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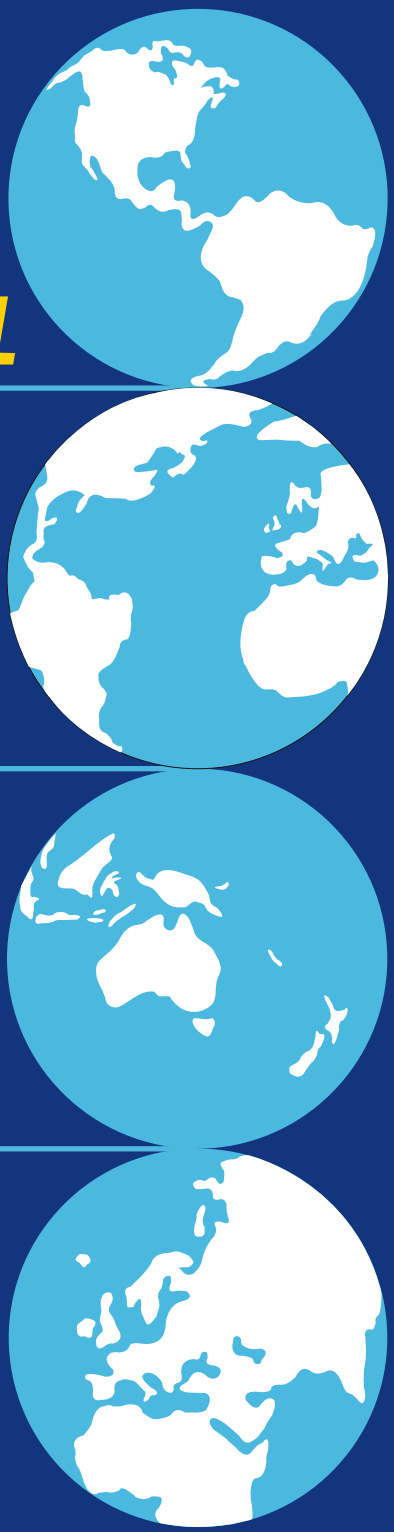

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ARTICLES

Irén Annus*

THE RULING DISCOURSE ON PROPER WOMANHOOD IN THE HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENT

ABSTRACT: Starting with a debate in September 2012 on the incorporation of domestic violence as a distinct offence in Hungary's new Criminal Code, the issue of gender and proper womanhood has regularly re-surfaced in statements made by ruling coalition MPs in parliamentary debates. Drawing on discourse analysis, this study investigates a selection of these statements in the context of the government's current policy and public discourse. The paper argues that these discourses outline an essentialist model reflective of a dominant ideology that is traditional, Christian, patriarchal and heteronormative, which, by hinting at women's accountability for certain social ills, also allows for a chain of associations that ultimately results in the subversion of the overall social status of women, dividing and marginalising them further and discrediting any claims or actions aimed at establishing a more egalitarian society in the country.

KEY WORDS: Hungary, political discourse, FIDESZ-KDNP coalition, gender hierarchy, proper womanhood, motherhood.

The Hungarian Government and Its Policies

In the 2010 parliamentary elections in Hungary, over two-thirds of the seats were won by the FIDESZ-Hungarian Civic Alliance and their election partner, the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP). Consequently, the two parties were entitled to form a coalition government, one which is often described as

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centre-right on the political spectrum. While the political position and ideology of the current government has been characterised in a variety of ways, such as the Hungarian "New Right" with a mixed ideology (Bozoki), "Christian and nationalist" (Tartakoff), "the conservative third way" (Péterváry), "Christian socialist" (Méltányosság) and the "mafia state" or "octopus state" for its putative long reach (Magyar et al.), it is important to point out some of the specific features of the government's policy that may account for such a wide range of interpretations.

The FIDESZ-KDNP government can indeed be regarded as conservative, nationalistic and Christian in terms of the social and cultural values it represents. On the other hand, it also displays a particular animosity towards the free market economy and towards business sectors typically regarded as relatively profitable, such as banking, and foreign/Western capital represented in Hungary by large multinationals. Hence, a tendency to expand central government control—which is often coupled with state ownership—of particular segments of the economy has strengthened since the government assumed power. Moreover, pronounced political domination over Hungarian culture, the media, the education system and numerous other areas has evoked in many, especially among the older generations, memories of governing practices under socialism.[1] These actions signify an increasing political objective of normalising, regulating and controlling the whole of society as well as boosting the overall power and authority of the government and its close allies centred on the authoritative figure of the Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán.

As in some other parliamentary systems, because the political party or parties that win a parliamentary election are also entitled to form the new government in Hungary, members of which are usually also MPs themselves, there is no strict separation of the legislative and executive powers. This is particularly the case when MPs are encouraged to form a solid bloc and vote first and foremost along party lines, a common state of affairs since the regime change in 1990. The current government, with firm support from coalition MPs, made use of its legislative power and replaced the country's constitution with a new document called

[1] In a heated parliamentary debate, the Prime Minister even stated: "In the eighties, I was not fighting against dictatorship; I was fighting against those who were doing [*sic!*] dictatorship" (Szalay).

the Fundamental Law, which went into force on January 1, 2012. Forced through Parliament by a two-thirds majority of the ruling coalition, the new Law was not based on an overall social consensus and thus was received with serial criticism. One such criticism was concerned with the institutionalisation of heteronormativity and the unambiguous preference for traditional gender roles expressed through the definition of marriage and family in Article L, in the section entitled Foundation:

(1) Hungary shall protect the institution of marriage as the union of a man and a woman established by voluntary decision and the family as the basis of the nation's survival. Marriage and parent-child relations provide the basis for a family.[2]

(2) Hungary shall encourage the commitment to have children (7).

The sense of social conservatism and a Christian value system is captured further in Article II, in the section entitled Freedom and Responsibility: "Human dignity shall be inviolable. Every human being shall have the right to life and human dignity; embryonic and foetal life shall be subject to protection from the moment of conception" (11). Although leading politicians in the ruling coalition have claimed that this statement merely carries symbolic significance, the Ministry of Human Resources since then has funded various programmes towards this end, such as a controversial pro-life campaign launched by the Agota Foundation.

Through its executive power, the government has also taken certain measures and implemented various programmes to achieve these objectives. These have included the introduction of family taxation, which offers significant tax deductions to "large families," which are defined as those with three or more children. The demographic programme passed in 2013 was primarily designed to encourage natural population growth through various types of benefit and support granted to families, such as a new system of housing support and more favourable conditions for maternity leave. The regulation of abortion[3] represents another example of state interference in this regard in the private affairs of citizens and in the medical profession in general. These examples illustrate that through the Law and its execution, Christian

[2] The second sentence was added in spring 2013, the fourth time the Law was amended.

[3] Currently, abortion is legal in Hungary under certain conditions. A recent addendum to the issue was the status of the abortion pill, which was passed in May 2012, and then, within two weeks, the decision was rescinded as a result of a parliamentary debate initiated by the Christian Democrats.

conservative norms and ideas have increasingly become the legally binding reality for every citizen living within the borders of Hungary.

Public Governmental Discourse

The coalition has made apt use of its access to media channels to develop a public discourse in support of its value-system and policy, part of which regards the social role and position of women. Fairclough sees "discourses as ways of representing aspects of the world . . . associated with the different relations people have to the world, which in turn depends on their positions in the world" (124). Moreover, drawing on Fairclough, Baker and Galasinski emphasise that "discourse is constitutive of and constituted by social and political realities," (65) which are confirmed by means of power expressive of ideologies that are underlying "structures of signification" (66). They conclude that the study of discourse is thus a useful tool to "reveal the ideological framings of discursive practices," (25) to which this study also hopes to contribute.

The Hungarian government has developed a series of discursive strategies to contextualise, argue and justify its policies. It has ensured wide dissemination of these through the regulation, centralisation and government control of the media. In the government's public communication, certain tropes, such as family, nation, danger, attack, independence, defence and success, have surfaced regularly, with shifts in meaning, foci and relevance (Szabó 2007). I argue that the family, defined as the "basis for the nation's survival" (Fundamental Law 7), occupies a key position in this matrix of signifiers.

Foucault points out the importance of the family in modernity, in particular in the politics of emerging nation-states. He argues that, as of the mid-eighteenth century, governments have started to rely on the family as an exceptional tool of governance since they realised that "certain factors within the population, such as sexual behaviour, demographics, the number of children or consumption can be accessed only through the family" (119). Political power, therefore, has come to politicise the presumably private, familial space to shape and govern the nation, aiming to determine family matters and thus gender roles on the basis of government interests (Collins, Strach).

I emphasise that the family as an institution is not only central to governing, but also to constructing the nation as a unique and sovereign group of people. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Hungary, but is shared in varying degrees among nation-states that have located ethnicity at the core of their national consciousness. In his study of the constitution of nation-states, Smith distinguishes between "two models and trajectories of nation formation, the civic-territorial and the ethnic-genealogical," (4) of which Hungary is characterised by the latter. I consider ethnicity as "instrumental" (Smith 9) in the symbolic construction of Hungarian national identity in numerous ways, the most important segment of which for the current discussion is that the "'ethnicity' of a community . . . presupposes the uniformity and antiquity of its origins, as a result of which it may be viewed as a natural grouping and its characteristics as inherent in the population" (Greenfeld 13). Indeed, as captured by Bátory's definition of Hungarian identity as a "kin-state identity," central to the construction of Hungarian national identity is the consciousness of shared ethnic origin: it places the existence of the community in a historical continuum based on common blood descent and therefore constructing the image of Hungarians as a naturally evolving, authentic group defined though kinship, and not as a political or cultural "invention" (Sollors, Hobsbawm) or "imagined community" (Anderson).

The concept of nationhood constructed through that of ethnicity is inherently structured along gender lines: authors such as Domosh and Seager (160-167), McDowell (44-50), Rose (66-77) and Yuval-Davis (1-6, 25-29) discuss various ways in which the rhetorical construction of ethnicity rests on the notion of biological reproduction and thus of motherhood. This understanding throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became culturally embedded in the feminisation of religion (Putney 7, 74-76, DeRogatis 211-212, Marsden 83-84), in which a relevant conceptual shift was indicated by modelling modern womanhood on the example of the Virgin Mary and sacred motherhood (DeRogatis 211)—a shift which also found its way to Hungary, where it prevailed well into the twentieth century (Balogh).

In terms of social structure, modernity advocated the model of the nuclear family for a middle class emerging through expansive industrialisation. The model became widespread in Europe and the US throughout the 19th century, marked by the separation of

the private and public spheres and specific, accentuated gender roles that placed women in the domestic realm, primarily as wives and mothers (Marsh 21-32). A true woman, according to this model, was expected to have "four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity," of which "piety was the core of woman's virtue, the source of her strength" (Welter 152). Paradoxically, while these virtues were expected to keep women in the private realm, the logic and arguments to justify it also stimulated the birth of the first women's movements and organisations, thus contributing to the emergence of a powerful social conscience, public presence and voice for women (Kelly), a phenomenon that also characterized Hungary even during the first half of the 20th century (Sipos).

The current Hungarian government, by focusing on nationhood conflated with ethnicity and thus endowing it with the notions of an inherently shared identity and culture, has succeeded in creating a populist discourse aimed at evoking an emotional unity and solidarity among the population, to which its policies in general can easily be appended. In order to heighten the sense of solidarity and constitute its own position as the sole power that can lead the nation, the government has also engaged in discourses of fear. I argue that this rhetoric is in line with the type of discourse Calhoun characterises as features of governments that are suspicious of globalisation. He concludes that one pronounced feature of such a discourse is that these nations "are generally presented in terms of inherited identities and solidarities in need of defence" (147). In the case of Hungary, a culture of fear is imposed upon the population through government discourse that relies heavily on the rhetoric of war—a feature that has historically figured in the construction of Hungarian nationhood because of the series of wars it had to engage in to achieve independent statehood (Kiss).

The current government's messages regularly reiterate that the Hungarian nation is under attack, both foreign and domestic. It is argued that the European Union presents a foreign political danger to the nation, while the IMF, foreign investors, multinationals and banks pose an economic threat. Since the government discursively identifies itself with the nation, every Hungarian critic of government practices is constituted as a domestic enemy of the nation (Szabó 129). This type of discourse not only heightens the emotional zeal among the people, but it also positions the government rhetorically in a military context:

Hungarians have been regularly hearing that their nation is in danger and that the government, engaged in a successful war of independence, represents the force that has managed to and will continue to defend Hungarians from these attacks. Furthermore, with a recent shift in the discourse, it is no longer merely Hungarian people that are being defended, but Hungarian *families*.

This introduction of the familial into the discourse of fear highlights further gender-related implications that the discourse of militarisation itself evokes. In her study of gendering ideologies and practices in Israel, for example, Berkovitch has found that the "environmental threat" (Sanday, quoted in Berkovitch 616) has increased "the masculine ethos" (606) in society, while confirming Israeli motherhood as the national mission through which women could be mobilised and incorporated into the state as citizens. In Hungary, the rhetoric of war framed by a series of perceived threats has created a culture of fear and/or uncertainty, which is rounded out by further concerns about negative demographic changes in the form of an aging and shrinking population.[4] While mobility has also contributed to this problem—indeed, the number of Hungarians that have migrated from the country is estimated to be around half a million, a significant number in a country of fewer than 10 million inhabitants—government communication still emphasises the need for natural reproduction, targeting women first and foremost to contribute to this imperative national project. All these indicate that concepts around which government discourse is structured, such as nation, family, attack and danger, not only overlap, but are loaded in terms of gender, conveying a message that locates the social significance of women in their role as mothers, while positioning them within a traditional gender hierarchy as well.

Parliamentary Discourse on Women

This rhetorical construction of women's role is echoed in a selection of statements made by ruling coalition MPs during parliamentary sessions. The main set of excerpts to be discussed

[4] According to Hungary's National Census of 2011, the average number of children per family was 1.3, marriage rates were declining, only 44% of the population lived in families, etc.

is taken from a parliamentary debate on the legal status of domestic violence (Fábián) that took place on 10 September 2012. The issue was placed on the docket as a result of a civil initiative: in response to Parliament's[5] original refusal to recognise domestic violence—usually referred to in Hungarian as "violence within the family"—as a distinct offence, over one hundred thousand signatures were collected to demand its incorporation into the new Criminal Code. Reflective of the importance that the governing parties assigned to the matter, the discussion was scheduled for 3 a.m. This met with opposition outrage, as an outcome of which it was moved up to 9.30 p.m. Only seven MPs were present from the ruling parties, but the following words from one of them, István Varga,[6] were sufficient to immediately stir up a heated debate: "Maybe mothers should go back to mainly raising children, and maybe they should be primarily concerned about having not just one or two, but three, or rather four or five children in this society. Then we'd have a reason to respect each other more, and domestic violence wouldn't even come up."

The first sentence reflects the MP's identification with the logic of the Fundamental Law: if domestic violence is violence within the family, which is defined by law as a social group with parents and a child or children, then the female adult member of the family is by definition a mother. This lays the groundwork for the upcoming discourse that reflects and confirms traditional, essentialist approaches to gender roles. Accordingly, female representation in his discourse is achieved through the function of motherhood—something the MP seems to assess on the basis of the number of live births a woman has given. His reductionism, on the one hand, reflects the typically gendered nature of discourse on the topic of children in Hungary as far as it tends to be connected to women, both as a biological process as well as a social and cultural responsibility (Joó). The sentence suggests that having children is solely a matter of women's free will and choice: no reference is made to men—as if they either had no responsibility in the matter or performed their duties par

[5] In the 2010 elections, only 9% of parliamentary seats were won by women. They comprised 8% of the FIDESZ-Christian Democrat coalition, 8% the Hungarian Socialist Party, 4% of the far right nationalist Jobbik party, and 31% of the centre-left, green liberal party Politics Can Be Different (LMP).

[6] A member of FIDESZ, he is the 60-year-old father of five children. His marital status is unclear.

excellence—nor to any social, economic, health-related or other factors that may also be considered in planning children.

Implied in this sentence is women's responsibility for the negative demographic change: the decreasing number of births and the resultant shrinking of the Hungarian population. Although the MP is unclear about the number of children a proper woman is expected to have, he is hinting at giving birth to at least three, but preferably more children. This ambiguity may be understood either as granting the freedom to determine the number of children one wishes to have beyond three or as an intentional vagueness. The informational gap in the discourse may also provide the government with the freedom to change their expectations, thus leaving women—discursively constituted as solely responsible for the number of children they have—in a state of permanent self-doubt about their performance as birth givers.[7]

This vagueness, however, also contributes to the confirmation of patriarchal power within the family, creating a faulty and highly simplified logic based on which domestic violence cannot be regarded as a crime but as a familial act for which women—as inappropriate mothers—may be held responsible. This is achieved by a logical twist introduced through the concept of respect. The excerpt hints at the gendered nature of violence within the family, which is typically committed against women. Women as potential victims, however, become constituted as potential perpetrators in this discourse: they give birth to children, the number of which is found insufficient by the husband, as a result of which he is justified in not respecting her and thus in expressing his dissatisfaction in the form of violence.

The social responsibility among women for certain problems has since then been implied in other parliamentary debates as well. Almost exactly a year later, for example, Parliament was discussing the problem of homeless people and their visibility in frequented public spaces. One of the Christian Democrat MPs, Tamás Lukács,[8] unexpectedly referred back to the debate on domestic violence when he argued as follows: "When, as a result of outside pressure or pressure from other groups, we work on a law on domestic violence, we do not realise that we are passing

[7] This is especially interesting as one of the most famous slogans used by Viktor Orbán offered a clear understanding of the model family in 2000: "Two parents, three rooms, three children, four wheels."

[8] Aged 63, with 5 children, he heads the parliamentary Human Rights Committee.

laws to solve a problem and, in doing so, create another problem, and thus we stand here surprised that we have the problem of homeless people . . . I braved a homeless shelter, where the story told by 8 out of 10 men started with: 'when I got a divorce . . . '. Is no one responsible for this?"

Through a series of conflations and often unfounded associations, he seemed to imply that civil society was wrong to pressure Parliament to consider domestic violence as a legal offence; that the debate over the recognition of domestic violence as an offence accounted for some divorce cases; and that the majority of homeless people were men who, in their autobiographical narratives, identified divorce as the initial reason for their current state. The MP was ultimately blaming civil society activists, mainly women, and victims of domestic violence filing for divorce, primarily women, for homelessness in the country. The act of assigning collective blame to women is solely grounded in his personal experience and not in research findings or specific studies of the issue, which is a recurring feature of statements made by ruling coalition MPs in heated debates.

During the discussion on domestic violence, Varga's words stirred up fervent reactions from certain opposition MPs—of whom three were women—in response to which Varga clarified his position: "The most important calling for women, ladies, especially young ladies, is to have children. Besides this, naturally, once everyone has given birth to two, three or four children and has given enough to the homeland and everyone is happy, and [*sic!*] afterwards everyone can fulfil herself and must work at different places . . . The birth rate is the lowest in Hungary. Women have forgotten about giving birth while they were busy with getting emancipated." He not only confirmed his position that childbearing lies at the heart of proper womanhood, but through a more refined choice of words he attached it to the culturally loaded, old-fashioned word for "ladies" as opposed to the more generic "women." In his statement, motherhood functions as the social construction through which women can contribute to the nation, like a gendered duty of citizenship, as well as a source of happiness. Varga defined motherhood as a calling, a spiritual and moral responsibility of a higher degree, that enjoys primacy in the lives of proper women, to which paid employment must remain secondary. At this point, however, he briefly shifted into a register reflective of a more egalitarian language use, referring to work as fulfilment for women, as if leaving motherhood out of the

equation. In the last sentence, however, he returned to his original logic, presenting female emancipation in opposition to motherhood and thus to proper womanhood. Additionally, since women are able to contribute to the success of the nation as mothers, the last sentence by extension also implies that women concerned primarily with self-fulfilment and gender equality fail to serve the nation in their proper capacity.

Another coalition MP, Ottó Karvalics,[9] lent a political dimension to the debate when he argued as follows: "A faulty education system and a female visibility in the negative sense have brought it [violence] into the family." The education system to which he referred resulted from a series of educational reforms introduced under previous, primarily leftist and liberal governments, whose parties are currently in the opposition. In order to correct the perceived shortcomings of this system, the present government, once it had assumed power, initiated a reconstruction of public education, which included changing the curriculum for some subjects and introducing ethics or morality as compulsory. The statement thus also forms part of the discourse that justifies these interventions in the education system.

István Szávay,[10] a member of the right-wing nationalist Jobbik party, expressed his support of coalition views in his statement, which also illustrates the cultural logic and gendered pattern of masculine language use: "I did not want to say anything, but Katalin Ertsey[11] has simulated my adrenalin level, so I must speak up … [I]n the midst of the great defence of women's rights, in the fight for equal rights, their message has often slipped into hatred of men, into the expression of some kind of female superiority." The conflation of the protection of women's rights and the struggle towards a more egalitarian society with a sense of female superiority and hatred towards men is an increasingly common discursive practice aimed at undermining advocates of women's equality and discrediting any activism, political or professional discourse that point outs shortcomings of gender equality in the country (Barát). It also clusters these as ideologies and practices that jeopardise social stability and the country itself.

[9] Aged 66, married with two children.

[10] Aged 32, married with no children.

[11] Female opposition MP.

The growing frustration with which certain ruling MPs approach gender equality and its proponents is conveyed through the intensity of the words used by the leader of the Christian Democratic People's Party, Péter Harrach[12], a theologian by training, during a parliamentary debate on 30 September 2013 over government policy on state funding for families: "Opposition ultra-feminists try to depict ruling coalition MPs as boors for campaign purposes . . . Christians respect women, as God created them in his own image, but they respect mothers even more as it [motherhood] is the complete self-fulfilment of womanhood." In Harrach's discourse, the views of the political opposition are conflated with extreme feminism and the opposition itself is accused of campaigning over six months before election time. He positions Christians—and thus himself and the coalition—in contrast to them and confirms the sanctity of motherhood—endowed by faith—as the complete fulfilment of womanhood. Through this logic, he provides a religious explanation to justify his claim, one that cannot be challenged lightly, as it becomes a matter of belief.

The Construction of Proper Womanhood

These examples illustrate particular ideological presumptions and changing socio-cultural tendencies encouraged by the current political power structure in Hungary. Although reality is far more diverse, treating gendered female bodies as comprising a homogeneous group and influencing their self-perception and particular life choices through discourses, particular policies and institutions do impact women's lives increasingly. Therefore, government discourses and policies do matter as they designate people's opportunities, life courses and positions, which are different for men and for women. Thus gender does matter.

Statements made by the ruling coalition in Parliament clearly indicate the politicisation of gender: the political elite advocates the model of motherhood as the desired example for Hungarian women, hearkening back to a model of true womanhood that spread in the nineteenth century and confirming gender hierarchy with heteronormative masculine power and patriarchy as the norm. Unlike this model, however, the current political emphasis

[12] Aged 66, with 3 children.

is placed on female reproductive capacity and performance. In relation to that, any form of deviation towards a more egalitarian gender perspective, from the fundamental belief in the right of choice and self-determination to the demand for equal rights and recognition, is dismissed as a leftist-liberal project—which is not necessarily the case by definition. Moreover, egalitarianism is also conflated with the socialist period—when political discourse conveyed the idea of complete gender equality, and therefore a rejection of that political establishment has often translated into a rejection of the era's "forced emancipation"—as well as with foreign, that is, Western, influence—often camouflaged in the discourse as feminism. Feminism, in turn, is frequently used with an implied characterisation of extremist, man-hating, greedy, career-oriented, flamboyant single women who resent marriage and refuse to have children, which has long carried a negative connotation in mainstream Hungarian society (Acsady and Hochberg). Non-conformist women are thus often misrepresented as indifferent if not hostile to the current government and thus, to the nation, both in political and ethnic terms.

Due to the overtly vague definition of domesticity, women have been, implicitly or explicitly, held responsible for specific social problems, such as divorce and homelessness; they therefore often appear as the guilty party and as perpetrators. I argue that this is partially possible because women are typically discussed as separate from men in whatever familial project they are associated with. Men tend to be only implied in discourses on family, but their role or position is not problematized. This could also be observed in connection with the proposition of the infertility tax, for example, later referred to as the childless tax, which was considered as a potential levy on women.

Operating as a free floating signifier, motherhood also allows for the power structure to change its discourse and momentary expectations at will, granting a flexibility to governmental and patriarchal rule as well as maintaining the heightened psychological zeal in women to perform better. In the meanwhile, women are faced with the recognition that whatever they do may not be good enough. Moreover, the ruling coalition's divisive discourse can undermine any female solidarity and women's movement—that have emerged only modestly since the regime change (Arpad and Marinovich)—and deepen divisions between their various groups. Women thus unintentionally re-institute and naturalise heteronormativity as well as masculine and

patriarchal power positions as part of their "unconscious ideological" (Ahall) realm, degrading and marginalising themselves and their own sex even further in the midst of the great Hungarian national project.

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GRAPHIC NARRATIVES OF WOMEN IN WAR: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE WORKS OF ZEINA ABIRACHED, MIRIAM KATIN, AND MARJANE SATRAPI

ABSTRACT: By applying terminology from trauma theory and a methodological approach from comics scholarship, this essay discusses three graphic autobiographies of women. These are *A Game for Swallows* by Zeina Abirached (trans. Edward Gauvin, 2012), *We are on our Own* by Miriam Katin (2006), and *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (trans. Anjali Singh, 2004). Two issues are at the centre of the investigation: the strategies by which these works engage in the much-debated issues of representing gendered violence, and the representation of the ways traumatized daughters and their mothers deal with the identity crises caused by war.

KEY WORDS: Gendered violence, graphic narrative, identity, trauma.

My article examines identity construction in three contemporary graphic narratives, *A Game for Swallows* by Zeina Abirached (trans. Edward Gauvin, 2012), *We Are on Our Own* by Miriam Katin (2006), and *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (trans. Anjali Singh, 2004). These graphic narratives are autobiographical in nature; their protagonists and narrators are girls; they all take childhoods troubled by armed conflict and war as their topic. *A Game for Swallows* takes place in East Beirut in 1984 during the Lebanese civil war; *We Are on Our Own* is set in Budapest and the Hungarian countryside in 1944-1945; while the Islamic Revolution and the war with Iraq in Iran are covered in *Persepolis*.

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As mentioned, the protagonists are (little) girls, and they are also daughters: in 2002 Marianne Hirsch argued for the importance of the role of daughters in the transmission of trauma. Hirsch regards the mother-daughter relationship as exemplary, a model on which she bases what she calls "allo-identification" with the victim and witness of trauma. Allo-identification happens "by adoption", not by family ties: trauma narratives are most often family narratives or personal memoirs, where family ties help or hinder–but most definitely influence—relatives in their relations with the traumatized family member. Hirsh's concept of "allo-identification" disregards such ties: "by adoption" anyone can make an effort to identify with the traumatized. This approach also offers a way out of debates about authority or legitimacy in speaking about or researching trauma ("Marked by Memory" 86-87). Hirsch writes:

> if identifications learned and practiced within the family can be expanded to cross the boundaries of gender, family, race, and generation, then the identification between mothers and daughters form a clear example of how a shared intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance, based in bodily connection, can be imagined ("Marked" 77).

In this paper I examine medium-specific ways of representation of what Hirsh called "shared intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance," and how this space is re-created by the graphic narratives of Abirached, Katin, and Satrapi. I rely on concepts introduced by research on the Holocaust, such as "embodied memory," "deep memory," or "testimony," but use them in a more general sense, to refer to traumatic experience caused by war. I examine how the experience denoted by these terms is rendered as comics in the above listed graphic narratives. But, above all, I am interested in the representation of women and the ways they reshape their identities and roles in armed conflict.

This paper is concerned with comics, an essentially visual medium. Comics' touching upon the topic of trauma is parallel to a certain shift in the concept of witnessing and testimony, enabled by a technical shift in recording media. The first archives of Holocaust testimony contained spoken or written narratives. Later, the possibility of audiovisual recording changed the researchers' perception of trauma and memory. Pinchevski (2012) states that the creation and investigation of deep memory, memory preserved by the body and the senses, would not have

been possible without the use of audiovisual recording techniques and the operations they allow for—forwarding, rewinding, pausing, playing again.

Parallel to this technological change, critical as well as artistic interest has turned towards the visual and the performative. A "visual discourse of trauma" has been forged (Hirsch's term, "Marked" 72), and I would like to argue in this paper that graphic narratives are part of this discourse. The body has been reevaluated as a keeper of secrets, as the medium in which embodied memory manifests (Hirsch and Spitzer 156-157).

Visual images . . . do more than to *represent* scenes and experiences of the past: they can communicate an emotional or bodily experience to us by evoking our own emotional and bodily memories. They *produce* affect in the viewer, speaking *from* the body's sensations, rather than speaking of, or representing the past (Jill Bennett paraphrased in "Marked" 72. Hirsch's emphasis).

Representing the body is a central issue in graphic narratives. In particular, the body and its small gestures are a central topic in Abirached's *A Game for Swallows.* Abirached frequently bases her page layout on a series of geometrically designed, extremely similar panels. Yet there are minute differences between the panels, which are to be deciphered by the reader. These are sometimes comical, sometimes they contain drama. Reading *A Game for Swallows* is made considerably slower by this technique, as the reader has to work to spot these differences between gestures, or to trace the stages of arrested movement. The body is, again, central, while its representation is more dramatic in *Persepolis,* where we see tortured bodies, massacres and executions, as imagined by a little girl (Chute 103). For example, Marji sees an almost organic unity between bodies and the flames consuming them, or imagines the tortured and cut up body to be hollow. In *Persepolis* the human body is drawn in a deliberately naïve way, with simplistic tools. No shading is applied, neither is the convention of perspective. The resulting style, which Chute calls "often-gorgeous minimalism" (99), emphasizes the fragility of the human body by its very inadequacy.

The body does preserve memory, and the mixed media artworks Hirsch favours in representing memory are close to comics in their approach. The way Hirsch describes mixed media artists Tatana Keller and Jeffrey Wolin could be a characterization of the goals of the comics authors this paper examines:

These artists both search for forms of identification that are nonappropriative. The mixture of media and the multiple responses they elicit, the oscillation between reading and looking, in particular, create a resistant textuality for the viewer ("Marked" 88).

By their very mediality these artworks consciously evoke the problematic nature of remembering: the difficult work needed to bridge the gap between generations, and the danger of appropriating somebody else's pain ("Marked" 78-87). Comics have the potential to offer a similarly sensitive, "mediated access" (88) to trauma: comics can be the tool of allo-identification. Art Spiegelman's name seems to be unavoidable in an essay dealing with the representation of transmitted trauma in comics. *Maus* (1986) is not only the first book-length graphic narrative that was a major success outside the comics world, it is also one which showed the wider public that there are no thematic restrictions in the representational strategies of comics.

Maus has been criticized widely for representing Jews as mice and Nazis as cats. Spiegelman follows the tradition of "funny animal" comics, while Abirached, Katin and Satrapi draw humans and human bodies. It seems that representing suffering or bodies in pain is always in the centre of ethical questions (see Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*): should images of violence be reproduced and shown? The fact that comics are a drawn medium can serve as an answer to these dilemmas. Hirsch states that photographs of war victims place viewers in the position of the weapon holder ("Surviving Images" 24). Regardless of the time difference, looking at these photos can mean re-victimization: we can "unwittingly" repeat "the acts of the perpetrators" (Jacobs 228). Drawing allows for a representation of victims without re-exposing them to the gaze of the oppressor. Via a certain visual simplification that is a trademark of comics (McCloud 30), an individual can be represented in a few characteristic lines: these make him/her recognizable, but also leave enough space for readers to fill in the gaps with their imagination, and to identify with them.

I consider it significant that these graphic narratives were written by, and are about, women. For decades, Holocaust testimonies, as well as the testimonies of the second generation, were narrated by men (Disch and Morris 13), and many survivors and scholars were, as Abrams and Kacandes put it, "uncomfortable with" the idea of "Holocaust gender studies" (17).

Yet trauma, gender, and the Holocaust are related (Abrams and Kacandes 17). As Marianne Hirsch states, "the position of the daughter as historical agent is not the same as that of the son" ("Marked" 88).

I propose that the shift towards a more gender-sensitive perception of narratives of trauma of the Holocaust, a process that, according to Disch and Morris, began in the 1980s (11), contributed to the birth of Abirached's, Katin's and Satrapi's graphic narratives of trauma. Comparing the representation and the role of the mother in Spiegelman's *Maus* to the mother in *We are on our Own*; or Anhala, the neighbour in the grandmother's role, in *A Game for Swallows*; or the maternal characters in *Persepolis,* reveals that a significant change has indeed happened in the representation of women in graphic narratives dealing with trauma. In *Maus*, the mother, Anja, is missing: she committed suicide after the war, her diaries have been destroyed. Her husband speaks for her. Moreover, the husband, Vladek states: "she went through *the same* that me, TERRIBLE!" (*Maus I*: 158. My emphasis in italics.) In *Maus*, whatever we get to know about the missing mother is based on Vladek's account of her. This account is most of the time unchallenged by Artie, the son, who is interviewing his father about the Holocaust.

Whenever an episode in Vladek's testimony centres around Anja, she is portrayed as physically and mentally weak. We are informed that she weighs only 39 kilograms (*Maus I*: 30), and she is unsuccessfully hiding the pills she takes for her nerves. She is prone to hysterics (*I*: 122) and is deeply depressed after the birth of her first son (*I:* 31). In the concentration camp she is portrayed as weaker than the others, and thinks of suicide (*II:* 53). In Vladek's narrative there are only two occasions when Anja is active and willful: she translates communist messages into German, but gives it up when Vladek threatens to leave. When she does not let their first-born son be taken by a Polish family, Vladek gives in, but is still bitter about it (*I:* 81).

Naturally, Artie is aware of the one-sidedness of his father's story, and his constant asking for Anja's misplaced diaries is his way of maintaining awareness of the lost maternal narrative. This also makes the readers aware that Vladek's story is only a construct—and so is Artie's own. At one point, for example, he pictures his mother with the attributes of a saint, with a bright halo against a black background, and in a posture similar to praying. She is saying: "Don't leave me alone again. I'm *terrified*

while you're gone" (*I*: 140). At another point, in an insert of Spiegelman's early graphic story about how his mother's suicide affected him, Anja is portrayed as huge and frightening (*I*:103). As the title of the insert, "Prisoner on Planet Hell," suggests, the death of his mother is an incomprehensible trauma imprisoning Artie.

When Vladek finally admits that he has burned Anja's diaries, Artie calls his father a murderer. We can understand Artie's frustration; however, he needed Anja's memoirs not exclusively to rediscover his mother's voice, but to make his own work more perfect. "I wish I got mom's story while she was alive. She was more sensitive . . . It would give the book some *balance*" (*I:* 132). If Anja's text had survived, it would have been recycled into Artie's story. This hiatus left by the mother's story reminds us, on the one hand, of the danger of appropriating somebody else's story, and, on the other hand, it signals that silence, forgetting, and loss are all parts of remembering.

A similar attempt at reconstructing the mother's lost story is present in Miriam Katin's autobiographical graphic narrative, *We Are on Our Own.* This book is the author's attempt to come to terms with what happened to her parents in 1944-1945. At the same time, it is also a record of Katin's construction of her own identity. Various features are designed to authenticate the book: first, the subtitle, "A memoir by Miriam Katin"; then the copies of the parents' letters written in Hungarian; and, finally, a reprint of a photograph captioned "Miriam Katin with her Mother. Photo taken in 1946." The similarity of the girl in the photograph, and the little girl in the black and white panels, creates the narrative's visual link to Katin's biographical persona. Yet the graphic narrative itself centres on moments when maintaining identity is (almost) impossible. The first sign of this is that the girl, whom we have been advised to identify with Katin, is called Lisa in the story.

It is becoming a mother, a significant change in a woman's identity, which triggers the adult Katin's growing awareness of her parents' history. In the colourful panels depicting the present, 1968-1972, we can see the adult Lisa's insecurity and uncertainty concerning life, and concerning the cultural orientation of her son. She is insecure in the maternal ward: "So peaceful here. Everyone seems so calm and secure. One can almost believe that it can last" (Katin 6). Panels showing the grown up Lisa talking about her loss of faith interrupt the narrative of the World War II

events. In these panels of the world war, the small Lisa is frequently shown while looking for or trying to contact God. For the little Lisa, her open, enthusiastic and protective relationship with dogs is a mirror to her relationship with God. She contemplates: "Is there a doggie God in doggie heaven?" (17). In this relationship the roles are playfully interchangeable: "I am helping my bestest friend to eat. I am the god of my doggie" (34). The disappearance and death of dogs she loves deeply shakes her faith in God. The narrator comments on the death of Lisa's dog with the following words: "And then, somehow she knew that God was not the light and God was not the darkness, and not anybody at all. Maybe, God was not . . ." (69). By the end of the book we get a glimpse of the depth of Lisa's crisis. The little girl is portrayed kneeling with a fork in her hand, with which she has just stabbed a male toy figure. The page contains only this one panel, which is surrounded by blackness, by extremely dense lines of black pencil. After all the hardship during which her mother tried to protect her, the little girl now turns against her mother: "And what if mommy burned that God after all" (122).

The mother, Esther Levy, is trying to protect her daughter from the horrors of war. She has to burn all her past and go into hiding: she destroys all the photographs of her family, as well as the letters from her husband and relatives. She has to assume a new identity, that of "a village girl with an illegitimate child. A servant in the city". (18). In the fake documents she must betray the father of her daughter: "father unknown. A bastard." (18). She has to become a different person to stay alive and save her daughter. This metamorphosis is most striking if we compare the new Esther with how the old one was represented. I believe that by portraying her mother as a cosmopolitan lady, fashionably dressed, wearing high-heels and skirts above her knees, Katin turned the style and rhetoric of Nazi propaganda against itself.[1] Katin's representation of her mother can be interpreted as a visual answer to Nazi propaganda, which represented Western women in sexually provocative situations and with visual attributes similar to those used by Katin in the representation of her mother. For example, leaflets dropped in 1944 on the Allies in

[1] Art Spiegelman did the same when he chose to represent Jews as mice. Spiegelman's visual world was motivated by "the visual stereotypes of Third Reich symbology, [...] editorial cartoons depicting Jews as hook-nosed, beady-eyed *Untermenshen,* creatures whose ferret faces and rodent snouts marked them as human vermin." (Doherty 74).

Italy to demoralize them hinted that the wives and girlfriends left at home cheated on the soldiers. These women were very decorative, wore high-heels and skirts that left their legs to be seen. Propaganda would never have allowed a similar representation of, the bodies and clothing of Aryan girls and mothers. At the opening pages of the book Esther is portrayed as similar to the Aryan stereotype of the Western woman, and thus the edge of the insult is taken.

The change of clothing, from a lady to a peasant girl, also illustrates the freedom the mother gives up when she takes refuge in the country. But even by giving up her lifestyle she cannot protect herself or her daughter from the war. Although the child is depicted as small and naïve, the atrocities gradually destroy her naivety. One of the most poignant sequences is when the German officer returns to the farm where Esther and Lisa are hiding. This time he has not come for wine, but for Esther. He gives chocolates to the little girl, who is sharing them with her dog while her mother is raped, and thinks that the officer is "such a nice man. Maybe he is God. The chocolate God" (42).

The deaths of the dogs and the dubious roles of men all add up to the burst of frustration that is triggered by the freshly returned father's renunciation of God. Under a table, in the safety provided by the long tablecloth, Lisa kills a doll with a ball-bomb and cuts a male figure into pieces with the sharpest object in the book, a fork. As already quoted, she accuses her mother of being responsible for her crisis. This final panel of the book radically reinterprets the action of 1968-1972, represented in colourful panels: Lisa's becoming a mother, her doubts concerning her new identity, the responsibility that the cultural education of her son means to her. In the present we see mother and daughter talking on the phone—a mediated attempt to bridge the emotional distance we only get to understand at the very end.

Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* shows, similarly to Katin's work, that it is nearly impossible to preserve the innocence of childhood during war. The parallel processes of maintaining and losing innocence are illustrated several times. Violence is Marji's everyday experience, and as such it is part of her construction of identity. There is violence in each childhood story she is told. Her grandfather, for example, had to spend hours in a cell filled with water. As a means to identify with him, Marji stays in her bathwater for a very long time. Later she tries to imagine the martyr of the war slogans. When she is picturing the motto "To

die a martyr is to inject blood into the veins of society" (115), we see a martyr laying on his back, covered in a black blanket under his waist, a pillow under his head, screaming of pain. Seven dark lines are attached to his arms, his blood is channeled towards the edges of the panel. His body is very stiff, and society cannot be seen. This most unrealistic representation is capable of illustrating the horror Marji lives with. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, the visual simplicity of Satrapi's drawings protects the victim from the aggressor's gaze.

While martyrdom was interesting and even attractive for the child Marji, it becomes a horrifying and imagination-blocking experience for her adolescent self. After glimpsing her friend's corpse, a completely black panel illustrates her horror. She wishes to be blind, she wishes to lose her voice: "No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger" (142). As Marji experiences more, she will think in a less visually inventive way. We can read rather than see her thoughts after a girl of her age is raped and murdered. "All night long, I thought of that phrase: 'To die a martyr is to inject blood into the veins of society.' Niloufar was a real martyr, and her blood certainly did not feed our society's veins" (146).

When the adult Marjane returns to Iran after her four-year stay in Austria, the cult and rhetoric of martyrdom makes it unbearable for her to walk in the city. Streets named after martyrs and slogans advocating martyrdom make her feel alien in her own country. A further step in the process of alienation is when she draws a martyr in order to be admitted to university. Although she uses Michelangelo's "La Pietà" as a model, her drawing reproduces the official fundamentalist portrayals of martyrdom and women. A veiled woman is holding a dead martyr; her body is reduced to only an outline. Marjane takes the first step to compromising the values she has believed she stands for, though her intention by applying to university was not to integrate into fundamentalist society.

To find her identity, Marji is experimenting with a wide range of roles. These come from a mixture of Western and Eastern cultures: God's disciple; the prophet; the witness; the punk as allowed by Islamic rule and the punk as allowed by Western freedom; the consumer; the homeless; and the wife and the divorcee, to name a few. However, the "repressive air" (248) of Iran does not give her enough room to construct herself. Meanwhile, she is constantly challenging both the Western perception of the

Islamic woman and the Western perception of the modern Western woman. Women who Marjane meets in Austria seem rather naïve, in spite of their freedom, with an emphasis on their sexual freedom.

As far as Iranian women are concerned, instead of being veiled, unidentifiable, and oppressed, they are shown as individuals who find ways to show their integrity. "In *Persepolis*, pictures of the veiled woman reject the stereotype of the Muslim voiceless woman" (Claudio, comicsgrid.com). Marjane unveils the code-system behind the aesthetic of covering up: "With practice, even though they were covered from head to foot, you got to the point where you could guess their [women's] shape, the way they wore their hair and even their political opinions"(296). Islamic women in *Persepolis* are constantly pushing the limits by wearing makeup, shorter veils or maintaining a double life.

For Marjane, the embodiment of integrity and femininity is her grandmother: she does not make compromises, always follows what is morally right, and keeps jasmine petals in her bra. Marji has a strong, physical connection to her grandmother: her message, "be true to yourself" (150) is inseparable from her embrace.

Physical contact is central in providing comfort and safety to the child protagonists in Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows*. The little Zeina and her brother are frequently shown hugging or holding each other. The adult characters embrace them, wrestle with them, or sit them on their laps. A sense of safety is also given by a beautifully decorated wall hanging, which is constantly seen in the background. The little Zeina is attracted to this wall hanging: it provides a small yet fixed point of reference in the massive darkness the characters are frequently depicted against (46).

The protagonists have to share a small, confined space during air raids: the safest room in the building is the Abirached family's foyer. As the neighbours arrive, the foyer gets more and more crowded. The main setting, the crowded foyer is represented as a geometrically organized space, always subject to minor changes. Abirached's representational strategy is preoccupied with issues regarding space and bodies in space. The book opens with a map of "Lebanon and Surrounding Area 1975-1990" and is followed by a one-page landscape of East Beirut, dominated by a black sky (9). This is succeeded by eight stills of the streets of Beirut, two per page (10-13). We can see traces of life and armed fighting, yet there are no people and there is no narration. The stillness and

muteness are broken only temporarily by narration, action and a greater number of smaller panels (14-23). The action depicted deals with the physical separation of parents and children, the characters stand lonely against the black background. “I think we are more or less safe here”, says the grandma, looking at the blackness beside her (23). We turn the page (24-25), and we face a double-page of black and white chaos. The caption, “here is all the space we have left . . .” helps us realize that this is a map. “Here” is written in the top right corner, in a white balloon: it is a tiny round space in the angular maze of streets. Another double-page panel follows: here the space of streets is deleted by whiteness, so that only two narrow strips of streets are left at the two sides. Beirut is cut in two, a white nothing is between the two parts. Turning the page (28-29) we find both the space of the city and the space of the comic book page further deconstructed: little islands are left of what used to take up a double page. This pair of pages looks as if it has been censored: perhaps censored by the instruments of war: “snipers, oil drums, containers, barbed wire, sandbags.” Whiteness which used to sign undiscovered territories on maps is now the indicator of inaccessible space. The series of one-page panels continues, we see the demarcation line of oil barrels: space that is taken yet belongs to nobody.

The confined and crammed foyer, the only habitable room in the family apartment, which is at the same time the place of human relationships, stories and physical contact, is forever juxtaposed to these vast opening panels of the book. In the absence of the parents, Anhala minds the children. She has been a maid all her life, and is now their neighbour. Rosary in hand, Anhala makes coffee and cakes to comfort whoever is stressed. She is a grandmother-surrogate who is portrayed in front of the wall-hanging more often than any other character.

As we are informed on the back cover, the idea of this book originates in a moment when Abirached saw her grandmother in a documentary, saying: “You know, I think maybe we’re still more or less safe here.” As discussed above, “here” is a concept this book does not take at face value. While the vast empty city is juxtaposed to the foyer busy with life, the page layouts themselves call attention to their very own spatiality. In graphic narratives, style is always part of meaning (Hatfield 61), and Abirached’s two-tone, geometrical and repetitive style contributes greatly to her message. Often, upon first looking at the page we see horizontal and vertical lines, angles, curves, circles, which turn out to be

people, furniture, or details of the wall hanging. Abirached utilizes some of the key working mechanisms of comics: when she designs her page layouts to be this geometric, she builds on the tension between the ways we interpret an individual panel and a sequence of panels, as well as on the tension resulting from the conflicting reading strategies required by reading a sequence and a whole page (Hatfield 36-67). The geometricality and regularity of Abirached's style result in a certain page-level rhythm, a constant playfulness. However, this very geometricality and regularity clearly suggest a sense of order, a sense of people and things having their place. The chaos of war that haunted Katin's and Satrapi's graphic narratives is here replaced by the geometric companionship of people, of order in design, and order in human relationships based on love. Yet the foyer, which provides the frame for the action and the stories told in the book, is hit by a shell, and the inhabitants have to flee. Leaving becomes part of little Zeina's identity: soon she learns to write her name, and in the same process, she is transforming her signature to a ship, and the surface of striped paper she is writing on, to sea.

A Game for Swallows is possibly the most optimistic narrative of the three, yet it is not exempt from the identity crisis caused by war that is central in *Persepolis* and *We are on our Own.* I strongly believe that graphic autobiographies, of which I have examined only three in this paper, can offer eye-opening accounts and representations of traumatic events and the process of overcoming them. Comics have proven their potential in representing even the most disturbing topics, while graphic autobiographies also have historical referential claims. The medium of comics sits between literature and the visual arts and has produced accounts of those caught between the frontlines. That is, women.

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THE POLITICS OF LOCATION AND SEXUALITY IN LEILA AHMED'S AND NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S LIFE NARRATIVES

ABSTRACT: This article explores Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage*, and Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, *A Daughter of Isis*, and *Walking Through Fire*. It contrasts their works and argues that location and gender-awareness play an important role in the writing of autobiographies. The focus is on showing how El Saadawi's positioning as a feminist activist in Egypt and Ahmed's location in the USA determine the texts' themes and shape the construction of the autobiographical "I."

KEY WORDS: Women's life narratives, Middle East, female circumcision, gender, class, location, Islam.

> *For in this class patriarchal world of ours, a mother's name is of no consequence, a woman is without worth, on earth or in the heavens. In paradise a man is promised seventy-two virgins for his sexual pleasure, but a woman is promised no-one except her husband, that is if he has the time for her, and is not too busy with the virgins who surround him.*
>
> Nawal El Saadawi, *A Daughter of Isis*

> *To believe that segregated societies are by definition more oppressive to women, or that women secluded from the company of men are women deprived, is only to allow ourselves to be servilely obedient to the constructs of men.*
>
> Leila Ahmed, "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem"

Arab women writers have narrated their lives in different forms and shapes. Their narratives have been of interest to Western readers and scholars alike. *Memoirs of an Arabian*

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Princess (1888) was written by Emily Said-Ruete in German and translated into many European languages. Widely read and appreciated in the West, *Memoirs* is rarely mentioned or referred to in studies about Arab women's autobiographies in the West or in Arab countries for that matter.[1] The life-story of this exceptional Arabian princess fascinated people when published because it primarily catalogues in minute detail women's lives inside the harem of an Arabian Sheik. Yet, she was amongst the first Arab women, if not the first, whose construction of her past life inside the harem and among the wives and concubines of the ruler of Oman, her father, unsettled Western views on that space as *locus eroticus*. The space is empowering and disempowering, liberating and suffocating, and occupies a central place in Arab women's life-narratives, especially those who write for a primarily Western audience. Immigrant writers and critics from Arab origins seem to cultivate this Western obsession. In her influential "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem," Leila Ahmed challenges Western views on segregated Arab and Muslim society by controversially stating that, as quoted above, secluded women are not necessary more deprived and oppressed than their sisters in the West (531). This claim is quite hard to sustain given the fact that she had to leave both Egypt and the United Arab Emirates to be able to live and write as an independent woman. Calling upon feminists in the West to rethink their theories and views on Arab and Muslim societies, whilst living in the USA, may prove to be incongruous and even controversial.

Women's writing, Gardner argues, is characterised by its "defiance of conventional generic boundaries" (359). The stakes are much higher for women from the "ex"-colonised world and the Middle East. Their life-narratives invite Western readers to view a "different world" and represent "a serious challenge" to both Western generic conventions and literary theories, as Barbara Harlow posits (*Resistance Literature* xvi).

In *De/Colonizing the Subject*, Smith and Watson state that the colonial subject's account "challenges us to recognise their experiments in subjectivity, and account for their exclusion from "high" culture" (xviii-xix). They predicate their argument on the differentiation between the postcolonial subject who lives and

[1] See for example, Al-Hassan Golley's *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies*; *Arab Women's Lives Retold*; Vinson's "Shahrazadian Gestures in Arab Women's Autobiographies"; Shaaban's *Both Right and Left Handed*; and Eber and Faqir's *In the House of Silence*.

writes in the West as exile and the neo-colonial subject who is based in the third world. Spivak crucially points to such a distinction in "The Political Economy of Women" by arguing for the importance of location for the speaking subject (226). I explore the role of location in Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage: A Woman's Journey from Cairo to America* (1999), and Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (1981), *A Daughter of Isis* (1999), and *Walking Through Fire* (2002).

In "The Politics of Experience," Gunn compares the autobiography of Leila Khaled, *My People Shall Live*, with that of Annie Dillard. She concludes her essay with two general remarks on third-world women's autobiography: "First, it involves an unmasking of what I have called a denostalgizing of the past; second, it orients itself towards a liberated society in the future. In the first respect it is a form of resistance literature, in the second, it is a form of utopian literature" (77). Her thesis, albeit holding some truth, cannot be extended to the works I will be considering. This article will explore the differences between Ahmed's and El Saadawi's works, and argue the importance of location in writing autobiographies.

El Saadawi's three compositions pertain to what critics call third world autobiography. Harlow, Gunn, and Kaplan, amongst others, use the term to refer to works of women from third world countries who live under different forms of oppression in their homeland, and their writings are informed and shaped by resistance and political activism. This definition cannot be extended to *A Border Passage* because its author lives in the USA and is not a political activist. El Saadawi's powerful account on her prison-experience, on the other hand, is a case of third world autobiography. It shows how a writer, a feminist and political activist can suffer because of her writing. In contrast, Ahmed's *Memoirs* is the work of a postcolonial subject who lives in the West and whose construction of the self bears on her privileged class and current location. Location and political awareness determine, in part, the narrative's tone, thematic concerns and aspirations. Harlow argues that the speaker may fashion and authorise new ways of knowing "conditions of observations" or what Hartsock calls a "standpoint epistemology," meaning "an account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margin as well as the centre . . . an account which

treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world" (171).

El Saadawi's own theories about writing can be of great significance in this respect. Writing is a political affirmation of both the self and the community. Creative writing is intrinsically dissident and emanates resistance to counter hegemony and oppression. Her theories on creative writing are disseminated in many of her books and are shaped by her belief in the power of words to initiate changes by exposing all forms of injustice. Language is a weapon that should be claimed in the struggle against poverty. In "Gender and Islam," El Saadawi sees creative writing as resistance and dissidence. Her theories are based on the importance of political activism and writing as an integral part of the author's personal responsibility towards her people and their concerns. She writes: "I believe there is no dissidence without struggle. We cannot understand dissidence except in a situation of struggle and its location in place and time. Without this, dissidence becomes a word void of responsibility, devoid of meaning" (2). Her search for a female culture does not start in the harem, as I will show in Ahmed's memoirs, but in the agricultural fields where peasant women toil from sunrise to sunset. Location in time and space is central and shapes literary production, as she explains. Her existence in Egypt, her country, authenticates her writing about Arab women and the poor. When she was in the USA, she was yearning for Egypt. In *Walking Through Fire*, her homeland is the only enduring presence in her life in the USA. She uses the dream-pattern to cater for her virtual travel to Egypt in order to survive her exile (4-5). Writing is empowering when it is lived as a continuous struggle against oppression: "You have to start from yourself, from your ground, not to be in the air. That's why struggle starts locally, and it expands, and it connects globally. You have to start locally from your soil, from your village, from your country, from your state to liberate yourself ("Gender and Islam" 3).

Leila Ahmed's memoir *A Border Passage* spans the life of its author from childhood to adulthood. It follows–in a *bildungsroman* pattern–the itinerary of the protagonist's growth in colonial Egypt and ends on her return to Egypt from the US as a celebrated scholar. What happens in between is a long journey that takes her to important points of stasis, namely Cambridge, where she studies and graduates with a Ph.D., and UAE where she works and earns money to finance her trip to the US, her final

destination. In the USA, she becomes an academic authority on Islam and gender, and makes a seminal intervention in a domain of knowledge that still grips scholars' attention in the West. Her book, *Gender and Islam*, and the issues related to "Western Perceptions of the Harem" are seen as a significant contribution. The "inbetweeness" of her identity is a major trait she focuses on in constructing the autobiographical "I." Identity is a process of self-construction whereby subjectivity is formed. Subjectivity is articulated through written language in the narrative text and is shaped by experience as an internal and external process of self identification with one's history, geography, culture, and heritage. Agency, on the other hand, is the result of one's transnational experience. In *Reading Autobiography*, Mason and Watson define the process of constructing one's autobiographical subjectivity. They identify the dimensions of autobiographical subjectivity separately and insist that they are enmeshed with each other and should be seen as an organic unity in the literary production of the "I" in the autobiographical text: "the psychic (memory), the temporal (experience), the spatial (identity), the material (embodiment), and the transformative (agency)" (49). "Situatedeness" is a term related to location and historical and cultural specificities of the interaction of the narrative self with her environment (49-50)**.** The construction of an autobiographical subjectivity is a complex narrative process where experience plays a defining role.

In *Keywords* (126-28), Raymond Williams outlines the historical development of the concept of experience in Western thinking. He notes that the experiences of a subjective witness "are offered not only as truths, but as the most authentic kind of truths" which are presented as "the ground for all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis." William also highlights experience as "the product of social conditions or of systems of belief or of fundamental systems of perception." The concept of experience with its material and collective implications has come to denote the relativity of truth and its fragmentation. In *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa de Lauretis defines experience as a process by which the individual becomes subject. Her definition closely ties the notion experience to ideology:

> Experience is the process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to,

> originating in oneself) those relations—material, economic, and interpersonal—which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical (159).

The "I" in *A Border Passage*, is constructed as polyvalent and mobile in between different cultures. The transnational nature of experience is defining for the self. *A Border Passage* explores issues of cultural differences, and counters stereotypical images of the harem and Arab women. In this respect, she depicts the harem in Egypt and what she calls "the Harem Perfected" in Cambridge as similar and empowering female spaces. Postcolonial writers and theorists who are living in the West write about a third world that they appropriate to themselves. This attempt to construct it for Western readers is replete with inconsistencies, namely the negation of the material realities of women in third world countries. In her essay "The Feminist Standpoint," Nancy Hartsock expounds how "Feminist theorists must demand that feminist theorizing be grounded in women's material activity and must be part of the political struggle" (304). Ahmed's discourse on women's domestic lives is sustained by cultural identity claims, and its veracity is cemented by her belonging to Egypt. Elleke Boehmer states that the "social position of immigrant writers" makes "not only the work, but also the biographies of post-colonial writers, many of whom are émigrés or exiles, appear to enact [hybrid] minglings. Their lives are distinguished by cultural clash, linguistic collision, and transnational movement." They, therefore, deny or gloss over class oppression and poverty, and accentuate claims to identity (241-242). Leila Ahmed's strange comparison between the harem in her Grandfather's estate and Girton in Cambridge is a case to point. The harem is where she lived, learned about Islam, met women from different classes and heard stories. Her self-awareness and progress in the world is informed by the bond she has with the harem's women, including the maids. They are happy and pleased with their mistresses' help and charity; the mistresses even talk to the maids, and treat them as equal. Ahmed then argues that she is not romanticising the "slave-master relationship," which, of course, she is, throughout her depiction of the harem (183).

The harem in *A Border Passage* is rich with women's stories about themselves and their world. Their views about their societies and their lives will inspire Leila Ahmed as a scholar in the West to carve out a place in Western academia. The suffering of women in their homes is discussed inside those female

gatherings, but their powerlessness remains quite frustrating. "The Harem Perfected" is when Ahmed leaves for the UK and enters Girton College in Cambridge. She seems at pains to convince her readers of inexistent similarities between two opposing worlds. The harem seems to be empowering for her and her sister because they left to study and live in the West, and encaging for those who remain in the country. In *A Border Passage*, Ahmed is reminiscent of colonial Egypt, of the rich harem of her grandfather and of the happiness of maids there. She writes long theoretical passages concerning how Western feminists' views and theories about Arab and Muslim women are fraught with prejudices (182-183).

In "Shahrazadian Gestures in Arab Women's Autobiographies," Vinson compares Ahmed's memoirs with the autobiographies of El Saadawi, and shows how their works converge. She argues that Ahmed writes "counternarratives" that resist oppressive narratives about Muslim women. In this part of the article, I will focus on the differences between the two authors by arguing that Ahmed's countering of Western narratives about Muslim women resulted in romanticising the harem and negating its segregated nature. This emphasis on the positive impact of the harem on her and on the other women, including the maids, testifies to her privileged class position. Studying in colonial English schools in Egypt, graduating from Cambridge and then settling in the USA makes the culturally oriented theories on Muslim and Arab women that stress cultural difference central to her researches. Moreover, the challenging of essentialist representations of Arab and Muslim women reifies new images that are themselves controversial and unrepresentative. This, according to Chow, is a process of self-subalternisation in academic cultural studies that entails the following, "What these intellectuals are doing is robbing the terms of oppression of their critical and oppositional import, and thus depriving the oppressed of even the vocabulary of protest and rightful demand" (13). The postcolonial trait that characterises many exiled writers consists of dismissing class oppression and global capitalism, and emphasising the role of culture. This creates the condition of possibility for them to position themselves in Western academia and make issues pertaining to differences of cultural identity a platform for theorising about third world countries. In the *Afterword* to the second edition of his book, *Literary Theory*, Terry Eagleton

critiques US based postcolonial scholars and shows convincingly how they are cashing in on the issue of cultural difference. By "over-emphasizing the cultural dimension," they simplify serious economic issues related to transnational flow of capital, labour-market, and relations between poor and rich nations. The exaggerated significance of the theme of cultural otherness and self-identity at the expense of "vital material conditions" has resulted in the "romantic idealization of the 'other'" and the quasi-total negation of neo-colonialism and its economic determination (205-206). In an interview, El Saadawi makes the same point by emphasising the reasons for playing down or neglecting the economic. She criticises those "professors in academia" who "are fond of the term 'postcolonial'" and states that the term "speaks partial truth in order to hide a more important truth, to hide the fact that we live in a new or neo-colonial era where colonialism is transnational" (Smith 147-148). Contrary to Ahmed, poverty and class-division are central to Nawel El Saadawi's feminism. Her books thematise the intersections between poverty, oppression, class struggle and gender issues. Unlike Ahmed, whose relation with written Arabic is problematic and antagonistic, El Saadawi uses the language subversively and in so doing charges it with her anger and other emotions. Her Arabic is empowering and powerful, alive and awakening, and daring and liberating. Her use of language revolutionised our understanding of and relation with the written text. The translation into English of her texts does not always fully render El Saadawi's work to her readers in the West and across the world. El Saadawi is aware of the absence of women's tradition in Arabic literature and redresses it in her writing by evoking the glories of female queens, priests and poets from the pre-Islamic era and ancient Egypt. Feminism for El Sadawi is activism, a way of life and a life devoted to fighting oppression. The depiction of poverty and ignorance, and debates on religion, sex and politics made El Saadawi's works revolutionary and disturbing to the ruling class and fundamentalists. The theories she develops in her fiction as well as life narratives are extensions of her meditations, thinking and interaction with people in their environs.

Memoirs from the Women's Prison, *A Daughter of Isis*, and *Walking Through Fire* were written at turning points in El Saadawi's life. Prison and exile inform and shape the narrative fabric of the works. But *Walking Through Fire* ends with her

return to Egypt. In her autobiographies, El Saadawi sees her writing as more real than life. It is the force that keeps her alive and fighting: "Writing has been the antithesis of death and yet, paradoxically, the reason why in June 1992 I was put on a death-list" (16). In a marked contrast, Ahmed goes to Egypt as a celebrated American scholar, and writes about issues that are more relevant to and easily decoded by Western critics, while El Saadawi is forced to leave her country when she is almost sixty because of Islamist threats. El Saadawi's fight for freedom is articulated through her writing as a lived reality. The autobiographical act is rooted in the political and economic realities of Egypt; it spans over sixty years of her life and her country's history. Linda Anderson raises the complex question of "the subject's discursive position and material and historical location" in life narratives. The representational dimensions of the self are the result of the materiality of its location and the historical discourse it produces (Anderson 97-98). Nancy K Miller's *Getting Personal* studies the relation of the female subject to theory and politics (21) and affirms the performativity of the autobiographical act as it "matters to others" and in this sense "engaged" (24). In the production of knowledge, discourses determine the process and define our identities as discursive constructs. In "Discourse on Language," Foucault reminds us that "we are not free to say just anything" and that "we cannot simply speak of anything" (340). Statements on the same issue at the same time may be different from one autobiographer to another and their truth value depends on who speaks and with what authority.

Ahmed and Saadawi speak in their narratives about female circumcision or genital mutilation. Ahmed's tone is evasive and even dismissive of the whole affair. The reader gets the impression that it is of no consequence since she is not exposed to it and her mother makes it clear to the woman who comes offering her service that it is not wanted. Ahmed even claims that it is not as common as it is thought to be in the West (97). In my understanding, she wants her Western readers to know about and distinguish between women in Egypt. Her mother–because she belongs to the rich Turku–Circassian aristocracy–spared her daughters such trauma. Indeed, her endeavour to challenge what she calls "Eurocentric images of Arab and Muslim women" goes as far as to avoid mentioning her father's family in *A Border Passage*. Being Egyptian may undermine her discourse about

female genital mutilation. She emphatically underlines the fact that all her female relatives on her mother's side are not circumcised, and, in so doing, she undermines those who claim the contrary. This is far from being the case in El Saadawi's works, in which she writes her life in the text by incorporating her experience and the experiences of other females living and dead. The state of *malaise* and alienation, as lived and experienced by Ahmed when she is searching for her roots and identity, is a bourgeois privilege third world women activists and the poor won't know much about. Identity is a continuous struggle against all forms of oppression for El Saadawi. Her account of her circumcision is charged with pain and humiliation, with anger and rebellion, and with determination. The description of her circumcision is graphic, and disturbingly detailed, which indicates its present impact on the author's psyche and sexual life. The memories of the incident whenever recalled regenerate feelings of pain and agony as well as the helplessness and frailty of the then-child that the Daya,[2] and the group of female relatives who came to help, left coiled in a pool of blood. The series of images that cross her mind about that particular event ignites rebellion and erupts into uncontained anger. The description of the event is very short and extremely powerful because it is hard to forget, and even harder to remember and narrate. Some critics in the West argue that despite El Saadawi's self-assertion, her accounts about her sexuality are brief because of social and cultural inhibition. Albeit true, this can be better explained by the painful act of remembering and writing about what she calls "The Forgotten Things in Life" (*A Daughter of Isis* 11-13). Consequently, those powerful and defining moments are rendered by the briefness of the passages and the recourse to dream-anchored depictions where many female stories merge into one in her memories. The piercing pain of those who underwent such experiences, be it the author or the host of women whose stories are woven into the narrative, remains present in their lives and testifies to their sufferings as female in a society that comes "to a standstill" when a female child is born. "The sorrow might conceal a latent desire to bury the female infant" is better than

[2] Village midwife in rural Egypt, she is responsible for the cutting. In El Saadawi's memoirs and her works, the Daya is a recurrent archetypal figure. Her presence in women's lives is accompanied by fear and shame; she is a continuous reminder of their cursed existence and helplessness.

infanticide (19).[3] The passage that describes her genital mutilation is short but revealing and shows that the "I" is an extension of the poor, the peasants, and the working class women in Egypt. She is not speaking for them, but acknowledging their pain as part of hers. In my view, when relating her grandmother's genital mutilation, she underlines the continuity of an ancient and painful female suffering that is passed on from one generation to the other as a legacy of shame and humiliation (36). While Ahmed claims that it is not a widespread phenomenon, El Saadawi describes her genital mutilation, works on the subject as a researcher, writer, medical doctor, activist, and director of public health. In her capacity as a highly ranked official in the Ministry of Health and the UN, she affirms that "Not a single girl . . . escaped" (73). She is the first Arab writer to speak openly about sex and sexuality and expose such crimes against women.

The biographical and autobiographical merge as one in El Saadawi's life narratives. Sexual relations between married couples, child-marriage, incest, rape, and paedophilia are explored within her own life stories. Her knowledge stems from her own plight and is authenticated by the trauma and suffering of women around her. It bears witness to her commitment that could have cost her life had she stayed in Egypt. She stages in her life narrative her political commitment, making of the oft-quoted "the private is political" a lived reality. Saadawi's own experiences are interwoven with those of other women, and articulate feminism as a way of living, struggling and writing. In *Resistance Literature*, Harlow points to a new form: a relation between character/writer that emerges in writing about women in prison. El Saadawi's "Writing . . . no longer distinguishes her from other women in the society, but rather links her to them in their respective opposition to the reprisals of authoritarian structures" (140). The self is constructed and even dissolved in the other; women writers who are jailed because of their writing see their texts as resistance and extensions of their people's aspirations for freedom and democracy. Not in the sense of speaking for them, but in opening the narrative space to their stories and lives. They enter her life-narrative as subjects, where they assume the "I" position by fashioning dialogues where they speak directly to

[3] El Saadawi quotes the Koran and refers to the pre-Islamic tradition of burying infant girls alive. She sarcastically speaks about being born "in better times" (*A Daughter of Isis* 19).

readers. This can be applicable to her autobiographical works, as she keeps reminding the readers of the prison of women inside the home, and of the poor inside Egypt.

The story of her mother who married at the age of seventeen and died when she was forty-five inspired Saadawi to write a work of fiction, *She Has no Place in Heaven*. It is quoted and referred to in *A Daughter of Isis* and *Walking Through Fire*, when she refers to her mother. She imagines her in Heaven looking for her husband, the only reward Muslim women have in paradise are their husbands on earth, but he has no time for her. Whenever she goes to see him she finds him busy; he is given seventy virgins whose virginity is always renewed. They are, therefore, in a continuous queue, waiting for their turn. The body of work that forms her autobiographies testifies to her awareness of the limitations of the genre. She introduces the sub-narratives of women's stories, fiction and facts to tie up her work, and states that this is by all means an unfinished work and that, "I have not sat down to write it yet" (*A Daughter of Isis* 353). She is experimenting with the genre of autobiography and unsettling its boundaries, introducing diaries, stream of consciousness, short stories, dreams and reveries. The temporal narrative sequencing is cross-cut by other writing forms that solidify the narrative self whereby the voice of Saadawi, her feminist awareness and political activism is felt and experienced by her readers because of the materiality of her condition in Egyptian time and space. The self is foregrounded in the stories as are the worries of her country, Egypt. Harlow refers to El Saadawi, amongst others, to demonstrate how prison-writings of women from the third-world "propose alternative parameters for the definition and articulation of literary conventions" (136).

The "I" in Saadawi's three works is aware of its own belonging to a culture, a country where writing is a serious crime, and a class of deprived Fellaheen. When she was ten, she kept a secret diary; she wrote what she felt and should not have been saying because it was sinful. She wrote poems and short stories or ideas that crossed her mind and made her think and revolt. The forbidden and the creative were interrelated and came together as one in her diary. This diary became a source of knowledge that she often quotes in her works. She also uses her grandmother's narratives, short stories or legends to consolidate her own stories. In her works there is no harem, no harem perfected and no Shahrazad either. Her writing challenges postcolonial critics who

are based in the West and write primarily to Western readership about Arab women, using the archetypal figure of shahrazad, buttressing their theories with words like harem, deconstructing the harem, the veil and what it stands for, theorising even what seems to be obvious and, in demystifying it, rendering it more complicated and vague. Writing is politically affirmative and cannot be creative unless it counters hegemony (*A Daughter of Isis* 352).

Notwithstanding the criticism levelled against her by Leila Ahmad, and many others, especially about female genital mutilation, and the representations of Arab women, El Saadawi remains one of the mostly read and translated authors and the most outstanding feminist in the Arab and Muslim world. Writing is political and empowering for her as a writer, and for many Arab women who grew up reading her books. Feminism for them is synonymous with her name. Her writing is not directed primarily at a Western audience, but it is written in Arabic and translated into many languages. Directed at Arab readers and powered by their own cultural references and codes, the act of reading is also political and for this reason El Saadawi is perceived as a very serious threat to religious fanatics and dictators. As a visiting professor in Duke University, she wonders how her American students will be able to understand her. In a country where reading means reading only the Koran and writing means writing about only it, and when the state controls what you write and say, and even when the states doesn't, the religious establishment and the Islamists do. They attack freedom of speech, they can even curb personal freedom and basic human rights in the name of Islam. It is difficult to explain how people go to the polls and vote for those who will oppress them in the name of religion after the so called "Arab Spring." But writing for her is an empowering weapon and, as long as she is writing, her fight against obscurantism, oppression and poverty continues.

In an extremely provoking passage, El Saadawi compares her writing to killing. Her experience of writing, of taking the pen and actually putting the letters on small pieces of paper, is an act of violence and aggression that erupts with passion, anger, and revolt. For her, writing is not meant to preserve life, in contrast to those critics who evoke the archetypal figure of shahrazed. Instead, life is an ongoing struggle. In *Memoirs from A Women's Prison*, she identifies or rather sees herself in Fathiyya, the murderess, who "took hold of the hoe and struck the blow" (116).

El Saadawi conceives her writing as more real than her life; when she writes she feels the passion of the murderess. What motivates her is the urge to fight oppression in her writings and because of that her writing is more important than life. The prison is synonymous with freedom; 'The pen is the most valuable thing in my life', and if she did not learn to write she would have learnt how to use the "hoe." Writing is instigated by the urge to kill, she writes in her secret diary, a point that she emphatically espouses in her writing as a young woman and as an adult "When a desire to kill seizes hold of me I pick up a pen and sit in front of a sheet of paper" (164).

A Daughter of Isis is about her childhood, and ends with her graduation as a medical doctor. *Walking through Fire* chronicles her later years and ends on her departure home after a short exile in the USA. She is unable to write in Egypt, so she leaves; for her, writing is larger than life. She expounds her own theories about life-writing and employs many writing strategies whereby her life-narrative is articulated through collective and shared processes of accommodating many female voices and stories. Malti-Douglas reminds El Saadawi's readers that "the textual backgrounds on which she is fighting are quite Middle Eastern" and "if we ignore this fact; we denude her texts of much of their power and specificity" (6).

A Border Passage, on the other hand, is personal and private, where experiences centre on the "I" of Ahmed as a postcolonial critic and émigré. The differences between the two authors are instrumental in showing how the politics of location and experience shape the author's sense of belonging and determine her writings and thematic focus. This article has demonstrated how El Saadawi's positioning as an activist in Egypt has made her narrative rigorously engaged in the struggle of her people and how Ahmed's *Border Passage* is directed primarily at Western academics and specialists, and challenges their views on Muslim and Arab women. Her attempt to represent and speak about subaltern women is undercut by her positioning in the West and belonging to an elite class in colonial Egypt. Ahmed elaborates on the West/East divide and focuses on the cultural in the construction of the self and the women she depicts in her work. For El Saadawi, "the clash is between the people who own the money and the military power—the colonizer and exploiters—and the poor and women. That is the clash: a clash of economic interest. There is no clash of civilizations; this is a very false theory to hide the economic reason for oppression" (Smith 61).

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ARAB WOMEN IN THE GULF AND THE NARRATIVE OF CHANGE: THE CASE OF QATAR

ABSTRACT: The dramatic transformation of the Arabian Gulf since the discovery of petroleum resources has called for a new perspective on the situation of women in the region. Qatar is an example of fast-paced industrialization, modernization and profound socio-cultural changes. As the environment transforms literally from day to day, new identities are being forged and social roles re-negotiated. The leadership's vision for the country speaks of gender equality and opportunity for all. This article asks how young Qatari women's personal stories fit into the national narrative of change and what they see as the best path to agency and empowerment.

KEY WORDS: Arab women, stereotypes, Qatar, narrative, change, vision, education, employment, empowerment.

Recent years have seen a revision of the image of Arab women. Traditionally, the Western gaze pictured Middle Eastern females as either the exotic, eroticized "Other" or the embodiment of ignorance and poverty. However, the dramatic transformation of the Gulf region in the post-oil period, as well as the Islamic revival that began in the seventies, has called for a different perspective. Thus, while early feminist studies of the region focused on the oppression of women inherent in the patriarchal system and conservative interpretation of religion, contemporary scholars have begun to undermine the view of Muslim women as a homogenized group of passive victims.

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The small but oil rich and strategically important country of Qatar is a fascinating example of changes in the Middle East. The pace of the country's modernization and industrialization is unprecedented and the ambitious plans for the future imply profound socio-cultural changes. In addition to being an important political player, Qatar wants to become a regional leader in education, scientific research and sports tourism. As the national narrative is being written, new identities are being forged and traditional social roles renegotiated. At the same time, this conservative, gender-segregated tribal society ruled by *sharia* law prides itself on keeping close links to its past. Branded as a place where tradition meets modernity and where the speed of change is fast, it is indeed a study in contrasts and a field rife for ethnographic research. A touristy gaze will focus on the veiled women in black *abayas* and men in white *thobes* driving the latest models of luxury cars or shopping in gigantic malls, where Western hit songs are interrupted by the call to prayer resounding over the city five times a day. A closer look will reveal a society in transition, trying to adjust to changing expectations, and, especially in the case of women, negotiating the dialectic of traditional and modern forces.

Like in the other GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) member nations, in Qatar the vision of the country is shaped by the elite. The official image for tourism, international relations and internal consumption is that of a modern country attempting to preserve the national heritage and Islamic art. Qataris are deservedly proud of their achievements and very sensitive about any implied criticism. The idealized, romanticized view of the past is evoked through pictures of Bedouin tents, camels, falcons and *dhows* (traditional boats). On the other hand, the capital city, Doha, is advertised through its architecturally stunning skyscrapers or man-made islands. In addition, slogans such as "Qatar deserves the best" appeal to patriotism and national pride and prominently displayed signs "*Think. Wonder. Achieve. Create."* exhort the youth to excel academically. Billboards, advertisements and commercials tell a similar story, featuring traditionally dressed but in every other aspect modern Qatari couples (usually with two children) usually as high-end consumers, investors or spectators at exclusive sport events. A conscious effort is also made in these images to present women on equal footing with their husbands.

The visibility of women in the public discourse reflects the country's official policy. The leadership's vision articulated in the

document *Qatar National Vision 2030* speaks of gender equality and individuals realizing their full potential. Specifically, it spells out the need to "enhance women's capacities and empower them to participate fully in the political and economic spheres, especially in decision-making roles." How do these themes resonate in the individual stories of young Qatari women? To what extent have they interiorized the national narrative of change and embraced the new social role? In their perception, how does their lived reality align with the officially sponsored vision? What follows is an attempt to answer these questions based on the information in the public domain and on surveys and semi-formal interviews with female nationals. The discussion will revolve around the issues of education, employment, political participation, and empowerment.

Education and Participation in the Labor Market

Not unlike in the Arab world in general, Qatar's narrative of change is best exemplified in the new educational opportunities for its citizens. The first thing to point out is that in terms of education young Qatari females outnumber and outperform males. To fully understand the significance of the fact, one needs to bear in mind the country's history of education.

In the pre-oil era education was synonymous with religious instruction. In *kuttabs*, informal classes held in mosques, boys were taught to recite and memorize the Koran; in some *kuttabs*, usually in larger towns, they also learned some arithmetic and acquired basic literacy skills. Meanwhile, girls received very rudimentary instruction in private homes. The beginning of modern education in Qatar can be traced back to the fifties. The first school opened in 1949. It was attended by 50 boys who were taught by one teacher. Although five years later there were already four public schools, with 26 teachers and 560 boys, opposition and distrust of education for females remained fierce. Even when it became acceptable for girls to receive religious instruction, some considered it dangerous to teach them to write, since it could enable them to communicate more freely and thus encourage immoral behavior. The first school for girls was established in 1956 only after an Islamic scholar Shaykh Muhammad bin Mani issued a fatwa (religious ruling) stating that the Koran did not forbid education for females (Sonbol 222-223).

Another milestone in the history of the educational system in the country was the establishment of Qatar Foundation and the development of the tertiary level of education under the sponsorship of the former Emir's wife, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Misnad. The first university in the country, Qatar University, opened in 1973. In the following years, Qatar Foundation invited six prestigious American universities to open their branch institutions in Education City, Qatar Foundation campus. And thus Virginia Commonwealth University School of Arts in Qatar opened in 1998, followed by Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar in 2001, Texas A&M University at Qatar in 2003, Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar in 2004, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar in 2005, and Northwestern University in 2008. While all government schools and Qatar University were, and still are, gender segregated, Education City universities from the beginning offered co-educational education based on the Western style of teaching and learning.

These developments have greatly improved educational opportunities for all Qataris, but especially for women. While previously some men pursued post-secondary education in the West, it was extremely difficult for girls to get a college degree, since they were not allowed to travel without their families or husbands. Now, for the first time, it became possible to get high quality education without having to leave the country. It was not long before Qatari women began to outnumber and outperform men in all educational institutions. First of all, twice as many Qatari girls as boys are completing secondary school and pursuing post-secondary education (Planning Council 2005). In a 2010 paper titled "The Dearth of Qatari Men in Higher Education: Reasons and Implications," Sheikha Abdullah Al-Missnad points out the huge gender discrepancy at universities:

> In fact, the gender ratio is so skewed that at Qatar University the 2008/2009 student body was 76% female. Incidentally, this trend of female domination at the university level has been going on since the inception of the University, although the ratio was slightly less skewed at 38% men and 62% women in 1973/1974. Even in terms of higher education scholarships, which include support for study at the Education City universities or abroad, the trend shows an increase in women who receive scholarships compared to men. In 2008/2009, 290 women enrolled compared to 170 men. (Al-Misnad 9)

In brief, female students' academic success has reversed traditional patterns in the area of education. While older Qatari men are better educated than older Qatari women, the opposite is true for Qataris younger than 40. To quote from the 2007 RAND report, "the educational attainment is trending in opposite directions for men and women, with women becoming better educated over time while men's level of education declines" (Stasz et al. 14-15).

Unfortunately, the high educational attainment of women has not translated into changing the traditional male dominance of the job market. Only three percent of Qatari female nationals are employed outside the home versus 63% of Qatari male nationals. Although the female employment rate of 36% is high compared to 17% in Saudi Arabia, 28% in the United Arab Emirates, 25% in Oman or 30% in Bahrain, it is still below the percentages of other developed, high-income countries. It is hard not to view the situation as paradoxical, since "throughout all cohorts of workers, Qatari male workers have an average 10.7 years education compared with 14.1 years for females–a difference of 3.4 years" (Planning Council, 2005, 13). The fact is also surprising because among GCE countries Qatar is arguably the best place for women who want to build professional careers. In addition to educational opportunities, Qatari women benefit from favorable legislation. For example, in 2001, the Civil Service Act (Law No. 1) and the regulations of the Council of Ministers (Order No. 13) laid ground for gender equality in the workforce, Law No. 24 of 2002 provided women with retirement benefits and allowed working women to combine their earnings and pension entitlement with those of a deceased spouse, and Labor Law enacted in 2004 (Law No. 14) established the principle of equality in pay, training opportunities, and job advancement. Moreover, like in other oil rich countries, in Qatar the cost or availability of childcare is not an issue. Domestic help is easily available and the ubiquitous presence of maids, nannies and chauffeurs is taken for granted. Overall, these favorable conditions appear to make it easier than ever or than anywhere for Qatari women to enter the labor force.[1]

[1] Although it is still low, the female employment rate has been growing. Women's share in the total labor force more than doubled in the past 20 years. For example, it was only 14% in 1986, but already 27% in 2001, and 30% in 2003. In 2013, 26,992 females were employed compared to 55,609 males (Qatar Statistics Authority Website: Qatar Information Exchange, 2013). Moreover, according to the Qatar National Development Strategy 2011-2016, the figure is expected to rise to 42% by 2016.

Even a cursory look at the data will reveal yet another striking characteristic. Qatari women hold jobs that cluster mainly in education and health care (Planning Council, 2005); they are absent from many fields such as construction, trade, and manufacturing, and it is still considered inappropriate for Qatari women to work as actresses, flight attendants, hotel and hospitality workers or to serve as diplomats in the Foreign Service (Bahry and Marr 114).

To put things in perspective, male employment rates and job preferences are not much different. With the highest per capita GDP in the world, Qatari nationals make up only 11% of the total labor force. Thus, among the factors that influence women's choice of employment, the first one is economic in nature. Due to the high average Qatar family income and generous welfare system, women are not attracted to low paying or labor-intensive jobs. Furthermore, most of the Qataris who are employed, men and women alike, choose government jobs. The preference is easily understandable, since the public sector provides job security, better benefits, shorter working hours, and higher salaries without a performance review. The only significant differences between men and women in terms of bias against private sector jobs is that men are more concerned about low pay while women seek prestige and respect; a number of them also attach considerable importance to working in a single-gender work environment.

At the same time, there is no doubt that cultural factors also play a role in women's employment trends. Surveys have revealed that, regardless of sex, young Qataris value jobs allowing them to spend more time with the family. For a woman the primary role is still a domestic one, so the conflict between professional duties and finding sufficient time for spouses, extended family members, and social obligations is perceived as a very real one. Thus, considering the combination of the economic and cultural factors that play a de-motivating role in women's labor force participation, the female employment rate of 36% cannot come as a surprise and does in fact seem to reflect social readiness for change or growing acceptance of female presence in the public sphere.

Changing Social Attitudes

Young Qatari women are well aware of the main themes in the national narrative and their impact on social roles. First and foremost, now that the value of schooling has already been commonly acknowledged, girls know that their education is considered important and a college degree is seen as "normal" or sometimes even expected. Although religious beliefs and parental advice are still the two most important factors considered by high school female graduates in choosing their career paths, 88% of the girls who graduated in 2006 also considered it important to take into consideration their own personal interests (Stasz et al.). There is every reason to believe that this number is even higher nowadays.

Nowadays Qatari women also feel more comfortable working side by-side with men. According to Stasz et al., "although females who graduated in 1998 considered working in a single-gender work environment as relatively important, 95% of the female students graduating in 2006 had no reservations about working in a mixed-gender work environment." Despite the fact that some employers and conservative members of society still express skepticism concerning women's ability to balance family and work responsibilities, young women are more optimistic about their professional future and the possibility of gender equality in the workplace. Women are also attracted to entrepreneurial enterprises, and the establishment of the Qatari Businesswomen Association[2] in 2000 both reflected and nourished this development. Data obtained from the Qatar Chamber of Commerce show that 1,360 business licenses were issued to women from 2003 to 2005, and that women comprised almost 17% of active entrepreneurs in 2005. Since many Arab businesses are family businesses, which helps women blend the personal with the professional, this number is expected to grow steadily. The local press regularly showcases this type of achievement. Nevertheless, although the Qatari constitution stipulates equality, female nationals still live in a male-dominated society and attitudes towards working women are still split along gender lines. There are significant differences between men and women when it comes to rank. In 2009 only 3% of employed women were in a leadership posts. Ironically, when Qatari

[2] Also known as Qatari Business Women Association.

Businesswomen Association held its 3rd annual International Forum in Doha in 2012, the panel included 4 men but only one woman. Moreover, at a recent roundtable discussion, all of the women admitted that they struggled with negative stereotypes perpetuated by both men and women, and 85.5% said they were fighting to prove themselves.

While public discourse emphasizes the presence of celebrated role models, there is little, if any, discussion of issues that comprise a typical feminist agenda. It is not surprising that in a country under sharia law, many topics such as contraception, abortion, homosexuality or sex outside marriage are excluded from the public domain. There is also noticeable silence, at least in the English language Qatari media, regarding issues that cannot but be important to Qatari women: polygamy, arranged marriages, *misyar* marriages[3] or domestic violence.

A high and rising rate of divorce does not fail to capture everyone's attention and is extensively reported by the press. According to 2013 statistics, 40% of marriages end in a divorce; the rate of the so-called pre-marriage divorce (unconsummated marriage) is also high. The main reason given for divorce is excessive consumerism leading to debt. According to one of the main English medium newspapers in the country, 40% of divorces are solely due to disputes over bank debt ("Money is a major cause of divorces" *The Peninsula*, November 27, 2013). The article states that Consequently, a pre-marriage counseling program targeting Qataris now offers money management in addition to stressing the importance of the family. Another reason for concern is the fact that the high cost of weddings and marriage contracts results in growing numbers of nationals marrying non-Qatari women. Moreover, although not discussed publicly, the practice of *misyar* marriages is on the rise. Last but not least, there are also many who think that the reversed trend in education and the rising female employment rate are key factors in the breakup of families. From their point of view, the presence of foreign nannies is no less threatening to tradition and national identity than Western experts and an army of cheap labor force from the poorest countries in the world. Overall, while the high divorce rate is not seen as a sign of Qatari women

[3] Practiced in the Gulf, *misyar* marriage is a temporary arrangement, a religiously legitimate way for men to have affairs. The relationship is under the complete control of men.

moving away from the traditional importance of the extended family, it is regarded as troubling.[4]

Even more worrisome is the problem of domestic abuse. A recent study of female students at Qatar University (QU) reported that 23% of Qatari women and 22% of non-Qatari nationals attending QU experienced domestic violence (verbal and physical abuse and marital rape). Yet the study found a serious lack of legislation to protect victims of abuse (Al-Ghanim 80-93). Then there is the practice of penalizing sex outside marriage and single mothers. An unmarried woman giving birth to a child faces the threat of spending a year in jail. This policy is criticized by Western feminists, who are also concerned about some cases of sex trafficking and female domestic help abuse. In Reuter's 2013 poll Women's Rights in the Arab World, assessing the situation of women in the Arab World based on criteria, such as the right to divorce, education and employment options, reproductive rights, and domestic violence, Qatar came in fifth from top, behind Oman (2nd) and Kuwait (3rd), but ahead of the UAE (10th), Bahrain (12th), Saudi Arabia (20th) and Egypt (22nd place). Qatar scored poorly due mainly to women's limited participation in politics, with one woman on the Central Municipal Council out of 29 seats, and the first female judge appointed only in 2010. As summed up in "Factbox: Women's Rights in the Arab World," it appears that "Qatari women are active in business and higher education but face pressure to conform to traditional gender roles" (Kehoe). Evidently, more progress is still needed.

Doubtless, local attitudes have been changing, and will continue to change, due to increased exposure to international media, opportunities to travel abroad, and a large number of Western expatriates in Qatar. Even more important, however, is the support of the country's leadership and the appearance of well-known role models. The best known and most celebrated is Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Misnad. One can also point to other women who shape socio-cultural and economic policies: Sheikha Hanadi Al-Thani, a powerful businesswoman, Shaikha Abdullah Al Misnad, President of Qatar University and a member of the Supreme Educational Council, Shaikha Ghalia

[4] In 2011 The Supreme Council of Family Affairs started pre-marriage counseling. In the period 2009-2012, 64.9% of those attending were women (*The Peninsula*, 27 November, 2013: 1).

Bint Mohamed bin Hamad Al Thani, member of the United Nations Child Rights Committee or Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad Al Thani, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Qatar Museums Authority. As the number of both influential role models and ordinary working women increases, perceptions and conduct are bound to change. New views of women's roles have already manifested themselves in everyday life behavior:

> Ten years ago, no respectable Qatari man would walk side by side with his wife; rather, he walked two or three steps ahead of her. These days men and women not only walk side by side; it is not unusual to see men and their veiled wives strolling together in Doha's fashionable City Center mall holding hands. Only a few years ago, this was considered *'shameful.'* (Bahry and Marr 114).

Qatari Women's Narratives

What the public discourse and personal stories of Qataris have in common is emphasis on change. Just like in the national narrative, and in the Arab news in general, education outranks other topics when young women reflect on their lives. Generally speaking, they measure themselves against the past generations of Qatari women or against the situation of women in countries like Saudi Arabia, and observe how much their lives have changed for the better. Thus, for example, in *Qatari Voices,* an anthology of personal essays*,* young women talk about school, family culture, marriage traditions, and women's personal strength in an upbeat tone. While they acknowledge initial challenges, such as adapting to the co-educational environment in Education City, or worry about the work-life balance issue, they are committed to their new roles. Anecdotal evidence and informal interviews with students in Education City further substantiate this sense of pride and optimism. The young women's comments show their awareness of having to negotiate different social worlds, but the process seems to them exciting rather than threatening. One could say that to some degree they have embraced the modern concept of the self as a design, the result of choosing from a set of available identities. However, they are careful to draw a distinction between modernization and Westernization. Feminism remains a controversial concept and few would identify with it. They see their identity as stable and

rooted in the family and Islam. Driven by the ambition to prove themselves and concerned with social status, they appreciate the educational and professional opportunities they have been offered. At the same time, they are not ready to give up the security or comfort of the customary ways that give them an exalted status combined with protection.

In many ways this attitude is typical of how contemporary Arab women deal with the dialectic of tradition and modernity. As it has been pointed out, "Muslim women may be modern in their thinking, seek to educate themselves to their fullest potential, and aspire to professions once dominated by men. However, they cannot embrace a modernism that elevates the individual above the family without compromising their identity as Muslims" (Al-Malki et al. 167).

It is important to emphasize that young Qatari women, like many of their Arab sisters, do not see themselves as passive or as victims in need of being saved. On the contrary, they consider themselves strong and able to find agency within the constraints of the patriarchal society. To give an example, it has become customary for women to write the permission to study, work or travel abroad into their marriage contracts. The *abaya* and *hijab* are still religious and ethnic signifiers, but as such they have been losing some of their rigidity. The so-called *new abaya* is no longer the shapeless garb it used to be; allowing for experimentation with the newest design, fabric, cut, and ornamentation, it can be a fashion statement. Similarly, the *burquini* (modest swimming attire) or sportswear following Islamic rules have recently enabled women to exercise and participate in some sports.[5] Characteristically, any mention of unresolved issues meets with the response "in ten years." Even more importantly, the remaining constraints are presented as mostly a matter of individual choice.

More research is needed before one can reach any meaningful conclusions about the lived reality of Arab women's lives. Needless to say, the observations presented here have obvious limitations. The informants come from an elite, privileged group of highly educated young women. Consequently, it is hard to determine to what degree their opinions are representative of the

[5] In 2012, for the first time ever, Qatar sent female athletes to the London Olympic Games. Four women participated in four events: athletics, shooting, swimming and table tennis.

community at large. In general, Qataris are sensitive to criticism and hesitant to speak on record. Among major problems facing Western researchers in the Middle East is not only the scarcity of available data but also the unreliability of surveys or interviews due to language and cultural barriers. There is also the issue of the researcher's bias. In reality, as indicated in the following quotation, one needs to negotiate between two conflicting discourses:

> Arab Development reports tend to underplay the barrier of culture for Arab women. They too easily associate the rising economic empowerment of Arab women with a hoped-for social and political empowerment, and tend to pay lip service to cultural change without acknowledging the cultural forces of patriarchy an Arab woman must overcome in order to rise as a cultural agent. Human rights accounts from the West tend to overplay the restrictions of Arab cultures on women, sometimes going so far as to condemn Arab societies as irremediably patriarchal and revive Western colonial myths. (Al-Malki et al. 235)

To gain true insight into Qatari women's perceptions of their reality we need to hear them answer questions that they themselves will ask.

Concluding Thoughts

Education does not mean secularization and, in any case, secularization does not necessarily mean empowerment of women. However, education definitely opens doors to professional careers and participation in political life. It also enables individuals to interrogate and reinterpret dominant narratives and write their own scripts. In addition to education and affirmative employment practices, Arab women need political power. That goal assumes more gender solidarity. Often those talking about women's rights are attacked by females defending both conservative interpretations of the Koran and what they believe to be their glorified status. If women are divided against themselves or choose ethnicity over gender, they are complicit in gender discrimination.

Arab feminists are wary of talking about the polarity of tradition and modernity. They do not believe that such a distinction is useful or neutral; they claim that the opposite is true:

> It is oversimplistic to think that modernity and globalization are always women-friendly progressive forces and that tradition implies holding women back. Alexander and Hawkesworth's anthology contends that the tidy division of the world into "the modern" and "the traditional" (aka "the backward) is a division that serves the interests of modern champions of globalization (mainly the US and European governments). Yet this tidy division is neither a tidy nor a hard distinction. (Al-Malki et al. 246)

Looking both West and East, Qatari women seem to opt for gender equality within the framework of a benevolent theocratic patriarchy. In the eyes of many young Qataris, this approach avoids setting up painful dichotomies and promises a smooth path to empowerment.

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NARRATIVES OF ARAB ANGLOPHONE WOMEN AND THE ARTICULATION OF A MAJOR DISCOURSE IN A MINOR LITERATURE

ABSTRACT: "It is important to stress that a variety of positions with respect to feminism, nation, religion and identity are to be found in Anglophone Arab women's writings. This being the case, it is doubtful whether, in discussing this literary production, much mileage is to be extracted from over emphasis of the notion of its being a conduit of 'Third World subaltern women.'" (Nash 35) Building on Geoffrey Nash's statement and reflecting on Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of minor literature and Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderland(s)*, we will discuss in this paper how the writings of Arab Anglophone women are specific minor and borderland narratives within minor literature(s) through a tentative (re)localization of Arab women's English literature into distinct and various categories. By referring to various bestselling English works produced by Arab British and Arab American women authors, our aim is to establish a new taxonomy that may fit the specificity of these works.

KEY WORDS: Arab Anglophone literature, Arab Anglophone women's narratives, minor literature, de-territorialization, re-territorialization, Diaspora, home, cultural translation.

Introduction

This paper aims to (re-)locate narratives produced in English by women authors who are Arab British/American immigrants or daughters of early Arab British/American immigrants, for those

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narratives are now widely recognized by Western critics and are of interest to many academics and researchers.[1] Indeed, the last few decades have been marked by a significant increase of interest in literary works produced in foreign languages by Arab male and female writers who are described either as *Anglophone* or *hybrid*.[2] Anglophone Arab female writers outnumber male writers.[3] They are either academics and/or intellectuals who migrated to Britain or USA and decided to write in English, or British/American writers who are daughters of the early twentieth century Arab immigrants who settled mainly in the US, and whose mother tongue is English. Interestingly, literary works written by Arab Anglophone women writers–mainly novels and short stories–have brought more recognition and visibility to the Arab Woman whose identity is perceived by the Western readership as being different, peculiar, complex, and mosaic because of her portrayal in the media and in the books of early orientalists.

Certainly, Anglophone Arabic literature, that is, a literature conceived and executed in English by writers of Arabic background, is qualitatively different from Arabic literature and Arabic literature translated into English (Nash 11). This trend of Arabic literature is to be considered as an influence on contemporary international literatures, in particular on the postcolonial, with its theorization of intercultural relations by

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[1] For example, Dr Lindsey Moore (University of Lancaster), Dr Geoffrey Nash (University of Sunderland), Prof Hoda Elsadda (University of Manchester), Dr Anastasia Valassopoulos (University of Manchester), Dr Dalia Mostafa (University of Manchester), Dr Michelle Obeid (University of Manchester), Wail Hassan (University of Illinois), Dr Claire Chambers (University of York), Dr Lindsey Moore (University of Lancaster),and others.

[2] The concepts of cultural hybridity and hybridization that were popularized by Homi Bhabha in the 1990s are widely used in anthropological and cultural studies circles to stand for the process by which cultures around the world adopt a certain degree of homogenized global culture while clinging to aspects of their own traditional culture. The result is a mixture, or hybrid. Hyphenation is also a term used to describe the process whereby young generations of immigrants give birth to ethnic minorities whose hyphen joins two sides of their identities as is the case of Arab American second and third generations.

[3] Female authors who are Arab British include Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, Layla Elalami, Betoul Elkhedir, Leila Aboulela and others. Arab American female writers include Mohja Kahf, Diana Abujaber, Layla Elmaleh, Naomi Shehab Nye amongst others. These women have gained literary recognition for their works which created certain cultural and literary bridges between divergent spaces, cultures and peoples as is the case for Soueif's prominent novel, *The Map of Love*.

reference to the impact of colonialism and imperialism on non-Western literatures. The transnational aspect of Anglophone Arabic literature highlights the impact and the effects of globalization. Narratives produced by this category of Arab women writers have often been classified under the labels of postcolonial, feminist, non-native, hybrid or Anglophone literary discourse. It is assumed that, compared with the literature in French produced by North African writers (Algerian, Tunisian or Moroccan) or even Lebanese writers, the list of writings produced by Arabs (mainly from the Middle East) in English was, on the whole, unimpressive. This view has been challenged by an increasing number of English-language works by Arab writers, written mainly by women such as Ahdaf Soueif, Leila Aboulela, Soraya Antonius, Fadia Faqir, and others. Recently, there has been a significant growing interest in these works. More courses are now devoted to Arab Anglophone writings in western universities, many books[4] record and analyze these works and conferences take place which focus on the particularity of this discourse[5].

However, what has often been problematic is which literary framework best fits these narratives and how to categorize this hybrid/blend of English and Arabic literature. Attempting to answer these questions, a primary issue in our research paper is to give a more specific categorization to Arab Anglophone women's narratives while taking into consideration that these writings are widely divergent because of the political, cultural and religious non-homogeneity of the Arab world itself. We believe that a common commitment to their *Arab-ness* and cultural identity must be shared among most—if not all—Arab Anglophone women writers whether they are Arab Americans, Arab British or *Anglicized* Arab female intellectuals. In the following sections, we will present our argument that these narratives are more likely to be considered as minor literature. We examine a set of examples of novels and works produced by the most read Arab Anglophone women writers.

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[4] The British academic Geoffrey Nash alone has produced four books devoted to Arab Anglophone literature.

[5] An example is the one-day interdisciplinary workshop on the works of Arab women writers in diaspora held on December 10th, 2009 under the title of "Arab Women Writers in Diaspora: Horizons of Dialogue" and which was organized by Dr. Youcef Awad, a currently senior lecturer in Amman University, Jordan.

Minor Narratives but a Major Discourse

The academic Wail Hassan (2011) has analysed immigrant narratives expressed in the writings of Arab American and Arab British writers. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of minor literature (1986) is also useful as it suggests that Kafka's work—and thus the work of non-natives or immigrants—is a rhizome.[6] The expression of this work does not crystalize into a unifying form; instead it proliferates along different lines of growth. Such work resembles crabgrass, a bewildering multiplicity of stems and roots which can cross at any point to form a variety of possible connections (Deleuze and Guattari 14).

Deleuze and Guattari's theory simply traces the figures of immigrants who stand between the culture of origin and that of the *adoptive* country. Immigrants are equipped with first-hand knowledge of both cultures and they assume the role of mediators, interpreters, cultural translators or a double-sight observer of the two cultural entities. This is very much true to most Arab Anglophone (British or American) women authors– Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, Laila Lalami and Leila Aboulela and others as British Arabs; Naomi Shehab Nye, Layla Halabi, Susan Muaddi Darradj and Diana Abou Jaber and others as Arab Americans—though differences exist.

In this regard, and following the same line of Hassan, we assert that Arab Anglophone writings, as immigrant literature, fall primarily into the category of minor literatures, because a minor literature does not come from a minor language, but it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language as it is in the case of English writings produced by Arab immigrants or

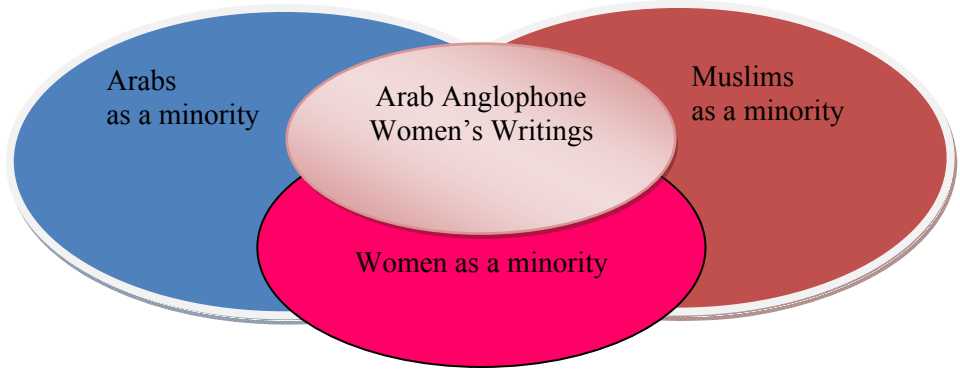
[6] With the metaphor of rhizome and the *proliferation of different lines of growth*, the authors refer to a linguistic, a cultural and an ideological multiplicity shared by most minority narratives. As for the linguistic feature, we have what we call the blending of languages or the code switching by which authors express their linguistic specificity of mastering different mother tongues–English and Arabic for Arab Americans and Arab British writers. In terms of cultural multiplicity, immigrant narratives often exhibit divergent cultures, notably the home-country's culture and the hosting country's culture. Ideologically specific, minor narratives do not side with one ideology, neither the one of the mainstream culture nor that of the back home culture, but they side with what they perceive from the margin, i.e. their own perception of the world which is double-voiced as is the case of American Palestinians who reject both the policy of the US and that of the Palestinian authority, for they see both as a betrayal of the Palestinian Cause.

Americans and/or British citizens of Arabic descent that share the characteristics of minority literatures. Such literatures, for Deleuze and Guattari, have three main characteristics:

1) the deterritorialization of language,
2) the connection of the individual to a political immediacy,
3) the collective assemblage of enunciation.

Based on this perspective, we argue that Arab Anglophone writings and the writings of women in particular, may be categorized as minor and/or minority literature. Although contemporary Arab women's writings are divergent, as their authors belong to different communities, we believe that the literary texts produced by hybrid and hyphenated Arab Anglophone women authors converge, and the differences work to a common commitment vis-à-vis the nation, the home, culture, religion and, above all, gender.

Attributing the label of minor literature to the writings of Arab Anglophone women emerges from a linguistic and cultural perspective. English, the major language, in the hands of these writers–Faqir, Soueif, Halabi, Kahf, Aboulela, Nye and all Arab and/or Muslim Anglophone women authors–has been de-territorialized and metamorphosed to meet the cultural specificity of Arab women as writers who traverse worlds, cultures and languages. The following chart displays a three-fold minority aspect that characterizes Arab Anglophone women's writings:



The chart above displays how Arab Anglophone women's writings are located at the meeting point of three minorities: Arabs, Muslims (taking into consideration that Arabs are Muslims and non-Muslims) and women. Thus, our focus is on the fact that this trend is a three-dimensional minor literature and more concrete examples are going to be given in the following sections.

The Specificity(ies) of Arab Anglophone Women's Writings

As suggested by Geoffrey Nash (2007) in his analytical book devoted to Anglophone Arab literature, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*, contemporary Anglophone Arab writers use English rather than Arabic as the language for their fiction for personal preference, to avoid cultural restrictions and censorship, and to optimize exposure. Some Anglo-Arab writers were embedded within an English-speaking environment either in their country of origin or in Britain/the United States of America, and this made English virtually a native language, so it is natural that they would choose to write in English. Others, especially those for whom Arabic is their first language but who acquired English through the medium of education at a relatively late stage, may make a considered choice of English, aware that there will be both losses and gains, acceptance and rejection. Given the various reasons behind Anglophone Arab writers' choice of English for their literary expression, we suppose that the literary discourse of each group of these writers is different.

Though "multicoloured" and distinct, in terms of themes and literary discourse, works by this group of writers contribute to the emergence of an independent literature that is neither Arabic nor English, but is linguistically and culturally hybrid, discursively multidimensional and literarily heterogeneous. The best example are novels like Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) where one grasps a meeting of different cultures–the Sudanese and the Scottish–different linguistic repertoires as in "Among the cacti, Rae had queried 'Tariq?', stressing the q. She answered 'yes, it's written with a qaf but we pronounce the qaf as a g back home" (6); in this quote, we perceive a cultural exploration of the *Other* embedded in a linguistic query: Sammar, the Sudanese immigrant who works as a translator, translates a culture and a language to Rae, the Scottish Western professor of Middle Eastern and Postcolonial studies, who wants to explore Sammar's linguistic otherness and hybridity. *The Translator* represents Rae and Sammar as products of cross-cultural encounters as described by Duncan McLean. *The Translator* is a subtle investigation into the meaning of exile and home, doubt and faith, loss and love. The story it tells is sometimes sad, often troubled and troubling, but moves towards a conclusion that's unforced, affirmative and finally very moving.

Aboulela's writing is always beautifully observed, her voice one of restrained lyricism: she is a writer of rare and original talent.[7]

The other issue that is specific to this trend is the audience. In fact, by excluding the relatively small bilingual readership who is able to read in English and Arabic, this group of writers must assume an audience predominantly Anglo-American or European in their cultural perspective; this may lead to more thematic variation. Choosing to address such a readership necessitates what we may describe as a cultural translation that brings about problems inherent in trying to present an alien culture to the globally dominant one, i.e. the Arabic culture to the Western one.

In this connection, literary texts produced by women of *Arabic* decent in foreign languages, notably English and French, have recently become significant for scholars and academics. These scholars noticed an important new hybrid literary phenomenon in the writings of Arab Anglophone women. These texts also present other dimensions in the representation of the *Arab* Woman both in the West and back home in the *Arab* world. Such texts that fuse foreign linguistic background with *Arabic* cultural context also contributed to the reshaping of bridges of cross-cultural and trans-cultural dialogue away from political, geopolitical and socio-economic arenas.

Choosing to write in a foreign language like English is, for Anglophone women writers of Arabic decent, either a deliberate choice that satisfies their literary needs or a natural choice as English is for some writers a mother tongue. As for the former, "many Arab Anglophone writers have also written literature, essays, or academic studies in Arabic, indicating that writing in English is not a repudiation, but a choice offered by the individual writer's background and sensibility, and reinforced by her study of the language and her familiarity with English literature" (F. Ghazoul 302). Ahdaf Soueif, for instance, has produced fiction and non-fiction books and essays both in English and in Arabic. *Aisha* (1983) is her first English collection of short stories. Soueif also writes political commentaries and articles in the Arabic newspaper *Alahram*.

Ahdaf Soueif's novels and short stories have carved out an important space on the stage of world literature. Though she grew up in Egypt, Soueif has also lived in Britain, including during part of her childhood, and wrote her doctorate at the University of

[7] Reference: http://www.leila-aboulela.com/books/the-translator/reviews/

Lancaster. As a matter of fact, Soueif's social, educational and political background make her posit her consciousness at the very crossroads of different generations and divergent cultures. Hechmi Trabelsi published "Transcultural Writing: Ahdaf Soueif's *Aisha* as a Case Study" (2003) which considered Soueif's choice of writing in English. Ahdaf Soueif seems to have no personal history of opposition to or rejection of English. She is simply more at ease with English, the language of her professional training, "the first language [she] read in. "As a woman of two worlds, she is very much "the product of a wrenched history: an Egyptian living in England and writing about Egypt in English," yet she is aware of her paradoxical situation, "conscious of the depth of Arabic, where a word can have certain nuances of which [she] is not aware" (Wassef). She does see the specific danger of being at present the only Egyptian woman writing in English, a foreign language. Worse still, as her detractors have often argued, she wrote (in English) about sex: her first novel, *In the Eye of the Sun*, was originally banned in the Arab world for its portrayal of sexuality. But there is no false apology for not writing in Arabic; as she stated in a 1999 interview, "It is very difficult to explain that this was not a choice, that you work with the tools that are best for you . . . I don't know why, but the fact is that I write better in English than I do in Arabic" (Brooks).

In Soueif's novels and short stories—as in *The Map of Love* and *Sandpiper*—we do notice a certain *in-betweeness*, namely a borderland that separates and gathers at the same time two worlds, two cultures, two languages and above all two consciousnesses; all are different or opposing to one another, yet this very place is where a new mestiza, to use Gloria Anzaldua's word, and Soueif, as such, has transformed into a *nepantela* that in-between state, a third space in which people live. In fact, Anzaldua's conceptualization of borderlands and in-between spaces is very much found in Soueif's writings.

The Mexican American scholar and feminist, Gloria Anzaldua, has brought to the area of cultural studies a new conception of how people of two cultures, culturally hybrid after Bhabha, perceive their geographical and psychological space. Anzaldúa was working on a variety of interlinked theories, including a "geography of selves" Anzaldua states "I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses" (Anzaldúa 4). Likewise, A. Soueif is a cultural mediator between

two worlds: Britain and Egypt, the ex-colonizer and the ex-colonized, the West and the East. In *The Map of Love*, for instance, the main character Amal El-ghamrawi, represents a borderland woman who brings closer the borders of generations, geographies and cultures. For Anzaldua, living between cultures results in 'seeing' double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent. Removed from that culture's centre, one glimpses the sea in which she or he has been immersed but to which they were oblivious, no longer seeing the world the way they were acculturated to see it.

Yousuf Awad, from Jordan, has submitted a whole PhD thesis, entitled *Cartographies of Identities: Resistance, Diaspora, and Trans-cultural Dialogue in the Works of Arab British and Arab American Women Writers* (2011), in which he aimed at exploring the controversy that stems out of the differences existing between Arab British and Arab American women writers. He argues that there is a tendency among Arab British women novelists to foreground and advocate trans-cultural dialogue and cross-ethnic identification strategies in a more pronounced approach than their Arab American counterparts who tend, in turn, to employ literary strategies to resist stereotypes and misconceptions about Arab communities in American popular culture. He also argues that these differences result from the diverse racialized Arab immigration and settlement patterns on both sides of the Atlantic (Awad 6).

Amal Talaat Abdelrazek has published a significant book entitled *Contemporary Arab American Women Writers: Hyphenated Identities and Border Crossings*. This book explores what a hyphenated identity of an Arab American woman is. This work adds an important clarification vis-à-vis the significance of the concept "hyphenated identity" used to refer to Arab American writers and "hybrid identity" to refer rather to Arab British writers within the context of our research. We deduce that a conceptual distinction must be given to different groups belonging to the major trend of Anglophone Arab writers: *hyphenated* to Arab American writers, and *hybrid* to Arab British writers. This distinction is highlighted in the way each group would represent their identity through writings differently and/or similarly, and then it brings a crucial dimension for the categorization of Anglophone Arab women's narratives belonging to these two

subgroups. It is argued that the different identities strongly influence mainly the thematics of the writings of Anglophone Arab women writers, their conception of their "home" / "home-country," and the Diasporic experience.

The precarious—yet different—positions Arabs occupy in ethnic and racial discourses in Britain and the US influence Arab Anglophone women writers living in Britain and in the US. They perceive and re-identify their *home* and *home-country* differently. They also see their *identity* differently and distinctively. The vision of home specific to these diasporic writers is rooted in the specificity of their hybrid and/or hyphenated identity. As women, as fiction writers and as Arabs, Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, Leila Aboulela, Diana Abu Jaber, Naomi Shehab Nye, and others, found a space in their narratives to explore their own depiction of *home*. Either they re-shape the *home* they left behind as grown-up citizens with a critical insight (as in the case of most British Arab female writers) or, if born in the West, they evoke *home*, often with nostalgia, at a later stage of their lives (as in the case of Arab female writers).

Through the various works of literature—whether poetry, novels, short stories and even drama—produced by Arab Anglophone women, we read diverse perceptions of *home* as being identified differently by Arab women writers who write in English. Because the word "home" immediately recalls the idea of the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter and comfort, the perception of home in the writings of Arab Anglophone women writers relies on their conceptualization of their *home*–homeland, home-country or the nation and the place they are supposed to (originally) belong to–and is twofold as it moves along two main axes:

– The axis of the home they have willingly or unwillingly been displaced from, and then seek to change and see differently;

– And the axis of the home to which they are supposed to originally belong to, and then imaginarily represent with nostalgia.

In this respect, we need to stress that the heterogeneity of the literature produced by Arab women writers in Diaspora arises from the different politics of location specific to two distinct ethnic communities—Arab British and Arab American—as Arab immigration and settlement patterns in Britain and the US are quite historically divergent. As a matter of fact, the literature produced by Arab British writers must be of a different cultural expression than that produced by contemporary Arab American

writers. In the words of Layla Almaleh, Arab British literature is mostly female, feminist, diasporic in awareness, and political in character (Almaleh 13), while Steven Salaita (2007) argues, discussing Arab American literature, that Anglophone Arabs are no less Arabs than anybody else—they merely carry different cultural values as a result of their different social circumstances.

To focus on Arab British women writers, we intend thereby to deal with particular narratives produced by Arab authors who live in Britain (or between Britain and the Arab world) or who are of a mixed Arab and British marriage. Whereas, by focusing on Arab American women authors, we deal with American-born citizens who are of Arab origin. The two groups of writers represent two different minority groups, but with a convergent *home*—the Middle East—and common cultural identity, be it that of Arab origins.

Behind this classification lies an assertion that Anglophone Arab women writers hold a specific view of their *home*, the adoptive culture, their cultural identity and how to bring closer the two cultures; yet this view depends on their politics of location. For instance, in Faqir's *My Name is Salma*, the story is set between the Middle East and Britain. It investigates immigration to a Western country—Britain—not only as a new theme in terms of the central character Salma who is an unskilled Bedouin woman, but also in terms of raising questions about the future of Arabs who live in Britain. Salma is cut off from her country of origin and arrives in Britain for a permanent stay; as such, the novel portrays conflicts of forced dislocation, integration, assimilation, racism and the settlement experience. Salma is constantly dislocated to a new place, that is, a new home, but now it is for a permanent stay in England, a completely different country that seems to be different in culture and religion.

It is in Exeter, in a new home (-land), that Salma goes through a process of forming a new identity, with a new name 'Sally Asher' and a new language with which she fuses Arabic, while she is still haunted by past experiences echoing from Hima, her home-village. Undertaking a brutal process of acculturation,[8] Salma's

[8] Acculturation is a process in which members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs and behaviors of another group; it also refers to assimilation, and assimilation of one cultural group into another may be evidenced by changes in language preference, adoption of common attitudes and values, members hip in common social groups and institutions, and loss of separate political or ethnic identification.

identity is changeable to the point of fragmentation. “A few years ago, I had tasted my first fish and chips, but my mountainous Arab stomach could not digest the fat . . . Salma resisted, but Sally must adapt” (Faqir 9) These lines, quoted from the first chapter of the novel, sum up a long process of de-territorialization, dislocation, acculturation and assimilation that the Bedouin Arab woman victim Salma goes through.

On the other side of the Atlantic, we see Arab American women writers tending to employ literary strategies to subvert stereotypes commonly associated with Arabs in the US. They also tend to look closely at the Arab community from within in order to explore some of the problems that Arab Americans encounter. The re-representation of Arab communities as an important minority in American society is central to the works produced by Arab American authors.

For instance, The Arab American novelist Diana Abu Jaber has dealt with conflicting messages about her Arab identity. Abu Jaber writes about Arab American life, and about characters who are from Iraq and Jordan as is the case with *Crescent* (2003) that is set in Los Angeles and features two major characters with Iraqi roots. The major characters in *Crescent* include Hanif Al Eyad. He's an erudite Iraqi professor in Los Angeles, educated at Georgetown, who has religiously lapsed but still considers himself a devout Muslim and is endowed with good looks and sex appeal. Al Eyad was forced to flee from Saddam Hussein’s reign, but his life on the run is only a small backdrop to the first half of the story as his dislocation and malaise will continue in the Diaspora whilst being de-territorialized. However, Nadia’s restaurant is the place where a lot of minorities and ethnic groups gather to re-territorialize their lost cultural traits, particularly through food, and it is there that Hanif may be re-territorialized and re-integrated too.

Crescent (2003) engages with a problem that faces Arab American communities, namely, stereotyping. *Crescent* explores the life of the intellectual in Diaspora. Among other themes, it attempts to give an insight into the daily issues that an exile encounters. Abu Jaber throws light on the problems of displacement, exile and Diaspora in the present global scene. Lorraine Mercer and Linda Strom, for instance, argue that ‘food functions as a complex language for communicating love, memory

and exile' in *Crescent*.[9] The two protagonists of the novel, the Iraqi American Sirine and the Iraqi exiled lecturer Hanif represent two different experiences of displacement: cultural exile vs. political exile.

Arab Muslim English Writings: a Minor Trend Within Minor Arab Anglophone Narratives

Indeed, Anglophone Arab literature, mainly the one produced by women, is a promising field of literary, cultural and discursive research, not only because it is a minority literature but also because it represents an important bridge of communication between the West and the Arab/Muslim world in an era during which tension is growing between the two sides. Due to their cultural blending and linguistic tapestry, these writings offer Western readers an authentic portrayal of the Arab world, and Arab Muslim woman, away from a false representation transmitted to them through manipulated media channels. The Arab American Mohja Kahf has produced novels and poetry that exhibits to her American compatriots her Muslim identity. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* is beautifully written and features an exuberant cast of characters. It charts the spiritual and social landscape of Muslims in middle America, from five daily prayers to the Indy 500 car race.

The novel is challenging to both the mainstream American community and the Arab American Muslim community. The cover depicts a beautiful Muslim American girl wearing a scarf but also wearing jeans. The novel re-counts events of Khadra Shamy's life in America. The protagonist is the daughter of Syrian immigrants to Indianapolis, whose parents become heavily involved with the Da'wah Centre. The first half of the book is about Khadra growing up in America–in the first few years of elementary school, of dealing with issues like "pig in candy corn," wearing hijab for the first time and dealing with the abuse of racist neighbours. The novel not only deals with issues that disturb the mainstream American major community like racism and hijab, but it also and

[9] Lorraine Mercer and Linda Strom, 'Counter Narratives: Cooking Up Stories of Love and Loss in Naomi Shihab Nye's Poetry and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*', *MELUS*, 32 (2007), 33-46 (p. 33).

particularly exhibits those issues that bother mainly conservative Arabs and/or Muslims like abortion, art and music.

The other Muslim writer who is widely recognized and accepted by Western readers is Leila Aboulela whose fiction depicts the experience of practicing Muslims in Britain, particularly in the cosmopolitan city of London. This depiction is essentially from an Islamic worldview that is shaped by the immigrant and minority status of British Muslims. Because the fiction inspired by Islam is unusual and often rejected by Westerners and in the English tradition that has been mystical, secular or Christian, Aboulela's works have challenged not only the English literary tradition that has been so many times Islamophobic,[10] but also Modern Arabic literature that has been for many decades predominantly secular.[11] In fact, distinctively minor within a minor literature, Aboulela's Muslim fiction represents a minor tradition in relation to Arabic, American and British literatures as it develops new dimensions to global Muslim discourse that is a major religious discourse. In *Minaret* (2005), the protagonist Najwa joins a wider Muslim community in the central mosque to make an end to her displacement and disintegration into rich Arab immigrant families and/or Christian British mainstream culture. In relation to the Scottish identity–as evidenced in Aboulela's essay "Barbie in the Mosque" (180) or in *The Translator* (1999), we see that her narratives attempt to answer distinct and crucial questions regarding the Muslim identity in the West and the Scottish identity in Britain through a portrayal of a complex process of de-territorialization and dislocation experienced by most of her characters, particularly Najwa in *Minaret* who finds a sense of re-territorialization when she wears the scarf, and finds refuge in the purity of her faith.

However, Aboulela's veiled character is invisible to most eyes, especially to the rich families whose houses she cleans. Exiled to London after years of high class life back home in Sudan, Najwa is forced to move into a long process of dislocation and invisibility

[10] *Those In Peril* (2011) by the British novelist Wilbur Smith is such an example. It is a simplistic story about a woman who is the owner of an oil company. The hero is a security man and the first victim is the heroine's daughter who is kidnapped and held for ransom, tortured and raped. And all this is done by "Muslim" pirates as part of an obscure vendetta against the hero and heroine.

[11] It is the case of most prominent Arab writers: Naguib Mahfouz, Nizar Qabani, Mahmoud Darwish, Houda Barakat, Ahlam Mostaghanemi and others.

even when she feels the spiritual peace and stability that she finds only in Regent Park's mosque with her Muslim friends of different races. In this respect, we consider that *Minaret* is a story of how devout Muslim women can find another chance at life even when being rejected, exiled, displaced or de-territorialized. This can be seen as another type of the re-territorialization process described by Deleuze and Guattari. Aboulela explained her commitment to Muslim narratives in an interview. She indicated that she is interested in writing about the state of mind and feelings of a Muslim who has faith. (Aboulela, *Minaret*).

Conclusion(s)

English literary works produced by contemporary Arab women writers surpass the post-coloniality attributed to them by most critics. The multiplicity within these works originates in the specificity of their writers. They "are no less Arabs than anybody else—they merely carry different cultural values as a result of their different social circumstances" (S. Salaita 35). The particularity of these women is not only that they write in a universal language—English, and that most of them are women of two worlds—the mother country and the Diaspora, but also that they may find more liberty in dealing with controversial issues and taboo themes when writing in English. Consequently, their English writings give a vivid and authentic representation of the Arab world with its cultural, religious and political specificity, and they are likely to succeed in constructing cross-cultural bridges between the West and the Arab world.

In fact, what is special to these works is the fact that they are written by women who, in different ways, feel displaced but are located at the very contact zone of many cultures. It is argued that these characteristics bring an important element of distinctiveness and individuality to English Arab women's writings. Through their writings, Arab Anglophone writers, hyphenated or hybrid, defy any categorization and speak articulately to the diversity of Arab women wherever they are—to their ideas, desires, emotions and strategies for survival.

In this regard, it should be mentioned that Anglophone Arab women's narratives grew out of a different context than that of their Francophone compatriots. This difference originates in the

divergent colonial policy practiced by France and Britain. As for France, it exercised a policy of cultural assimilation and simply tried to "francophy" its territories, expending great effort to repress the cultural specificity of dominated peoples. Britain, due to a racist assumption denying that Arabs and other colonized peoples could ever be part of the British *cultural fabric*, eschewed such assimilation. As a matter of fact, Arab women's francophone literature is generally produced by women writers who only write in French, as they are familiar only with colloquial Arabic, not standard classical Arabic. On the other hand, Arab women's Anglophone literature is produced by women writers who are generally well-acquainted with standard Arabic, and they have other reasons for writing in English, like having grown up in areas or having studies in institutions dominated by English, or simply having migrated to English-speaking countries such as the Egyptian Ahdaf Soueif, the Palestinian Soraya Antonius, the Sudanese Leila Abulela or the Jordanian Fadia Faqir.

We believe that the self-identification of Arab British and/or Arab American writers is important. Their gender, their ability to manipulate different cultural traits and amalgamate them into one, and, for some, bilingualism—have given rise to specific literary writings with special thematics, special characters, special literary techniques, and a special doubled perception of contemporary life. These writers are especially sensitive to the de-territorialization / re-territorialization internalized by immigrants who feel displaced and dislocated in the Diaspora. Therefore, it is high time literary critics thought of Arab Anglophone women's narratives as a new minor literature that is articulated in a major language—English—and as an international discourse particular to Arab Anglophone women writers in order to set out new literary elements that can add more detail to Sabry Hafez's *feminist literary typology,*[12] namely the Arab Anglophone women's writings' discursive and genre typology.

[12] In an article entitled "Women's Narrative in Modern Arabic Literature" published on NITTLE Arab World Project website, Sabry Hafez, the author of *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*, offered a significant gender-based typology of Arab women's literary writings. This typology of the development of feminist awareness in the Arab world posits a homological relationship between changes in class background of the writers and their perception of national identity. Ref. http://acc.teachmideast.org/texts.php?module_id=7&reading_id=37

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'IN DRAG': PERFORMATIVITY AND AUTHENTICITY IN ZADIE SMITH'S *NW*

ABSTRACT: Zadie Smith's latest novel, *NW*, presents a multiverse in which multiplicity is driven into homogeneization by the forces of those dominant discourses that attempt to suppress the category of the "Other." This paper focuses on the development of the two female protagonists. Their opposing attitudes towards motherhood, together with their confrontation with their origins, bring to the fore the performativity found in the discourses of gender, sexuality, class, and race. Thus, this paper will explore authenticity and performativity in a contemporary context, where patriarchal and neocolonial discourses still apply.

KEY WORDS: Authenticity; performativity; neocolonialism; intersectionality.

Introduction

Postmodernism and the more recent focus on hybrid and multiple identities have celebrated decentred subjects who are always in flux. Although this conception of the subject has influenced various theoretical fields, it is in the feminist and postcolonial agendas that these discourses on multiracial contexts can be felt more strongly. Different theories derived from these fields have, in turn, raised questions on originality and the impossibility of conceiving the subject as whole and authentic. This has been an ongoing debate in postcolonial theory, which our increasingly globalised world has only encouraged. In the case of postcolonial and migrant subjects, the idea of a split

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identity has been the cause of a schizophrenic nature, as well as the source of a heightened perspective that allows them to partake of various cultures at the same time. However, this migrants' split identity has raised scepticism among some scholars. Linda Hutcheon remarked that "the postmodern rejection of the coherent subject is something of a "luxury," given the need of the majority of people from post-colonial countries to affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity" (qtd. in Davies and Sinfield 45). On the other hand, from a multicultural and hybrid perspective, the postcolonial or diasporic subjects' fragmented identity has usually been regarded, and even celebrated, since it may provide an advantageous perspective on reality. Other critics, such as Lawrence Driscoll, have warned against the almost excessive and systematic "idealisation of contemporary British literature and culture as a space of fluid, flexible decentered subjects" (1). Indeed, I would agree that there has been an idealisation of fragmentation, as well as an idealisation, and misunderstanding, of the concept of multiculturalism. The idea of multiculturalism that has prevailed, as Trinh T. Minh-ha argued, "doesn't get us very far" because, more often than not, it is still understood as difference between cultures, and not within the same culture or self (qtd. in Braidotti 12).

Contrary to this celebration of difference enhanced by multiculturalism and fragmentation, globalisation may potentially increase the search for sameness and the need to assert an authentic identity. Victor J. Cheng questions the contemporary search for authenticity in a global world where everything and everybody tends towards sameness. Cheng quotes Regina Bendix, who contends that "behind the assiduous documentation and defense of the authentic lies an unarticulated anxiety of losing the subject" (5). In the case of migrant or diasporic subjects, this anxiety is the result of a struggle between integration and the maintenance of one's origins. However, the process of integration has quite often been (mis)understood as assimilation. In fact, some critics have testified to an increase of assimilatory discourses. Liz Fekete has observed this tendency, and maintains that the pursuit of sameness and authentic national identities arises from governmental institutions whose policies depart from "multiculturalism towards monoculturalism and cultural homogeneisation" (18). Although multiculturalism is still very much present in many cultural and literary contexts, it is certain that many narratives display the effect of assimilatory practices

and the migrants' anxiety derived from the struggle to maintain balanced hybrid identities that integrate various cultures without actually developing a schizophrenic subjectivity resulting from the internalization of those discourses that reject difference and enforce sameness.

Similarly, in the last decades, many feminist theories have criticised those essentialist discourses which ascribed inherent qualities to the category of woman and denied woman's multiple subjectivities, thus offering a monolithic idea of womanhood. Instead, recent theories have favoured an understanding of female subjectivity as multiple. Rosi Braidotti's metaphor of the nomad and nomadism rejects essentialism and conceives female subjectivity as always travelling, always in the process of becoming. Braidotti refersto Donna Haraway's theory so as to specify that nomadism should not be understood as "fluidity without borders but rather [as] an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries" (36). More recently, Moya Lloyd has defined this vision of female identity as "subject-in-process," that which is "inessential and open to transformation" (1). Lloyd, who revises a large extent of feminist theory in her study of identity politics, draws from Rosi Braidotti and others, such as Inderpal Grewal, Judith Butler, Diana Fuss, Teresa de Lauretis, Kathy E. Fergurson, and Chantal Mouffe, to argue in favour of the need to understand the subject as "ambivalent, in-process, indeterminate, and terminally open to reinscription" (27) and thus develop feminist political theories which truly consider multiplicity. Moreover, Lloyd places special emphasis on Chantal Mouffe's argument that it is the split and multiplicity attributed to the subject that explicitly allow for politicisation (20). Rosi Braidotti for her part highlights Deleuze and Guattari's warning against the increasing fragmentation that comes with a postmodern understanding of the subject, since this may lead to what they call "micro-fascism" at a local level (5). In addition, Braidotti points to Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's idea of "scattered hegemonies," which consider those aggressions at a more global level (5).

Recent feminist theories have also focused on the intersection of race, class, and gender as the categories or discourses that form, and oppress, female subjectivity. Gender itself has come to be understood as the category which more clearly exhibits the intersection of different forms of oppression. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, considers that "the subject is conceived as

engendered in race, class and sexual relations" (qtd. in Lloyd 24). Another way of approaching these discourses has been what Elizabeth Spelman has defined as "ampersand thinking." According to Spelman, "ampersand thinking handles race, class, sexual orientation and gender conceptually, as if these factors are separate atomic particles, metaphorically speaking, which bump into one another accidentally from time to time and occasionally stick together" (qtd. in Lloyd, 45). Nonetheless, Richa Nagar has pointed out that "reiterations of the trinity of class, gender, and race sparked criticisms in several quarters for their lack of engagement with questions of ableism and heterosexism" (33). Furthermore, the hierarchization of the various types of oppression to which women have been subjected has been widely criticised. Pratibha Parmar has pointed out that "such scaling has not only been destructive, but divisive and immobilizing" (107). Therefore, the concept of intersectionality should not only be broadened, but it should also consider all these factors operating at the same time. Braidotti's figure of the nomad is understood in such terms. She specifies that "axes of differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, [and that] the notion of nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once" (4). For migrant women, patriarchal and colonial discourses have been said to combine in such a way that they exert what has been termed as "double colonization" (McLeod 175). The theory of double colonization incorporates the interconnected occurrence of the axes of differentiation that Braidotti considered. Thus, the metaphor of colonization may be used to analyse the reality of the multiple oppressive discourses that play some role in the formation of female subjectivities.

On the Rejection of Origins and Impossible Selves

Many characters in Zadie Smith's novels show a split personality which is the result of migration and this split can still be acutely perceived in the second and third generations. Even though the younger characters are very much established within the host cultures, by no means are their identities stable. Zadie Smith's first novel, *White Teeth*, as well as her persona, were classified as representative of a multicultural society at the beginning of the new millennium. However, the celebration of

multiculturalism in *White Teeth* is rendered problematic and burdensome, since what comes to the fore is the pain suffered by different generations of migrants as they try to integrate into the host culture, and the development of a double consciousness that only the character of Irie Jones seems to be able to balance. I agree with Dominic Head's indication that *White Teeth* is "part celebration, part cautionary tale, [and] an apt summation of the triumphs and the limits of British multiculturalism at the end of the century" (111). It is also in her earliest novel that Smith starts to play with the deconstruction of the idea of a pure or authentic identity, especially when national, racial, or ethnic identities are considered. Indeed, one of the characters of the older generation, Alsana, articulates quite well this argument when she comically states that "it's still easier to find the correct Hoover bag than to find one pure person, one pure faith, on the globe . . . . It's all fairy-tale (Smith, *White Teeth* 236). Smith's novels after *White Teeth* continued to focus on issues of authenticity. *The Autograph Man* (2002) worked with the metaphor of the "original," and *On Beauty* (2005), with class, race, and gender relations. All these issues have persisted in Smith's narrative to date. Before *NW*, her latest novel, came out, the marketing campaign publicised it as a novel about class. While it is certain that the concept of class is central in the novel, race, gender, and sexuality also disclose the interconnection of oppressing discourses present in the formation of subjects currently living under the influence of neocolonial and neoimperialist discourses.

NW narrates the lives of four main characters: Leah, Keisha (who will change her name to Natalie), Nathan, and Felix. These characters share a common working-class origin, localized in the imaginary Caldwell estate in Willesden. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the female protagonists. The novel presents Leah and Natalie in their thirties, struggling with adulthood, and looks retrospectively into their lives, displaying different stages of their identity formation. As will be shown, the interconnection of axes of differentiation and the oppression exerted by the dominant discourses on class, gender, race, and sexuality are very much present in the novel, which shows quite explicitly the constructedness and performativity that they may entail.

The first section of *NW*, "Visitation," narrates Leah's life crisis, which is mostly caused by motherhood, and, I would argue, an unresolved sexuality. However, race also appears to be part of the

conundrum. Zadie Smith argued that she wanted to reverse the Western centre/periphery dualism by marking Leah's whiteness (qtd. in Mullan). In fact, Leah is described as isolated, ashamed, and with a deep feeling of unbelonging, which transfers the feelings that have been often attributed to those on the margins onto somebody allegedly in the centre. Nevertheless, Leah's underprivileged position is mostly the result of class. The narrator explains that when Leah and her husband, Michel, of Algerian origin, are invited to higher class parties

most often at Natalie's house, where she and Michel are invited to provide something like local colour, they look down at their plates . . . letting Natalie tell their stories for them, nodding to confirm points of fact, names, times, places. Offered to the table for general dissection these anecdotes take on their own life, separate, impressive (96).

As a multiracial couple, Leah and Michel represent a multicultural image that is commodified in the novel. Furthermore, they seem to have been colonized by those belonging now to the upper classes, who speak for them, dissect their lives and limit their agency. This description points to the idea defended by the author herself that "colonialism is all about class" (qtd. in Nasta 275). Here, nevertheless, the novel presents a colonialism-in-reverse of sorts, although this is not the only colonizing attitude that Leah encounters.

Leah is subjected to what can be considered to be heteronormative colonization in terms of sexuality and gender. With regard to Leah's sexuality, I would argue that there are episodes in the novel which point towards the suppression of lesbian desires and the acceptance of heterosexuality as an imposed discourse. In the "Visitation" chapter, there are several sections under number "37," as well as the elision of section 37 in the "Host" chapter. The events narrated in those chapters, their misplacement, and even their silencing in "Host," reveal important details of Leah's sexuality. In fact, narratively, they can be read as the unconscious reflection of Leah's sexuality and the potential marginalization of those who do not submit to heteronormativity. The first chapter "37" narrates one of Leah's youthful lesbian relationships with a girl obsessed with the number 37. Leah confesses that "she once was a true love of mine. Now that girl is married, too" (48). The second chapter "37" narrates Leah's third abortion. The third "37" chapter appears to be the speech given

by "The Black Madonna" of Willesden, who seems to ask Leah directly "Did you hope for something else? . . . Who are you? . . . Could things have been differently arranged, in a different order, in a different place?" (82). In the last "37" chapter, Leah confronts a strange coincidence. When picking up some photographs, the pictures of a girl named Shar, a former schoolmate who tried to scam her at the beginning of the novel and with whom Leah has been somehow obsessed, appear in Leah's envelope. After some confusion and rage, the narrator says that Leah "looked and saw what was there. The girl. Her photos. My envelope. . . . Like a riddle in a dream. There is no answer" (109). There are further references, scattered through other chapters, that bring to the fore the fact that Leah still has lesbian desires. In fact, Leah dreams about the possibility of running away with Shar so that they can become "outlaws" (86). Leah seems to be unable to voice her desires, to express what was and is still there. The narrative offers some answers to this riddle, but concentrates more explicitly on Leah's confrontation with motherhood.

Leah is being constantly pressured to become a mother by her own mother, Pauline, and her husband. She is equally pressured by her female colleagues. When being with them, Leah tries to behave as "normal women do" (38). But Leah rejects this image of "normal woman", whereby woman is understood as an essentialist category, and the "institution of motherhood as compulsory for women" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 92). After finding out that she is pregnant, she has her third abortion. She equates becoming a mother to being mature and definite, and thus connects motherhood to the passing of time and death. Moreover, Leah's concerns over reproduction do not end with the abortion. She agrees with her husband to have children. As has just been mentioned, for Leah, having children is only a movement towards death. Consequently, she starts taking the contraceptive pill in secret. Julia Kristeva understands the maternal body in terms of abjection, "as the site of the origin of life and consequently also of the insertion into mortality and death . . . . as both sacred and soiled, holy and hellish; it is attractive and repulsive, all powerful and therefore impossible to live with" (qtd in Braidotti 93). In addition, Nancy Chodorow corroborates that those "behaviors that sabotage fertility and pregnancy . . . meet up with an unconscious belief and commitment with time standing still" (103). Leah's wish for stillness seems to be quite conscious. Leah's rejection of

motherhood may also be analysed as submerged in "fears of losing oneself and one's identity," as Chodorow puts it. (110). However, what aspects of her identity Leah wants to preserve are not clear in the novel. The narrator nevertheless expresses Leah's discomfort with the idea of achieving an apparently fixed identity against her perceived state of endless "becoming" (74). Leah's contradictory attitude in her simultaneous search for stillness and state of becoming, as well as her rejection of the discursive imposition of motherhood, may become the sediments for a potential rejection of those discourses and behaviours which are the effect of hegemonic institutions. Be that as it may, the fact that Leah masks both her sexuality and her non-desire of motherhood excludes any defiance. Yet, Leah's narrative lays bare the persistence of essentialism and the repression of homosexual desires in favour of compulsory heterosexuality.

When describing the abortion episode, the narrator comments how Leah "is ashamed before an imagined nobody who isn't real and yet monitors our thoughts" and how "she reprimands herself" in an attempt to think "the sort of thing normal women think" (65-6). That "imagined nobody" could be identified with what Judith Butler defines as "normative phantasms" (*Bodies that Matter* 4). Leah is ashamed because she does not live up to the standards which have been set by those discourses which she has internalised. Leah does not fit into what is "normal" or, rather, heteronormative. In this section of the novel there is repeated emphasis on the fact that everybody says and does the same things in the same way. Globalization has brought sameness into our current multiverse, one which should have allegedly learnt to accept difference. Susan Hawthorne has explained that "systemic power tends toward the universal and toward the imposition of sameness, homogeneity, monopoly, monotony and monoculturalism" (68). Leah may have succumbed to some of the dictates of systemic power, but the narrative shows her awareness of those processes which aim towards sameness and, in turn, renders them as cultural and/or political constructions. The constructedness of these discourses will be further exposed in the case of Keisha and her metamorphosis into Natalie.

Contrary to Leah, Natalie D'Angelis, née Keisha Blake, does not seem to struggle with motherhood. Nevertheless, the narrator comments that she becomes a mother because she "had no intention of being made ridiculous by failing to do whatever was expected of her" (321). This is but one example of Natalie's

attempts towards assimilation into hegemonic discourses. As a girl, Keisha could only dream about the freedom that having no roots could bring about. This potentially liberating idea, however, is subdued as Keisha falls victim to the confines of assimilation. As a teenager, she considers herself to be a forgery after realising that she is full of inconsistencies and contradictory attitudes, such as her recently awakened sexuality and its repression by religious morality. In a subsection entitled "Surplus value, schizophrenia, adolescence," Keisha recognizes her friend Layla as real in the mirror, but she recognizes herself only as forgery (221). This Lacanian moment of (mis)recognition will deepen Keisha's internal divisions and precipitate further "forgeries," while calling attention to a theory that works around images of wholeness and fragmentation.

When she is at university, Keisha seems to enter yet another symbolic realm, and it is then that she metamorphoses into Natalie, undergoing a deep process of "self-invention" (247). This process of self-invention is provoked by her professional and class ambitions and her need for acceptance within her university circle, where she can only conceive herself as a subject in her new identity as Natalie. Despite Natalie's efforts, the narrator implies that this process of self-invention does not and will not work. After having been at different universities for some time, Leah visits Natalie. When Leah is departing, she confesses to Natalie that "(she is) the only person (she) can be (her)self with." The narrator describes Natalie's pain because she has "no self to be, not with Leah, or anyone" (246). This selfless subject is not the result of a postmodern and poststructuralist conception of subjectivity. This selfless subject results from the influence of political, patriarchal, and neocolonial discourses which silence Natalie's origin as a working-class woman and force her to assimilate into what her new society considers to be universal and normative. Therefore, the participation in such a system implies, in this case, the erasure of Natalie's origins and the construction of a new identity which is the result of performativity.

Judith Butler understands performativity as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names" (*Bodies that Matter* 2). Furthermore, she specifies that performativity is "not a singular act, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (*Bodies*

that Matter 12). Butler applies performativity to gender in order to "show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it showed that what we take to be an "internal" feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures" (*Gender Trouble* xv). As has been shown, *NW* shows the performativity that is implied in the very idea of motherhood. But the novel also makes reference to another key concept in Butler's theory, that of drag.

Butler argued that drag "subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (*Gender Trouble* 174). Butler later on specified that drag is not inherently subversive per se, but that "drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes" (*Bodies that Matter* 125). In *NW,* drag is extended to categories other than gender. Section 170 of the "Host" chapter, entitled "In drag," enumerates all of Natalie's drags:

> daughter drag. Sister drag. Mother drag. Wife drag. Court drag. Rich drag. Poor drag. British drag. Jamaican drag. Each required a different wardrobe. But when considering these various attitudes she struggled to think what would be the most authentic, or perhaps the least inauthentic (333).

The metaphor of "drag" is used here not only for gender, but also for Natalie's disguises in terms of class, nationality and the private/public divide, exposing them as constructions. The reference to the wardrobe is also explained by Butler in her argument that "we derive that knowledge from the clothes that the person wears, or how the clothes are worn. This is naturalized knowledge, even though it is based on a series of cultural inferences, some of which are highly erroneous" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxii). Here, original gender and any other original identities attached to various "axes of differentiation" are parodied, and in turn rendered impossible.

The impossibility of encapsulating an original identity is further elaborated at the end of the novel, when it is revealed that

Natalie's greatest "drag" is in her old self. Her identity as Keisha has survived, and not only as a subconscious ego. Natalie has kept her old self and location within the working class environment of Willesden in her internet identity as "Keisha NW," which she uses for listings that offer sexual encounters. The internet offers Natalie the possibility of keeping Keisha alive, even if the subject she creates is practically a caricature of her old self. Although it may seem that this possibility allows her to be both Natalie and Keisha, lawyer and hairdresser, higher and lower class, the narrative reveals that she continues to have no self to be. When her husband, Frank, discovers her life as Keisha NW, he asks if it is fiction. The problem is that, not only Keisha, but also Natalie, are fictions. At the end of the novel, she is said to have "no name, no biography, no characteristics." (360). She goes as far as admitting that "there was some relief in becoming an object" (363). Therefore, she has no self and, consequently, no origin. Irigaray's idea of miming should be considered here, since her idea of miming "has the effect of repeating the origin only to displace the origin as an origin" (qtd. in Butler, *Bodies that matter* 45). Despite the criticism of the notion of an origin or an original, the split identity that is here developed and the desire to become an object should also be read as the effect of power. bell hooks argued that one becomes a subject when "one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new, alternative habits of being" (15). Similarly, Judith Butler has argued that "the normative force of performativity—its power to establish what qualifies as "being"—works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 188). Thus, one can only wonder if Keisha has ever stopped being an object. Keisha has been trying to become a subject by imposing on herself various identities which do not celebrate difference within female subjectivity nor offer a new way of being. The identities she adopts are based on set discourses, which leave little or no space for alteration or subversiveness. Natalie's drag is not the result of a subversive agenda, but rather of camouflage. After an encounter with Nathan, an old school friend, who has addiction problems and still belongs to the underclass, she clings to her Natalie identity again, due to her "strong instinct for self-defence, self-preservation" (399), thus making it clear that, in this new survival of the fittest, her identity as Natalie is the only way out for her.

Conclusion

Judith Butler argues that "social discourse wields the power to form and regulate a subject through the imposition of its own terms. Those terms, however, are not simply accepted or internalized; they become psychic only through the movement by which they are dissimulated" (*The Psychic Life of Power* 197). Hegemonic power has managed to become naturalized in many instances and its dissimulation should always be suspected and questioned. I would argue that *NW* questions it in the narration of Leah and Keisha's identity formation. *NW* shows the interconnection between the axes of differentiation that make up female subjectivity and reflects on the understanding of the subject as multiple. The persistent influence of patriarchal and colonizing attitudes portrayed in the novel results in subjects who are torn apart, rather than considered multiple. The existence of a unified and authentic female subjectivity, or any subjectivity for that matter, is also questioned. Those who search for an authentic identity usually fall prey to hegemonic discourses, whose ultimate aim is to impose sameness and diminish the potentially dangerous role of those subjects on the margins, those who are still regarded as "Other."

Zadie Smith presents a multiverse in which characters, and the female protagonists in particular, are driven into sameness. The novel raises awareness of the constructedness of contemporary identities and the performativity that they imply, thus making Butler's use of the metaphor of drag suitable to explain the different identities that each person adopts in varying contexts. The notion of origin and an original identity are thus parodied in the novel, but *NW* also shows the impossibility of being caught in between different constructed subjectivities. Drag should display its subversive potential, but those who seek subversion need to be able to raise their voices, to become politicised, in order to provide a stronger critique of the hegemonic power of a society which still favours assimilation and therefore is unable to recognize the constructedness of its allegedly natural discourses.

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HOW TO REPRESENT FEMALE IDENTITY ON THE RESTORATION STAGE: ACTRESSES (SELF) FASHIONING[**]

ABSTRACT: Despite the shifting ideologies of gender of the seventeenth century, the arrival of the first actresses caused deep social anxiety: theatre gave women a voice to air grievances and to contest, through their own bodies, traditional gender roles. This paper studies two of the best-known actresses, Nell Gwyn and Anne Bracegirdle, and the different public personae they created to negotiate their presence in this all—male world. In spite of their differing strategies, both women gained fame and profit in the male—dominated theatrical marketplace, confirming them as the ultimate "gender benders," who appropriated the male role of family's supporter and bread-winner.

KEY WORDS: Actresses, Restoration, Bracegirdle, Gwyn, gender notions, deployment of alliance, deployment of sexuality.

Introduction: Men, Women and Changing Gender Notions

The early seventeenth century was an eventful time for Britain, a moment when turmoil and war gave way to a strict regime, which then resulted in the return of peace and stability in the form of Parliamentary Monarchy. The 1600s saw two of the most significant events in the history of the British Isles: the Civil War and the execution of Charles I.

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The Civil War was the result not just of a questioning of the figure of the Monarch, but of the discourses of truth that sustained absolutism. The deployment of alliance was characterised by a cruel and repressive authoritarianism, which closely followed Biblical teachings, the theory of humours and the Galenic model. In this rigidly hierarchical society that hardly allowed for any mobility "men and women were seen as very different in nature, temperament, role, status, and place on the Great Chain of Being, and these allegedly innate and natural differences were canonised in law, theology, and writings on conduct and society" (Pearson "Gendered bodies" 163).

The established church warned about the danger women posed for social order; the Bible portrayed them as the devious daughters of Eve: lustful, disobedient and irrational. The legal discourse supported all of these negative views, giving men the power to punish unruly women. The medical doctrine argued that "men and women are . . . not different in kind but in the configuration of their organs; the male is a hotter version of the female, or . . . the female is the cooler, less perfect version of the male" (Laqueur 4). This vision of women rendered them inferior to men, placed underneath them in the pyramid of power, with little chance of climbing up to position themselves at the same level.

The execution of Charles I was a key step in a process of change in these discourses of truth: the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century meant that God was no longer the centre of the Universe and the King was not the sole Head of the Government. A new order had emerged: the deployment of sexuality. The religious discourse was displaced by a secular one: a scientific method which claimed that women were not an imperfect copy of men, but an essential complement to the male sex. "Sometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented. The reproductive organs went from being paradigmatic sites for displaying hierarchy . . . to being the foundation of incommensurable difference" (Laqueur, *Making Sex* 149).

Laudatory descriptions of the strengths of each sex were promoted, insisting on a seemingly positive description of the natural qualities that each possessed: women were tender and nurturing, while men were reasonable and strong. Thus, it followed that men were better suited for a public life and for the stress it entailed; women meanwhile, needed to be protected from the ugliness of the world, and their natural qualities would be better exploited indoors.

The Restoration was a turning point in the dominant notions of femininity, a period of "chronological overlap between the misogynistic tradition and the first flowering of a positive ideology of womanhood" (Fletcher 1999: 377). The 1660s saw the struggle for permanence and dominance between both systems, a battle for leadership that could only have one conclusion: the disappearance of one of the two. And in fact, by the year 1700, Britain saw the collapse of the deployment of alliance and the triumph of the deployment of sexuality that survived well into the twentieth-century.

The Merry Monarch and the Arrival of the Actress

Such was the ideological panorama that Charles II found upon his arrival to the British Isles in 1660; the Merry Monarch would be remembered, rather than for his politics, for his contribution to the development of drama in Britain. After a hiatus of eighteen years, Charles reopened the playhouses and it was not long before women took over the stage, changing the face not just of British drama, but of British society forever.

For centuries women had been banned from the stage on the basis that they did not need their natural vanity to be flattered by being admired and revered as goddesses on stage. Another consideration was that women who were allowed outdoors, unchaperoned, would soon have less than reputable relations with men. The feudal system clearly saw that nothing was to be gained from allowing ladies onstage and that, in fact, it was a most dangerous concession.

What changed in 1660? There seem to be a number of factors that eased the emergence of women onto the stage. On the one hand, the intervention of the King and his Court Wits seems to have been essential in the process: "Charles II was more closely involved with the public theatre, as opposed to the court theatre, than any other English Monarch" (Howe 23). Furthermore, they were no strangers to the presence of women onstage: not only had they witnessed the Queen performing at Court, but, while in exile, they found that women had been acting for years, a custom they imported to Britain.

"This shift in attitude can be linked to a wider change in how relationships between the sexes were defined" (Howe 23): the insistence on the natural differences between genders led to the

allowing of a certain individuality for both. Still, this is not to say that actresses were readily accepted by the general public; what is more, many were the voices that raged against them, denouncing them as unnatural women who did not fit the female ideal of either deployment.

In spite of counting on the support of the King, actresses soon became the focus of public gossip for, "although the public actress was an exception to the typical domestic female, she was subject to the same ideological constraints and her gender difference was emphasised (and enjoyed) by constant reference to her sexuality, both on stage and off" (Howe 21).

In the eyes of seventeenth-century audiences, the actress was defined by her sexuality: as soon as she abandoned the "safety" of the home, she exposed herself and her reputation, becoming a public woman in the broadest sense of the term. As Bush-Bailey points out: "anxieties arising from women working in an openly commercial and wholly public sphere quickly led to parallels with prostitution, a link that has endured for generations in patriarchal society employing the binaries of private/public, virgin/whore as its construct of femininity" (13).

The general belief was that "no 'respectable' woman became an actress. Society assumed that a woman who displayed herself on the public stage was probably a whore" (Howe 32). This meant that many were the men that flocked to the playhouse not to be entertained, but to approach the female actors expecting them to accept their offers.

Soon, the stories of actresses' liaisons became more interesting than their actual talent and, "the actress's sexuality—her potential availability to men—became the central feature of her professional identity as a player" (Howe 34). It seems that audiences attended playhouses not just to admire their ability, but to gather the latest scandals surrounding these new onstage goddesses: "Restoration society was enthralled by the actress's craft on stage and simultaneously engrossed by the stories surrounding their sexual liaisons off stage" (Bush-Bailey 13).

The actress soon became a fiction herself, making it increasingly difficult for audiences to separate the character from her actual persona. Her status as a public figure meant that audiences soon created a whole new woman that, in most cases, did not correspond with the human being behind the make-up; as Bush-Bailey explains, "the elision between her public and private

identity, the visual spectacle of her acting body on stage and the potential availability of her sexual body off stage created an ambiguous perspective" (13) of who she was.

Actresses could count on a series of roles at the time, depending on the genre; tragedies usually allowed for three types of women: the virgin-maid, the sultry temptress and the villain. But if there is one genre that Restoration is identified with, it is the comedy of manners; it is precisely this comedy that offers actresses the most interesting opportunities to either fully realise their subversive potential or to reinforce the patriarchal gender stereotypes.

Although for Howe most of the female characters created for the Restoration stage are subjected and limited by patriarchal constraints, the aim of this paper is not to analyse the construction of heroines. It is rather to show how certain performers took advantage of the identification actress/character, to create a private/public persona that would allow them to successfully navigate the male-dominated world of theatre.

The Immortal Orange-Seller: Nell Gwyn and the Madcap

Restoration comedy is characterised by the creation of the "witty" couple, which "consists of a pair of lively, witty lovers whose love contains an element of antagonism–each desires the other but is wary of commitment" (Howe 66), provoking a series of amusing misunderstandings and trials. This "gay couple" is by no means the union of two conventional characters, but a struggle for power between two opinionated and active individuals who are less than willing to relinquish their freedom and independence. While in tragedies most of the women are acted upon, in the case of these comic heroines we find young outspoken women who orchestrate actions and plots to finally win the man of their choice, or even remain single.

The "gay couple" was inspired by two performers rumoured to have been an item in real life: Charles Hart and the immortal orange seller, Nell Gwyn. In fact, "the inspiration of this assertive heroine was Nell Gwyn and thus, albeit indirectly, she brought a new approach to comic love relationships between the sexes" (Howe 71). Her performances, alongside her then lover and acting mentor, Charles Hart, gained both the company and Nell great success, so that the 'gay couple' became the convention of the genre.

This was the beginning of her success as an actress and of her legend as an icon of the period; the fact that her acting career only spanned seven years has not prevented her from becoming the paradigmatic image of the Restoration. In Nell Gwyn, we find the height of the identification between the real person and the dramatic persona that all actresses endured. The public fascination with her private life and her roles reached an all-time high, so much so that "the glamour and scandal of the roles she played carried over into her off-stage persona, and vice versa, never to be relinquished, neither during her lifetime nor after it" (Perry, Roach & West 64).

Although this interplay of reality and fiction put pressure on most female performers, who were immediately labelled as whores, Nell Gwyn accepted this label, making it her own. She took on the role of the madcap and became an expert at it, inside and outside of the theatre, managing to create a legend that allowed her to survive the defamation campaigns during her own time and subsequent centuries: the key to her success lies, according to Perry, Roach & West in that "Gwyn . . . fashioned her unique personality into a repeatable model for the new professional career of actress-celebrity, blazing a trail for others to follow" (71).

Although Nell was not the first actress on the British stage, it is undeniable that "she was the first starring one, and she remains the most popularly referenced" (Perry, Roach & West 71). The question is, why Nell? She was not exceptional in that "her sexuality 'became the central feature of her professional identity as a player'" (Perry, Roach & West 71), she was, as much as any other actress, an object for men to project their fantasies upon.

The difference with Nell is that she accepted the public role given to her, appropriating and subrogating it. As Perry, Roach & West explain, "part of Gwyn's magic resided in her ability to make her personality a conduit for the jolt of social energy" (71) that characterises the Restoration: she took the gossip surrounding her life and instead of attempting to deny the scandals, she appropriated them, fashioning her own story out of them, thus protecting herself from public shaming and carving a name for herself in the history not just of theatre, but of Britain.

Nell was, and still is, well-known for her sexual conquests; her mentor, Charles Hart, tutored her in more arts than acting, taking her as a lover when she was merely fourteen, only to be abandoned by her when Lord Buckhurst took her as mistress.

Still, although these two liaisons did put her in the spotlight, it was her affair with King Charles that ultimately pushed her to the forefront of celebrity and the episode of her life most novelists and experts still ponder about. Most portray it as a fairy—tale romance, in which Nell and Charles fell in love and lived happily ever after, trying to make the distinction between Nell, as the good—natured mistress, and the evil and ambitious concubines like the infamous Duchess of Portsmouth.

Nell's affairs with powerful men certainly gave her notoriety, but it was the way she handled the rumours surrounding her private life that set her apart from the other women who got lost in the viciousness of celebrity. While never denying or confirming any of these affairs, Nell Gwyn is known to have publicly "dubbed her royal lover, who had followed in the steps of Hart and Buckhurst, 'Charles III'" (Perry, Roach & West 74). This pun is not merely a manifestation of her celebrated wit, but it links her even more closely to the madcaps, who do not have their virginity and purity exalted; in fact, in many instances we can find that these heroines are by no means inexperienced in sexual matters.

One example of such a character is Buckingham's Constancia, whom Gwyn interpreted to perfection; "she is not, it seems, a virgin, but her murky past is ignored or made a joke of, and she is presented as a kind of free spirit who engages in bouts of wit with the hero and wins him in the end" (Howe 67-68). Although Nell played this part long before she became a royal mistress, it seems that she appropriated the playwright's strategy, applying it to her own life, making a joke of her past and of her string of lovers, but never attempting to deny them. Furthermore, her continued friendship with Buckhurst and the memory of her stellar performances alongside Hart were immediately activated once this pun on her sexual history started circulating. With this simple line, Gwyn appropriated the qualities of the witty heroine: the ability to "improvise" jokes, and her sassiness and unabashed boldness when it came to discussing her private life, were some of the traits that Nell shared with the madcaps.

After abandoning the theatre for her royal lover, Nell did not leave the spotlight at all; in fact, it can be argued that she became even more famous and that public opinion was even more attentive to her comings and goings. Legend has it that one afternoon, while she was travelling through the streets of London, an angry mob stopped her coach having confused her with the Duchess of Portsmouth. The people of London were beyond unhappy about Charles's affair with Louise de Kérouaille, a

Catholic noblewoman from Brittany; both her religious views and her French origins made her an object of mistrust and dislike.

When confronted with this anti-Catholic mob, Nell made a show of her shrewdness and quick-wit, by emerging from the coach and addressing them thus: "Pray, good people, be civil, I am the *Protestant* whore" (Perry, Roach & West 67), to which the crowd answered with cheers. Distinguishing herself from the hated Duchess of Portsmouth was a clever move. This very short line hides a double dimension: on the one hand, it shows Nell's understanding of state affairs and politics with her emphasis on her being a Protestant, rather than a Catholic, one of Kérouaille's most hated flaws.

Nell's identification with a whore is another crafty device; while many of the women who had affairs with the King insisted on their being women of quality even when they were public adulterers, Nell openly admits to her status as a public whore. Instead of pretending to a morality that she is betraying when bedding a married man, she openly accepts her role as a concubine, appropriating the label "whore" and turning it into a source of pride rather than shame.

In a Court where women were constantly competing for the King's attention, having the favour of the general public was an advantage, and it was all Nell's; she is the real-life madcap, always ready for merry banter and a witty remark. She managed to survive not just the rumours that surrounded her theatre life, but also the malicious comments at Court, using the same strategy: transferring the roles she mastered onstage to her day-to-day life, she fashioned a character that she interpreted both in public and private, performing the role of the madcap to perfection. Thus she became one of the few women to successfully navigate the agitated waters of Restoration public life and survive as an essential part of the British collective imagination.

The Darling of the Theatre: Anne Bracegirdle, the Romantic Virgin

In direct contrast to Nell's whorish reputation stands Anne Bracegirdle's image of spotless purity, virtue and sinless innocence. As it was normally the case with women actors, Anne's public persona both influenced and was shaped by the dramatic roles she was recurrently hired to perform. Depending on the

genre of the play, she used to incarnate one of two different types of character: in tragedy, Anne ordinarily played a virtuous and suffering heroine that often endured sexual violence but remained pure and blameless; in comedy, she was commonly depicted as an attractive and witty heiress who refused a legion of undesirable suitors until she found the husband of her choice.

Despite this genre-motivated difference, passivity was the keynote of most of Bracegirdle's characters: either as an afflicted and sexually-abused virgin or as the target of pressing fortune hunters, she almost invariably played the role of the victim/pursued and eschewed initiating agency. Many are the testimonies that corroborate and extol Bracegirdle's well-known virginal reputation. Among those, Cibber's laudatory assessment of the actress is worthy of quotation:

Never any Woman was in such general Favour of her Spectators, which, to the last Scene of her Dramatick Life, she maintain'd, by not being unguarded in her private Character. This Discretion contributed to make her the *Cara*, the Darling of the Theatre: For it will be no extravagant thing to say, Scarce an Audience saw her, that were less than half of them Lovers, without a Suspected Favourite among them: And tho' she might be said to have been the Universal Passion, and under the highest Temptations; her Constancy in resisting them, served but to increase the number of her Admirers. (135)

Anne's tenacious resistance to temptation, her proclaimed sexual unavailability, only increased men's desires. The unattainable "Romantic Virgin" was as much the object of male desire as the whore. As Cibber would later state, "in all the chief Parts she acted, the Desirable was so predominant, that no Judge could be cool enough to consider, from what other particular Excellence, she became delightful" (135). In fact, Aston described her as an extremely attractive lady:

> of a lovely Height, with dark-brown Hair and Eye-brows, black sparkling Eyes, and a fresh blushy Complexion; and, whenever she exerted herself, had an involuntary Flushing in her Breast, Neck and Face, having continually a cheerful Aspect, and fine set of even white Teeth; never making an Exit, but that she left the Audience in an Imitation of her pleasant Countenance. (168)

The idea of virginity is encoded in the description of Bracegirdle's physical attributes. Solomon explains that many of the virginal heroines that hit the Restoration stage had dark eyes.

Furthermore, the brightness of the actress's gaze and the freshness of her complexion connote innocence and virginity, whereas her blushes carry associations of the first bloom of love. Besides, "the 'involuntary' aspect of Bracegirdle's blushes connotes a sincerity of emotional expression that appears to verify the sexual innocence Aston refers to when he compares her to the Roman goddess of chastity" (Solomon 142).[1]

Bracegirdle fashioned her public persona in accordance with the construction of femininity that began to gain currency with the Scientific Revolution: Essentially virtuous, passive and kind-hearted, she was not an inferior and imperfect version of the normative male, but his spiritually equal and biologically complementary opposite. Similarly, most of the roles played by Bracegirdle were designed to suit the emerging gender ideology. Nevertheless, she also incarnated some libertine characters that indulged in unsanctioned sexual affairs and delivered licentious prologues and epilogues. Ironically, these occasional reversals of the audience's expectations did not undermine, but rather reinforced the actress's virginal reputation.

Several are the effects that critics have attributed to the exceptional roles where Bracegirdle's character and her public persona were strongly disassociated. The "comic incongruities" (Solomon 136) that stemmed from such disassociation could provide the play with "a new and effective show value" (Pearson 26), frame it as social satire (Holland 157) or allow non-virginal characters to "find redemption through their actress" (Solomon 158). In any case, Bracegirdle's embodiment of the emerging ideology of womanhood was deeply ingrained in the period's collective imagination.

As hegemonic masculinity comes to be defined in relation to a feminine opposite, the domains of public and private become increasingly gendered spaces, and the household, women's "'separate but equal' area of activity and authority" (Shevelow 3). In this context, the figure of the actress becomes essentially transgressive, posing a huge threat to the ideology of separate spheres through which masculine dominance is secured and enforced. The construction of actresses as whores, as marginal figures whose deviance reinforces hegemonic notions of gender, constitutes an effective way to contain their subversive potential. Seen in this light, Bracegirdle's emphatically virtuous public

[1] Aston refers to Bracegirdle as "that *Diana* on the stage (168)."

persona mounts a flagrant challenge to the patriarchal association women/home.

Cibber tried to erase the contradiction inherent to Anne's identity by confining her to the utmost privacy, arguing that she "would rather pass her remaining Days forgotten, as an Actress, than to have her Youth recollected in the most favourable Light" (134). Nevertheless, Bracegirdle had already stepped into the "masculine" domain of public life when she performed on the London stage, to the delight of an enthusiastic audience that would soon look on her as a star.

Like Cibber before him, Anthony Aston noticed the subversive potential of Bracegirdle's public persona. In a laudatory description of the actress' charitable nature, he made the following remark: "and yet this good Woman was an Actress" (169). In defining her case as exceptional, Aston reinforces the actress/whore connection and contains the threat that Bracegirdle posed to the established gender system, validating the emerging ideology of femininity.

Though more positive, this construction of femaleness was not a shred more empowering, since it confined women to the private sphere, granting them no authority whatsoever in the public domain. Even though Bracegirdle integrated this ideology in her public persona, she also contributed to subvert it. First, as mentioned above, she posed a threat to the actress/whore association, a threat that her admirers could not manage to either contain or erase successfully. Proof of this failure is provided by the following fragment from *A Comparison between the Two Stages*:

> RAMBLE: And Mrs. Bracegirdle ...
> CRITIC: Is a haughty conceited Woman, that has got more Money by dissembling her Lewdness, than others by professing it.
> SULLEN: But does that Romantick Virgin still keep up her great Reputation?
> CRITIC: D'ye mean her Reputation for Acting?
> SULLEN: I mean her Reputation for not acting; you understand me. (qtd. in Wilson 127)

This dialogue reflects the period's anxiety about women stepping into the male public sphere, an anxiety embodied by the ideologically contradictory figure of the actress. The participants equate acting with prostitution and fashion the female performer as a marginal figure whose sexual deviancy reinforces the

emerging construction of femininity. Significantly, this verbal attack was launched at a moment when Bracegirdle's public prominence was at its height. In 1695, the United Company, which had held the monopoly of the London stage since 1682, broke down as the result of internal conflicts between the autocratic manager and several players. A group of "rebel" actors signed the "Petition of the Players" and gained from the Lord Chamberlain a license to open a new theatre at Lincoln Inn Fields. In this revolt, Bracegirdle played a central role, one which male "traditional historiography has failed to investigate" (Bush-Bailey 97). Furthermore, she became, together with Elizabeth Barry, the first actress-manager of a London playhouse, gaining unprecedented influence as a theatre woman in the "male" public domain.

The typical Bracegirdle heroine embodied a positive–yet disempowering–image of femininity; attractive, virtuous and passive, she apparently reinforced the unbalanced relations of power between the sexes. Furthermore, the actress also adjusted her public persona to this construction of womanhood and, thanks to her virginal reputation, became a mere object of male fantasy and desire, "an Ornament to the Theatre" (Cibber 135). At first glance, Anne's decision to conform to the period's ideal of femininity seems to serve patriarchal ends. Nevertheless, through her own voice and body, she subverted the actress/whore association and managed to exert extraordinary influence in the "male" public sphere without jeopardising her virginal reputation.

Conclusions

Whether portraying a whore or an angel, actresses soon became the favourite topic of gossip and rumours; still, they were the best publicity for the companies, who competed to see who attracted more people. The attitude towards the actress was, then, complex and diverse, a mixture of desire, rejection and scorn; she was an object of both fascination and abjection: audiences were repulsed and entranced by the sight of a woman on stage, who immediately acquired a special appeal, completely divorced from her actual acting skills.

"The actress' figure proves to be a site of ideological contradiction in the emergence of dominant notions of gender and sexuality in the eighteenth century. . . . [A]s women whose

profession is undeniably public, actresses resisted the assumption that feminine sexuality was the private (and passive) opposite of masculinity" (Straub 89). To solve this contradiction that could very well threaten the balance of power in this patriarchy, some authors, both male and female, insisted on the objectification of the actresses' bodies, constraining them to tired and stereotypical roles. It is true that "Restoration theatre literally brought the female body back from abstraction" (Findlay 191), not only as the instrument to develop her craft and her means of expression, but also, and more importantly, as her prison; drama soon takes advantage of it, using and abusing it, turning actresses into objects and reflections of male sexual desire.

Nevertheless, although it is true that many of these women were treated as objects and that scenes involving partial nudity or the display of actresses' physical assets increased after 1660, it seems unfair to assume that none of them used this new-found voice to air grievances and complaints against a system that did not allow them any agency. This argument seems to be too limiting, refusing any possibility of these women being capable of not just *carrying* meaning, but *creating* it; it is our contention that although many female actors were used to propagate negative images of women, some others managed to realise their subversive potential, using their visibility to fashion themselves as women who defied and resisted classification.

Although Gwyn and Bracegirdle, did, to some extent, embody some misogynistic stereotypes, they also appropriated and subverted them, creating the public personas we have come to know. And it is precisely this self-fashioning that made them dangerous "gender-benders," becoming independent women and the sole bread-winners.

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FEMALE CROSS-DRESSING IN CHINESE LITERATURE CLASSICS AND THEIR ENGLISH VERSIONS

ABSTRACT: Cross-dressing, as a cultural practice, suggests gender ambiguity and allows freedom of self expression. Yet, it may also serve to reaffirm ideological stereotypes and the binary distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine, homosexual and heterosexual. To explore the nature and function of cross-dressing in Chinese and Western cultures, this paper analyzes the portrayals of cross-dressing heroines in two Chinese stories: 《木蘭辭》 *The Ballad of Mulan* (500–600 A.D.), and 《梁山伯與祝英台》*The Butterfly Lovers* (850–880 A.D.). Distorted representations in the English translated texts are also explored..

KEY WORDS: Female cross-dressing, gender role, parody, performativity, patriarchal hegemony.

Introduction

Cross-dressing, or the act of adopting the role and many of the customs of the opposite gender, "implies different things in different cultures and has been viewed historically in widely varying ways" (Bullough and Bullough 3). For centuries, terms such as "gynemimesis, andromimesis, gender dysphoria, female or male impersonation, transgenderist, femmiphile, androphile, femme mimic, fetishist, crossing, transsexual," (Bullough and Bullough 3) etc. have been introduced to describe cross-dressing. The wide range of terms indicates that people have come across and perceived the idea of cross-dressing in various ways. For

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instance, early physicians and psychiatrists in the West had the inclination to medicalize cross-dressing and queer identities as an illness or a mental problem. Yet, for radical feminists such as Judith Butler, drag and cross-dressing can be a witty parody of the imitative structure of gender. In Chinese literature, cross-dressing is sometimes portrayed as "unsocialized pleasure" (Dyer 7), namely the kind of unruly delight that breaks free from the discipline of formally well-behaved narrativity and staid, coherent points of view. At other times, cross-dressing is nothing more than a plot device. To find out the different implications of cross-dressing, this paper looks into the representations of female cross-dressing in two well-known Chinese stories: *The Ballad of Mulan* (500–600 A.D.) compiled in Guo Maoqian's *Music Bureau Collection* (twelfth century), and *The Butterfly Lovers* (850–880 A.D.).

The paper will also compare the representations of cross-dressing in the Chinese texts with those in their English adaptations. The variations found in the English texts will be examined and analyzed on the story level (what is being told–incidents, characters, etc.), as well as on the discourse level (how it is told) (O'Sullivan 81). The two English texts to be looked at are Charlie Chin's *China's Bravest Girl: The Legend of Hua Mu Lan* (1993) and *The Butterfly Lovers* (1995), retold by Lee Geok Lan. The variations in the representations of cross-dressing between the Chinese and English texts will shed light on the different attitudes and ideological assumptions about gender.

In the following, I will first recapture Butler's ideas of gender performativity, drag and parody, which will later on be employed to discuss the various representations of cross-dressing in the chosen texts.

What is Gender Performativity?

Gender Performativity is a term coined by Judith Butler, the poststructuralist feminist. Drawing on the claim made in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, that "there is no "being" behind doing, acting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction imposed on the doing–the doing itself is everything" (29), in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler introduces the idea of performativity: "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted

by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (33). She argues that gender is merely a construction regardless of any ontological truth. "[T]here is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires" (Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" 273). For Butler, gender is not genetically coded. It does not happen once and for all when we are born. Instead, it is "a sequence of repeated acts that harden into the appearance of something that's been there all along" (Salih 66). In other words, femininity, masculinity and heterosexual identities are all everyday performativity. They are constructed, represented, repeated and, in turn, reinforced as if they are ordained by Nature. They are fabricated at the moment when they are performed. In chapter three of *Gender Trouble*, Butler continues to develop her argument:

If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the true effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity (174).

In this light, all gender is a form of parody. It is a "corporeal style" (*Gender Trouble* 177), a "stylized repetition of acts" (*Gender Trouble* 179), and "a copy of copy" (Salih 66). However, such gender parody or performativity should not be interpreted as something that can be put on and off at will, like a costume or role. As Butler declares in *Bodies That Matter* "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" (1).

Drag and Parody

While the majority in society is unwittingly engaged in this sort of ordinary, everyday gender practice, drag performances are subversive. As Butler explains, "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself–as well as its contingency" (*Gender Trouble* 175). By citing 'the feminine' through a range of signifiers such as mascaraed eyelashes, prominent breasts, movements of hips, which have no point of origin in any female body, drag acts disrupt the assumption of heterosexuality (Brook 114). They allow "the possibilities of

denaturalizing, proliferating and unfixing identities in order to reveal the constructed nature of heterosexuality" (67).

That said, it is important to note that not all forms of drag are subversive. In fact, there are drag performances which serve to reinforce and confirm the existing distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine, gay and straight. Dustin Hoffman's performance in *Tootsie* (1982), for instance, demonstrates how certain denaturalizations of the heterosexual norm actually enforce heterosexual hegemony (*Body That Matters* 231). Such entertainment, according to Butler, is "a ritualistic release for a heterosexual economy that must constantly police its own boundaries against the invasion of queerness" (*Body That Matters* 126).

Cross-dressing of Mulan, the Chinese Woman Warrior

To explore whether cross-dressing in Chinese literature classics serves to destabilize or reaffirm heterosexual hegemony, I will first examine Mulan, the female cross-dressing character in 《木蘭辭》, *The Ballad of Mulan* (500–600 A.D.).

"The Ballad of Mulan," a Glorious Break from of Patriarchal Constraints

Mulan, or Hua Mulan, is a young Chinese heroine who disguises herself as a male warrior, joins the army and goes off to war in her old father's stead. Like most folklore, the time setting of the story is uncertain, but the earliest text that recounts the legend of Mulan can be dated as far back as to the fifth century C.E., when China was dominated by the Wei Tartars (Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture* 250). The poem, known as *The Ballad of Mulan*, was first written in the *Musical Records of Old and New*, but the popular version well-known to most Chinese is from Guo Maoqian's *Music Bureau Collection* (twelfth century).

What is remarkable about *The Ballad of Mulan* is that it is one of the earliest texts that challenge the oppressive patriarchal constraints on Chinese women. The Confucian doctrine requires women to stay home and perform the conventional female duties and virtues. 'Virtuous women' are expected to follow the rituals of

three obediences, which mean that before marriage, a woman should obey her father; after marriage, she is to obey her husband; finally, after the death of her husband, she should obey her son, if she has any. In other words, "a girl is . . . trained to be respectful and submissive from birth" (Xiao 13). Men will decide what is good and appropriate for them. A decent Chinese woman should not make any decisions for herself at any point of her life. Besides the three obediences, women must also make sure that they possess four womanly virtues so as to become a truly "virtuous woman." According to Ban Zhao's *Nujie* [Precepts for women] (compiled in *Hou Han shu*, 1965), the four virtues are (1) chastity and fidelity, (2) womanly words, (3) womanly bearing; and (4) womanly work. Simply put, a good woman is supposed to behave modestly, speak softly, dress up prettily and work (sew and weave) diligently in order to please and honour her husband and family.

By viewing *The Ballad of Mulan*, we can argue that Mulan is not the kind of virtuous woman that the traditional Chinese society would expect. Instead, in the name of filial piety to her father, Mulan sets the three obediences aside–she makes up her mind to fight in place of her father:

昨夜見軍帖 But last night I read the battle-roll;
可汗大點兵。The Kehan has ordered a great levy of men.
軍書十二卷 The battle-roll was written in twelve books,
卷卷有爺名。And in each book stood my father's name.
阿爺無大兒 My father's sons are not grown men,
木蘭無長兄 And of all my brothers, none is older than I.
願為市鞍馬 Oh let me go to the market to buy saddle and horse,
從此替爺徵。And ride with the soldiers to take my father's place.

(English translation by Waley 251)

The narrative indicates that Mulan does not obey her father. Rather, she has the full subjectivity to make the decision all on her own. From the text, it seems that regarding the military announcement, neither have the people concerned shown any expectations from Mulan, nor has Mulan sought advice and permission from anybody. What happens is that she tells her father she wants to fight in place of him, and all her father can do is just to believe in Mulan, keep quiet, and let her go off to war for him. Also, whether it is before, during or after the military service, not once has Mulan followed any orders from a male. Her husband and son are either not mentioned, or they simply do not

exist in the ballad. Mulan is not under the constraint of the three obediences.

Apart from the three obediences, Mulan has also subverted some of the womanly virtues. At the beginning of the ballad, it is said that like other women, Mulan weaves and performs womanly work, "Mulan sits at the door and weaves" (Translated by Waley 251). Yet, as she puts on her armour, she hides her gender identity and gains power from her cross-dressing. Under the disguise, she walks out of the domestic sphere and leaves the womanly work behind. She trespasses into the sphere of the opposite sex, and gets promoted to the public sphere. Similarly, when Mulan joins the all-male army, she sets herself free from her womanly bearing. The cross-dressing is so successful that, for twelve years, not a single man discovers her gender identity. Thus, when Mulan finally dresses as a lady after the war is over, her fellow battle companions are all astounded, "Her messmates were startled out of their wits" (Translated by Waley 254). Intriguingly, there is a hint of unruly delight towards the end of the ballad:

雄兔腳撲朔	For the male hare has a lilting, lolloping gait,
雌兔眼迷離。	And the female hare has a wild and roving eye;
雙兔傍地走	But set them both scampering side by side,
安能辨我是雄雌。	And who so wise could tell you "This is he"?

(English translation by Waley 254)

Regarding the ending of Mulan's story, Li claims that "Mulan's crossing of gender lines is only provisional" (86), because at the end of the story, "Mulan is decorated by the emperor, returns home, removes her male garment, is reunited with her family" (86). Indeed, as Li points out, the story does end with the unmasking of the cross-dressing. The division of gender spheres is reinstated and reaffirmed on the narrative level. In fact, considering the cultural setting when the ballad was written, it is not surprising that the story ends with Mulan returning to the domestic sphere after the war, as the narrative recounts. On the story level, however, Mulan, the cross-dresser is not punished for deceiving her battle companions with her disguise. Also, on the discourse level, the last four lines of the ballad (as cited above) reflect a subtly subversive attitude that challenges the Confucian gender system–the gender transgression of Mulan is not taken as a taboo, nor is it portrayed as sinful, immoral, or disgusting. To a certain extent, the disguise is represented and perceived as

a delightful temporary escape from the oppressive patriarchal hegemony. The playful tone is especially strong in the last line, "And who so wise could tell you "This is he?" (Translated by Waley 254).

Although the narrative does not imply that gender identity can be fabricated, the rhetoric style helps open up an alternative way of seeing: a buck or a doe, male or female, there is a possibility that both might look and behave the same, in spite of their true sex. How do we distinguish the two?

Chin's Version: Mulan as a Dutiful Daughter and Wife

Because of the popularity of the legend of Mulan, there are numerous translations and adaptations made for English readers too. Charlie Chin's *China's Bravest Girls: the Legend of Hua Mu Lan* (1993), an English picture book, is one typical example among the many English versions. A great deal of difference can be found throughout the adaptation. First of all, on the discourse level, the 'doe and buck' metaphor that describes gender confusion is replaced. The narrative compares Mulan to a pearl hiding in an oyster:

> The ocean hides the oyster.
> The oyster hides a pearl.
> Bright armor and heavy helmet
> Hid China's bravest girl (Chin 24).

In the Chinese language, the first part of the word 'pearl' (珍珠 *zhen-zhu*) is pronounced the same as the word 'real' (真 *zhen*). Because of the sameness in pronunciation, a pearl is commonly used as a metaphor for the real, the authentic or the essence. One well-known Chinese idiom, 'a fish-eye mixed in pearls' (魚目混珠 yu mu hun zhu) also employs the metaphor, in which pearls represent the real and the precious, whereas a fish-eye refers to a fake pearl, or something that is just a copy of the real. Thus, comparing Mulan to a pearl is a subtle way of making the point that the true gender is out there. It can be hidden but it can never be fabricated. Discarding the metaphor of "a doe and a buck" and replacing it with the metaphor of "a hidden pearl in an oyster" is, therefore, an act to get rid of the sense of queerness and unruly delight submerged in the original version.

In addition to the change of metaphor, Chin also puts an emphasis on the female's role, which every woman should play. In the original text, the story ends with Mulan choosing to return to her former way of life. For this, not much explanation is given in the ballad–there could be thousands of reasons why Mulan wants to go home. It could be that she misses her hometown, or that she is bored with life in the military, etc. The reader is given room for free interpretation. Yet, in Chin's adaptation, the reason that Mulan returns home is clearly stated:

> There's nothing that I desire,
> neither wealth nor minister's post.
> My duty is to my father.
> In old age, he needs me most (18, my emphasis).

"My duty is to my father" is obviously an indication of Mulan's devotion towards the 'Three Obediences'. Mulan the heroine, still sees herself as the subordinate—she is her father's dutiful daughter. The traditional gender position is further reinstated as the story unfolds. Towards the end of Chin's version, Mulan gets married and becomes her comrade's wife. It is said that Mulan dresses herself up femininely "for the wedding in her husband's hall" (28). This is yet another hint of Mulan fulfilling the second obedience–as her husband's faithful wife, Mulan puts on what pleases her husband's eyes. With the "Three Obediences" in mind, Mulan can by no means be free from the female role of being a daughter, a wife and a mother. The playful tone suggesting the unruly delight of cross-dressing is dismissed.

Cross-dressing of Yingtai, the Female Scholar in *The Butterfly Lovers*

Another female cross-dresser well-known to all Chinese readers is Zhu Yingtai in the Chinese love story, *The Butterfly Lovers* (also known as *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai*), which is often regarded as the Chinese equivalent to *Romeo and Juliet*. The earliest narrative of the legend of *The Butterfly Lovers* was found to be in the late Tang Dynasty, recorded in Zhang Du's *Records of the Xuan Hall* (850–880 A.D.). In the story, a young woman called Zhu Yingtai from a noble family disguises herself as a young male scholar and studies in a renowned school in Hangzhou. During

her studies, Yingtai meets Liang Shanbo. Studying at the same school and sleeping on the same bed for three years, Yingtai secretly falls in love with Shanbo, but her disguise remains undiscovered after she finishes her studies. Before parting with Shanbo, Yingtai manages to remind Shanbo to pay her a visit. Unfortunately, when Shanbo visits Yingtai and finally realizes that she is a woman, Yingtai's family has already decided that Yingtai should marry Ma Wencai, a young gentleman from a rich family. In despair, Shanbo falls seriously ill and dies of a broken heart. On Yingtai and Ma Wencai's wedding day, there is a thunderstorm. The disheartened Yingtai insists on going to Shanbo's tomb though the wedding procession is not supposed to go past it. When she reaches the place where Shanbo is buried, the tomb suddenly opens up. And Yingtai throws herself into the tomb to join her beloved Shanbo. Since the tragic death of the lovers, two butterflies are often seen flying around Shanbo's tomb. People believe that they are the spirits of Yingtai and Shanbo. The young lovers are therefore called "butterfly lovers."

Yingtai's male disguise, compared with Mulan's, is very different. In Chinese culture, besides the binary opposition of "yin" and "yang," which refers to female and male respectively, there is also the "wen-wu" binary in the idea of maleness. According to Louie, as stated in the *Great Chinese Dictionary*, the core meaning of "wen" centres around "literary and other cultural attainment" (10), whereas that of "wu" centres around "martial, military, force and power" (10). While "wu" is similar to the contemporary Western idea of maleness, "wen" refers to "soft masculinity" (Wang, "Mr. Butterfly in *Defunct Capital*" 41). A man of "wen" (or "caizi," a talented male scholar) is usually not a tough, muscular warrior, but an educated, handsome male with "sophisticated cultural tastes in art and literature" (Wang, "Mr Butterfly in *Defunct Capital*" 41). Like "ladies," "caizi" almost always have "fair skin, elegant features and delicate physiques, as well as tender voices and romantic hearts" (Wang, "Mr. Butterfly in *Defunct Capital*" 42). The delicate features of caizi is a reflection of his cultural cultivation and literary talent. In this light, we can imagine that the cross-dressing of Mulan is relatively more challenging, for to become a convincing "wu" hero, Mulan must both look like a man and fight like a man. On the other hand, the disguise of Yingtai is easy. As a "wen" hero (or "caizi"), Yingtai does not need to hide her feminine appearance. Wearing male

attire, her effeminate look is just what a "caizi" is expected to look like. Such cross-dressing may not create the subversive effect that Butler suggests.

Chinese Version: Yingtai as a Convincing Cross-dresser

As in a recent Chinese version of *Butterfly Lovers* tailor—made for young Chinese readers, cross—dressing as a caizi (a talented male scholar) is portrayed to be easy and convenient, despite the fact that the cross-dresser has to put on the disguise for three years, day and night without a break. For instance, in the children's story book, Yingtai's parents do not permit Yingtai to study in a boys' college, unless Yingtai cross-dresses as a boy (source text: 條件是她必須女扮男裝 (44) English translation: "the condition is that she [Yingtai] must disguise herself as a male.")

The implication is that the disguise as a "caizi" is easy and convincing. The chance of being unmasked is considered low. Thus, Yingtai's parents are fine with the cross-dressing of their daughter. Also, when Yingtai puts on her male disguise, the narrative remarks that Yingtai's new look is convincing: (source text: 居然也有幾分男子的英偉氣慨(44); English translation: "Unexpectedly, [Yingtai] shows some manly, handsome features.")

In addition, it is repeatedly mentioned that as Yingtai's close companion, Shanbo discovers nothing about her real gender identity. On page 45, it is written that "梁山伯為人憨厚誠實.. 他一直沒有察覺有什麼異樣" Translated into English, the sentence means "the honest Shanbo does not notice anything abnormal [about Yingtai]." On page 46, the narrator reminds the readers again that the cross-dressing is successful, "倆人在同一張床三年, 梁山伯還是一點也不知道祝英台原是女兒身." (English translation: "The two of them sleep on the same bed for three years, but still, Shanbo does not realize that Yingtai is a woman"). No matter how many times Yingtai subtly reveals to Shanbo her real gender and her secret love for him, still Shanbo does not get it. On Yingtai's gender switching, Altenburger remarks:

the story's unfortunate ending with the impossibility of marriage and the reunion in death indicates that Zhu Yingtai's male impersonation caused a lasting rupture in the gender order. Therefore, she cannot seamlessly revert to her "original" gender role anymore . . . (181).

The tragic ending can be viewed as a punishment for the violation of the code of morality. The cross-dressing though is far from the kind of "subversive parody" that Butler mentions. That said, Yingtai's easy disguise nonetheless proposes a possibility that gender identity can be "an achieved status" based on "tasks performed" and "the significance of clothing" (Bullough and Bullough 5). Indirectly and subtly, the socio-cultural construction and gender roles are questioned.

English Version: Yingtai as a Cautious, Self-conscious Cross-dresser

Also written for junior readers, Lee Geok Lan's *The Butterfly Lovers* (1995) is an English adaptation especially designed for English learners. However, unlike the Chinese version, in Lee's text, Yingtai's disguise is hard. Before Yingtai cross-dresses as a young man and travels to Hangzhou, her father makes her promise to obey three important conditions: firstly, to protect the honour of the Zhu family, the disguise must never be found out. Secondly, as a dutiful daughter, Yingtai must return home immediately should her mother's health turns worse. Finally, and most importantly, to safeguard her chastity, when Yingtai comes home, her father will ask a midwife to "find out if [she is] still as virtuous as an unmarried woman should be" (20). Chained by these constraints and surveillance, limited room is left for the cross-dresser to become spirit-free and playful.

For a couple of times, Yingtai's male impersonation is on the verge of being unmasked. The first time Shanbo notices something different about his friend is when he helps the drunk Yingtai to get into bed: "Shanbo noticed that her [Yingtai's] undershirt had numerous buttons like that of a woman's" (35). Yingtai then explains immediately to Shanbo that wearing a female undershirt is "an act of filiality" (35). Besides the female undershirt, Shanbo also discovers other suspicious features–for instance, he is shocked to find out that Yingtai's earlobes have been pierced. Fortunately, Yingtai is witty enough to provide a good reason just in time, "[a]s I was a child, my mother believed that I would be protected from all bad luck by having both my ears pierced" (47). Interestingly, Shanbo is not the only one who is amazed by the effeminate traits shown by Yingtai and her "page boy," Yin Xin. When Yin Xin asks for a needle and some thread

from Mrs. Zhou, the wife of the schoolmaster, Mrs. Zhou cries, "But sewing is only for girls!" (38). On hearing Mrs. Zhou's startled exclamation, Yingtai is left with no choice but to tell more lies, "It's good for us boys to learn to sew a few stitches whenever we are far away from home" (38).

Under the constant threat of being unmasked and bringing shame to the Zhu family, Yingtai becomes extremely cautious. For example, despite the hot weather in summer, she wears two layers of clothes to hide her feminine figure. She dares not take off her clothes "for fear that others might notice" (37). Often, she reminds herself that she must watch out for being discovered by Shanbo: "I must be very careful, even though Brother Liang is a true gentleman" (35). Yingtai is also worried that some people might find her disguise inadequate and suspicious. Even a curious smile can arouse her anxiety, "she [Yingtai] suddenly remembered how Mrs. Zhou had smiled at them . . . as if she suspected something was not quite right" (39). Under enormous stress, Yingtai can hardly enjoy her cross-dressing. She even goes as far as to warn Ying Xin to be extra careful when talking to people whom she suspects. In sum, Yingtai's cross-dressing in the English version is not as easy as that in the Chinese version. Also, it is not a jolly, unruly delight, as represented in *The Ballad of Mulan*.

Conclusion

In *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler makes the point that drag performances could be seen as a subversive parody that mocks the existing heterosexual power structures. Yet, looking at how cross-dressing is represented in the selected Chinese texts and their English versions, one will be disappointed. The implications of the cross-dressing motif are rarely subversive. Noticeably, in the English versions, the representations of cross-dressing become more conservative and less 'problematic'. Compared with the Chinese versions, the subversive effect in the English versions of cross-dressing is reduced, if not eliminated.

In the legend of Mulan, temporary transgression of gender borderlines appears when the female protagonist disguises as a male soldier and goes off to war for her old father. In the original Chinese version, *The Ballad of Mulan* (500–600 A.D.), the female cross-dressing can be viewed as an unruly delight, at most a

temporary escape from the oppressive patriarchal hegemony. Although the cross-dressing does not last forever, the last lines of the poem put forward a hint of playfulness. They subtly suggest the possibility and plausibility that both male and female can look the same, in spite of their true sex identity. Yet, in Chin's English version, the playful tone is removed. A new ending has been added to the plot–Mulan does not only return to the traditional role of being a daughter, she also becomes her comrade's wife. The gender hierarchy is neatly rendered and reconfirmed.

As for *The Butterfly Lover*, the female protagonist Yingtai is allowed a temporary space to emancipate herself from the suffocating traditional gender roles. In the Chinese version of *The Butterfly Lovers*, Yingtai's disguise as a caizi (male scholar) is represented as easy, convenient and convincing. The basic image of the 'wen' masculinity is sufficiently conveyed. Nonetheless, at the end of the story, the temporary usurpation of male power has to end. The deception is punished with an irreversibly tragic ending. Similarly, in the English version of *The Butterfly Lovers*, the stress on the threat of being unmasked and bringing shame to the family is magnified. Cross-dressing is neither an unruly delight nor a subversive parody.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Magic Realist Cinema in East Central Europe, by Aga Skrodzka, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, pp. 190.

> The 'others' are not merely the markers of exclusion or marginality, but also the sites of powerful and alternative subject-positions. Thus, the bodies of others become simultaneously disposable commodities and also decisive agents for political and ethical transformation.
>
> (Braidotti 44)

Binaries such as centre / margin, same / other, culture / nature, feminine / masculine, sedentary / nomadic, have been transformed by the impact of globalized postmodernity. As Rosi Braidotti asserts, those in former peripheries can now voice their concerns and highlight the discontents of the old anthropocentric assumptions that have dominated the European cultural paradigm. Those previously marginalized in the dominant political imagination are now important producers in the European cultural sphere and have activated flows of socio-cultural interactions celebrating differences and the uncanny and, more importantly, revolting against the logic of Sameness. In acting against the mainstream, those from the peripheries often produce unique discourses that go beyond established divisions and schemas, thereby marking their own individuality and highlighting alternative subject positions.

It appears that this voice of revolt is a major inspiration for Aga Skrodzka's study of films from the post-communism block. Initially, one thing has to be noted; among numerous publications devoted to East Central European cinema, published in Poland and abroad, Skrodzka's book stands out as the most comprehensive study of liminal cinematic productions in the

mode of magic realist aesthetics. The publication aims to cover the most important films of this type from Poland, Serbia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Macedonia, Slovakia and Hungary against the background of the socio-cultural processes of post-1989 Europe. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that this monograph, which predominantly belongs to the field of film studies, contains a close and thorough investigation of socio-cultural mechanisms in the context of post-1989 transitions. As the author emphasizes, the transformation of the political and economic order enabled filmmakers to redefine the Western cultural paradigm and eventually transgress the meaning of a singular European identity.

To exemplify these changes, Skrodzka explores the peripheral spaces where the processes of capitalist modernization encounter the forgotten, the excluded and the abject dimension of this part of continent. Her in-depth analysis of cinematic productions shows that East Central European artists, while facing post-communist transformations, have been recycling both old regional and new post-industrial formations to grasp the fluidity of contemporary identity. As indicated in the second chapter "They Live on Mars: The Magic of the Periphery," the filmmakers, Emir Kusturica and Jan Jakub Kolski, employ magical realism by choice to cherish cultural "otherness" and mark their alternative artistic vision of the distinctive European identity. In this regard, Skrodzka's discussion of Kusturica's *Underground* and Kolski's *History of Cinema in Popielawy* or *Johnnie the Aquarius* accentuates the subversive potential of provincial places, among others. In fact, she notes that having assumed grotesque and highly ironic attitudes, the directors distance themselves from norms, and thus become intentionally "peripheral to be able to speak of this very peripherality" (Skrodzka 55).

While tracing magic realist cinema, Skrodzka skillfully arranges the analytical material, which is accompanied by theoretical background, to define the distinguishing characteristics of this aesthetic. However, the author does not allow theory to play the dominant role in the analysis. She tailors her discussion on magic realism to explore the visual materials and symbolic motifs in the output of artistically varied film directors. Hence it comes as no surprise that the titles of all the chapters in the book refer to aesthetic elements of the films discussed. In this manner, it is easier for viewers to notice the interdependence between the categories of magical realism's symbolic representations.

The first chapter, which is devoted to the theoretical aspects and the evolution of magic realism sensibility in literary and cultural studies, is constructed through the narrative about the geopolitical situation of East Central Europe and its troubled history. Skrodzka asserts that there is no denying the fact that these aspects are inextricably linked and therefore cannot be analyzed separately. The whole chapter is enriched with images from the selected films, aptly illustrating the vernacular magic realism and "the current tensions that exist at the heart of the globalizing locality" (44).

The third chapter "Wooden Monsters, Dead Bodies and Things" traces the affinity between magic realism and miserabilist aesthetics. As the author points out, the strategies of "the aesthetics of excessive deficiency" are often applied by the directors to oppose the official discourse and undermine the importance of developing capitalism. From this perspective, Skrodzka discusses films about excluded and marginalized subjects who grapple with the aggressive strategies of the western consumer market that does everything to unify socio-cultural tastes. In this light, the aesthetics of miserabilism is a tool that initiates a critical cinematic language on technological advancement and consumer mentality.

A discussion of the similarities between the concept of carnival, children's imagination, and magic realist aesthetics constitute the core of chapter 4. As the author points out, directors apply the child's magical worldview to blur the line between fantasy and reality, appropriating the traditional discourse about the Other. This, combined with intertextual dialogue and carnivalesque humour, renegotiates the significance of canonical texts.

The book is enriched with a nostalgic epilogue that clarifies Skrodzka's fascination with the multidimensional encounters in East Central Europe. The author feels especially attuned to the times of her childhood spent in Communist Poland by expressing her affection for pagan rituals from the past, her first encounter with Wojciech Jerzy Has's films and visuals and with Bruno Schulz's literary and visual works. The aforementioned choice of memories and cultural texts clearly implicates the imaginative, carnivalesque, hybridic socio-cultural background of Europe's margins. The publication highlights, therefore, that the vernacular imagery melts with transnational and globalization processes. Moreover, Skrodzka's sensitivity to the diverse cinematic images produced by the transnational filmmakers and

her ability to decode the symbolic dimensions of the artistic language shows that, though currently living and working abroad, she partly belongs to this part of the world, where "modernism and postmodernism have developed unique local formations, quite different from Western models" (Skrodzka 168).

Through its form and content, the book will be of interest to anyone who wants to delve into the complex cultural dimensions of the majority of East Central European filmmakers who formed an original magic realist discourse to revolt against the strictly unified processes of globalization. There is no denying the fact that Skrodzka's interdisciplinary insight into the cinematic productions crosses cultural borders and social divisions, offering new ideas on the dynamics of magic realist aesthetics. This book indicates that peripheral directors have become decisive agents in contemporary European cinematography.

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