we, the researchers who identified the central theme of the project and labeled it: "most of the time, we keep quiet about ourselves."

It is not coincidental that many of our respondents compared their own life course and daily experience with that of their parents. What they had

learned from their parents, or, more broadly, from the older generation, demanded confirmation and substantiation. The theoretical work of European psychologists (M. Bowen; V. Satir) proved particularly valuable to the researchers in understanding this multigenerational process and its antithesis, a disjuncture. Although a comfortable balance between autonomy and contact between generations in some families and disjuncture in others did not show a direct cause and effect correlation in relation to satisfaction with one's life, there was a strong association between these factors.

A basic finding of this study is that women who strove to reject physically and emotionally the lifestyles of their parents and forgot about them proved to be less successfully than those who relied upon the symbolic capital of emotional ties with older relatives, learning from them how to overcome difficulties (especially when the relatives were themselves scholars). In other words, the preservation and transmission across generations of a feeling of connection and belonging, of family identity and family values, can sustain individuals even under the stressful conditions of life in the Soviet Union and in post-perestroika Russia. This hypothesis is confirmed by the life stories. Despite having highly varied personal experiences, the women who recounted their life histories shared one feature: all of them at some stage of their lives secured social advancement, success or influence. What internal factors conditioned respondents' need for internal growth?

We found that the most important factor was the respondent's relationship with her father, her desire to fulfill his will, his choice, to justify his vision of his daughter's future, as illustrated in the following six comments by respondents:

> He tried to develop my capabilities, because he had dreamed of having a son, but instead he had a daughter. And so he tried to develop in me male sorts of habits, so that being with me would be interesting to him…

> My dad was a scholar. And although there was no attempt to push me to follow the family path, that was how things worked out…

> My dad's self-esteem played a role. I think that's what he wanted, that his Marusia would be better than all the others…

> Because my dad had a strong inclination towards the humanities—he wrote poetry and created crossword puzzles—he and I agreed that I would study at Moscow University in the Journalism Faculty…

> In childhood, I was a humanist, but my dad was a mathematician. Therefore, he drove me forcefully into mathematics school, and pushed me to take the entrance examinations with the admonition, "Well, do you really not want to test your own strength?
>
> When my dad became a physician, he did not go to Moscow to study. Maybe, he said, I could realize his old dream?

Obviously, the influence of fathers on the respondents was significant, although most of the women had mothers who had achieved professional success. The mothers also pressured their daughters to become self-sufficient professionals. The striving for independence, the sense of self-respect, the ability to achieve set goals and defend their positions—all this developed from childhood and from the relationship with fathers and mothers.

"Argue with me! Learn to defend yourself!" my mom demanded, and if I felt hurt or cried, she teased me as a cry-baby.

> The regimen in our family was this: "After each failure, you need to have success; otherwise, you won't have any successes." My mom always said this to me, and my father added, "Hang on by your fingernails!" When I was a child, my favorite fairy tale, which was always told to me, was about two frogs who fell into a pitcher of milk—an optimist and a pessimist. You know it, right? The pessimist gave up and drowned. But the optimist kept churning, made butter and managed to get out. She saved herself. I was raised on that story. Everything is in our hands, and it's most important not to let things fall through.

Even so, it was more often fathers than mothers who played the key role in stimulating ambition in daughters. They explained to their daughters that education was the fundamental means towards social mobility and professional accomplishment. These parents did not talk about possible marriage partners with their daughters but instead instilled in them dreams of scholarly achievement and recognition. The lifestyle of their families was exceptionally important for daughters. Most often, they came from academic families, or at least one of their relatives had some connection to the scholarly world. It was also important that parents and close relatives expressed pride in their daughters' abilities in childhood and believed in their strengths:

> I had an aunt who had a doctoral degree—a biochemist. I watched what she did, and how, and I really liked it. My parents didn't add anything serious to it [my enthusiasm], but they encouraged me…
>
> My parents treated me as though I were something exceptionally valuable and they talked a lot with me, explained things, and did a lot with me. At home, all sorts of creative…games were common…

Even when future women-scholars were not raised in academic families, they often came from families of the urban or rural intelligentsia, where books and reading, including reading aloud at home, played a large role.

> Tons of books were purchased; there were a lot of books. And all of them were read constantly, in dim light. A whole cupboard of books were read—I remember that exactly…
>
> There were a lot of fairy tales, and a lot of books. Truly, that developed some sort of youthful imagination in me. In any case, it was clear.

Parents typically perceived their daughters to be like sons, openly expressing disappointment that they were not born as boys. Many of the girls tried to prove that they were "no worse" than sons:

> Mom told me, ironically, 'Learn to iron shirts—it will serve you well in life!' And all my sentient life, it was testimony to the fact that I was not worse than if I had been a boy…
>
> He tried to develop my abilities, because he dreamed of having a son, but instead a daughter was born, and so he tried to inculcate masculine habits in me…

Other guiding personalities—most notably teachers—appear in autobiographical accounts much more rarely than fathers, mothers, or close relatives. However, among respondents who came from rural families (in contrast to urban ones), it was non-relatives who were most important in guiding respondents not only in the choice of profession but also in lifestyle:

> For high school, we already went to a neighboring village. There we had a woman teacher, and I understood that that was my ideal. It

> seems to me that to this very day I imitate her in my dress, in everything…

The primary characteristic that distinguishes these girls, "born in place of boys," from typical sons was their exceptional orientation towards results, conscientiousness, and understanding of how to overcome difficulties:

> When I complained about something at home, that I couldn't do any more, that nothing was going to turn out for me, mom asked sternly, "After 'I can't'—what next?"

> Because I was accustomed to studying, and I had a sense of how study was indispensable, I studied and I studied and I studied. I thought everything over, reflected on everything, and analyzed everything… There were horrible problems in pharmacology, and I couldn't cram it into my head, but then I learned it all…

Within the focus-group of this study—those women who quickly and successfully established scholarly careers, defending their doctoral dissertations (that is, second stage dissertations following candidate dissertations in the Soviet and the Russian system) before the age of 40--there were almost no girls who were slackers. Literally every one of the respondents recalled that she studied very hard:

> Lessons, study….The first order of business was study. From the very beginning, I was focused on how I had to graduate with the gold medal [with honors]. And that's what I did!

> I was the first person in my school in 20 years who received the medal. My essay was recognized as the best in the district…

It is curious that among the respondents only one woman defended her doctoral dissertation before the age of 40 and was also selected as a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Science before the age of 50. Yet she reported that she had not demonstrated a passion for knowledge from her youngest years and had not excelled in school, and in general had not distinguished herself as a "model student." Even so, she was the one who was most professionally advanced at the time of the interview. Could it be that the orientation towards achieving the highest record in study and in

scholarly activities deprived respondents of skill in establishing relationships with friends and classmates and therefore hurt their chances to develop administrative talent? Communication also involves work, and they may not have had time for it.

In accounts of Russian women scholars, unlike their peers in the West, we do not encounter references to obstacles to a professional career coming during their youth from their parents or other close relatives. Among Russian women scholars we do not find feelings of abandonment, of desertion, of loneliness, of a lack of support from the moment they chose a life of scholarship. On the contrary, respondents were often the only children in their families. Their parents believed in them and supported their choices:

> In childhood, I won competitions at various levels—district-wide, city-wide. As a result, everyone thought that I would study literature…

> My father excited my interest in life. He was, truly, my first teacher; he believed in me!

Again, we should not forget that a mother, too, often played an important supporting role. Her strictness, her belief in the necessity of overcoming difficulties, provided a solid personal foundation for many respondents. The mothers of all respondents were persons of the Soviet period (the respondent cohort were all born in the 1940s-1970s). The transmission of ambition from mother to daughter can be found in some of the biographical accounts:

> You know, I truly reached the goal that my mom did not achieve but very much wanted to. My mother had a different start to life: the early death of her mother, and then the departure of her father from the family to another woman, leaving her alone from the age of 14. Mom left the provincial city, became a Muscovite, defended two dissertations. My life path repeats that of my mother, only without the complications. Mom always demanded from me more and more. Well, if she didn't demand it, then she just expected it…

The women who reached the doctoral degree at a young age achieved success in the face of difficulties. Every one of these early achievers claimed to have lacked the understanding and support of her senior colleagues. They recalled this happily because their accomplishments (such as the defense of two dissertations, and scholarly recognition) were all the more brilliant and

salient because they had overcome difficulties. For the majority of narrators, the account of the obstacles they had surmounted was the basis for their assessment of their career success.

Respondents more rarely took note of another type of complications--complications that still obtain in current academic life and everyday life.

Among these difficulties respondents named the envy of their colleagues..

> In school, I always had problems with classmates… The class was really oppositional… and for something like…half a year …they bullied me. At first, I became a nervous wreck, but then I learned not to allow offenses, and to say always what I think, and not care about others' opinions.

> In school, little by little I was badgered…as the star pupil. In the sixth grade, some sort of negative gossip went on…it was said, she has all A's, and there's something not right about it…

Russians tend to view themselves as victims. This is especially true of women. However much they may have been knocked around by fate or employers or husbands they nevertheless sometimes believe that they have suffered way beyond their deserts. In addition, their successful husbands are often likely to remind them that their accomplishments are "undeserved." Here is such a case reported in a life interview with a woman professor of economics:

> I always had the feeling that in life, I was getting more [opposition] than I deserved. I never had any desire to enter into a competitive battle. But my husband…, he… so to speak… increased this tendency. He always reminded me where I came from, what my social roots were… Now I know that he did this because he himself felt extremely insecure. The most amazing thing is that instead of supporting each other, he… in fact… tried to distance himself from me…

We may conclude that difficult circumstances in a person's studies and early professional experience often stimulate energetic efforts to surmount them.

> If I didn't succeed at something or I failed in some subject, for example, mathematics, I would reconsider the whole puzzle…

> In my third year, I had a crisis about the meaning of life…I very distinctly remembered that I chose my specialization because surgery is the most non-feminine area of medicine.
>
> Everyone went to enter the university in the closest city—but I went to another country.

The understanding of success, if we reconstruct it from the accounts of the informants, consists in an ability to pass through the stages required to reach the heights of scholarly recognition. When they experienced delays in getting hired, when their successes were overlooked by their supervisors, these incidents were noted as unjust. They considered the need to search for rewards for themselves—a new way or organizing work time, a departure from their own scholarly work in order to teach, supplemental work because a promotion at their primary job did not occur—as a reflection of the past and as an offensive strategy.

One of the most common themes to appear in the biographical narratives of women scholars is a collapse or complication in one's personal life. The divergence between societal expectations of well-being in family life and the reality was especially noticeable. Although in open-ended life interviews men could also have talked about complications in their personal lives, they did not, whereas women returned to these issues continually. For women, the cost of a successful scholarly career—divorce and difficulty in maintaining friendships—was among the most prominent themes.

The disinclination to praise professional success, the absence of a culture of recognition or a culture of praise, is characteristic of the scholarly world, yet this type of recognition is something for which women feel a strong need. The exception that proves the rule rings out in the account of one informant:

> My mom, along with several of her friends, created (at her initiative) a 'Society of Mutual Adoration.' That was how they called their accord—it was arranged that whatever was said about one or another of them about whatever or whenever, they would say only the best things… Wouldn't that be nice, if my mom or I myself worked not in a 'terrarium of the like-minded' (do you know that expression?) but rather in situation of good will… Really, we need to come to such an agreement and all of us found such a Society…

Women did not want to talk about their failures, if they had not risen above them. The respondents avoided topics concerning their personal lives; most of them had suffered complications:

> God! Oh, well, I don't talk about that to anyone. It's not necessary to tell about it…

In post-Soviet Russia, many businessmen have wives who are scholars. However, these men treat their wives' achievements as their own property, to be flaunted whenever the opportunity occurs. When both spouses are scholars in the same field, though, the men do not brag about their wives' scholarly accomplishments (cf. Tichenor, 1999). One woman lamented:

> My scholarly achievements did not help me to become happy… We had been married for 17 years, when I defended my second dissertation. My husband was in a dismal mood at the party, and the next day he said to me that he had decided to divorce me, because he "didn't want to be the husband of a Margaret Thatcher." I burst into tears. But what could be done in such a situation? That was how he showed which of us was the master.[2]

In a clear majority of interviews with women who achieved success in the scholarly world, men appeared as rivals, envious of their wives' success, sometimes openly as in the case just cited but more often hidden under a guise of indifference. This picture is typical in the narratives of women-scholars from other countries. One of the German respondents in an analogous project called her path (in which her husband shared her success and helped her) "completely atypical." As an exception, one of our respondents recounted a situation not in her own life, but in that of a friend and colleague:

> My ex, well, he envied me in everything and always. It seems that this is typical in families where both the husband and the wife are scholars, even in the same field. I myself know of only one exception—they were colleagues of mine from Ukraine, philosophers by training. Here it was, in that family the husband helped the wife organize everything. He let her defend her doctoral dissertation first,

2 Noted on September 14, 2008, Moscow (author's archive).

and become a leader in her field of expertise. How rare that is! I don't know any others like them.

Women who have attained the highest academic degrees do not envy their female colleagues who gave up academic work and pursuit of the doctorate during perestroika and turned into so-called "consumption managers"--housewives to "New Russians." These wives of businessmen supervise the building of huge country mansions and discourage their daughters and granddaughters from intellectual pursuits (Рис, 2002: 410). In contrast, women academics are committed to the preservation of child-rearing techniques that were widespread from the end of 1950s until the beginning of 1970s and which fostered a girl's scholarly interests. In the 21st century they still adhere to the intellectual values their parents taught them. They maintain with conviction that they don't suffer from deprivation and discrimination, they laugh together with their colleagues when hearing disparaging anecdotes about women scholars and deny that they are "oppressed". They contend that the flexibility in time scheduling, the fulfillment of intellectual work, the opportunities of personal advancement and self-realization, and friendly relationships with other intellectuals offset their meager salaries.

It is characteristic of academic women to attribute their scholarly achievements such as the doctoral degree, professorial rank, department head, membership in international organizations to a favorable conjuncture of circumstances and the help of "other important factors." None of the women respondents admitted that she had been pressing for official recognition of her achievements. Quite the contrary, all of them realized that "they had been placed under artificial constraints, but they did not resist them, waiting for a day in the future when somebody would come and offer them a better opportunity."

The biographical narratives of women scholars revealed their fears of losing reliable defenders, of being left by husbands, of being unable to cope with uncertainty. They did not boast of personal achievements, even in the academic sphere. This discourse reflects the impact of the Soviet-era concept of the *working mother*, who was valued not for her success in the professional arena, but rather primarily as a wife who reared her children and earned extra money. A sizable majority (75 %) of respondents who had gained prominence in the academic sphere were not married at the time of our interview. Thus, they had no obvious motive to adopt a deferential attitude toward marital obligations. But married women scholars tended to

value family preservation; sometimes they placed it ahead of their professional achievements.

Another statistic shows that one of the casualties for women of an ambitious scholarly career is family life itself. It is probably not coincidental that 48% of male scholars have two children and 10% even three; conversely, 29% of women scholars and academics have no children (another 29% have two children and only 2% have three). A "child-centered" family can be only a dream for many women-scholars (Vinokurov, 1999).

Could it be that the reluctance of women academics to fight against constraints might explain why the "glass ceiling" continues to obstruct their progress? Even though officially it does not exist, an impenetrable barrier remains. At present, women scholars trying to gain official recognition in their academic communities encounter practically the same obstacles as their mothers did thirty years ago. In the registers of doctoral degree holders in Russia, women made up 20% in 2000 (compared with 14% in 1980); associate members of the Russian Academy of Sciences 15%, and the highest rank (*akademik*) 1.3% (Троян, 2002). The Presidium of the Supreme Certification Commission that approves resolutions by academic councils is comprised of 26 men and one woman. Only one woman sits on the Council of the Russian Foundation for Humanities, which manages the financing of new scholarly projects. In the institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences, only one-fifth of the laboratory headships are held by women; 4% of deputy directors are women, and 2% of directors are women.[3] However, few women seem likely to protest the existing practices: 67% of women scholars interviewed believe that management, including in the academic sphere, will remain men's prerogative (Егорова, 2001: 16).

Why don't women scholars object to the inequitable relationship but instead take it for granted? Despite the low salaries, the women interviewed (from laboratory assistants to institute directors) emphasized that they are satisfied with their work (about 90% of respondents). This high rate of satisfaction implies that women are more interested in pursuing their scholarly work than in earning better salaries, higher positions, or even recognition for their academic achievements. As a professor of musicology said,

> An attractive, honored profession is worth much in itself (Гузеева, 2000: 6).

3 Наука России: 1994. М., 1995. p. 91.

The interviews reflect the existence of a complicated array of relationships between the men and women in the academic setting. For example, while recounting their everyday lives as scholars, Russian women underlined the fact that the heads of their administrative units replicated familial relationships in their departments, preserving multi-generational structures and a complicated hierarchy under the leadership of an all-knowing head of family (Verdery, 1996: 9). The posts of department heads in postgraduate and doctoral programs in our research institutes are almost without exception held by women acting as institute "mother hens." Just as in the traditional Russian patriarchal family and in the Soviet-era governmental structures, paternalistic relationships have continued to pervade our society, and academic life is no different. No matter who heads a unit, either a woman or a man, the unit's relationships take a typically patriarchal hierarchical form. The department head never performs the set-up for tea-drinking rituals or washes the cups of colleagues at the end of a working day. Relationships are governed by strict hierarchy: those people holding higher post are addressed with the polite form of "you" (except for members of the same research group, persons of the same age, and those people who are accustomed to socializing informally during research expeditions).

Women's value to their institutes would seem to rest more in their diligence than on their knowledge or talent. The statistics bear out this view: 52% of women employees of academic institutions and 57% of junior research assistants in scientific research institutes do not have an academic degree.[4] Women are abundant in the lower stratum of scholarly research, where their roles mimic those of housewives and of physical and emotional nurturers. It is in service professions–cleaner, cook, teacher, physician, psychotherapist–that women play the major role. From the home to the workplace, the notion that women belong in supporting roles prevails, even within the academic community.

The most important component of a scholar's everyday life is still preparation for and participation in meetings of scholarly congresses and other types of academic conferences. Respondents recalled vividly the severe reduction of such meetings that took place 10-15 years ago due to lack of financing. According to their accounts, in that period women scholars attempted to establish networks based on institutional "family" ties and began

4 Вестник статистики. М., 1987. No 1. pp. 54-56; Беляева Г.Ф., Горшкова И.Д. Профессиональные проблемы женских научно-педагогических кадров МГУ // Центр социологических исследований МГУ им. М.В.Ломоносова. 13 декабря 1998 (http://www.owl.ru/win/research/msu.htm).

to hold meetings "for insiders."[5] Through their "secret," "quiet" leadership, women tried to retain a position for themselves in post-Soviet scholarly life. Their efforts could be seen as the real story of the period, although these efforts could not be recognized, unlike the open, and theoretically legitimate and legal governance of men.

The second important component of everyday life for academics over the past twenty years was the struggle to obtain grants. In accordance with official procedure, project principal investigators had to file all applications and prepare all reports. But often higher-ranking academics were named as the principal investigators in order to facilitate the acceptance of the grant applications, while women, who generally enjoyed lower status, were relegated to "project manager" positions and routine work. Thus, this aspect of everyday life in academic communities was marked by salient gender differences. This situation continues today.

Few male scholars started their careers as secretaries in a research sector where they had to type other scholars' articles or answer the telephone (Мещеркина, 2002: 281). But for most women respondents, this was a typical rung on their career ladder. After a period of time, they proceeded to the second stage – that of writing a dissertation. Most women scholars described the third stage, preparation for the doctoral defense, as the most difficult. They faced great difficulties when they took the posts of professor, leading scientific officer and especially principal scientific officer. Most respondents who decided to write the second or doctoral dissertation did so in secret, and defended it at an institution far away from the one where they worked. Only a few had the courage to undertake the unequal struggle with their administration for promotion, with its concomitant stress and moral and psychological pressure.

When asked the direct question "At what stages of your career did you experience sex discrimination?" most women respondents pointed to the period before defense of the second dissertation and afterwards, when the administration tried to ignore the defense and made no change in salary or position in light of it. Nearly half of the women interviewed emphasized that their contributions to scholarship were not appropriately valued and that their rights to their intellectual property were violated in the course of publication of their work.

---

5 Васильева А. Женщины в науке и образовании (беседа с математиком Г.Ю.Ярошевской) (http://www.owl.ru/win/womplus/1999/science.htm).

> A chapter of a monograph was based on my manuscripts; however I was not included in the list of authors – since I was only an assistant to the Chair at that time, and then a Candidate of Medical Science. And I walked out, and went to another scientific and research institute (Агамова and Аллахвердян, 2000).

We encountered numerous examples of this type in our interviews. In writing my report on this project, I wanted to include the most typical examples of social practices that devalued women at the highest levels of academic hierarchies. It is interesting to observe how pervasive discrimination can be. Women who hold doctoral degrees suffer practically the same indignities and obstacles as women who are junior research assistants and senior researchers. But, strange as it may seem, most of the respondents did not want to focus on discrimination and preferred to explain their situations as unrelated to gender:

> I would not term it gender discrimination; it is most likely just a matter of personal social capabilities, what might be called social competence, and the ability to build relations with the right people. It is a problem of a talent for survival in academia, rather than gender imbalance. Talented people always face difficulties, and in this situation it is talent that suffers such restrictions (and not being a woman). Forget your *gender* …[6]

Women tend to give their accounts an air of gender neutrality, including a reluctance to recall, unless they are pushed, incidents of discrimination and injustice on the basis of sex. This is yet another manifestation of women deploying verbal expression in accordance with societal expectations.

In many interviews we observe an undervaluation of the achievements of the women. One respondent, an employee of a major academic institute, holder of a doctorate, and a professor, thoughtfully said in response to a request for an interview and to recount her own career in scholarship:

> Well, what kind of successful woman am I? Surely, I wouldn't do for [your project on successful women].

6 Noted on September 20, 2009. Moscow (author's archive).

The surprising conclusion of this analysis of life interviews of often highly successful academic women is that patriarchal stereotypes continue to permeate the scholarly community and are unlikely to be eradicated any time soon. When I raised the question of gender discrimination during the interviews, the overwhelming majority of respondents rejected the notion outright. A small number remarked that prior to our interview the idea of such discrimination had never even crossed their minds. It is hard to imagine that these intelligent and sensitive women do not feel injured in some way, and yet this would seem to be the case.

Women scholars appear to be happy for the opportunity to be included in a sphere traditionally reserved to men, the sphere of scholarly research and theorizing. Even if they understand that discrimination is a factor in their work relationships, they regard it as *normal* and make no effort to change the situation.

Despite their impressive accomplishments, most respondents presented their life stories as something unspectacular, and merely a steady, gradual progression, without crises or breaks. All of the women's accounts are histories of adaptation to circumstances. In their accounts, women narrators do not recognize their delusions or their deviations from their previous trajectory in life but rather see in their ability to adapt to changing conditions a great accomplishment and not in any way a concession.

However, this way of framing the question disguises a more positive reading of the evidence. Women who attained professional positions rarely complained about the lack of mutual understanding in the family, including in relationships with their children, whether their husbands left their professionally-successful rival-wives or remained with them to preserve the family and provide their wives emotional support. They set their goals and adjusted other aspects of their lives so that they could continue the scholarly work that gave them personal satisfaction and a desired identity. That is the core value. For the rest: "We don't talk about ourselves."

Literature:

Lindquist, Sven. 1984. "Grabe, wo du stehst". In: *Geschichte von unten: Fragestellungen, Methoden und Projekte einer Geschichte des Alltags*, ed. by H. Ehalt. Wien-Köln-Graz, 295-305.

Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist. 1980. "The Use and Abuse of Anthropology. Reeflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding", *Signs*, no. 5.

Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston.

Schepanskaya, T. B. 2003. "Anthropology of Professions (Antropologija professij)", *Zhurnal sociologii i socialnoj antropologii*, vol. VI, no. 1 (21), 139–161.

Tichenor, V.J. 1999. "Status and Income as Gendered Resources: The Case of Marital Power", *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 61, no. 3, 212-221.

Varenne, Hervé. 1988. "About Piere Bourdieu 'Homo Academicus'". *Teachers College Record*, no. 91, 263-265.

Verdery, Katherine. 1996. *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Ithaca.

Vinokurov, N. A. 1999. "Женщины и мужчины в науке", *Sociological studies (Sociologicheskie issledovanija),* no. 4, 82-86.

Wacquant, L. J. D. 1989. "For a Socio-Analysis of Intellectuals: On 'Homo Academicus'. Interview with Pierre Bourdieu", *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, no. 34, 1-29.

Агамова, Н. С.; Аллахвердян, А. Г. 2000. "Российские женщины в науке и высшей школе: историко-научные и науковедческие аспекты", *Вопр. истории естествознания и техники*, no. 1, 141-153.

Егорова, Л.С. 2001. "Гендерные стереотипы в управлении", *Женщина в российском обществе*, no. 3-4.

Гузеева В. Елена Маркова. 2000. "Женщина в науке – это сложно…", *Слово,* no. 1 (371-372) 01.01., p. 6.

Мещеркина, Е.Ю. 2002. "Бытие мужского сознания: опыт реконстуркции маскулинной идентичности среднего и рабочего класса". In: Ушакин С.А. (ed.) *О муже(N)ственности.* Сб. статей. Москва.

Мирская Е.З., Мартынова Е.А. 1995. Женщины-ученые: проблемы и перспективы // Социальная динамика современной науки. Москва.

Рис, Н. 2002. "«Профиль» буржуазности: новая элита о себе". In: Ушакин С.А. (ed.) *О муже(N)ственности*. Москва.

Троян, В. 2002. "Женщина и наука: подруги или соперницы?", *Зеркало недели*. 5 января 2002, no. 1 (376).

Viktorija Ratković

Narrating our Work, Questioning Our-Selves: Dilemmas of Migration Research[1]

In this paper, the focus is shifted from asking the questions "Who are you?" and "What do you do?", which we tend to ask the women who we want to narrate their lives, to the questions "Who are we?" and "What do we do?". These are questions we probably ask ourselves quietly all the time, trying to figure out why we (should/want to) do what we do (research, activism etc.), but they also get to the heart of the politics of academia. Here, migration studies are used to illustrate my arguments as on the one hand, my research focus is media and migration, and on the other many of the issues addressed are especially obvious in migration studies. At the same time, the questions posed apply to any research field. They have been raised (and answered) before, but in my opinion they are still relevant and necessary to ask ourselves over and over again. Also, this paper aims to serve as an invitation to step back and question our own work critically.

1. Who are we?

Heated debates have been dealing with the question of whether it is relevant to reflect upon who we are when it comes to doing research. In sum, the arguments come down to claiming that research needs to be objective

1 I would like to thank Claudia Brunner for her helpful comments on the first draft of this paper.

as well as value free on the one hand, and stating that every researcher has a certain standpoint that influences her/him on the other. The latter argument is of course very prominent in Feminist/Women's/Gender Studies, as asking who is talking from which position is one of the founding principles of feminist epistemology (see Singer, 2004). Other research fields have also adopted the view that anyone doing research needs to reflect on his/her standpoint, while some even put this question in the central focus of their research (e.g. Autoethnography, see Ellis/Bochner, 2000).

Yet trying to define and occupy one's standpoint can become a tricky endeavour, especially if striving to speak from the position of a collective subject. Thus the notion that it is possible to speak from the standpoint of "woman" has been criticized, as African American women have pointed out that the "we" of Western white middle-class women has excluded their experiences for a long time. Subsequently, Sandra Harding's call for "starting off research from women's lives" (Harding, 1990) has been enriched with the call for focusing on the "outsider-within" standpoint. Today, marginalised women are given more and more of a spotlight in academic discourses. At the same time, the image of the "third world woman" has been described as a construct of western feminism, used as a contrast to the emancipated modern self of western women (see Mohanty, 2002). Accordingly, representation has become a much debated issue in Feminist/Women's/Gender Studies, as postcolonial theorists have argued that it is not only necessary to question how a marginalised group is described but also who has the right to speak in the group's name (see Dhawan, 2005).

While I agree with the argument that it is necessary to declare one's standpoint and to reflect upon it critically, I have also found at times that it is impossible not to declare it or rather that some of us are forced into occupying certain standpoints. When presenting my research focus (media produced by migrants) in a course at my home university, I was asked by another participant whether I am a migrant myself. When I said yes, she seemed rather relieved saying, "That's why you are interested in the topic, right?" Focusing on Feminist/Women's/Gender Studies as a woman also leads to similar comments, as some assume that as a woman, one must *of course* be interested in women's lives and experiences. The problem here is the assumption that some research fields are basically only of interest to those who are part of it and irrelevant to everybody else, thus less valuable. In other words: those focusing on genetic engineering are hardly likely to be told that *of course* they have chosen their research topic as they have genes. Consequently, taking a look at the norms that define what apparently needs

to be questioned and what does not very much reveals the power relations that exist in academia.

In the field of migration studies, the question which media migrants are consuming is one of the main foci of research. The fear that some researchers voice is that if migrants only consume media from their home countries or media produced by migrants only, they will form media ghettos and become detached from the receiving society. At the same time research that has been done on this question has found that migrants who do watch German speaking political TV shows mainly do so if migration is featured as a topic (Bonfadelli, 2008: 258). Whereas this might lead to the interpretation that migrants focus solely on their own experiences of migration and therefore are unwilling to integrate, one could also argue that most audience members watch shows that talk to them about themselves: seniors watch TV shows on seniors, teenagers on teenagers and so on. The point I am trying to make here is that whereas everybody is influenced by their experiences in one way or another, one should not try to explain an individual's actions based solely on these experiences. Though it is important to know who one is (at all times) and to declare one's standpoint, on some occasions it is equally important to keep the declaration of one's standpoint as an option. Thus the goal should not be to celebrate (and/or romanticize) marginalised standpoints but to question and criticize the power relations and circumstances that create marginalisation in the first place (Dhawan, 2005: 83). Simultaneously it is important to notice that questions related to the distribution of power (in academia) have often been raised by members of marginalised groups.

Trying to define my own standpoint reveals some of the pitfalls: being a migrant woman at an Austrian university, I sometimes find myself taken as a kind of representative of "the migrant position" (although I would not go so far as to say that I am a "token subaltern"; see Spivak, 1996: 292). While it is true that I have experienced many specific migration-related situations and thus have certain insights that those who have never migrated do not share (e.g., when it comes to obtaining a new visa every couple of years), I am still very much aware of the fact that my education and job position distinguish my position very much from those who do not have legal status in Austria or simply do not fit the norm of whiteness (and thus are marked as the "Other").

2. Who/What do we focus on?

Everyone doing research has to find a research topic, the choice being based on what is of interest. Interest is defined by several aspects. First of all, we might ask ourselves which group of people is likely to profit from our interest in them. Again, this especially applies to marginalised groups. At the same time, one has to realize that focusing on a group of people with the wish in mind to help them might not only define them as a group in the first place but also as needing help. This was and partly still is the case when it comes to migrants in German speaking countries, starting with the *Gasterbeiter* (guest workers) in the 1960s. As it became clear that those who came to Germany in order to work for a certain period of time were planning to stay, they became the focus of several charities who defined their clients simply as migrants, without differentiating them according to age or gender (which is usually the case in social work). Thus migrants appeared as a homogenous ethnic group, and as social workers (who were the link between migrants and the receiving society) mostly contact those who need help, the group as such became defined as needing help (see Huth-Hildebrandt, 2004: 131ff.). Simultaneously, the social workers' focus on families led to defining female migrants as mothers and wives mainly, even though many women who came to Germany were also guest workers. Female migrants were thus described as victims, not only suffering as foreigners in a foreign country but also as suffering from the patriarchal structures of their countries of origins. Representatives of Women's Studies especially saw female migrants as powerless prisoners of hierarchal gender structures, unable to escape without the help of German feminists (see Huth-Hildebrandt, 2002: 141). Even today, a similar discourse can be found in Feminist/Women's/Gender Studies, especially when it comes to Muslim women and the headdress. While some researchers stress the women's agency and the possibility that women who choose to wear a head scarf might serve as agents of critique (of the discourse which defines them as victims/of circumstances that makes it difficult to wear a head scarf in public, see e.g., Dietze, 2009: 38), many still seem to define these women mainly as victims of their patriarchal and basically underdeveloped cultures of origin (see Gresch/Hadj-Abdou, 2009 for an overview of the debates). In an on-going research project, my colleagues Elisabeth Koch, Manuela Saringer, Rosemarie Schöffmann and myself are trying to stress the female guest workers agency by asking women who were

guest workers in Carinthia during the 1960s and 1970s to report about the experiences they made during their stay.[2]

Second of all, we could ask ourselves which topics are discussed widely and are thus mostly likely to attract funding – since realistically, most of us depend on this. When it comes to migration, the most prominent issue seems to be integration, meaning mostly that it is the migrants who need to integrate into the receiving societies. Thus the largest research project on media in migration in Germany was named "Medial Integration of Ethnic Minorities"[3] (2002–2009), and each of the books published by the project members carried the term integration in its title (in sum, five books were published; the project was conducted/supervised by Rainer Geißler and Horst Pöttker). In the first publication the authors defined integration as a compromise between assimilation (meaning that migrants need to lose all traces of their culture of origin) and segregation (meaning that migrants remain separated from the receiving society, e.g., by living in "parallel societies"[4]), stating that in order for integration to succeed, the receiving society needs to make as much effort as the migrants (Geißler, 2005: 65f.). While this can be seen as a productive and reasonable approach, one problem remains: even though the researchers try to give the term integration a new meaning, they risk strengthening a problematic discourse – especially as by now, the work published by this project has been cited in almost every article/book dealing with migration and media (in the German speaking countries). At the same time, important aspects of the migrants' experiences and problems remain invisible if one sees migration mainly through the lens of integration (and sometimes only). Accordingly, Hepp et al. in 2010 stated that the German language Communication and Media Studies as such focus mainly on integration, which is why the researches describe them as Media and Integration Studies (Hepp et al., 2010: 320f.). In a statement published in 2010, the network "Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies"[5] (based in Germany) called for focusing on democracy and not integration when it comes to migrants, the central argument being that "[i]ntegration presumes that those who work in this country, have children

2 Carinthia is one of Austria's regions, the title of the project is: "Guest workers in Carinthia – Traces of female work migration".

3 "Mediale Integration ethnischer Minderheiten", see http://www.integration-und-medien.de/index.php, accessed 6.9.2011.

4 Bukow et al. (2007) stated that (at least in Germany) while in reality no "parallel societies" can be found, they are still a much debated phenomenon. The researches thus created the term "felt parallel societies" (*gefühlte Parallelwelten*).

5 Kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung.

here, and grow old and eventually die here, must adopt a particular code of conduct before they are allowed to belong".[6] This of course is not to say that the topic and/or title necessarily influences our research in negative ways, as many of us have probably had the experience that naming a research project can become a very creative act, with the findings at times bearing very little resemblance to the proposal. At the same time, when integration is discussed, female migrants are once again assigned the role of the mother, with one recurring cliché being the Muslim mother who does not speak German with her children and is thus responsible for their presumed lack of German speaking skills. This lack is consequently described as the biggest problem when it comes to the allegedly desired integration of migrants into the receiving societies, e.g., when it comes to access to the job market. Accordingly it is the mothers that are understood as the most important target group of, e.g., language courses, at the same time not only disregarding the language skills these women most certainly have (though not necessarily German ones) but also defining mothers and thus women as the "bearers of the nation", as they are not only expected to teach their children the "right" language but also to pass on the values of the receiving society in order for the children to be able to become full-fledged citizens (see Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Third of all we might ask ourselves which focus makes sense when it comes to a certain topic. In migration studies, the need to focus on migrants (and especially the problematic aspects of migration) seems self-evident. Yet today, migration is not only relevant to migrants and migration does not necessarily need to be looked at as a problematic phenomenon, as, e.g., Tom Holert and Mark Terkessidis have pointed out. In their book the authors describe in which way tourists and migrants are very similar, while simultaneously migration is seen as a field of problems first and foremost and tourism mostly as a desired phenomenon. One could also argue that the questions that are asked of migrants in various surveys could also be asked of those who have never migrated. In a study conducted by the Austrian Commission for Migration and Integration Research in 2010, migrants were asked the following question: "When you look at Austrian society in general, do you [fully agree … to … totally disagree]?"[7] The aim of the question was

6 http://www.demokratie-statt-integration.kritnet.org/demokratie-statt-integration_en.pdf, accessed 2.9.2011.

7 "Wenn Sie die Österreichische Gesellschaft einmal allgemein betrachten: Sind Sie damit [sehr einverstanden – bis – ganz und gar nicht einverstanden]?"

to measure migrants' "mental distance"[8] to Austria. Any possible "mental distance" to Austria existing within those who did not migrate to Austria was not broached as an issue (see Statistik Austria, 2010: 94). In migration studies it seems that most of the time migrants are singled out, thus not only appearing as fundamentally different from those who have not migrated but also as the ones who have created problems in the first place. Accordingly, migrants are not only made responsible for problems that might evolve in the context of migration but some problems are at times even more or less constructed by researchers.

As described above, migrant women still tend to be described as victims, not only in public discourses but also in research. In my work, I am trying to question these discourses by consciously focusing on examples that show a broad variety of the portrayal of female migrants. One of the media that I am analysing in my PhD thesis is *Migrazine*,[9] a multilingual online magazine published in Austria. Its slogan is "from migrant women for all" and it aims at providing space for critical migrant voices and at making a statement against the stereotypical portrayal of migrant women. The magazine's editors define the term "female migrant" as a political identity and as a label for an oppositional standpoint in the sense of feminist and antiracist partisanship. Whereas migration in *Migrazine* does serve as an important point of reference, categories such as class, gender, ethnicity and/or religion are not only taken into consideration but regarded as crucial to the understanding and to the construction of the "female migrant" as a political identity. At the same time, dominant public discourses that define female migrants mainly as victims of their so-called "patriarchal cultures of origin" are questioned as the discrimination that female migrants often face is regarded as a form of structural violence. I argue that for critical research it is crucial to actively seek for articulations of marginalised groups and to provide these groups with space to speak for themselves and to define their standpoint instead of only trying to "give them a voice". The point I am trying to make here is the same that has already been made by Gayatri Spivak (2008): Those who are willing to listen are very much able to hear the voices of those who allegedly are not able to speak for themselves.

8 "*Mentale Distanz*" – the term is not defined in the study at all, making it difficult to judge the findings altogether.

9 See www.migrazine.at, accessed 27.3.2012.

3. What is the question?

In migration studies, next to the term integration, identity serves as one of the most debated issues. Drawing from various disciplines, researches dealing with migration have been trying to describe migrant identity ever since the guest workers. For a long time mainstream migration studies have perceived the question of migrant identity as a problematic one, as migrants were seen to be caught up in an either-or situation, unable to decide which culture they belong to. Up to the 1980s, identity and belonging were discussed simultaneously as if they were connected; adolescents especially were described as being torn between the cultures of the sending and the receiving countries, with both cultures understood as homogenous. By now, mainstream migration studies have adopted a more competency- and resource-oriented perspective, influenced by work on hybrid cultures and identities (Hall, 1994; Bhabha, 1996). Instead of focusing on an either-or perspective, it now seems that there is an emphasis on positive aspects of diversity and cultural pluralism, emblematized in Homi K. Bhabhas metaphor of a "third space", a space where hybrid existence can generate creativity and other forms of cultural enrichment (Ha, 2005: 14). Today, as Bronfen and Marius state, the question no longer is whether we see cultural hybridity as worthwhile but only how we handle it (Bronfen/Marius, 1997: 18). Still, some research seems to be influenced by the notion that young people especially who have experienced migration need help with finding their identity and in dealing with problems caused by living in cultures that are perceived as fundamentally different (see Yildiz, 2010).

At the same time while it might be of interest to researchers how migrants deal with different parts of their identity, this might not be of interest to them at all. Especially those who are struggling to make a living are probably not so much concerned with the "new" or "hybrid" aspects of their identity as researches aspiring to explore new ideas. As Zvi Bekerman (2011) pointed out: If one was to ask a poor, marginalised person whether they prefer being acknowledged as a minority (and being represented etc.) or whether they prefer getting money and resources, his/her answer is not difficult to imagine. Thus the question might not necessarily be how can we ensure that certain groups are represented well but which resources they need. Nevertheless (and realistically), it is much easier to conduct a research project on migrant identity than it would be on the economic and power structures that keep many migrants in marginalised positions. Personally,

being aware of the existing pitfalls still does not keep me from focusing on migrant identity constructions in my PhD thesis, but it certainly makes me very much alert to aspects that go beyond media studies. Thus taking into account issues such as structural violence and accordingly looking at categories such as gender, sexual orientation, class etc. when discussing migrant identity constructions are central approaches in my work.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to single out some of the dilemmas that I have encountered during my research. Taking a look at the literature dealing with these issues made it very obvious to me that I am by far not the only one struggling with them. Thus – realistically speaking – it should be noted that there will never be any once and for all answers to the questions raised. Still, for me at least, this is not a frustrating conclusion but moreover one that should motivate all of us to keep asking ourselves who we are, what we do and why we do it while simultaneously challenging the power structures that keep these questions relevant. Being aware of the political implications of our day-to-day work is, in my opinion, crucial in order to change problematic aspects not only in academia but also in dominant discourses. The lens of our own standpoint can clearly help us identify the pitfalls and advantages of certain approaches, especially if the standpoint we are occupying is a marginalised one. At the same time we should keep in mind that a candid reflection on our own situation and attitudes might reveal that we are contributing to the overshadowing of certain – even more marginalised – standpoints. Accordingly I argue that those of us who are able to do research should be well aware of their privileged position and use their influence wisely.

Literature:

Bekerman, Zvi. 2011. "Culture in the Service of Conflict". Presentation held on June 17 during the conference "Migration und Kultur", Klagenfurt June 16–18.

Bhabha, Homi. 1996. *The Location of Culture*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag.

Bonfadelli, Heinz; Bucher, Priska; Hanetseder, Christa; Hermann, Thomas; Ideli, Mustafa; Moder, Heinz. 2008. *Jugend, Medien und Migration. Empirische Ergebnisse und Perspektiven*. Wiesbaden: VS.

Bronfen, Elisabeth; Marius, Benjamin. 1997. "Hybride Kulturen. Einleitung zur anglo-amerikanischen Multikulturalismusdebatte". In: Elisabeth Bronfen (ed.) *Hybride Kulturen. Beiträge zur anglo-amerikanischen Multikulturalismusdebatte*. Tübingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1-30.

Bukow, Wolf-Dietrich; Nikodem, Claudia; Schulze, Erika; Yildiz, Erol. 2007. "Was heißt hier Parallelgesellschaft? Zum Umgang mit Differenz". In: Wolf-Dietrich Bukow; Claudia Nikodem; Erika Schulze; Erol Yildiz (eds.) *Was heißt hier Parallelgesellschaft? Zum Umgang mit Differenz*. Wiesbaden: VS, 11-26.

Dhawan, Nikita. 2005. "Die verzwickte Position der Postkolonialen Feministin. Gegen die Subalternisierung der intellektuellen Migrantin". In: Wolfgang Müller-Funk; Birgit Wagner (eds.) *Eigene und andere Fremde. "Postokoloniale" Kulturkonflikte im europäischen Kontext*. Wien: Turia+Kant, 77-89.

Dietze, Gabriele. 2009. "Okzidentalismuskritik. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Forschungsperspektivierung". In: Gabriele Dietze; Claudia Brunner; Edith Wenzel (eds.) *Kritik des Okzidentalismus. Transdisziplinäre Beiträge zu (Neo-)Orientalismus und Geschlecht*. Bielefeld: transcript, 23-54.

Ellis, Carolyn; Bochner, Arthur P. 2000. "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity". In: Norman K. Denzin; Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.) *Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Empirical Materials*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 733-768.

Geißler, Rainer. 2005. "Interkulturelle Integration von Migranten – ein humaner Mittelweg zwischen Assimilation und Integration". In: Rainer Geißler; Horst Pöttker (eds.) *Massenmedien und die Integration ethnischer Minderheiten in Deutschland. Problemaufriss, Forschungsstand, Bibliographie*. Bielefeld: transcript, 45-70.

Gresch, Nora; Hadj-Abdou, Leila. 2009. "'Kopftuchprovokationen'. Implikationen der Hierarchisierung von Gleichheitsimperativen in kontemporären feministischen Diskursen". In: Birgit Sauer; Sabine Strasser (eds.) *Zwangsfreiheiten. Multikulturalität und Feminismus*, 2nd ed. Wien: Promedia, 97-113.

Ha, Kein Nghi. 2005. *Hype um Hybridität. Kultureller Differenzkonsum und postmoderne Verwertungstechniken im Spätkapitalismus*. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Hall, Stuart. 1994. *Rassismus und kulturelle Identität*. Ausgewählte Schriften 2. Hamburg: Argument Verlag.

Harding, Sandra. 1990. *Feministische Wissenschaftstheorie. Zum Verhältnis von Wissenschaft und sozialem Geschlecht*. Hamburg: Argument Verlag.

Hepp, Andreas; Bozdag, Cigdem; Suna, Laura. 2010. "Herkunfts-, Ethno- und Weltorientierte. Aneignungstypen der kulturellen Identität und kommunikativen Vernetzung in der Dispora". In: *Medien und Kommunikationswissenschaft* 3: 320-341.

Holert, Tom; Terkessidis, Mark. 2006. *Fliehkraft. Gesellschaft in Bewegung – von Migranten und Touristen*. Köln: KiWi.

Huth-Hildebrandt, Christina. 2002. *Das Bild der Migrantin. Auf den Spuren eines Konstrukts*. Frankfurt a.M.: Brandes & Apsel.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 2002. "Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggle." In: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 28/2: 499-536.

Singer, Mona. 2008. "Feministische Wissenschaftskritik und Epistemologie: Voraussetzungen, Positionen, Perspektiven". In: Ruth Becker; Beate Kortendiek (eds.) *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung. Theorie, Methoden, Empirie*, 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 257-266.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1996. "Subaltern Talk. Interview with the Editors". In: Donna Landry; Gerald MacLean (eds.) *Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York/London: Routledge, 287-308.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 2008. *Can the Subaltern Speak? Postkolonialität und subalterne Artikulation*. Wien: Turia + Kant.

Statistik Austria. 2010. *Migration & Integration. Zahlen. Daten. Indikatoren 2010*. Wien.

Yildiz, Erol. 2010. "Die Öffnung der Orte zur Welt und postmigrantische Lebensentwürfe". *SWS-Rundschau* 3/2010: 318-339.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage.

"Capital As Medicine and Poison: Teach! Use! Says Spivak"

- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak talking with participants of the Dubrovnik course (May 25, 2011)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: I will not give a talk. We are a relatively small group. If you ask me questions, and I ask you questions, we have more time.

It is wonderful that we are from 19 countries, but that still doesn't make it a transnational world. There are 55 nations in Africa alone. How many from Africa are here? Two maybe? That's always a scandal. That is always a scandal. We have to remember that. I sit revising in Ilorin, a small university town in Nigeria, where I must give reminders of Dubrovnik, though China can no longer be ignored. That is the moving field of transnationality. I am coming from Ghana, where Tito and Nkrumah played together in another dispensation.

I have taught in these rooms. I came last to Dubrovnik in 1981. I was on the margins of *Praxis International*, the original journal gone in 1983, Gajo Petrović was my only guest to what we then called the "Marxist picnic" – the Marxist Interpretations of Literature and Culture Summer School that produced the big red book out of which people first read "Can the Subaltern Speak?" I invited him, and he came. That is the last time I saw him, a great humanist philosopher who believed in the radical potential of philosophy and learning to philosophize.

I want to say what follows very carefully. I wanted then not simply to complain and say that *Praxis* was excluding women. For they were the victims of history as much as we are. There are other ways of excluding history. (*Constellations*, the old *Praxis* internationalized, has Seyla Ben-Habib as a co-editor. Not a result of my epistemological initiative with Gajo.)

When we say "transnational," uniting countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Netherlands, this is a wonderful thing, but not exactly transnational perspectives. Other places, assuming we mattered to them, could just as well say, "they are racist, they are excluding us," but that wouldn't be true, we are women of good will. So, in the same way we have to be critical together, and first critical of ourselves. I am as critical of myself as I am of

ourselves together, we want always in our good faith, surrounded by friends from many different places, we want to claim too much forgetting that it is the public voice, the printed voice, that achieves transnationality, always imperfectly, always provisionally, always permitted by power, and so on. Even that is not for us to judge. And the question of epistemologically internalizing transnationality is altogether elsewhere.

Later, we have to make a distinction between judging too quickly and earning the right to judge. The worst thing is when people tell me, you are not following the correct line. But that's for a bit later.

I am not a religious person. The word "spiritual" scares me a bit. I came to you because, a) I believe in the necessity of an intuition of the transcendental, b) I wanted to revisit the place where *Praxis* died, and c) I felt that the fact that someone stole my Permanent Visa Card into the United States should not stop me from having conversations with a group of feminist women from 19 countries and of all ages and political convictions. I felt that it was really being defeated in a certain political way. I'll say one more thing. It's not capitalism being turned to socialism that is on the short term agenda. In order for capitalism to be turned to socialism, you have to undertake an enormous amount of epistemological effort first, but other kinds of effort as well. It's *capital* being turned to socialism, that one's less hard. Socialism cannot work without capital, but that's one of the things that romantic anti-capitalists, especially in the United States, with loud voices, do not know and therefore alter-globalization relies on non-stop "chase the money." This is what you hear constantly, "follow the money," because they don't know enough, they haven't started to think enough, and therefore they cannot make this distinction, that it is not capital, that is bad. Marx has a pre-critical model, his model is not good there, he builds it on a pre-critical idea of consent. You know, if you, the worker, quantify your labor willingly, and own the means of production, all will be OK. That is wrong. He was wrong. That pre-critical model of consent is like beating a girl so the girl goes "Aaah," and you say, "Oh yes, she consented" to the marriage.

The line from freedom from oppression and freedom to give away for social justice is not continuous, it requires an epistemological engagement. So Marx's notion that it would naturally follow was wrong. It wasn't understood at all, it was too counter-intuitive. He was not a Romantic anti-capitalist. This was a hard lesson, but in order for capital to be produced, you have to quantify. His words are "abstract average." Today we say quantification, turning into statistics and data. For structural reform, this is absolutely necessary. For epistemological training, to use the reform for socialization,

the question of living labor as well as the question of the gendered and raced imagination.

Why am I saying this? Because our insistence on self-expression carries the same mistake. This is a huge problem that we, who have felt excluded, asking for justice for ourselves in justified self-interest, cannot wait on. Doing justice is something for all. I can't go any further, because we are committed to a pre-critical model of self-expression. Bound and imprisoned by pre-critical notions of self-expression, a feeling that screwed up international socialism and brought it down to the dust, and made it coherent with capitalism. The 34-year-old left-front government in West Bengal died last year because, epistemologically untrained in socialism, greed in place for a will to social justice, it could only produce violence against peasants as an inchoate protest to capitalism's promise of social productivity.

For people of good sense, ways of working for social justice are still tied to that 18th-20th century notion of self-expression or consent given, although it is sometimes named by ethnic names. Labor turns to unions full of racism, full of sexism, full of classism. Labor joins hands with management. Why? Because labor aristocracy suffers from outsourcing. The socialistically inclined young in the Eastern United States think that working against outsourcing is socialism. Therefore, we attempt to train the imagination for an epistemological performance containing self-expression in the interest of the other, rather than, and here is the problem with the gender-, class-, and race-oppressed, at the behest of the other. If you are in a position to be able to fight for self-expression, you are already beginning to move to be part of the problem. Because if you say "self-expression" and then "I represent the world" you are speaking from a currently offended deeply feudal position. As I have often said, the women from the global South who come forward to work with an organization such as the World Social Forum, are generally deeply feudal, benevolent women ignoring the difference between the ethnic bottom feeders and themselves, people who do not necessarily have a transnational perspective but can code-switch from feudality without feudalism at home and a fully performed simulacrum of transnationality as networking at conferences. They look much more ethnic because they can say "I represent the world," and dress "ethnic," whereas the poor people who might look ethnic (or not) when dressed in everyday clothes often "dress up" to resemble their idea of city folk because they are coming to this thing, and at best they look like high school teachers, they don't look ethnic. This is what I have just experienced. Instead of auto-critique the left completely separated between urban left intellectuals and rural goon politics. When

even that line disappeared, we, women, feudal, hand in hand with international civil society, presenting ourselves as ethnic, brought the left down to where there's no room for struggle and moved on to bene/malevolent absolutism. We have to be thinking about how to be trained as real self-expressors, in search of singularity in other and self, rather than individualism for me and my group. That's where I begin.

With these warnings expressed (not necessarily heeded, that's harder, you stay on my case!) I would like to start with information from where I work. When you think that the national name means a nation, you're making a mistake. If you think the nation is the Capital City, you are making a mistake. A transnational perspective most often does just that. When people use the national word monolithically, like 19 nations on your flier, remember? When you see a critical icon of a certain kind of feminism, please remember the context, and do not believe her if she speaks for the nation state. Her iconicity and the interior texture, the episteme of the subaltern are at odds. Even if she has earned the right to access that episteme, in the context of a transnational conference she will not be able to code switch into it. If she speaks against the United States, I do not want to see her doing what in the US we call vulgarly, kissing ass.

That's not what we do as hardcore feminists. Whenever you listen to a piece of information, it's not about personal image, it's not about individualism. We take risks and we join the likes of people who are not necessarily from our backgrounds. In the end, we take two or three examples. That's the end of the introductory stuff.

After this confused series of sentences, is there anything at this point that you would like me to make clearer?

Iva Grgić: I wasn't sure I understand what you meant with capital and capitalism. I understand capitalism. Tell me about capital. Can it ever do good?

G. Ch. Spivak: It can always do good. Did you hear? The difference between capital and capitalism.

Iva Grgić: Because I think that's crucial, and I wasn't sure I understood.

Irena Ateljević: I will just give you my understanding of what I think she says.

G. Ch. Spivak: Absolutely.

Irena Ateljević: I think the main point is an idea that is challenging our leftist common struggles; that is to say, we associate capital with evil, as something bad we have to fight against, while there is so much power in capital. And that capital can be redistributed and handled in such a way that

that it can help us. We should not shy away from capital as a powerful tool to empower ourselves and to embrace it, and not to feel betrayed in a sense because we are opening up to that notion and taking it as something that we need to reclaim and use for good.

G. Ch. Spivak: That's wonderful. Unless somebody else would like to add something… That's what I would like to say, my mother was Indian American, she had an American passport. (…)

Suchi Karim: I do not understand how that is possible.

G. Ch. Spivak: Why not? I lived for fifty years in the United States, I'm still from India. I do not have a US passport, I have that permanent visa that has just been stolen. Mother went to the US in 1972, got a US passport, did volunteer work for over 10,000 hours for Vietnam veterans with post-traumatic stress disorders. Citizenship is not tied to a birthplace! Do you understand Bengali?

Suchi Karim: Yes I do.

G. Ch. Spivak: Then you will see… Cause I was really thinking of you in the way in which hyphenated people nostalgically claim the country of origin and have chosen another civil society, it's another politics. But no, you are located in the birth-nation. Fine. Let's get on with capital and capitalism.

Where I teach in rural West Bengal, obviously it's hard to get to the schools, right? So it's always on the back of motorbikes. So I'm on the back of this motorbike, and I'm just back from Japan, so he's saying I bet you enjoyed the simple meals in the villages here more than the 5-star hotels in Japan. (As a matter of fact, I had, but that's not the issue here.) He was making a pious anti-capitalist point. I said, look here, the parents and teachers of my students can't imagine those hotels and would, if they could, give their right arms, not to feel like insects if they were here. It's only by using capital for socialist rather than capitalist ends that we can bring about another world. And for that, people must know and want (want, want, important – trained imaginations) to use capital not just for their own profit when they have their hands on it. In Bengali capitalism is pūnjibād. Pūnji is capital, and bād is ism. Marxism is Marxbād, Leninism Leninbād. (I must say, your computer is really impressive!)

Irena Ateljević: High-end technique.

G. Ch. Spivak: Yes. Ok, now. So he's talking about capitalism and giving me this unexamined cliché. (He is himself a deliberately downwardly class-mobile member of the urban middle/lower middle class.) So I said to him: Capital is good, capitalism is bad. Pūnji good, pūnjibād bad. This sentence goes all the way back to where the truly committed middle class has earned

the right to touch the bottom but subscribes to that vestigial feudality, romantic anti-capitalism. Marx wanted capital's social productivity without capitalist exploitation; but also without real epistemological training rather than sloganized conscientization based on self-interest (as also in feminism perceived as gender-struggle alone), it so didn't work. It so didn't work, it didn't work. So that's the real effort. And who can make it work? Liberally educated people, unfortunately. The conscientized Leninist progressive bourgeoisie, is that a world? You know, that's not a world. So that every bit of work goes into the hands of the bourgeois liberals who are in fact at the end of the day themselves also greedy. So I'll explain why pūnjibād… Can I have a bit of chalk? Is there chalk here? (*member of audience leaving the room*) Come back…

G. Ch. Spivak: (*sound of chalk on blackboard*) You won't find this in a phrasebook. So, I'm putting this down. How are you, thank you very much, very nice, where is the closest toilet, where is the closest restaurant, where is the closest railway station. No phrasebook will tell you capital good, capitalism bad. And these things are Indo-European cognates or Turko-Persian cognates because of Islamic history. OK, so. This is just for your amusement, after all. To entertain. And sure enough my handwriting... (*conversation in Bengali*).

Suchi Karim: I'm saying that *bād* in Bengali also means to substract. So I substract capital, and I have been able to come and actually put my identity here.

G. Ch. Spivak: To subtract. If we had more time, we could have explained that. Let's stay on this now. What you will find now because of this euphoria about what happens in North Africa, all the left intellectuals are abdicating analysis, just a kind of being euphoric because they want to remain popular so they forget their differences, they forget their differences and so they talk about revolution. What does that word mean? But at any rate, because of that what we are doing now is, and most of them are my dear friends, they are trying to reestablish a humanist Marx. Believe me, and remember, I say it again, that's a mistake, to go for self-expression for all Europe's working class. And quite often what these intellectuals are doing is traveling back to Marx age 26 when he is sublating himself. Remember what I said, you go to an iconic figure, think context. First he gets his doctorate in philosophy, and he feels that that's not really where the he ought to be. OK, I'm now posited, Karl Heinrich Marx with a doctorate, good solid, not enough. So he negates it by going to the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, he becomes an investigator and activist. He discovers, as many of you have,

I'm sure, that that world is also full of competition, power play, dismissive behavior etc. etc. so he negates the negation. Sublates himself and begins to read material that he did not have to read as a Greek philosophy graduate student. Right? Contemporary economic theory. And he's 26 years old in 1844. Even when I was a university student in India in the 1950s, the only way to study at the National Library was to copy large sections of the books you are reading. And that's what Marx is doing, he's copying large sections, that's a way of reading. Slowly just as we did, but the notes are making the text change. I don't believe in the epistemological cut, but you don't find from there something to rescue the disgraceful situation of the globalized world today. This was already my friendly dispute with Gajo Petrović. And you will find among Western European intellectuals, American intellectuals, a tendency to establish that early Marx as doing a Derrida-style humanism or doing Deleuze's second disjunction, some kind of total liberal bourgeois program, because socialism became totalitarian without humanism. I am suggesting that capital into social is the main lesson, but it can be learned if humanism is taken out of the self-expressive liberalism into a training of the imagination for an epistemological performance of the will for social justice. A persistent, long term effort without guarantees.

Anyway, back to Marx reading. When he finishes reading, when he finishes taking notes he writes his magisterial *Grundrisse*. What is his main question? This is why I began with "19 nations…" Marx's question is: Why is nationalism so tough? That's his question. He has not come into capital-into-social yet. That's *Capital*.

When he's reading the books, he begins with Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. The opening word of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* is *Nazionalökonomie*. Although in English for some stupid reason the translators translated it as political economy. He hasn't come to political economy. He's not an economist. He's never read economics before. So he's reading. The question he comes up with, what happens with nationalism, why is it as strong as blood? The answer lies in the iron laws of reproductive heteronormativity in collusion with legitimacy as the passage of property. Engels does speculate about this later, but the passionate connection of nationalism and blood ties eludes him. And as for Marx, then, as we know, he finds something that totally, totally explodes in his head. He finds the secret of surplus value. He finds that the worker advances quantified labor to the capitalist and the capitalist pays back less in wages. The difference, surplus-value, is capital. And from then on he unfortunately does not concentrate on the question of nationalism any more. He has discovered that

the worker is the agent of the production of capital. The lesson of *Capital I* is for the worker to understand this. Then he will fight to own the means of production, quantify willingly, and use the difference to build a just society: capital into social. Like the US left, or perhaps the left everywhere, he is not able to realize that if you give that counterintuitive thought to everyone, they will not immediately start behaving in a predictable way. It's a rational choice mistake, alas. Consciousness-raising. If you give the thought, one raises consciousness, that does not mean epistemological change, that we construct our logical knowledge differently, that the raised consciousness is internalized.

So what is the meaning of what he did discover? He discovered, and this goes very far, that we, human beings and high primates, can make more than we need, – art rises there, emotions rise there, the intuition of the transcendental rises there, we cannot judge or mourn without our intuition of the transcendental. The capitalist takes advantage of this difference, takes what the worker can make, and gives back in wages only what he needs. The difference is capital.

(Fifty years later Rabindranath Tagore writes that "wasteful spending" – *bajey khoroch* – is the only thing that can tie the world together through the imagination, neither rational nor irrational. Because the rational thing seems to be not to waste but just make profit. Then I'm tying the world together not by way of an imaginative suspension in the other, but through capitalism, not through epistemic texture but the abstraction of data being used for the production of capital. That's why a transnational perspective in the world as it is makes me afraid.)

So at any rate that's what Marx discovers. And he discovers that capital rises there too. The capitalist steals that. The capitalist sustains sustainability. Sustainability is like that, you need the maximum of something in order to do the minimum of something. So that's what Marx discovers, that the worker can make more, because all human beings can make more than they need, there is no such thing as subsistence, the more is used for something else, that's all. Here what happens is that the worker makes more, capitalist steals it, takes it away. The entire *Capital I*, which is the only book he wrote, is about this. That the worker should agree, it's completely counterintuitive. Most of the people who write about reification, do not quote from Volume II, where all of this is laid out beyond production, in its entire abstract way. Now Marx is not interested in being a humanist, but in using Hegel's sense of making the negative work. He is by training a humanist through and through. But what he's interested in now is that the worker should be in a

situation where willingly he or she can quantify what rises in that difference between how much we make and how much we need and use that difference. In *Capital III* toward the end, 1015-1016 in the Viking English translation, you find that paragraph with five subjunctives in the German, *wäre wäre wäre*, in the English it's if if if, and what's the if? That's what we have to think about. The if is changing the mind of humanity against self-interest and self-expression, because only then can that thing that you have by self-quantifying, that has emerged out of difference, the thing called capital, only then can that poison be used as medicine… The idea is that you keep funds for the sick, you keep funds for the children, you keep funds for the old, it's just a welfare state and then the last sentence says: if this happens, you cannot distinguish between different modes of production anymore because capital is being produced and capitalism is not in power. (In the absence of those "if"-s, we have seen this turn into corrupt state capitalism.)

In the case of women it's so easy to see what rises in the difference between making and needing, pleasure and copulation, that even a fool can understand it. Children. Even a fool can understand it. Human capital. Reproductive heteronormativity has misunderstood it, miscoded it. But nonetheless, this is why capital, the abstract as such is both medicine and poison. Poison because capitalism is "naturally tied to human self-interest." And on the other hand, socialism turning that, quantifying.

Today consensual quantification as the basis of socialism is not even rationally pertinent. There the agent is the worker and industrial capitalism, even world trade, is no longer the maximal part of capitalism. Today the regulation of capital is the task. But, even as these sublations take place in the determination of capital, the task of changing capital to social through imaginative training in epistemological performance generation after generation does not change. This is why digital idealism because the nature of capital has changed and there is now accessible globality for a certain class is shortsighted.

Who saw the need for epistemological change? Gramsci saw it. Why did he see it? Because in his country there was a very large sector outside of capital logic, subaltern, not proletarian.

Kathleen Collins has written an extraordinary book about Central Asia: *Clan Politics and Regime Change in Central Asia*. She doesn't want to be a racist. She asks herself, let me look at Europe, it can't be that these people act like this because they are Central Asians? Racism is illogical, it's just incorrect, so as a good academic she is interested in further inquiry. She is not a Europeanist. Gramsci is not in her index. She goes to Europe and she comes

back with a with a lovely theory: that in places where the state was founded long before the so-called democratic structure the absolutist state more or less took care of other kinds of politics. Remember she doesn't know Gramsci. And she doesn't talk about the Balkans at all because even Europeanists don't talk about it, and says: "The only difference is Italy," because of Southern Italy's traditions, its connections with Muslim Europe, the presence of the subaltern.

The idea that we will establish democratic states and that we shouldn't export democracy where capital is not high enough are racist arguments. But this other thing, that if you give consent to the quantification of your collective labor, so capital comes out with your consent, you will immediately become good, and build a just world, that's where Gramsci understood that Marx's project had to be understood as "epistemological, not just moral and psychological." Gramsci was the chair of the Communist Party in Italy, he wasn't a romantic anti-capitalist, but he saw that the so-called proletarian was full of racism and prejudice against the so-called subaltern. So he could come up with this. Gramsci's idea that minds need to be persistently changed — we are talking about the nature of education, not just founding schools and photo-ops — that minds have to be persistently changed. That is the underbelly of capital being turned into the social. Minds being turned toward social justice. Inserting the intuitions of democracy, even in the poorest, even in people who have nothing. Not just teaching them their rights, teaching self-interest, but teaching at the same time to think of others. This is why capital in itself is not bad, it is abstract, both medicine and poison. What you teach is how you teach: develop a way of teaching that will perhaps produce the motivation to use it differently: a will to social justice. Self-governing will not do it, self-expression will not do it, corporate funding for collective remarks about many nations will not do it. It's hard work. This changing, turning one's mind away from the idea of self-expression alone, is hand-in-glove with turning-capital-into-social socialism. So this is my long answer to your wonderful question.

One more thing I'll say. Women are being used to speak up for corporate funding. Women who are corporate leaders are made to point at capital's social productivity, about which everybody is in agreement. Marx himself, in order to emphasize capital-to-social socialism, pointed at capital's social productivity and the Communist League called Marx a capitalist, making the same mistake we are making. The fact that in order to work, capitalism also has to incessantly subalternize because of this mechanism: maximum of something, minimum of something is not recognized by the corporate

women, although Marx, of course, based his entire call to action on that fact. This is how women are used, as spokespersons for capital's social productivity, from micro-credit recipient to CEO.

We are now the organic intellectuals of capitalism, with common sense assumptions about transnationality and self-expression. As women we are often used to justify good capitalism, corporate responsibility. Small businesses are made to look good, yet today the road from small business to venture capitalism is a straight line. Yet it's made to look good. Small business that breaks even is called simple reproduction, that is capital, it is going to move toward complex reproduction. These days venture capital moves to imperfect attempts at accumulation in poor places in the global South and calls it patient capitalism. Do you have any questions about this one?

Biljana Kašić: Can I just ask you, in the same line of thought, how all this relates to the procedure of gendering and how transnational agencies use it very efficiently for making not only superprofit, and supervalue but on the other hand also to do this subalternization…. because you did a lot of critical points on this.

G. Ch. Spivak: How is hard to say in detail. I gave an overview of the how.

Biljana Kašić: I know.

G. Ch. Spivak: In Britain there are actually two or three universities that have business school ethics, it's the other how, how to be good capitalists. I have lectured in both of them. In one, it's useless you know, but I said, "You want a good business school? Just describe socialism!" What else would that be? Teach socialism to the students rather than think of a country, look at game theory narratives that are taught at business administration schools, and show how it is not really a discipline. And yet it's killing us. As for gendering, the question you asked me was about why capital is not bad, but capitalism is. The only way to get to gendering by way of answering is to look at how capitalism uses gender. In the higher classes as spokespersons for productivity. In the lower classes by enforced sterilization, population control, trafficking, credit-baiting and so on. If you had asked me about gendering as such, I would have started by saying that reproductive heteronormativity is older and bigger than capitalism. I can't do that one now, because once again, I will be giving a lot of things at once and you would be irritated.

The only weapon against this kind of undiluted greed which supposedly capitalists take advantage of, the only thing I know is the backbreaking work of rearrangement of desires, where gendering is engaged as it shapes children. On one level, it is like fighting against nuclear power with a hatch-

et. On another, I speak in the name of the human mind, because it is so fragile, because it is so easily directed toward self-expression, self-interest. That's really the thing, speed is not good for it, the people who say you can upload in the name of networking you can upload speed into the human brain are not thinking of rearranging desires. Something has to be taught so capital is turned, and it is the fragility of human control that will do that. It's an absurd situation. That's unfortunately the only advice I can give, the only how. One should continue to say things, demonstrate, correct this sort of vanguardist statements with compassion and support young people trying to come out even if mature feminists are very different from young people starting. At the end of the day, to really work for a just world one must see two huge things that are face to face. One is the oldest globalizer, reproductive heteronormativity in the name of which everything gets organized, whether they be queer or trans or straight, and the other is the abstract majesty of capital. So this one is undercover, RHN, reproductive heteronormativity, gendered in terms of the difference that is perceptible, sexual difference. That one is the uncaring abstract product of the definition of the human being with the difference that defines it, the difference between making and needing. So in order for us to think capital, that face-to-face is what we need to think about. And that is connected to the fragility of the human mind. The fragility of the human mind is an instrument. Every day one should do every small thing, every small thing, whether it has any effect or not.

Jasmila Žbanić: My name is Jasmila Žbanić, I'm filmmaker from Sarajevo, and I'm not so much from theory world, more from practical one. I have a question; if I want to gain capital in order to use my capital to do good things how I'm going to get it if I don't respect capitalism?

G. Ch. Spivak: How else would you begin? Get the capital from capitalists, and use it for non-profit purposes. You probably can start that rather quickly. But don't make a distinction between theory and practice too quickly, OK? That's unnecessarily divisive. One works not so much by starting to generate capital but acquiring and turning. At this point also to work to regulate capitalism, not just as a filmmaker but as a citizen, is important. In order to do that you have to become at least literate in knowing the functioning of trade in foreign exchange; because you live in a world brought to crisis by it.

More or less right after Tito's death, because epistemic change could not be brought in for everyone, because epistemic change is this persistent education type of thing, what happened is a return to old prejudices. I heard a

student of Gajo Petrović say, last week, "Socialism is ideology!" The desire to turn capital around for social use, socialism, socialized this and that, should be certainly undertaken by citizens. Every generation can do that. Citizens claiming a just state. Real work that will last is the persistent training of the fragile human mind. Each generation as it is born. Each generation as it is born.

Rada Borić: If you said that capitalism was neither good or bad, than it means it's neither gendered or degendered. But if we know that women possess 1, 2, 4, 5 % of the capital, is it because women fear the capital because they sense, smell, experience what capitalism did to them? Also, women already possess social capital but social capital is not recognized as a good capital, kind of *has no value*. What is the chance, or *the methods* to change the values? If, let's say, Western civilization, and I don't see all Western as European, is about care and caring and we all know that women are taking care of the kids, and education, as teachers, nurses, caring for old people, homes for old people... what we now have in Europe, for the countries in transition, and tomorrow Croatia will join the European Union, is this: as in the 1960s our fathers from the subaltern world have been cleaning the communal shit (excuse my language) of Europe, so today women who are already highly educated (this is what socialism brought to them) would clean private shit, because the social welfare has fading away in Europe. So, social capital already exists, but has no value.

G. Ch. Spivak: You know, it's the same thing. You change people's values by engaging epistemological training. About women, that argument, that is dependent upon social division of labor, age-old social division of labor, it's got nothing to do with women. So to an extent, the idea, you see this is what, when you say that women have social capital, this will be recognized. First of all, all of the wages for work arguments already suggested this. And we were completely defeated when we worked against sweatshops and homeworking, because this so-called social capital was so resolutely held by the women as women's ethics, that they even said that we had come to put dissension into their families and turned their daughters into whores. So social capital may be the result of the sexual division of labor. In this sense the people who were bred for manual labor alone, for thousands of years, punished for intellectual labor, because obedience was required. If we say that women are like that, natural care givers etc., it's the race/class division of labor. So let's think that thing through. Because acknowledgment of social capital is a very fine thing. Getting testimonies from exceptional subalterns, is a very fine thing. I am not a censor, I'm not against anything.

But this other thing that I'm talking about, this is to recognize that the problem with any capital other than abstract as such is a metaphor, the capital and the data that, and I'm after all a literature person, I'm not an expert of this, but I'm certainly against not recognizing not even the word capitalism, so to an extent the idea of that work, the fact that gendering, that's why I mentioned reproductive heteronormativity, that gendering makes incessant use of it, something with consent and sometimes without, it doesn't matter. That's the thing that I would also talk about, I really feel 100%, I completely agree with you. Now.

Silvana Carotenuto: I'm Silvana, from Southern Italy, Naples. I'm saying Southern Italy because Northern Africa is something very intimate to us. Could you just go back to the idea of labor? I don't know who you were referring to in terms of the democracy to come, it doesn't mean too much, as you said before it could be… Can you say more about it?

G. Ch. Spivak: (*sound of chalk on black board*) OK, that's the person whose book I referred to. The woman's making money is a nice thing. I will just lay the things on the table, but then you will know, why I am negative. First of all, because it took advantage of the so-called essential nature of womanhood, that they repay debts more quickly. Essential my foot. Super-educated women have also started working for Goldman Sachs. And my university is full of people from South Asia, women from South Asia, studying in the business school, learning how to cheat legally. I heard a woman from Women's World Banking say at Columbia Law School that "this is a vast untapped commercial market," she didn't think that she was speaking in front of people who were committed activists and so on. So this is what she said. And, then, number three. They will talk about social stuff that comes with this kind of thing. And, unless things have changed, they always cited one example, which is in Southern India, called Self-Employed Women's Association or SEWA, which means service. Ela Bhatt was the director of it, she herself told me face to face how in the Fifties when she was a unionist, she was discouraged by all the men, because women in the unregulated sector were not employed by anyone, so she made up this category, "self-employed" for them, she collected 10,000 of them, she did some research, she saw that at that time a bank could be established with 100,000 rupees, she collected 10,000 of them and said, can you give 10 rupees, at that time that was a lot of money, can you bring me 10 rupees next month on this day, so she had enough to establish a bank and they established a bank. Mind you, a bank is a bank. But nonetheless, it was owned by these women. Which is a very different thing from micro-credit. And then what

made it very obvious was that between 150 and 200, it's not a big case study, but nonetheless it is a case study, between 150 and 200, I still use to see items here and there about micro-enterprise but I didn't have the answer to make me think. Between 150 and 200 maybe more women in Bangladesh spoke to me about the inequities within, and you know when you do a photo-op, and they were very general also, when you do a photo-op, I know so well how photo-ops lie, you know it is not possible for one of these people who are totally surrounded a) by people who are in control and b) photographed. So, it's impossible for them to say anything critical at all, especially with interpreters. On the other hand, knowing that there was a woman who spoke Bengali who would listen to them, they spoke to me. And in fact the last time that I heard Bengali there was a Belgian woman, wonderful Belgian woman sitting beside me and you know, she didn't understand a word they were saying and then, but she saw their expression, my expression, etc. etc. You know, she knew what it was about.

Now about Gramsci. What I was saying was, two things. Some Western Marxists are now to trying to save Marx by turning him into a liberal humanist, I gave two examples of two talks I have recently heard, one of them basing Marx on the 1844 manuscripts turns Marx into a humanist, preaching in the to-come or *à venir* mode in the Derridean way. Now Derrida himself was not talking about industrial capitalism. Now industrial capitalism, to go back, is of course that moment when Marx suddenly discovers that the human being is capable of making more than he or she needs, and sees that that's the root of everything. He was only talking about the economic value system, but you can go much further, and that's what gave rise to the analysis of industrial capitalism. Let me also say to you that when you hear from the digital idealists that it is all immaterial labor and so on, let me tell you that in this recent financial crisis the basic problem was also that there was insurance to protect credit. One layer fell, the next layer fell, insurance to protect insurance to protect insurance, so at the bottom you had exactly industrial capital. So what I said to Derrida was that Derrida engaged just as this person who reads Marx as a liberal humanism to come, so did Derrida stay with German ideology and not with anything that Marx had written after he saw revolution and after he made the surprisingly simple discovery. The last thing that I did with him in New York in the Lower East Side synagogue, I said to him, you know that you wrote something negative about me, I never read it because I didn't want to be hurt, but people like to hurt people, especially men, so I have been told by all kinds of men very loudly exactly what you wrote, I know what you wrote. But I'm obstinate.

Every time you write about Marx, I wait to see if you have written about industrial capitalism, but you haven't yet. So I have critique not just of this person, who is saving Marx, but even of the model that this person takes. And number two, I heard a talk which basically just simply says that Marx is a good humanist and so on, but says it's through Gilles Deleuze's I think second disjunctive cut or something, I forget the exact phrase, but what I was saying in opposition to that was, that that is not correct, if you go into the Marx that has been most used by the world which is the Marx the critic of industrial capitalism, he at that point fell into a theory of the human which was pre-critical and based everything on a simple model of consent. So Jasmina, it is also true that Marx's directive was to the workers who were producing capital, not the small business owner reproducing capital. I was saying that that did not happen, vanguardism first of all wasn't the workers making the decision, when even the workers were making the decision, they acted like human beings, they took everything for themselves, unions, this that all the capitalist victimizing etc., and then there was outsourcing. So there I wasn't talking about democracy. I was just saying that when today we insist on self-expression we should be aware that international socialism died because this kind of huge idea that if you, the worker, could agree to quantify yourself to produce capital you could turn it into socialism. A) it did not work, and b) this does not apply to us anymore, because it's not industrial capitalism alone and we're not factory workers, I'm talking about the idea. We do it in different ways, like you state through asking your question, right? You don't do it like the businessman and woman. But that wasn't the idea from the beginning. Gramsci I said did recognize that it was necessary to change minds.

Vita Fortunati: I'm Vita from Bologna, Italy.

G. Ch. Spivak: The biggest Gramsci Institute.

Vita Fortunati: Yes. And I was very impressed by some of your key words. The first one, the fragility of the human mind, the second one, epistemological training in order to change minds and you mentioned also neuroscience. So, I am not an activist, I teach at university, and I want to know if it is connected even with your ethical position, this idea of the fragility of mind. I don't know if I'm clear, but these three points impressed me.

G. Ch. Spivak: Your question reflects that I am not perfectly clear, so fine question, but I do not know what time it is?

Rada Borić: It's past noon. We have time.

G. Ch. Spivak: OK, let me say this first. You know Giorgio Baratta?

Vita Fortunati: Yes.

G. Ch. Spivak: I never saw him. But I suppose he was old enough to have seen Gramsci when he was very young. I mean that's what I hear.

Vita Fortunati: Yes. They knew each other.

G. Ch. Spivak: That's, yeah. And he always referred to Gramsci as Nino. But at any rate, he said to me, I never saw him, he was a bit crazy, he wanted to put me into this film, Giorgio, but he said to me, "it really is true that that stuff, epistemological training, that was what he was focused on," that the only change would come by the production of the subaltern intellectual and the ordinary intellectual instrumentalizing himself or herself, putting himself or herself in a master-disciple relationship where the master is the surroundings not the intellectual. The problem is, we are so romantic, you make the subaltern into the master, that's a denial of history. That's where I am with the fragility of the human mind. I mean, that's all I have done all my life, I'm a full-time university teacher for 47 years. And I teach the dominant literary tradition in the United States in the dominant language. Epistemological training has nothing to do with neuroscience. Neuroscience I respect deeply, and more than that I respect neuroscientists. So at this conference on rational choice we have social scientists and we had me and we had a guy called John Dupré who was a frontline genomics man, a philosopher of science and he said, "you know I'm sorry, everything that our genomics research tells us is that we should agree with Professor Spivak and we should teach so that the mind gets a kind of reflex taught." Epistemological training is to train the mind to construct objects for knowing, and this one can do even in the lowest of lowest. Epistemological training is training to construct the object of knowledge in a different way. That's a hard thing to do but you can try to do it and that's what… At Columbia I'm getting a lot of hostility because they say globalizing the curriculum they mean Chinese opera today Balinese cockfight tomorrow. Our idea is that epistemological training has to produce a different kind of mind.

Rada Borić: Since our guest is about to leave, maybe somebody would like to add something nice?

Iva Grgić: I would like to tell to Professor Spivak that, and this is crucial, constructing the object of knowledge in a different way, that in the traditional academia they are allergic to that and they feel it, they feel it that we are doing something subversive by constructing the object of knowledge in a different way, and they fight against it. They try to confine us back into our disciplines as they see them. And there's a great struggle.

G. Ch. Spivak: Of course. I mean, the idea of a discipline is in fact an epistemological idea. We should keep fighting, but it's not so easy. The uni-

versity system is a very powerful old system, you succeed within it and you think you have made an alternative. But it's like the Obama story, the system catches you. As I say, I have been around, I became an Assistant Professor in 1965, received tenure in 1970, I became a full professor in 1975, I have been teaching in all kinds of educational establishments for a very long time, therefore beware of thinking that you have an alternative model that's going to supply what has lasted for so long. I am completely in favor of tampering with the mainstream, but do not tamper with the mainstream if what you have is collective self-interest, do not do it. It will take you. There is no way. And if there were time I would also have cited people like Du Bois, who took back what he wrote about the Talented Tenth in 1948 when he revised, people don't read that, they only read *Souls of Black Folk*, that's the Du Bois that's monumentalized, so this I will say. Yes, the mind is a very important thing, but we cannot give back a legitimation by reversal. Sabotaging is hard. You have to learn how to use the instrument very well if you are going to sabotage it affirmatively, use it against the grain. The title of one of my books is, *Outside IN the Teaching Machine*. So therefore in order to be out, you really have to be in. (…) If you want to do sabotage, you have to know the tools so well that you can use its resources in order to make your critique and therefore in a certain way, not just in any old way, but in a certain way, your work is brought down by your own critique, and it continues. That's why you don't have to say, Marx was bad, let's go on with it in another way not excusing not accusing but entering into the system so well that you will be able to see something and turn it around and use it. So I would say that if you are thinking about how, do not focus on the fact that they are excluding you and being un-nice to you etc. You are not nice to many people who are not in this room, I am anyway. So to an extent the real thing is to get to know the system so well without becoming contaminated, so that you are able to use it and utterly fail, because you will. History is larger than personal goodwill, so you pass it on to the people who are going to take it up again, that's a theory of change, that's not a theory of the end of history. That's not how the world works. (*applause*)

IN MEMORIAM:

Ulla Vuorela

(1945 – 2011)

ULLA VUORELA, professor emerita of social anthropology, passed away unexpectedly after a brief illness on 17 December 2011 in Helsinki. She was a creative scholar with many areas of interest. She is remembered by her colleagues and friends for her imaginative thinking, truly intellectual take on life as well as for her bright and cheerful personality and her many talents also outside of the academia.

Ulla Vuorela was born in Helsinki on 30 August 1945. She graduated from *Tyttönormaalilyseo*, after which she studied both at the University of Helsinki and at the Sibelius Academy. She graduated from the University in 1973 with Finno-Ugric ethnology as her main subject, and later in 1977 from the Sibelius Academy, specializing in piano.

After graduation she taught piano at the Academy between 1973 and 1976, and worked as a research assistant at the Department of Ethnology 1976–1980. In 1982, she started as a researcher in a project funded by the Finnish Academy and headed by Marja-Liisa Swantz. This project led to her doing fieldwork in Tanzania, which became the place that turned her into an anthropologist. She lived in Tanzania for many years and she often referred to the community of scholars at the University of Dar-es-Salaam, composed of both local Tanzanian and western scholars, as the solid ground for her later academic life. Other places also became important for her later in her life, especially Japan, Pakistan and Palestine, but Tanzania retained its special importance for her throughout her career, and she returned there several times.

She defended her Ph.D. dissertation in 1987 at the University of Helsinki. The dissertation "*The women's question and the modes of human reproduction: An analysis of a Tanzanian village*" was based on her fieldwork in Tanzania, and it focused on the questions of reproduction and gender.

Ulla Vuorela was nominated as a professor of social anthropology at the University of Tampere in 1989. She was the first professor of anthropology in Tampere and she established the discipline there in close co-operation with other social sciences. Despite scant resources and a small number of teaching staff in the discipline, Ulla succeeded in creating a vigorous atmosphere around anthropology, and a growing number of students around her who specialized in anthropology. Anthropology in Tampere, under Ulla's professorship, has made a profile in transnational anthropology, producing a number of international and national seminars, Ph.D. dissertations, and other publications. Ulla said that her contacts with Asian families in Tanzania led her to think about transnational connectedness already in the 1980s, but only later could she turn those thoughts into theoretical thinking. The book *Transnational family: New European frontiers and global networks*, which she co-edited with Deborah Bryceson, become largely read and discussed among scholars working with the concept of transnationalism, as well as among scholars of kinship and family.

The work of Hilma Granqvist, one of the first Finnish anthropologists, was a long-term research focus for Ulla. Engaging with Granqvist's work also led her to Palestine, where she organized the conference *In the footsteps of Hilma Granqvist* in 1997 in Beit Jala. Consequently, an active group of researchers of Muslim societies was formed around Ulla. She gathered material and did research on Granqvist for more than a decade, and she was working on Granqvist's biography. Sadly, this project was left unfinished with her premature death. When she resigned from the professorship in 2011, she gave a lecture with the title *Vapaan tutkijan merkittävät toiset Näkökulma Hilma Granqvistin tutkijanuraan* (The significant others of a free intellectual – Insights into Hilma Granqvist's research career). Granqvist's life opened a window for Ulla to look critically at academic life, to rethink the history of anthropology as well as to analyze the meanings of kinship and gender for the possibilities to lead intellectual life.

Between 1999–2004 Ulla Vuorela held the first Minna Canth Academy Professorship. Her research project during the professorship was called *The Rich, the Poor and the Resourceful*, and it combined anthropology and gender studies in an imaginative way. During that period, Ulla did fieldwork in Tanzania, Japan and Pakistan, and she analyzed the various ways in which people in these places arranged 'welfare contracts' in relation to kin, family and the state. Another group of students and researchers, focusing on gender and postcoloniality, was formed around Ulla during this Academy professorship.

Ulla Vuorela's impact as a teacher and intellectual was important in many fields. Throughout her career, Ulla was interested in issues of development and gender. She acted as a member of the board of DEVESTU, the graduate school of development studies, as well as of the national graduate school of women's studies. She also taught in both graduate schools. Furthermore, she also coheaded the post-graduate course *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective* in Dubrovnik for many years, together with the Zagreb Centre for Women's Studies and the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Research in Croatia.

Later in her career she became interested in the ongoing changes in Russia, and she headed a research project funded by the Finnish Academy focusing on transnational ties in the social life of 21st century Russia. The evaluation of anthropology in Norway 2010, together with three other experts, was one of her last tasks as an anthropologist.

Those who worked with Ulla remember her as a true intellectual, brimming with inspiring comments and questions, and at her best when envisioning new intellectual endeavours. She was an important teacher and supervisor for a significant number of both graduate and doctoral students, leaving a long-lasting imprint in Finnish anthropology, gender studies and development studies. She was a naturally cosmopolitan person, travelling widely and looking at the world from her utterly non-parochial viewpoint.

Ulla Vuorela was a great pianist and music remained important for her throughout her life. She gave numerous concerts both in public and for friends at her home in Helsinki, and later in Karkku. She also played the accordion, and entertained her colleagues with accordion music during celebrations and gatherings. She is also remembered as a great and experimental cook and a magnificent host for social events; events hosted by Ulla never lacked good food, great music and laughter.

Laura Huttunen

I can hear her playing the piano in her beautiful house in the spirit of the Finnish whiteness...

When I received the sad news that our dear, dear Ulla had left us, I sat for quite a while.

I remembered we met in Helsinki, during the seminar Kristiina Institute organised as a part of the Finnish women's studies yearly events, and we talked about transnationalism: Ulla had done research in Africa, I was teaching in Finland. I kindly invited her to join us at the postgraduate course on feminist critical analysis in Dubrovnik. I did not know then that during that summer she would become a part of our Zagreb team supporting us in resisting neo-colonialism in (feminist) knowledge sharing.

A year later Ulla became one of the co-directors of the course, not only a great co-director but the *spiritus movens* of our small organisational group. Her true support to the students with whom she would sit in the old courtyard reading papers and suggesting new readings inspired all of us.

Ulla was a true feminist: smart, supportive, friendly and funny... One might not connect feminism with laughter, but she broke the stereotype: at our common gatherings or farewell parties she was a feminist clown, playing with feminist terminology and re-claiming back laughter.

Some of us, Renata, Biljana, and Snježana, had the privilege of spending some time with Ulla in her own surroundings, her wooden house that she had been carefully building in Finnish wood.

I remember that wonderful Nordic winter experience: we were cooking together or she was playing the piano while we were looking out the windows into the white woods.

She, I felt, walked into the whiteness smiling.

Rada Borić

Ulla was a longstanding colleague but more so a dear, dear friend and exceptionally gifted and sensitive person. She was not only a superb scholar, but as those who have partaken of her hospitality will testify, she was an excellent

cook. After serving a wonderful meal, she would frequently sit at the piano, graciously consenting to play when guests would ask her.

A lot of people do not know that Ulla was a trained concert pianist. That's right, a concert pianist. That is, she was not like most of us academics, who love music and may play an instrument for the love of it. She once told me that given her piano training she had the option to adopt it as a profession but decided she loved anthropology too much and you could not travel with a piano while doing fieldwork. Nevertheless, she never gave up the piano and throughout the time she spent in Finland, she continued to train at the highest levels and gave small private and a few public concerts.

Most of all, I think, she loved all types of good food. And she generously shared all of it. As a great cook – food for the body. As an award winning anthropologist – food for thought. As a high-calibre classical pianist – food for the soul. All garnished with a joyful sense of humour.

The course *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspectives* was her "baby" and she was passionate about it. She loved being in Dubrovnik and adored all the women, Rada, Renata and the others. Her "acts" at the end of course party were unforgettably funny.

Like so many others, I will miss her. Rest in peace Ulla.

Durre Ahmed

~

My recollection of Ulla begins with a memory of our first encounter in her wooden house amid the snowy and sunny forest landscape next to the small town of Karkku, northwest from Helsinki. My first visit to Finland in 2006, the year coloured with optimism of memory, seemed like a feminist fairytale coming to life – Finland had re-elected its first female president Tarja Halonen; the Centre for Women's Studies in Helsinki was radiant with the positive energy of networked and entrepreneurial women; the Centre for Women's Studies in Tampere looked like a high-tech humanistic lab which aside from teaching also did socially relevant research; our agreement to launch a joint feminist seminar continued in the sauna where our dreams and plans attained a more concrete shape, and the humour of nude women assumed an almost shamanic power of liberation and bonding. By the time of our working meeting in Ulla's forest curia, a day later, the four of us, guests from Zagreb, felt completely hosted and welcome. The intellectually vibrant and confidential atmosphere of 24 hours of female companionship, which we created in the modest Helsinki home of our host and project initiator, Rada Borić, had now multiplied in Ulla's house with about ten of her close collaborators and doctoral students. We gathered around the fireplace and the piano in her spacious, nearly empty, brightly painted living room, and the meeting was chaired, with lots of spirit and casualness, by our cerebral host and skilled moderator. The aromas of international dishes arranged by colour were enticing us from the kitchen, just

like in Paul Auster's novel *Leviathan* which we were discussing, evoking memories of Ulla's childhood "in the attic" of a Finnish academy where her father worked. At the centre of Ulla's forest kingdom was a study room with a view of the snow, clean, solid and deep like crystal, and the owner proud of having amalgamated the best of the Finnish countryside atmosphere (uninterrupted work in isolation and pure nature) and contemporary technologies in order to be in constant touch with her colleagues and students in Helsinki and Tampere. Ulla's focus, sense of moderation, tact and attentiveness in communication, whether it comes to collaborators, students, seminar participants or caterers from Dubrovnik, are still the vivid focal point of my memory of this broadly educated anthropologist, concealed artist and feminist, the true successor to Queen Christina Augusta who had unified the northern audacity and determination with the passion of the South, its smells, colours and sounds. Like a modern shaman, Ulla tried to poetically live and work in a world where, in Heidegger's words, "one not only builds... but builds in the sense of the poetic taking of measure," in accordance with her basic needs, memories of childhood spaces and feminist visions of a more humane future.

Renata Jambrešić Kirin

~

Dear colleagues, from your memories I am discovering how many parts of Ulla's wonderful person I missed to know. I just remember that during her lectures in Dubrovnik I always started to take notes seriously, about her topic and method and results, but then I ended up also noting her spontaneous witty aphorisms (and adding little smiles and hearts on my paper, just to remember to go back to those lines). These days I found my notes of her lecture from 2008, about the importance of the middle class in Tanzania (at least, that was the topic according to my records): there is a line with a little smile next to it, a line which I want to share with you as my favourite quotation from Ulla. In that lecture, just among other important things about her research, she said:

"Many years ago, when I was a bit older than now…"

I hope so much that we can learn from Ulla how to become always younger.

Natka Badurina

~

I don't know how to explain it, but whenever I think of Ulla, a smile starts turning my face around re-activated by joy, gentleness and the inexplicable trace of the virtue of a human being altogether. Ulla Vuorela was a feminist *virtuoso* in making us human, providing us with the chance to laugh if just for a second, without anger, both through her jests and clownish antics as by her clear and meaningful gesture of words. Amazing crystal words! Words that dismantled the frontiers between anthropological narratives and realities, between educa-

tional sessions and activist care-being engagements, between the North and the South, in their geographical and metaphorical zones of existence.

I wish I could trace some of the words I inhabited from Ulla into the whiteness of the North that is north from Tampere. For a moment anyway. I can't remember the name of this place where everything was white, full of layers of glittering snow. Yet I remember a house in the centre of this immense whiteness where Ulla projected her dreams for her being, namely coming to be. A place freed of everything that may contaminate a sense of being/viewing/hearing. A piano was there, remaining a possibility. How to feel the tunes, how to provide the accords, how to breathe through the enunciation of music?

2006. Dear Ulla, you showed us the first attempts. Like a flustered girl, but with promising commitment. The music was everywhere. The *comrades* from the South, Dubrovnik's *comrades* accepted your hospitality with pleasure. Once we discover how the flows of diversity that we had begun to create may then turn to the imaginary world pulsating of sunshine music of balls of snow. Gleaning the remains and possible moments. We will enjoy listening, I promise.

Biljana Kašić

I remember our debates in the shades of the trees at the Inter University Center where we continued to discuss what had been said in the classroom earlier and to which Ulla would contribute with her sophisticated remarks, her testimony. I remember the presentations where she would raise questions about gender and gender systems in various countries in Africa and Asia, not only Finland, transcending cultural and developmental boundaries, thus providing us with a simultaneous understanding of the position of women in the world. I remember her fair figure in the tanned city, her slightly tilted head, her ability to listen, to relate her story by intertwining experiences and knowledge, even during lunch at Gundulićeva poljana, delighting in the calamari and fragrant dried figs, at least for a short while, in the shade of the patrician city. I remember her dressed in beautifully coloured linen blouses and comfortable white trousers, her warm figure. I remember her lively eyes, blue like the Scandinavian sky, and her interrogative, bemused clownish face, when in the moments of mutual creativity she was ready to share with us the moments of fun, music, laughter. Attentive even then to bestow a deeper meaning to her body gestures, and to her miraculous feminist clown, with arms slightly raised in wonder, the task of searching for a lost identity. Accompanied by laughter and joy, we never stopped learning from her. It is May. We are preparing for the new edition of our course *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective* in Dubrovnik. Ulla, we are going to miss you immensely.

Melita Richter

When I think of Ulla, different memories come to my mind but the ones I treasure the most are her warm hearty smile, the feminist clown nose and sitting on Dubrovnik walls sharing experiences about her time spent with women shamans in Finland. Despite the difference in age, knowledge and experience, she was a person you could connect to and easily learn from, the two important qualities which not many people have. Ulla certainly had both, leaving me grateful for the acquaintance.

Iva Bulić

Ulla Vuorela wasn't just a great scientist and feminist, she was a lovely woman with a great aptitude for making us really laugh at the talent show, which took place after our seminar in Dubrovnik. Then she transformed herself into a sweet clown with a red nose. Thank you for those special moments, Ulla. We will miss you.

Martina Bitunjac

Bringing to close our fourth, and for now perhaps the last, book from the *Feminisms in a Transnational Perspective* series with an "In Memoriam" to one of the co-directors of five post-graduate courses with the same title, and member of our editorial board, makes me sad in more ways than one. The news of Ulla's passing came unexpectedly, in between two courses which for many years marked for us the end of spring and the beginning of summer. Ulla would come to us from Finland together with the sunshine and warm weather, regularly, devotedly, bringing a cornucopia of knowledge and wisdom she was so eager to share. This abrupt end to a tradition, so shocking for me since I only saw her in Dubrovnik at regular intervals, still brings distressful thoughts on both the greatness and fragility of human life. A place in the world of such an accomplished person such as Ulla has suddenly been left empty. It is a great loss for our small Dubrovnik team, as it is for her academic community, friends and family in Finland.

We have been honoured to have been able to have Ulla Vuorela as a co-director and teacher in our course. She would share abundantly from her horn of plenty, and what I will remember the most is her generous pedagogy, intricacies of living as transnational families, the emancipatory power of laughter, and the lived practice of global sisterhood as her most precious gift.

Sandra Prlenda