

FEMINIST SPACES



Volume 4 Issue 1, Spring/Summer 2021

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Cover Image: *The Lost Bride in the Broken Dream* by Rinat Zemach and Mali Aroesti

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Feminist Spaces is an online, interdisciplinary academic journal that invites students, faculty, and independent scholars from institutions worldwide to submit formal essays, creative writing, and multimodal artistic pieces per our biannual Call for Works. The journal is published by the Department of English at the University of West Florida and designed by the Department of Art and Design at the University of West Florida.

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Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

When we first began the process of restarting *Feminist Spaces* after a four-year publishing hiatus, we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into. With the prior editorial team graduated and long gone from our university in Pensacola, Florida, we had little information available on how the journal operated before us. (Let alone the sheer number of emails that we envisioned awaiting us in the journal inbox after four years). We embarked on the process of tracking down and stalking old editors on social media, hacking accounts and passwords for the journal, and sleuthing through archaic editorial files—OK, they were only from 2013, but still.

Restarting the journal in the midst of the pandemic posed some unique challenges, like never meeting our editorial team face to face, the consequent Zoom lag and fatigue, and the inability to pop into the office of a faculty member that we needed to talk to, as the campus remained shut down for most of the year. Despite the challenges, we are proud to present the latest installment of *Feminist Spaces* with a digital facelift and makeover, including a graphic design rebrand and newly built website to match.

We have been blown away by the support and excitement garnered at bringing this journal back from the dead, and we hope that it remains thriving for many years to come. *Feminist Spaces* was originally established in 2014 by the Women's Studies Collective at the University of West Florida (UWF), and the journal was once the beating heart to a sprawling curriculum and discourse of feminist theory, artwork, writing, philosophy, history and study at our university. Although many of the organizations and feminist institutions that helped create this diverse community of thinkers have disbanded over the years, we felt that it was imperative to restart the journal, and by doing so, hopefully rekindle the very foundation on which it was first opened.

At *Feminist Spaces*, our mission is to cultivate and uphold a space where feminists and womanists around the world can challenge hegemony and critique the status quo through research, theory, activism, writing, and art. We are deeply committed to uplifting the voices of people who have been marginalized and oppressed, and we value the ever-expanding intersectional discourse of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, education, culture, ability, and religion.

We could not have accomplished this without the generosity of the Department of English at UWF and support from the department chair, Dr. Kevin Scott. Additionally, we owe a special thanks to our advisor, Dr. Robin Blyn, for her constant guidance along the way and to John Dougherty and the TAG Design Team, both from UWF, for agreeing to take on the task of redesigning and rebranding the journal.

In this issue, you will find a diverse range of art, film, and literary analyses from an international array of critical thinkers and feminists. Our open Call for Works yielded a diverse range of papers including a feminist-Marxist reading of insanity and disability in Nellie Bly and the instrumental role of the Kurdish Women's Protection Unit (YPJ), an all-female militia involved in the Syrian civil war and fighting against ISIS. You will also find beautifully transgressive artwork and writing on drag, gender subversion, and dismantling the gender binary. Undoubtedly, 2020 will go down in history as not only a year marked by a pandemic but also a year that showcased the power of civil protest as more than 60 countries worldwide protested police brutality against people of color. Taken place alongside these protests in 2020, we have included a series of protest photos from French protests against rape and incest. On our cover, you will find an image from *The Lost Bride in the Broken Dream* by Rinat Zemach and Mali Aroesti, which explores the disillusionment of marriage, housekeeping, and gender roles ascribed to brides. We hope that you enjoy the issue and that you will consider submitting your own artwork, creative writing, and academic papers to our future issues.

Our kindest regards,

Editors-in-Chief,
Dakota Parks
Teresa Scott



Editorial Board Biographies

Dakota Parks is pursuing a Master of Arts in English with a specialization in creative writing at the University of West Florida. She is a published poet and journalist, currently working as the Assistant Editor for Ballinger Publishing, where she writes for *Pensacola Magazine* and *Downtown Crowd*. She has served on the editorial team for the UWF art and literary magazine, *Troubadour*, and is the president of Sigma Tau Delta, an English honor society. Her research interests include eco-feminist studies, LGBT+/queer theory and literature, and experimental prose poetry. She is currently working on publishing her first chapbook of poetry. Her online portfolio is dakotaparks.org.

Teresa Scott is currently pursuing an M.A. in English literature from the University of West Florida. Teresa earned her Ph.D. in classics from the University of California, Irvine in 2017, where her research focused on socioreligious representations of women, reproduction, and sexuality in classical Greek literature. Her current interests include the reception of classical literature; feminist and indigenous literature; and representations of magic and ritual, both in literature and, more broadly, in society. Teresa is currently teaching English Composition at UWF and freelancing as a technical writer.

Madeleine Hutchison is a graduate student and research assistant in the English department at the University of West Florida. Her research interests include feminist Modernist literature, the confessional poets, and Marxist literary criticism. In addition to these interests, she writes speculative fiction; is vice president of Sigma Tau Delta, an English honor society; and helps edit UWF's art and literary magazine, *Troubadour*.

Natalie Duphiney is an undergraduate student at the University of West Florida. She is pursuing her Bachelor of Arts in English and hopes to continue her education post-graduation in UWF's Master of Arts in English program. She writes creative prose poetry and academic essays most frequently, but her interests also include photography and painting. She currently works as an English writing tutor and has a goal to become a teacher to share with her students how writing can give anyone a voice with which to explore and create.

Theodore Reese Jr. is an undergraduate studying English at the University of West Florida. There, he is a member of the Kugelman Honors program. He is interested in queer identity and how popular ideas surrounding psychoactive substances affect the ways those substances are consumed. He comes from Milton, Florida.

Elizabeth Curl is pursuing her B.A. in English with a concentration in creative writing, while also minoring in the subjects of art and health promotion. Her interests include reading poetry, feminist literature, and scientific articles.

Eve Knight is a junior at the University of West Florida majoring in

psychology with a minor in creative writing. She is set to graduate in 2023. She is very passionate about speaking out against oppression and making minority voices heard. Being raised in a household that greatly valued education, she is determined to make the stories of those with no voices heard.

Fiana Mastrangelo is an undergraduate student at the University of West Florida who is studying English, creative writing and psychology. She is also a member of the Kugelman Honors Program and president of UWF's Psi Chi chapter. Her research interests include improv therapy, nonclinical alternatives to therapy, gender performativity, and trauma narratives. Her interests in queer and feminist theory are deeply incorporated in her psychological studies and will be a major focus in her graduate schooling.





A Proper Amount of Illness:

A Feminist-Marxist Approach to Nellie Bly's *Ten Days in a Mad-House*

S. Leigh Ann Cowan

There have not always been proletarians: there have always been women; they are women by their physiological structure; as far back as history can be traced, they have always been subordinate to men; their dependence is not the consequence of an event or a becoming, it did not happen. Alterity here appears to be an absolute, partly because it falls outside the accidental nature of historical fact.

—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

In 1887, a young woman, using a pseudonym and feigning insanity, infiltrated the New York City Women's Asylum on Blackwell's Island. Her goal was to record her experiences, flinging open the shutters that hid the atrocities of the asylum from the outside world, and, in the process, she created a sensation. This was Nellie Bly, who spent ten days trapped in Blackwell's asylum in order to not only procure a secure position for herself in the male-dominated world of journalism but also to improve the circumstances of the unfortunate insane, poor, and disabled caught in the clutches of the Island. This paper, through a feminist-Marxist reading of Nellie Bly's account of her time in the insane asylum from

Ten Days in a Mad-House, examines how biological determinism as well as Darwinian ideology, which both hold that women are biologically and mentally inferior to men, permeate patriarchal medical systems and serve to punish and further oppress women who do not (or cannot) conform to acceptable societal roles.

The patriarchy has been used to justify and maintain a monopoly of positions in economic, political, and social power, chiefly by denying women the rights to education and to political and social power.¹ The perceived superiority of the male sex was considered to be an innate quality, paralleled by the hierarchical belief that noble bloodlines were superior to those of the peasantry. But as science, with its potential to topple ancient systems, began to take a more prominent role in society, scientists began to look for evidence that would justify the social order.² Biological determinism was one of the mechanisms which, coupled with Charles Darwin's observations, bolstered the patriarchy. Sarah Hrdy writes that Darwin's theory of evolution "was a very neat, internally consistent—if entirely androcentric—package, leaving out crucial female contributions to subsistence as well as the strategizing females engage in to ensure their local clout and the survival of any young at all."³ The theories effectively silence female activity and autonomy not only within the social system but also the economic system. These oppressive philosophies were challenged at the turn of the twentieth century with the rise of women's rights activists, such as the suffragettes, who demanded rights and reform.

Marxism focuses on the material and historical realities within socioeconomic systems which condition the participants in the system to believe and/or behave in certain manners. In these systems, the motivation for participation in social and political activities, including

education, government, religion, and media, is gaining economic power. When an ideal functions as a propagandist machine in order to mask itself and keep the rich powerful, Karl Marx terms it a false ideal, or false consciousness, since it pretends to support those in the lower classes, while actually protecting and promoting the interests of the powerful.⁴ A pure Marxist perspective is insufficient for an exploration of Nellie Bly's *Ten Days in a Mad-House* due to "the indisputable failure of Marx ... to develop adequate tools and a comprehensive theory on women."⁵ Although Marx argued that "women, and especially children, should be protected by legislation against the worst assaults of capitalist exploitation," he identified the development of capitalism as "an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere, to women, to young persons, and to children of both sexes."⁶ He stops short, however, of recognizing that there exists a material root underlying the oppression of women.

The feminist perspective can make up for the deficiency in Marxist criticism in that it recognizes that men have used theories like biological determinism to monopolize economic, political, and social power. This theory also acknowledges the intersectionality of the female experience; although all women are subject to patriarchal oppression, each woman's race, class, religion, location, and (dis)ability also play into the extent of their oppression.⁷ In combining Marxism and feminism, one can closely investigate the realities of women's institutionalization in Bly's period and recognize instances of class oppression coupled with the oppression of women.

The development of the psychiatric field that would eventually lead to Nellie Bly's internment at Blackwell's is a complex one. The underlying assumption during the Victorian period that virtually any dissenting or "odd" woman suffered from hysteria colored the

investigations, diagnoses, and treatments of the myriad symptoms. This belief that women are more vulnerable to insanity than men had crucial and lasting effects on both medical and political policies.⁸ This perception of female vulnerability led to the mindset that women need more care and supervision, which caused the development of a healthcare system in which male psychiatrists held power not only over their female patients but also over the definitions of femininity and insanity.⁹ In the case of female criminals, even though the diagnosis of hysteria was rare, these women were seldom judged to be normal—their criminal behavior was linked to some nervous instability or moral debility within the family history.¹⁰ This systematic misdiagnosis of women more or less continued until the 1870s, which "initiated a period of legal and journalistic agitation over the wrongful confinement of women in lunatic asylums" in which Nellie Bly participated.¹¹

Moving to Blackwell's specifically, it was built on an island off the mainland of New York, conforming to the idea that part of the cure for insanity was separation from family and friends and was planned to be a "grand and imposing structure" in order to intimidate the inmates and make them easier to control.¹² Although the asylum reforms headed by Philippe Pinel and Jean-Étienne Esquirol did create institutions that, for the well-to-do, began to look more like spas and less like prisons, Phyllis Chesler points out that:¹³

At their best, mental asylums are special hotels or collegelike dormitories for white and wealthy Americans, where the temporary descent into "unreality" (or sobriety) is accorded the dignity of optimism, short internments, and a relatively earnest bedside manner. At their worst, mental asylums are families bureaucratized: the degradation and disenfranchisement of

self, experienced by the biologically owned child (patient, woman), takes place in the anonymous and therefore guiltless embrace of strange fathers and mothers.¹⁴

But in the case of Blackwell's, the commissioners were convinced that the immigrant women, who were admitted more often than American-born women, had been sent by other countries who "were sending their undesirables [t]here, palming off their care on the United States."¹⁵ In all likelihood, the patients were not even part of such a bureaucratized family structure. The extreme overcrowding and underfunding of Blackwell's asylum—which was built to accommodate 200 patients but housed an average of 7,000 people daily—led to a lack of accountability on the parts of the supervisors, doctors, and nurses, as well as to a lack of repercussions or consequences for abuses and deaths under their watch, despite the facts that by October 1879, "stories about [Blackwell's] asylum abuses were regular features in all the papers" and that Nellie Bly's "account confirms every horrible story inmates and visitors to the asylum had been telling for decades."¹⁶ These conditions demonstrate that not only were the practices in mental institutions like Blackwell's asylum well behind clinical theories, methods, and practices, but also that although this "situation was known, it was very little discussed for mere administrative convenience [era una situación conocida, aunque muy poco discutida por mera conveniencia administrativa]."¹⁷ Although during the nineteenth century, reforms to the theories and treatments of the insane were instituted, the "misuse of male authority," especially against female patients, continued, and other treatments like electroshock, hydrotherapy, forced feeding, restraints, and drugs prevailed.¹⁸ On top of all these abuses of the so-declared mentally ill was the presence of both sane-but-impoverished and/or immigrant women

and the fact of misdiagnoses of very serious diseases such as syphilis. As Allan Hopper and Brian Burrell's monograph explores, "Syphilis was rightly known as a great imitator, its profile indistinguishable from epilepsy, hysteria, neurasthenia, and insanity."¹⁹

The reasons, justifications, and perceptions of women who were admitted to asylums vary drastically, but, from a feminist perspective, the higher rate of psychiatric hospitalization for women than men has been explained as "one consequence of women's disadvantaged status in a patriarchal society in which women and women's roles are devalued."²⁰ Chesler states that "[w]hat we consider 'madness,' whether it appears in women or in men, is either the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one's sex-role stereotype."²¹ Those women who did not conform to the roles ascribed to them by the patriarchy risked being labeled "mad" and sent to asylum as a punishment. But even this type of treatment would then need some external justification and support, which is where the media steps in: "Media frames—the conventions media producers use to organize, make sense of, and give meaning to social phenomena—have symbolic power to assert the narratives of certain privileged and dominant perspectives in ways that ultimately lead to widespread, if erroneous, perceptions."²² In other words, sensational gossip, success stories, and medical narratives filtered through media all support the idea that women who step out of line should be punished, all under the guise of curing them.

In the time Nellie Bly is gearing up to investigate Blackwell's, the economic realities of the period reveal several developments in women's movements, particularly into the public sphere. As artisans and craftsmen failed to mass produce as a factory could, more men found themselves

having to give up their own autonomy and accept someone else's rules. These changes in turn challenged the masculine ideal of the independent man, since men increasingly depended on someone else's authority ... for their livelihoods. ... [S]ome men at the turn of the century feared that masculinity was in danger of feminization from the increased exposure to women.²³

This anxiety concerning the increased movement and independence of women in the public sphere, whose behaviors rejected the Romantic and Victorian notions of the "perfect woman / helpmate" ideal, is canonized in literature such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in which "the apparently helpless woman assumes male, female, and preternatural powers, taking away from the now-paralyzed Dracula magus' potency."²⁴ In other words, men fear that women will usurp their power. As Simone de Beauvoir points out, "The conservative bourgeoisie still see in the emancipation of women a menace to their morality and their interests. Some men dread feminine competition."²⁵ Setting aside the suffragette movement in order to focus on the economic transformation that led to more opportunities for women, Bly's era saw a rising number of entrepreneurial American women who made investments and started and ran businesses. For example, sisters Victoria Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin opened their successful brokerage house on Wall Street in 1870 and, most famously, the enigmatic Hetty Green, who made herself the wealthiest woman in the world.²⁶ This was "a period of economic reconstruction and reorientation during which gender roles were challenged and significantly transformed."²⁷ Despite this economic transformation, women never achieved the political power that usually accompanies money, largely due to the fact that women

were held to be essentially incapable of managing their money wisely or in socially acceptable ways.²⁸ Katherine N. Rankin writes that

social capital inheres in the social structure and must be conferred value by a society consenting to its cultural logic. Within this logic, differently positioned individuals experience associational life differently; some benefit at the expense of others. The benefits and costs of participation are distributed unequally. One does not acquire or squander social capital on the basis of individual choice; rather, one accrues obligation and opportunity to participate in social networks by virtue of one's social position.²⁹

Because the patriarchal power structure did not confer value upon the increasing movement of women into the public sphere, women's participation and contributions were seen as inferior to those of men. When individual women reject the notion that their social status outlines their opportunities and begin to operate within the economic system, they place the patriarchal tradition in jeopardy and disrupt the logic of the system. A feminist critic recognizes that the women's movement(s) that created this transformation was neither unified nor strong enough to combat common misconceptions and allow women's economic independence. Thus, their interruptions of the patriarchy were not as threatening as they could have been. A Marxist interpretation of this rising autonomy of women would celebrate their roles as proletariats rejecting the oppressive boundaries of their class, a victory for themselves, but would also recognize that the disunity of the movement created less of an impact than it could have had.

And yet, it is certain that even entrepreneurial women were still, for the most part, continuing their duties as mothers and housewives. Marxists seem to largely ignore housework because they believe that the “material conditions for women’s emancipation were being produced by the development of capitalism itself and would reach their culmination with the achievement of socialism, when domestic labor would finally disappear.”³⁰ Because women are not paid for their labor at home, Marxists would classify it as “unproductive.”³¹ All this means that women are responsible for taking care of the home and children, which their entrepreneurship seems to directly defy, and this deviation from traditional gender norms could be grounds for institutionalization. Not to mention that the strain of keeping up with housework, caretaking, and entrepreneurship can take a toll on a woman’s mental and physical health, which might also be grounds for institutionalization.

The woman whose sensationalist journalism launched her into fame, and whose pen name was Nellie Bly, was born Elizabeth Jane Cochran in western Pennsylvania on May 5, 1864, the third of five children.³² Her father “had become wealthy as a grist mill proprietor and real estate speculator, and he was prominent enough to have been elected an associate justice of the county..When [Bly] was six years old, though, Judge Cochran suddenly fell ill and died, without having left behind a will.” A rather unfortunate development, as according to Pennsylvania law, a woman is not entitled to an inheritance without having been specifically named in her husband’s will.³³ After years of struggle and financial reliance on half-siblings from her father’s previous marriage, Bly, determined to provide for her mother herself, attended a training college for young women but was pulled out after only one semester due to financial difficulties.³⁴ Hoping for a better future, Bly’s mother took her children to Pittsburgh, where Bly began her journalist

career in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, of which she was an avid reader—but she was told only to write about things concerning the women’s sphere.³⁵ It was here that she adopted her pen name, Nellie Bly, based on the popular tune “Nelly Bly.”³⁶ While writing for the *Dispatch*, “Bly did all she could to resist being confined to the women’s page,” until at last she left Pittsburgh behind to find, she hoped, improved prospects in New York City.³⁷

As a young woman searching for opportunities in New York, her funds slowly dwindling, Bly went to Colonel John Cockerill, managing editor of *The New York World* who had previously rejected her for a position, and lobbied for a tryout, which he eventually gave her. Many of her ideas for stories, such as to travel to Europe and return in steerage class so she could report firsthand the experiences of an immigrant, were rejected, and she was instead propositioned to feign insanity and get herself committed to Blackwell’s asylum. “It was a harrowing demand to make of a gentlewoman only trying out for a position, but to Bly it was far more appealing than the prospect of starvation.”³⁸ Bly’s work participated in a type of journalism known as “stunt reporting,” which combined “the exploitation of crime, scandal, or shocking circumstance with the spirit of a crusade, delivered into words by a clever and talented writer who donned a disguise to get the story.”³⁹ Bly’s propulsion into fame is likely the strongest rationalization for Blackwell’s immediate transformation of their practices and treatments of the inmates at the asylum. Further, “the success of her Blackwell’s Island exposé emboldened her for further impersonations,” including the exposure of a white slave trade ring, how young women in a paper-box factory were exploited in dangerous conditions, and the complicity of the police in a man’s predation on young unaccompanied women in Central Park.⁴⁰

Composed of articles written after Nellie Bly returned from her undercover assignment at Blackwell's asylum, *Ten Days in a Mad-House* recounts Bly's involuntary commitment to the asylum, the abuses and neglect she witnessed and experienced, as well as how she was extricated, her identity revealed, and the changes initiated at the asylum after the publication of her exposé. From a feminist-Marxist perspective, her work dramatizes the working-class woman's struggle to be heard: "The doctors," according to Miss Anne Neville, sick from overwork, "refuse to listen to me, and it is useless to say anything to the nurses."⁴¹ The irony is that when Bly first managed to infiltrate the asylum, she had "confidence in [her] own [acting] ability now, since one judge, one doctor, and a mass of people had pronounced [her] insane," but shortly after her arrival she declared that "[she] felt sure now that no doctor could tell whether people were insane or not, so long as the case was not violent."⁴² In fact, it takes only a few unrelated, nonsensical questions from a distracted doctor to determine her insanity and that Bly is a "hopeless case."⁴³ Her skepticism of the doctors' abilities to diagnose and treat their patients demonstrates that "the belief that mental illness was incurable ... did little more than mask the ignorance of the supposed 'specialists.' [la creencia de que la enfermedad mental era incurable...no hacía más que camuflar la ignorancia de los supuestos 'especialistas']."⁴⁴ One doctor's declaration that Bly is a hopeless case, then, condemns her to a lifetime in the asylum. "It is easy to get in," she writes, "but once there it is impossible to get out."⁴⁵ Women in asylums receiving treatment for their mental illnesses and behaviors directly contradicts the idea that mental illness is incurable. The fact that women are unwell enough to merit treatment indicates "a proper amount of illness," which implies that there is the inversely proper amount of wellness that ought to secure one's release from the asylum.⁴⁶ A reading

of stories, accounts, and histories such as *Ten Days in a Mad-House* reveals, however, that medical men denied this. The lack of a consistent and practical illness/wellness dichotomy is in keeping with biological determinism in that a) men define the health paradigm, b) because women are considered inferior they can never be truly well, and c) it demonstrates that men may have been aware that they were enforcing acceptable [read: traditional] gender roles as poor women, searching for what work they could, and opining women were also frequently shut up into insane asylums, a few of whom Bly introduces to the public in her articles, such as Miss Anne Neville, Sarah Fishbaum, and Mrs. McCartney. Bly finds that another patient is "quite silly mentally, although I have seen many women in the lower walks of life, whose sanity was never questioned, who were not any brighter."⁴⁷ It is clear that this particular woman must have stepped out of her bounds, been poor, or have been physically ill and/or weak to merit being sent to Blackwell's asylum.

A feminist interpretation of Bly's *Ten Days in a Mad-House* yields many recorded instances of expectations of female conformity, such as the idea that all women should be paragons—unrealistic standards of angel-like bearing. Moreover, it seems that once a woman causes an infraction of feminine expectations and is institutionalized, she automatically forfeits her chances to redeem herself. A recurrent theme is the doctors' examinations of their female patients, in which the questions and tests are invariable and which consistently condemn women to a life in the asylum, often at the behest of husbands' or other male authorities' wishes.⁴⁸ All this despite the fact that Bly, and certainly some cohorts, from the moment she was interred in the insane ward at Blackwell's "made no attempt to keep up the assumed role of insanity. [She] talked and acted just as [she did] in ordinary life. Yet strange to say,

the more sanely [she] talked and acted the crazier [she] was thought to be.”⁴⁹ Bly points out that even a criminal is “given every chance to prove his innocence.”⁵⁰ Of particular interest concerning this comparison is the fact that Bly masculinizes the criminal, demonstrating that a male criminal, who ought to be worse than an insane person because he chooses to commit a crime, is still treated more fairly, allowed to retain his autonomy despite his poor life choices.

Class also plays a major role in women’s institutionalization. Recall Chesler’s vituperation of mental asylums, which often catered to the rich and condemned the poor. This is illustrated by Sarah Fishbaum, who, when asked if she was insane, responds with this:

“Oh, no; what gave you such an idea? I had been overworking myself, and I broke down. Having some family trouble, and being penniless and nowhere to go, I applied to the commissioners to be sent to the poorhouse until I would be able to go to work...I knew after I got here that the majority of these women were insane, but I believed them when they told me this was the place they sent all the poor who applied for aid.”⁵¹

Through her use of dialog in *Ten Days in a Mad-House*, Bly reveals the underlying contemporary preconceived notions that the working class were immoral and more prone to suffer insanity. The workhouse is located on Blackwell’s Island, (now known as Roosevelt Island), where the prison and insane asylum that Bly infiltrated were located, perpetuating an association between the three classifications and showcasing the tendency to attempt to remedy the conditions of the poor, unemployed, mad, and beggars at the cost of human dignity and

rights. When the judge posits that Bly’s persona, Nellie Brown, be sent to an asylum, it is interjected that “[s]he is a lady and it would kill her to be put on the Island,” indicating that the abuse at Blackwell’s asylum is well-known, or at least common rumor, and suggesting that it is a fate that ought to be reserved for the poor.⁵² Despite the abuse and neglect Bly experiences, she is actually among the favored, largely due to the belief that she is a lady and that someone may be searching for her. This leads to a form of exhibitionism in which the insane are placed on display: “During the day the pavilion was visited by a number of people who were curious to see the crazy girl from Cuba,” and Warden O’Rourke “brought some well-dressed women and some gentlemen at different times to have a glance at the mysterious Nellie Brown.”⁵³ Of course, no one claims Nellie Brown, and Bly remains at the asylum to continue her work.

Darwinian psychology is also clearly at work in Blackwell’s asylum. The doctors operate on the presumption that women are clinically unaware of their own condition(s): “the doctor told him it was not necessary to trouble me further [with questions], as he had all the papers made out, and I was too insane to be able to tell anything that would be of consequence.”⁵⁴ They seem to attribute symptoms to patients with absolutely no evidence whatsoever, such as when “[Warden O’Rourke] wrote his name in my notebook, saying to the nurse that I would forget all about it in an hour.”⁵⁵ The patriarchal overtones of the medical system have been discussed above, but it is also of interest to note that Bly herself is not immune to doubting her own strength of will and mind. During her stay in the boarding house, surrounded by women, Bly “began to imagine that I was really in an insane asylum;” furthermore, she worries that “the strain of playing crazy, and being shut up with a crowd of mad people, might turn my own brain, and I would never get

back.”⁵⁶ This concern appears again during her stay, when she bitterly wonders whether any sane woman *could* exist in the asylum:

Here is a class of women sent to be cured. I would like the expert physicians who are condemning me for my action, which has proven their ability, to take a perfectly sane and healthy woman, shut her up and make her sit from 6 A. M. until 8 P. M. on straight-back benches, do not allow her to talk or move during these hours, give her no reading and let her know nothing of the world or its doings, give her bad food and harsh treatment, and see how long it will take to make her insane. Two months would make her a mental and physical wreck.⁵⁷

This passage suggests that the institutionalization of women effectively creates the epidemic it proposes to cure.

Another instance of this manifestation of Darwinian psychology, perhaps taken a bit out of context, is Bly’s dialogue with the editor. He tells Bly that he does not know how he will get her out of Blackwell’s asylum once she has gotten herself interred, but insists that she get in regardless. Here Bly notes that “I had little belief in my ability to deceive the insanity experts, and I think my editor had less.”⁵⁸ Since the editor had been reluctant to take Bly on as a writer, this could be read as an attempt to either scare her off or get rid of her—either as an inmate of the asylum for life or by refusing to hire her on account of her incapability to infiltrate Blackwell’s asylum. Neither of these possibilities paint the editor in a favorable feminist light. His lack of faith in Bly’s ability is in line with ingrained patriarchal ideologies and biological determinism; because Bly is a woman, she is unfit for the

position she seeks and will be unable to complete the task set before her—this “certain” failure would “prove” these theories. Bly’s success despite such obstacles is a major victory for feminists.

The failure of Blackwell’s to provide for its patients, by providing space, food, clothing, hygiene, heat, and even appropriate medical attention, is blamed on “a lack of means.”⁵⁹ Bly complains that there is no hygiene at the facility; that “[i]t is not the attendants who keep the institution so nice for the poor patients, as I had always thought, but the patients, who do it all themselves—even to cleaning the nurses’ bedrooms and caring for their clothing;” that “[t]he nurses had on heavy undergarments and coats, but they refused to give us shawls; and that “all the doctors were not competent.”⁶⁰ The nurses’ assertion that “[p]eople on charity should not expect anything and should not complain” and should be thankful for what they get contradicts the mission that patients should be cared for, which the judge who sent Nellie Brown to the asylum seems to expect.⁶¹ Rather, these patients are veritable slaves. Bly writes, “I have watched patients stand and gaze longingly toward the city they in all likelihood will never enter again. It means liberty and life; it seems so near, and yet heaven is not further from hell.”⁶² The sentiment parallels the experience of the proletariat looking towards the bourgeoisie’s luxurious existence. Bly’s hope in writing *Ten Days in a Mad-House* is not only to expose the horrors of Blackwell’s asylum but also to shock the public into making an outcry against them, enacting a form of Marx’s vision of the proletariat’s revolution.

Shortly following the publication of Bly’s exposé on Blackwell’s asylum, she is summoned before a grand jury, which launches an investigation into the process, persons involved, and living conditions.⁶³ When they arrive on the island, however, virtually all of Bly’s published

complaints had been rectified, and all knowledge of them denied:

The stories of the nurses and doctors contradicted [Bly's] story, but also each other. Everyone avoided responsibility for the conditions, saying they didn't know how the treatment, the food, the clothing came to be as Bly had written it...Most suspiciously, all the women who[m] Bly had quoted—and who[m] she had written as being as sane as her—had been discharged, transferred or moved to another quarter where she could not see them. The asylum had taken many steps to cover up its egregious abuse.⁶⁴

Bly writes that she “hardly expected the grand jury to sustain me, after they saw everything different from what it had been while I was [in Blackwell's asylum],” demonstrating her dismal awareness of the patriarchal and psychological belief that women's claims are generally unreliable.⁶⁵ Cheeringly, the grand jury rules in her favor, as she explains:

I am happy to be able to state as a result of my visit to the asylum and the exposures consequent thereon, that the City of New York has appropriated \$1,000,000 more per annum than ever before for the care of the insane. So I have at least the satisfaction of knowing that the poor unfortunates will be the better cared for because of my work.⁶⁶

And yet, this substantial increase proved inadequate to support the overcrowded asylum. Within a few years, the male patients had been moved to Ward's Island, but there still was not enough space for those remaining. Bly's scathing report cemented the image of Blackwell's

asylum as a human rattrap. By the end of 1894, all the patients were moved to other institutions, and the asylum was abandoned, a “symbol for the unrealized goals and the blatant failures so extensively covered in the press.”⁶⁷

By using a feminist-Marxist lens to examine the context and historical realities surrounding the figure of Nellie Bly and her foray into stunt journalism, specifically her entrance to, analysis of, and escape from Blackwell's asylum, one garners a more complete understanding of the story. That is, in order for modern readers to truly understand the impact Bly's works had on contemporary readers, they must have context and background of how society operated and dictated women's roles, sweeping aside those who did not conform to traditional societal expectations. Women had few rights socially, politically, or economically, which served to support a system which punished working class, immigrant, and impoverished women striving to improve their quality of life. Bly exposes the system as a false ideal instituted to protect the interests of men in power, not to help the women caught within it.

Notes

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4. Lois Tyson, "Marxist criticism," in *Critical Theory Today* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 56.
5. Lise Vogel. *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 35.
6. *Ibid.* 69, 71.
7. Tyson, "Feminist criticism," 89.
8. Elaine Showalter. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. (London: Virago, 1987 [2012]), 73.
9. *Ibid.* 78.
10. Jill Harsin, "Gender, Class, and Madness in Nineteenth-Century France." *French Historical Studies* 17, no. 4 (1992): 1058 – 59.
11. Showalter, *Female Malady*, 126.
12. Harsin, "Gender, Class, and Madness," 1050; Stacy Horn. "The New York City Lunatic Asylum." in *Damnation Island: Poor, Sick, Mad & Criminal in 19th-Century New York* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2018), 5.
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14. Phyllis Chesler, "Extracts from Women and Madness." *Feminism and Psychology* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 269.
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16. *Ibid.* 7; 53; 79.
17. Pérez Fernández, Francisco, and María Peñaranda Ortega. "El Debate En

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18. Showalter, *Female Malady*, 26, 78, and 203.
 19. Hopper and Burrell, *How the Brain Lost*, 63.
 20. Baukje Miedema and Janet M. Stoppard. "I Just Needed a Rest': Women's Experiences of Psychiatric Hospitalization." *Feminism & Psychology* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 251.
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 27. *Ibid.* 88.
 28. *Ibid.* 97; 101.
 29. Katherine N. Rankin, "Social Capital, Microfinance, and the Politics of Development." *Feminist Economics* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 6.
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 31. *Ibid.* 89.
 32. Matthew Goodman. *Eighty Days: Nellie Bly and Elizabeth Bisland's*

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33. *Ibid.* 4.
 34. *Ibid.* 5.
 35. *Ibid.* 6 – 7.
 36. *Ibid.* 8.
 37. *Ibid.* 13.
 38. Brooke Kroeger. *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist*. (New York: Random House, 1994), 84 – 86.
 39. *Ibid.* 88.
 40. Goodman, *Eighty Days*, 35.
 41. Nellie Bly. *Ten Days in a Mad-House*. (Rockville: Wildside Press, 1887 [2019]), 35.
 42. *Ibid.* 31; 39.
 43. *Ibid.* 38.
 44. Pérez and Peñaranda, “El Debate En Torno,” 97 – 98.
 45. Bly, *Ten Days*, 90.
 46. Showalter, *Female Malady*, 135.
 47. Bly, *Ten Days*, 35.
 48. *Ibid.* 43 – 44; 48; 51; 78; 79.
 49. *Ibid.* 9.
 50. *Ibid.* 51.
 51. *Ibid.* 78 – 79.
 52. *Ibid.* 27.
 53. *Ibid.* 43 – 44.
 54. *Ibid.* 33.
 55. *Ibid.* 45.
 56. *Ibid.* 11; 18.
 57. *Ibid.* 69.
 58. *Ibid.* 8.
 59. *Ibid.* 93.
 60. *Ibid.* 62 – 64; 70; 93.
 61. *Ibid.* 37; 59.
 62. *Ibid.* 85.
 63. *Ibid.* 92.
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65. Bly, *Ten Days*, 94.

66. *Ibid.* 5.

67. Samantha Boardman and George J. Makari. “The Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell’s Island and the New York Press.” *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 164, no. 4 (Spring 2007): 581.

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“Les Voir Venir,” a photographic subseries of the project *The Feminist Gaze*.

***The French subtitle “Les Voir Venir” translates to “See Them Coming” in English**

Virginie Foloppe

On February 28, 2020, I joined the demonstrators near the Salle Pleyel—the day of the César Awards ceremony where Roman Polanski was nominated for 12 awards despite multiple accusations of rape. I joined demonstrators again, on the evening of March 7, where we were violently repressed by the police, and I surprised myself shouting with the demonstrators as never before. Finally on July 10, we protested at Place de l’Hotel de Ville following the appointments of Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, accused of rape, and Minister of Justice Eric Dupont-Moretti, a lawyer who has both defended a government member accused of rape and sexual assault and has ridiculed women speaking out in the #MeToo movement. During these three events, I took photos of the demonstrations as part of my project, *The Feminist Gaze*.

On March 6, 2021, the Feminist Committee of the University of Paris V called on the public to join them during a demonstration against

sexual violence in education. I responded to this call, which took place in a context that is important to clarify.

Among the signatories of the call to demonstrate, there was the feminist collective organization Garçes, which was created ten years ago at Sciences Po, an international university for research in political science. Garçes’ mobilization efforts and actions in conjunction with other organizations resulted in the resignation of the director of their school, Frédéric Mion, on February 29, 2021. This resignation came directly after the publication of Camille Kouchner’s book, *La Familia Grande* on January 7, 2021.

In her book, the author, a professor at the University of Paris V, accused Olivier Duhamel of sexually abusing his stepson—Kouchner’s twin brother. At the time of publication, Olivier Duhamel was a professor at Sciences Po, and Frédéric Mion, the director, had known of his crimes for years. On January 6, 2021, one day before the publication of Kouchner’s book, Garçes tweeted a press release reacting to an article in the French magazine, *Le Monde*, where Frédéric Mion admitted to having been aware of the allegations against Oliver Duhamel as early as 2019. In their fight, Garçes was supported, among others, by Alice Coffin, a prominent feminist activist, elected ecologist at the Paris council, and author of the book *Le Genie Lesbien*.

In the wake of the successful sales of Camille Kouchner’s book, #MeTooInceste was launched by Caroline de Haas and Mathilde da Silva on January 16, 2021, following the tradition of the #MeToo movement that launched in the United States in 2017. Very quickly, testimonies from incest victims poured into social networks, tagged with #metooincest. Prior to the events of January 2021, Charlotte Pudlowski’s podcast “Ou peut-être une nuit” had also helped raise awareness of the extent of

the devastation of incest in France in September 2020, emphasizing the widespread denial that accompanied those crimes.

It is, therefore, in this context of the expansion of the #MeToo movement, first initiated in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke, that the call for demonstrations launched by the students arose. I teach representations of rape at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University in Paris, and it was only after actress Adèle Haenel publicly spoke out against the film director Christophe Ruggia for sexual harassment and inappropriate touching on November 3, 2019, that I was able to affirm the inclusion of the word “rape” in the title of my course in cinema. I have always felt able to speak freely about the subject of rape in the class I teach. I first noticed an acute interest for the subject of incest from my students during my analysis of the film *Festen* in my first year of teaching the course. Outside my classroom, however, I faced perceptible resistance in the many refusals to my responses for calls to conferences when they dealt with the subject of rape or incest. It is, therefore, with gratitude and joy that I answered the call to resist and took these photos which testify to the vitality of the protestors’ commitment and the hope that the students give me/us.



This protestor holds a sign that translates into “lesbian, feminist, and angry.”



A non-binary protestor holds up a sign that reads “Enby dyke against the hetero patriarchal cis-tem.”



A protestor affirms that “feminism is not a fashion, but a revolution.”



At the appointment of Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, who has been accused of sexual assault, a protestor holds up a sign that reads “Darmanin resign” from the speech bubble with the caption “no to rape!!!”



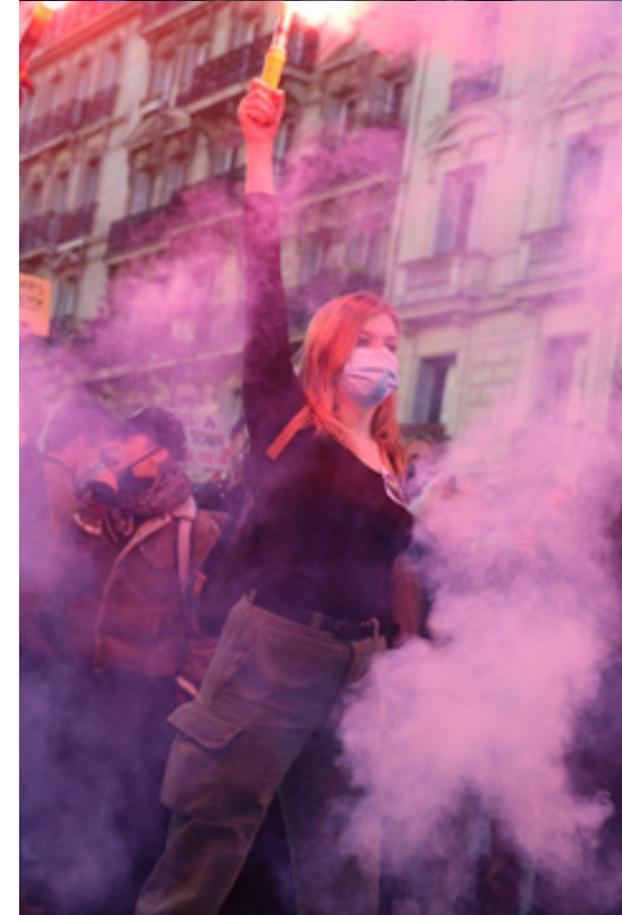
This protestor has written and crossed out the phrase “protect your daughters” and replaced it with “educate your sons” in bold lettering below.



The sign carried by the protestor reads “Silence = Complicity.”



A protestor holds a sign that reads “support for our community, victims of the law of silence.” Adelphe is the gender-inclusive French word for community.





Gender as a Continuous Becoming:

Exploring Drag Practices in Katarzyna Kozyra's *In Art Dreams Come True*

Maria Markiewicz

Abstract:

This article examines contemporary drag practices as performative spaces where gender norms are destabilized and subverted and where gender can be analyzed in its most complex form. Arguing that gender is a social construct and building on works by Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir, I propose to explore drag practices as performances that are inherently linked to the constructed nature of gender. I do so via a close analysis of one of the works by a prominent Polish contemporary artist, Katarzyna Kozyra, in which the artist is learning how to be “a real woman” from her drag queen master.

Yet I accept the idea that gender is an impersonation, that becoming gendered involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits.

— Judith Butler, *The Body You Want*¹

My body is a point of departure which I am and which at the same time I surpass.

— Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*²

Introduction

As Jack Halberstam once wrote, “It is remarkably easy in this society to not look like a woman, but relatively difficult, by comparison, to not look like a man.”³ As gender and queer theorists have also previously argued, “being feminine” is not necessarily ontologically related to being female and “being masculine” is not always “about men” (see for example Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick).⁴ Both femininity and masculinity are mythic constructions perpetuated through the performative repetition of acts, bodily gestures, and mundane movements. It is in those everyday acts that gender, understood herein as “a cultural construction imposed upon identity,” manifests itself in its purest form— as something we act, perform, appropriate, interpret, and then reinterpret all over again.⁵ Is gender performative? Is it subversive? Is it imposed on us or dependent on us? Since the notion of gender itself asks us to pose a vast array of questions, let us proceed

by looking at what might be seen as best depicting the ambiguity of gender: drag practices and how they pose a challenge to our beliefs about gender and sexuality, through a close reading of one of the works by a critically acclaimed, contemporary Polish artist named Katarzyna Kozyra.

Through exploring gender, drag and their depictions in contemporary art, this essay will argue that all gender is scripted, rehearsed and performed, building on what Butler wrote on its performativity.⁶ Gender is indeed a social construction, something that can be put on and then taken off, just like a drag queen's scenic image when she enters or leaves the stage. Moreover, through a close reading of Kozyra's multi-threaded and multi-part project, *In Art Dreams Come True*, focusing mostly on those parts that involve Kozyra working with Gloria Viagra, a Berlin-based drag queen, this text will attempt to show drag practices as not only sides where the notions of the "feminine" and the "masculine" are blurred and contested, but, most importantly, where the notion of gender itself is represented in its most complex form. First, this essay will briefly define the notion of gender as seen in different feminist writings and look at drag practices as subverting gender norms and revealing the structure of gender itself, rather than degrading women and appropriating their identities. Secondly, it will apply its findings to the abovementioned work of Kozyra, to radically conclude that gender can possibly shift from day to day, year to year, moment to moment, and that there is no such thing as "masculine" or "feminine." Perhaps there is not even such a thing as gender; instead, what remains is only a set of repeated acts, impersonations, and modes of how we decide to acculturate our bodies.

CHAPTER I: On Becoming One's Gender

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman."⁷



Figure 1: Katarzyna Kozyra and Gloria Viagra performing in drag. Still from *In Art Dreams Come True*, 2006, 20'58". © Katarzyna Kozyra, courtesy Zachęta National Gallery of Art. Source: DigiBeta.

In Judith Butler's reading of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Butler acknowledges how the sex-gender distinction was a crucial part of the essentialist feminist effort to dispel the myth that woman's anatomy is her destiny.⁸ This is precisely when the division between the two concepts of gender and sex begins to be acknowledged by recognising sex as the factual aspects of the body and gender as the cultural meaning that the body acquires. However, we have to question if this distinction still holds true. As both Butler herself and Kosofsky

Sedgwick point out, being “female” and being “a woman” are “two very different sorts of being.”⁹ Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that a “biological” female who self-identifies as a woman, a masculine-identified “biological” female, a drag queen, or a male-to-female transsexual are all equally authentic and feminine (or masculine) as they ought to be, since gender is, by definition, “unnatural.” In other words, as Butler argues, rephrasing Simone de Beauvoir’s famous line, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman,” “to be a woman is to become a woman,” and this becoming can happen through appropriating, interpreting, and reinterpreting certain gestures and acts.¹⁰

Hence, becoming one’s own gender involves an active process of constructing oneself— a process that results in establishing one’s identity that is no longer tied nor limited to anatomy. Since the process of becoming is never complete, gender is a very unstable identity, constituted and performed in regard to a certain time and space. According to Butler, how gender is constituted is similar to performative acts within theatrical contexts.¹¹ Whereas Butler calls to read gender as a performative act, Monique Wittig, on the other hand, calls for a utopian ungendered space, opposing the very categories of “woman” and “man.”¹² The disappearance of these categories would indeed make the “gender trouble” seem non-existent, but it would also leave it unresolved. By contrast, feminist theorist Marjorie Garber has argued for implementing a third term, providing a solution that would break us free from the binarism of gender, not gendering on its own.¹³ Undoubtedly, it can be argued that there is a third gender category already, which according to Caroline Hodes and Jorge Sandoval is the category of drag.¹⁴ Thus, in the next part of this essay, gender will be explored through the lens of performativity by taking Butler’s claims even further, acknowledging that gender is something that can be put on or off, adjusted, reinvented,

and then performed again, building at the same time on the notion of a “third gender” or a “third term,” that will be explored here as something especially present in drag practices and performances, which destabilize gender and create something new out of it. To put it in other words, drag practices give a space to experiment and to play—a space to truly become one’s own gender, even if it means doing so for the sake of performance.

CHAPTER II: Destablising Gender in Drag Practices



Figure 2: Michel becoming Gloria. Still from *In Art Dreams Come True*, 2006, 20'58". © Katarzyna Kozyra, courtesy Zachęta National Gallery of Art. Source: DigiBeta.

Some scholars view drag queens as reinforcing assumptions about the dominant nature of gender, while others go as far as to say that drag queening is a misogynistic practice embedded in masculine privilege. This

view has been present in Marilyn Frye and Janice Raymond's writings and more recently, in bell hooks' commentary on *Paris Is Burning*.¹⁵ They all agree that drag is inherently offensive to women and that it is an imitation based on ridicule and degradation. Queer theorists, on the contrary, argue that drag queen performances are transgressive actions that are about *destabilising* gender and sexual categories through presenting hybrid and minority genders and sexualities.¹⁶ They *cannot* imitate or appropriate women's traits or struggles, since drag is not intended as an imitation or copy of a particular gender. Instead, drag "enacts the very structure of impersonation by which any gender is assumed."¹⁷ Therefore, drag practices, whether involving drag queens or drag kings, can be perceived as a great way to destabilise the female-male binary and to demonstrate that there is no such thing as an "original" gender. However, this claim has some limitations; namely, the great ambiguity regarding what drag performances convey. As Butler demonstrates in *Bodies That Matter*, drag can be a site of great ambivalence.¹⁸ It can indeed be perceived as subverting the norm or perpetuating it through various detrimental stereotypes about women and femininity. Nevertheless, can drag queen performances really strengthen those gender stereotypes if they do not deal with women by definition, but rather with the disidentification of women? Drag queens are "disidentifying with not only the ideal of woman but the a priori relationship of woman and femininity that is a tenet of gender-normative thinking."¹⁹

Because Western culture is so deeply committed to the idea that there are only two genders, it is hard to imagine a world without this binary division.²⁰ However, such a world is possible on a smaller scale: the world of drag. Even though most drag queens are content to identify as male when they are off-stage, they often combine masculine and

feminine traits whilst performing in drag, which complexifies how they perceive their own gender and further illustrates that one's gender does not have to be a fixed state.²¹ "There are no direct expressive or casual lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality," and drag queens and their performances embody this fact very clearly.²² There is no better place than a drag show if one wants to uncover the true meaning of gender—a meaning insisting on its performative and subversive aspects and a place where one can be a man, then a woman, and then a man again. Drag shows provide spaces where men are more "feminine" than many women will ever be, where there is no such thing as purely "feminine" nor "masculine," and where it all no longer matters or maybe matters more than anywhere else. This seems to be one of the conclusions that Kozyra draws in her project *In Art Dreams Come True*, where she wants to fulfil her dream of finally becoming a "womanly woman," and, to help her become one, she asks Gloria Viagra, a Berlin-based drag queen, to take the artist under her tutelage.

CHAPTER III: In Art Dreams Come True

Why 'being a woman' and 'being a man' are both "internally unstable affairs"²³



Figure 3: "Women's tutelage." Still from *In Art Dreams Come True*, 2006, 20'58". © Katarzyna Kozyra, courtesy Zachęta National Gallery of Art. Source: DigiBeta.

In Art Dreams Come True is a large-scale project that Katarzyna Kozyra started in 2003. It consists of thirteen different pieces, including performances, videos, quasi-theatrical productions and happenings. One of the immediate inspirations for the project was "the will to become a real woman."²⁴ For the project, the artist has chosen two guides who assist her in assuming her new role of a "real woman:" drag queen Gloria Viagra and voice coach Grzegorz Pitulej, who is known in the work as Maestro. Both of the worlds chosen by Kozyra, the opera and the drag

club, are in a way saturated with artificiality, imitation, and posing. So too are the roles she has chosen to immerse herself into whilst realising this project: a drag queen (or king?), an opera diva, a cheerleader, Snow White, and finally, a seemingly innocent girl.²⁵ In this chapter of the essay, I would like to focus especially on Kozyra's training to become a drag queen as well as on Gloria Viagra, through analysing two videos: *In Art Dreams Come True*, a short quasi-documentary under the same title, which tells the story of the project, and *Tribute to Gloria Viagra. Birthday Party*, documenting one of Kozyra's drag performances.

In *Tribute to Gloria Viagra. Birthday Party*, Kozyra makes an appearance as a surprise-girl for Gloria, acting as her lookalike. The video begins with the artist entering the stage hidden in a huge birthday box. Gloria opens the box and Kozyra comes out of it dressed exactly like her drag master. The music starts playing and Kozyra begins her show, performing a striptease to the delight of the crowd gathered in Berlin's gay nightclub, Big Eden. After taking off all her clothes, an artificial penis is revealed, which is then torn off by Kozyra in a triumphant gesture and put into her miniature purse.²⁶ During the performance, the artist seems to move freely from one gender to another, impersonating three different genders: feminine, masculine, and intersex. The performance showcases, as it were, that gender is no longer dictated by anatomy and that anatomy does not seem to pose any necessary limits to the possibilities of gender. Moreover, seeing the artist undress herself to become a man, who then undresses himself to become a woman, once again shows that, these days, the body becomes a choice, a choice that we consciously make every day, and a choice to be one thing or the other, none, both or more at the same time. The choice of unbeing and undoing the body becomes "a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh."²⁷

The other work that I want to analyse here is the quasi-documentary *In Art Dreams Come True*, which shows the behind-the-scenes of Kozyra's project. The film begins with Kozyra singing "Let Me Entertain You!" by Robbie Williams on the same night that her previous performance took place. It then unfolds by taking the viewer to Gloria's apartment, where she is now Michel, who prepares for his next drag show. We can see a glimpse of him transforming into another gender, and this in-between state, when he is no longer Michel, but also not yet Gloria, is really interesting to examine. Michel is shown in his bathroom engaged in the ritual of becoming his drag alter ego. He shaves and puts makeup on, and this is when we can observe how from minute to minute, he is less of a Michel, and more of a Gloria.²⁸ This becoming happens in front of our very eyes. His gestures change, his voice changes, the way he moves is also different, but it all seems very natural, as if he is not really aware of this transformation—as if this was happening independently of him.

After Michel transforms himself into Gloria, we are taken to one of Kozyra's singing lessons, where Maestro, Grzegorz Pitulej, trains her voice. Even though Maestro self-identifies as male, which we can assume from the rest of the quasi-documentary, he is captured here wearing makeup and is shown putting on a satin, body-shaping corset, to then ballet dance in front of a mirror. This again not only debunks the idea that gender is by definition fixed and predetermined but also calls into question all gender stereotypes and the gender binary itself. Pitulej here is not simply a man wearing makeup; he is very different than in those parts of the footage where he is shown as a "traditional male," as if we have missed something, as something has happened behind the scenes that we are not being divulged or told about. Kozyra's characters, and the artist herself, all move so smoothly from male to

female roles and then again from female to male ones, that they are almost critiquing the distinction between sex and gender. They are their very own creations and constructions; they are creating themselves anew; they are becoming. And they do so fluently and effortlessly that we begin to question if the distinction between gender and sex binaries exists after all.

Kosofsky Sedgwick once wrote, "I as a woman am also a producer of masculinities and a performer of them."²⁹ This is what Kozyra's imaginary world created through *In Art Dreams Come True* looks like. It is a world without the violence of a gender ideal, where one can choose to be both genders at once or none at all. Kozyra's dream to achieve what she calls "true womanhood" is deeply rooted in what Susan Bordo theorised as "docile female bodies," meaning the bodies that are "habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, and 'improvement'" and characterise the reality of women living in capitalist societies.³⁰ It is Bordo who, influenced by Foucault and Bourdieu, acknowledged how our bodies are "texts of culture," stating that when viewed historically, the female body has been an "amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control."³¹ Therefore, it is no wonder that Kozyra, presenting herself as rather androgynous, also felt the need to comply with traditional gender norms, at least once in her life. But she took that norm and turned it upside down, because instead of becoming "feminine," she became "hyper-feminine" as she performed drag. Gloria, Maestro, and the other characters from *In Art Dreams Come True*, although dramatically different from each other, have one thing in common: not agreeing with the gender norm and the binary division to the extent of dismantling them completely and creating a new norm—that there is no norm.

Conclusion

This essay has shown that femininity, like all genders, is something that can be taught and constructed. It is a continuous becoming, a process, an intervention, a space to redefine and rediscover oneself that transgresses all possible norms. It has also demonstrated how drag queen practices, which at first seem to reinforce the so-called hegemonic femininity, are in fact places where redefining and transgressing gender-related borders take place. Arguing that there are no direct expressive or causal lines between gender, sex, and gender presentation, this text has advocated for the performative reading of gender, which is a term in process, a constructing that has no beginning or an end. Therefore, the performance of drag is closely linked to the performance of gender. Through creating a certain picture of a “woman,” drag reveals the structure of gender itself, as well as its contingency. It shows gender as an identity constructed in time, as a stylised repetition of acts.

By analysing Kozyra’s *In Art Dreams Come True*, this text has emphasised why contesting gender norms is so important. It is important because it makes space for new constructions and becomings to emerge. It is important because it opposes the violence constructed through the gender binary and sex norms. There is no such thing as a natural sex, a natural woman, nor a natural man. They are all social fictions—phenomena reproduced over and over again to protect the local consensus on how the world is organised. But what if we do not agree with the current state of things? What if we do not fit into dominant societal norms? What if we do not want to succumb? Drag practices and their popularisation show that there might be another world underway: a world where women can be masculine and men

feminine and a world where people can be both genders at the same time or none at all, a world where the world can be constructed anew and reinvent itself like we all do, from day to day, moment to moment, year to year.

Notes

1. Kotz, Liz, "The Body You Want: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Artforum*, 1992, p. 85
2. Jean Paul-Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 329.
3. Jack Halberstam, "Bathrooms, Butches, and the Aesthetics of Female Masculinity," in *Rrose is a Rose is a Rose: Gender Performance in Photography*, ed. Jennifer Blessing (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1997), 179.
4. This is discussed more broadly in Sedgwick's brilliant article "Gosh, Boy George, You Must Be Awfully Secure in Your Masculinity" and in Butler's equally interesting reading of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, in her essay "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*".
5. Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" (Yale French Studies, 1986), 36.
6. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).
7. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), 301.
8. Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" (Yale French Studies, 1986), 36.
9. *Ibid.*, 35.
10. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), 301.
11. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, no.4, (1988).
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17. Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 310.
18. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011).
19. Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 108.
20. Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough," *Sciences* 33, 2 (1993).
21. Caitlin Graef, "Drag queens and gender identity," *Journal of Gender Studies* 25, 6 (2016).
22. Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 315.
23. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011), 126.
24. Hanna Wróblewska, *In Art Dreams Come True* (Hatje Catnz Verlag, 2007), exhibition catalogue.
25. Katarzyna Kozyra, *In Art Dreams Come True*, 2006, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.
26. Katarzyna Kozyra, *Tribute to Gloria Viagra. Birthday Party*, 2006, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.
27. Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*", *Yale French Studies* 72 (1986): 48.
28. Katarzyna Kozyra, *In Art Dreams Come True*, 2006, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.
29. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Gosh, Boy George, You Must Be Awfully Secure in Your Masculinity," in *Constructing masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, Simon Watson, Carrie Mae Weems (New York: Routledge, 1995), 13.
30. Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight, Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 165.
31. *Ibid.*, 166.

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Vague Vagrant Vagina

Silvia Marcantoni Taddei

The male model I chose for this set is a nonbinary person, aged 47. I myself am a nonbinary person, aged 26. The model wanted to perform a virtual transition, and I wanted to help him/her through my own body and artwork. The model, pictured, is naked and wears a vagina drawn by me on paper. This drawing is an exact representation of my own vagina.

In this series of photos, the model holds two panes of glass in his/her hands. These panes of glass represent that his/her experience is hidden and revealed at the same time, like his/her own penis is hidden and revealed. The title is inspired by the very nature of the paper artwork: it's artificial (vague), it's movable and removable (vagrant), but it's a real vagina for the model.

Vague Vagrant Vagina (2021) wants to give dignity and visibility to the female state of mind of the model. Now that transgender and nonbinary rights are acquired in the Western world, the focus is to show individual identity and boost the personal way of living.







The Stylite

Dr. Susan Signe Morrison

Artist Statement:

Rooted in stories of religious solitaries from the Middle Ages, the stylite creates a feminist icon for all ages. Stylites were religious devotees who stood on pillars—sometimes for years—to demonstrate their devotion to God. Most of these named stylites were men, though anonymous women are said to have also performed these acts of spiritual and physical endurance. The female stylite imagined here elicits condemnation, only to ultimately triumph as a symbol of resilience and a source of inspiration. As figures for public consumption both in the past and present, women have been told to hide themselves away via clothing conventions or to silence themselves via shame tactics. Yet some defiant ones accept—even revel in—their roles as public spectacles.

Carrying her torso straight and fierce, she stands.

Her pillar, a column of independence, towers over the chaos of everyday life and the trials of the quotidian world. Not for her, the scurrying in alleyways to evade rats and snakes; not for her, the melting into shadowed doorways to escape panoptical forces; not for her, the anonymity to be found in swathed scarves and veils. Rather, the open sky is her roof—clouds her crossbeams and raindrops her canopy.

Under constant surveillance, she finds her freedom. With no obscurity, her secrets accessible to all, she delves within to foster a mysterious privacy cultivated by her will.

Defiant, silent, a rebel statue of insolence, she withstands shameless ocular intrusions. She learns not to flinch when attacked by rotten, decaying vegetables, moldy loaves of bread, and turned milk. She splashes on stinking garbage, chucked from below, like Eau de Cologne. Crumbled trash adorns her as haute couture.

People come—first singly, then clustered in dribs and drabs assembled in groups, then flocking in crowds. She galvanizes the community: a heroine of resolution, a demon of contagion, an effigy of ignorance. Each observer views her through their own image. The mother of compassion. The harlot of shamelessness. And, as time inevitably passes, the crone of knowledge.

They watch, hoping to spy on her moments of weakness. As she eats the edible food tossed up by sympathetic companions below. Shits as need be. Screams in pain. Sleeps in fatigue. Slaps mosquitoes. Shivers at glacial sleet.Laughs in joy at the covenant of rainbows.

Look as you wish. Can you see her change? Spy her wither? Her wrinkles crinkle up upon her smooth skin, reddened by the sun. Does she move? So slowly, you cannot stand long enough to see her tiny stirrings. You cannot be stagnant. You must realign and, in doing so,

miss the infinitesimal shift in posture when her elbow curves in, her chin tips a fraction of an inch, and her hip juts out in microcosmic repositioning.

You feel the pain of famine, you endure the agony of war, you expire with pestilence.

But she, implacable in the wake of heaving conflicts, apocalyptic terrors, and insidious disease, persists.

She digs roots in there above us. Her skin, toughened by the harshness of the elements, builds up a barky epidermis. Her arms rise up in branchy veneration. Her hair, tangled by eons of blustery gales and cushioned by tender zephyrs, blows in leafy abundance.

She perseveres despite it all—defiant to the end. And, when at last she must fall, her face glows with sweetness, sanctified by her ignominy. Smiling, she begins to die.

Through it all, she stands. Decomposing, she gently rots, perishing so that we may live sustained by her resilience.



The Lost Bride in the Broken Dream

Photo Exhibition by Rinat Zemach Levy and Mali Aroesti

This project is a series of photographs that presents the distance between the legendary image of a bride on her wedding day as opposed to the actual life of a woman as a wife and mother, the reality of which is complex and complicated. It deals with the myths of married life and family values.

The project presents various scenes from daily routine: preparing lunch, playing in the playground, and more. The gap between the magnificent, white dress and the true day-to-day actions of a woman creates a conflict between the dream of marriage and the life of the marriage itself. The exhibition is divided into four parts: the dream, the birth, the family phase, and finally, disillusionment.

In the first stage, the bride is presented in a dreamlike manner, laying with her eyes closed and surrounded by endless domestic objects. These objects represent the physical and emotional burden a woman has in housekeeping and raising children: toys, groceries, books, kitchenware, and clothing.

In the second stage, the bride is observed in the birthing process. This shows a moment of life and death for the woman: life in bringing a new baby into the world and becoming a mother and death in the metaphorical sense of the loss of her old and former identity.

The third part shows the day-to-day activities of the home and family maintenance. It shows the endless responsibilities: cooking, cleaning and spending time with the children. In this part the bride is no longer alone, as the children and husband are with her. The bride and her partner are no longer the same prince and princess who were dreaming of their future but two exhausted people lying down like two corpses on the bed, too worn out to even think of intimacy.

The last stage expresses the final station in life where there is disillusionment. She is observing what she has done, her mistakes and her past life. This phase expresses ending and separation, which are an integral part of the life cycle.

On the artists:

Rinat Zemach Levy, a multidisciplinary artist and art therapist (M.A.) talks about the decision to create the project: "I realized I was probably lost on the way to myself. I forgot to create and be present. I was focused outside and put my attention on being a superwoman and a good mother."

Mali Aroesti, the photographer of this series, has extensive experience in photography. She loves music, photography, and performance art. Mali talks about her connection to the project: "I remember myself as a child, dreaming about the whole package, but very quickly I realized that for me it does not fit. Therefore, I identified with Rinat and connected to the idea of breaking the dream."







Masculinity and Femininity:

Angela Carter's Concern About Patriarchal Representations in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977)

Dr. Yahyaoui Hanane

Abstract:

This paper attempts to demythologize patriarchal representations which corroborate certain images about masculinity and femininity. Through an analysis of Carter's novel *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) I try to question fixed stereotypes about masculinity and femininity and, therefore, argue that it is not biology which determines male and female identity so much as social and cultural constructions of it. In this way, Carter disrupts and subverts the idea of sexes which are perceived in binary oppositions and at the same time criticises the essentialist notions of patriarchy in which women are oppressed and relegated to a subordinate position. The paper eventually demonstrates that Carter privileges the concept of bisexuality in which both the male and female elements conflate to complement each other not only at the level of identity, but also at the level of representation, discourse, and language itself.

Angela Carter began for the first time to be read widely and internationally in 1979. This was considered as a turning point in her life as readers identified with her as a writer.¹ A most moving tribute was written by Salman Rushdie, reproducing his heartfelt statement from the *New York Times Book Review* when he acknowledged that "she was the most brilliant writer in England ... one of the best, most loyal, most truth telling, most inspiring friend anyone could ever have. I cannot bear that she is dead."² She is a writer, novelist, and critic; she wrote short stories, novels, and essays. She also wrote a volume of fairy tales for adults: "The Bloody Chamber" (1979). Carter also devoted a whole volume to *The Sadeian Women* (1979), written to the Marquis de Sade, whose discourse combined three main interests of surrealism: madness, sexuality, and transgression.³

Angela Carter's impulse to demythologize is one of the main features of her work. The thrust of Carter's demythologizing is powerfully apparent in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). It is a science fiction text, a speculative fiction which uses myths to question male/female roles. Drawing widely on Greek mythology, Carter proceeds to deconstruct some of the mythical sources of European culture. The story is premised upon Evelyn's adventures and his encounter with Mother, an embodiment of the omnipotent "phallic Mother" which will lead to his castration in the matriarchal underground called "Beulah."

The action takes place in America, during the time when there was a war among blacks and whites and the guerilla groups that have taken hold of New York and California. So, areas were devastated and only some hidden communities managed to survive. In the novel, these communities are "Beulah," the underground realm dominated by Mother, and Zero's farm. Evelyn, the protagonist, is a young British man who arrives in New York and finds a city immersed in chaos. He undergoes

a number of trials and, therefore, learns the way that femininity and masculinity are socially constructed.

This paper attempts to deconstruct patriarchal representations which corroborate certain images about masculinity and femininity in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). Indeed, I question these representations which construct absolute truth about gender identities and, therefore, depict the instances in which women are abused and disparaged by men. Carter develops cogently the idea that men's mistreatment of women is not an innate sexual drive, but is rather the result of how they have been culturally taught to view femininity. However, Carter disrupts and subverts the idea of sexes, which are perceived in binary oppositions, and at the same time criticizes the essentialist notions of patriarchy. In my analysis of the novel, I will unravel the constructed views behind Evelyn's myth, Zero's myth, Leilah's myth, and Mother's myth. I will also discuss the narratives of mirrors and the way it is oppressive to the characters. The paper eventually demonstrates that Carter privileges the concept of bisexuality in which both male and female elements conflate to complement each other.

In Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, the main protagonist, Evelyn, is depicted as a male subject who is transformed into a woman and, therefore, should acquire femininity as a social construct.⁴ Before indulging in the discussion of the novel, I will start with a brief theoretical framework which shows the way the woman enters the realm of femininity.

In *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*, Mitchell argues that the girl goes through two significant stages so as to enter the realm of femininity.⁵ The first stage starts with the child's initial relationship with the mother, which is characterised by the oral satisfaction gained by the sucking of the breast. In the second stage,

the child wishes to take the place of the father and thus to be her love object, in a perfect union with the mother. A third party, however, disrupts the mother-infant relationship when the girl is seduced by her father. Presumably, her love for the mother is transferred to the father. At that time, she becomes aware that she is castrated of the phallus. The girl learns masculine values which are essential to the development of her feminine subject. The crucial point is that at this stage the girl receives her identity as a feminine subject and is obliged to repress those aspects of her which are restricted to masculinity. In fact, both men and women behave according to their sexual identities and to the laws governed by their societies, which set up certain rules for masculinity and femininity. Consequently, the Oedipus complex is a patriarchal myth in which the boy learns the laws of the father and the girl is assigned to her feminine role: "Femininity is therefore a repressed condition that can only be secondarily acquired in a distorted form. It is because it is repressed that femininity is so hard to comprehend both within and without psychoanalytic investigation."⁶ It is interesting in this view that femininity is a cultural construct that the girl represses in her unconscious. She acquires her gender identity when she is first "seduced" by her father. She learns that she is castrated of the phallus and, therefore, the father who introduces to her this notion during the stage of the Oedipus complex. As such, the girl solves the dilemma of the Oedipus complex and enters the realm of femininity.

In *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter inverts the symbolism and challenges Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the Oedipus complex so that it is a man who is castrated in order to acquire gender constructs of femininity. In fact, she demonstrates that patriarchal representations create fixed stereotypes about femininity and masculinity. In the novel, Carter reveals that Evelyn is overtaken by a mythical figure called

Mother and becomes a woman whose name is New Eve. The latter is the prototype of the ideal woman and the projection of men's desires. Eve, therefore, emerges as an incarnation of male sexual fantasy. However, Evelyn's metamorphosis from a man to a woman, New Eve, is undermined by the fact that, although he is surgically transformed into a woman, he tends to reproduce masculine values. This propensity in Evelyn's psychology stresses the fact that it is not biology which determines female identity so much as social and cultural constructions of it. Evelyn's transformation from a man to a woman emphasises that the being whom Mother produces is as artificial as the myth of femininity constructed by patriarchy.

The bisexuality inherent in New Eve serves to further emphasise the traditional notions of femininity and masculinity in which femininity is perceived to be a matter of flesh and masculinity a matter of *logos*. The term *logos* alludes to man's sensibility and rationality; in the novel, the reader is told that, although New Eve is a biological woman, there are still some male elements of Evelyn inside her.⁷ Indeed, Carter questions these fixed stereotypes and reinforces the belief that biology is insufficient to create a woman by demonstrating that it is not enough to have a woman's body in order to be a woman. Evelyn concedes, "I know nothing. I am a tabula rasa, a blank sheet of paper, an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman's shape. Not a woman; no, both more and less than a real woman. Now I am a being as mythic and monstrous as Mother herself."⁸ As the passage attests, Evelyn perceives himself as a "Tabula rasa" and a blank sheet of paper. Arguably, it is one's interaction as a social being within a given culture which makes a woman a woman. That cultural aspect reveals that although Evelyn is transformed into a woman he lacks the essential features which pertain to femininity. Toril Moi argues that femininity

is a cultural construct imposed on women by society:

Among many feminists it has long been established usage to make 'feminine' and 'masculine' represent social constructs (patterns of sexuality and behavior imposed by cultural and social norms), and to reserve 'female' and 'male' for the purely biological aspects of sexual difference. Thus, 'feminine' represents nurture, and 'female' nature in this usage. 'Femininity' is a cultural construct: one isn't born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it.⁹

Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain standards of femininity on women so that they will conform to pre-defined patterns of femininity. Women who refuse to adhere to patriarchal codes are labelled "unfeminine."¹⁰ In the novel, Evelyn's new appearance should conform with the norms of femininity; Evelyn is constructed as a beautiful woman by Mother who upholds patriarchal ideology. Therefore, patriarchy has developed a whole series of feminine characteristics such as beauty, sweetness, subservience with which women should comply. These virtues are delineated, in the novel, as essentialist and oppressive to women in general and Evelyn in particular. In spite of her extreme beauty, Eve experiences torture and oppression under Zero, the image of the patriarch *par excellence*.¹¹

Evelyn's metamorphosis from a male character to a female figure enables him to experience patriarchy from a marginal perspective. Although he is physically a woman, Evelyn must acquire those aspects of femininity in order to be admitted in the phallogocentric order represented by Zero. Eve undergoes suffering under Zero, the archetype of masculinity and the essence of the patriarchal law of the father, as

Eve tells us, “He was the first man I met when I become a woman. He raped me unceremoniously in the sand in front of his ranch – house after he dragged me from the helicopter, while his seven wives stood round in a circle, giggling and applauding.”¹² The passage foregrounds Eve’s humiliation. By experiencing as a woman the degradations of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of a man, Evelyn finally learns how femininity is socially constructed, especially by men’s erotic pleasure in women’s suffering. In addition, Evelyn’s experience under Zero’s tyranny enables him to realise that he was a former violator. Eve tells us that when Zero raped her, “he forced me to know myself as a former violator at the moment of my own violation.”¹³ Hence, the “passion,” which the title of the novel points out, alludes not only to sexual desire, but also to the process of physical pain and denigration that Eve undergoes in her apprenticeship as a woman.

However, Carter criticises the extent to which women themselves collude with patriarchal views aimed to control them. In *The Passion of New Eve*, the wives of Zero simply surrender to Zero’s despotism without complaining or escaping from his harem. Eve comments, “They believed everything. They were accustomed to believing everything and the stranger the better, the more likely they were to believe it.”¹⁴ The irony in Carter’s fiction is that Zero allowed his pigs a liberty which he denies to his wives. For example, the latter were not allowed to speak loudly, and when one of his wives disobeyed his orders, she would simply be beaten. Eve admits, “But if he let the pigs do as they pleased, he demanded absolute subservience from his women. Although subservience is the wrong word; they gave in to him freely, as though they knew they must be wicked and so deserve such pain.”¹⁵ The reader of this passage cannot miss the sarcastic tone that characterises it. Presumably, the wives of Zero reinforce his myth. Carter, in fact, points

to the vacuity that Zero projects through his name. Zero is, as his name points out, a nothing raised to the position of complete importance by his seven wives, whom he mistreats, and without whom he would be of no importance. He represents the image of the patriarch, and he is presented as deficient in the maleness he mythologizes. He is delineated as “one-eyed, one-legged.”¹⁶ Elaine Jordan regards his name as reminiscent of the following:

He is the sign of nothing, by which women are represented in graffiti. Zero satirizes the power of the phallus, which Carter suggests in an arbitrary sign, as in Greek comedy and as in the wooden leg he straps on [...]. His power depends utterly on the persistence of his harem’s will to believe in him: But his myth depended on their conviction: a god-head, however shabby, needs believers to maintain his credibility. Their obedience rule[s] him.¹⁷

Carter uses the myth of Zero as in Greek comedy to allude to “the power of the phallus,” but she inverts the symbolism so that it is the patriarch who becomes associated with nothing, and his power is derived from the women who submit to his contempt and tyranny. Ostensibly, Carter represents patriarchy by such a powerless personality as Zero and, therefore, foregrounds the extent to which patriarchal representations are myths, constructs that women uphold by submitting to them.

Carter further deconstructs patriarchal representations and ultimately shows that the narrative of mirrors are only constructs imposed on women by patriarchal culture. Indeed, the character of Leilah constructs herself in the mirror as an object of vision for the

masculine gaze:

I used to adore watching her dressing herself in the evenings, before she went out to the clubs... she becomes absorbed in the contemplation of the figure in the mirror, but she did not seem to me to apprehend the person on the mirror as, in any degree, herself. The reflected Leilah had a concrete form... and we all knew, all three of us in the room, it was another Leilah. Leilah invoked this formal other with a gravity and ritual that recalled witchcraft; she brought into being a Leilah who lived only in the not-world of the mirror and then become her own reflection.¹⁸

Thus, I maintain that Leilah is another incarnation of male sexual fantasy. Leilah's predicament springs from the fact that the reflection she sees in the mirror is not her own reflection, but rather the reflection of the representation or constructs imposed on women by patriarchy. When she looks at herself in the mirror after changing her appearance and putting on the signs of femininity, she sees herself as "a formal other."¹⁹ The male representation is emphasised here by Evelyn who is doing the watching. Conversely, by presenting this pornographic view of the woman, Carter is not condoning it, but criticizing the fact that women have to assume a male point of view and are, therefore, bereft of an independent subjectivity.²⁰ By the same token, Evelyn is himself involved in the emptiness of a subjectivity once he is watching Leilah in the mirror. In other words, Evelyn, in that act of gazing, takes the role of the male consumer of that image in the mirror, as he comments:

To watch her dressing herself, putting on her public face, was to witness an inversion of the ritual disrobing to which she would submit her body... So she too, seemed to abandon herself in the mirror, to abandon herself to the mirror, and allowed herself to function only as a fiction of the erotic dream into which the mirror cast me... together, we entered the same reverie, the self-created, self-perpetuating, solipsistic world of the woman watching herself, being watched in a mirror that seemed to have split apart under the strain of supporting her world.²¹

Interestingly, Carter condemns pornography, for she considers that it exploits women and dehumanizes them by transforming them into commodities. In this context of commodification, Carter states in the preface of *The Sadeian Women* (1979) that:

Pornographers are the enemies of women only because our contemporary ideology of pornography does not encompass the possibility of change, as if we were the slaves of history and not its makers, as if sexual relations were not necessarily an expression of social relations, as if sex itself were an external fact, one as immutable as the weather, creating human practices but never part of it.²²

As the passage demonstrates, pornographic representations reproduce the anatomical difference of masculinity and femininity. Indeed, the woman is constructed as receptive and, therefore, subjected to masculine exploitation. Sexuality, as symbolised by such binary

oppositions, is constrained by ideological representations of sexual difference which take it for granted that masculinity should be active and femininity is passive. Carter, therefore, contests the caricatured representation of femininity as it expresses itself in pornography and the ideology in which social positions are forcibly assigned to human agents.

Carter revises the concept of femininity and strives to liberate women from the existing structures and myths inherited from the phallogentric tradition. The concept of masquerade in which the woman changes her identity in order to be desirable to men is deconstructed. In effect, Carter reveals the contingency of patriarchal representations symbolised by the narrative of mirrors by shattering the glass in Tristessa's house. This task is, in fact, entrusted to Zero who performs it inadvertently when he is searching for Tristessa:

And then, astonished, he lurched back against a great glass and dislodged it from its chrome pedestal so that it fell and shattered on the floor. The girls let out such a loud collective gasp the candle flames shivered; they rose up on their mounts to catch the action better while I involuntarily darted forward and then fell back, covering my eyes, for I could hardly believe what I saw, what the parted strands of silver have revealed.²³

It is significant that the breaking of the glass in Carter's fiction releases the characters, notably Evelyn and Leilah from the confining nature of the constructs imposed on them by the dominant modes of patriarchal representations symbolised by the mirror and thus allows them to come to terms with their own identities. For example, Evelyn accepts his transformation into Eve and consequently loses his sadism.

Clearly, Carter demythologises patriarchal representations and hence resists the image of sexuality imposed on both the woman as commodity and the man who performs the role of consumer of that commodity.

However, Carter challenges the binary oppositions of masculine/feminine dichotomy by engendering a union which is devoid of essentialist characteristics between male and female. It is worth noting that Eve and Tristessa's ability to come to terms with their own identities involve their capacity to acknowledge both the female and male elements of their personalities.²⁴ Eve notes, "We are Tiresias."²⁵ The quote alludes not only to the bisexuality inherent in the relationship of Eve and Tristessa, but also to the reciprocity, communication and love which characterize their union. Additionally, the notion of masculinity and femininity is deconstructed. In her article, "Women's Time" Julia Kristeva advocates a deconstructive approach to sexual difference in which women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical. Kristeva writes, "The very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to metaphysics. What can 'identity,' even 'sexual identity,' mean in a new theoretical and scientific space, where the notion of identity is challenged."²⁶ This position challenges the notion of sexual difference and identity between man and woman. Arguably, a woman's place in society is equal to man as she is no longer represented as a subordinate member. Her femaleness merges with her male counterpart in a metaphysical way. Hence, the traditional masculine and feminine values are deconstructed and there is a consensus that society will cease to categorize logic, conceptualization and rationality as masculine.

In *The Passion of New Eve*, when Eve and Tristessa make love in the desert, they are represented as both masculine and feminine. Eve and Tristessa become one self and sexual differences are extinguished, as

Eve comments:

He and I, she and he, are the sole oasis in this desert. Flesh is a function of enchantment. It uncreated the world. He told me my intimacy smelled of cheese, no- not quite like cheese... and rummaged in a forgotten word-hoard of metaphor, but at last was forced to abandon imagery, since it is inadequate and he could only say is a sweetish smell, but rotten, too, and also a little salty...the primordial marine smell, as if we carry within us the ocean where, at the dawn of time, we were all born. This wild, rank, acrid odour hung about us; the smell of the first sea, that covered everything, the waters of beginnings.²⁷

Clearly, both Eve and Tristessa experience rebirth when they make love in the desert. The metaphor of the ocean is significant since it shows how the power-relations between feminine and masculine are overcome and, therefore, affords a note of hope which inspires a new beginning and future. Moreover, Eve's sexual experience with Tristessa is ultimately different from the one she experienced with Zero. Unlike Zero, Tristessa is not a patriarch or a misogynist, but rather a human being who inhabits both male and female positions and therefore accepts the other as part of himself. The idea of passion becomes associated for both bisexual beings with ecstasy. It is also equated with the idea of passionate involvement with the other as well as the self. The inference to be drawn is that Carter's propensity is to complement attributes of masculinity with those of femininity, not only at the level of identity, but also at the level of representation, discourse, and language itself. Accordingly, it is this conflation between masculine and feminine representation which is stressed in the union of Eve and Tristessa and

which is capable of creating the image of wholeness:

We were - every modulation of the selves we now projected upon each other's flesh, selves - aspects of being, ideas that seemed, during our embraces, to be the very essence of our selves; the concentrated essence of being, as if out of these fathomless kisses and our interpenetrating undifferentiated sex, we had made the great platonic hermaphrodite together, the whole and perfect being ... we brought into being the being who stops time in the self-created eternity of lovers.²⁸

Arguably, the union of Eve and Tristessa is more powerful than the one Eve experiences with Zero since it eradicates the essentialist notions between male and female. Carter, in fact, promotes this union and demonstrates that it can transcend the traditional view of sexuality which conforms with patriarchy as I have elucidated earlier in my analysis.

Carter also deconstructs the myth associated with the character of Leilah. It is worth noting the difference between the way she is delineated at the beginning of the novel and the way she is described at the end. Leilah first appears, in the novel, as a prostitute who relies on Evelyn to earn her living.²⁹ She becomes pregnant, but Evelyn loses interest in her, refuses to marry her, and tells her she must have an abortion: "As soon as I knew she was carrying my child, any remaining desire for her vanished. She became a shocking inconvenience to me."³⁰ In another episode, Evelyn's selfish and abusive attitudes are clearly revealed when he acknowledges, "But soon I grew bored with her. I had enough of her, then more than enough. She becomes only an irritation of the flesh, an itch that must be scratched; a response, not a pleasure. The

sickness ran its course and I was left only with the habit of sensuality, an addiction of which I was half ashamed.”³¹

Evelyn’s description of Leilah is in stark contradiction with the role she accomplishes at the end of the novel. Indeed, when Evelyn encounters her, she is no longer in a degraded state; on the contrary, she is delineated as holding power and thereby performs a masculine role since she is a guerrilla leader. Evelyn admits the following:

The immensity of the catastrophe and her bland and irreproachable composure overwhelmed me. And her presence here, her wholly unexpected and yet perfectly fitting presence at the end and beginning of the world-further, her absolute disinterest in my changed state! Her straightforward and unequivocal acceptance of my female condition! Nothing in her manner, which was conspicuously gentle, nor in her dress, which was ragged, indicated she was their leader; only the spontaneous respect of the other ranks proved it.³²

In this episode, Leilah is revealed to be less of a mythic construct; rather, she is portrayed as a being who is inscribed into history. She is perceived now as much more autonomous. It is interesting to note the qualities of leadership which are entrusted to her. The reader feels that there is a transition from myth to a sense of reality since the characters enter history: “History overtook myth ... and rendered it obsolete. Mother tried to take history into her own hands, but it was too slippery for her to hold. Time has a way of running away with itself, though she set all the symbols, she constructed a perfect archetype.”³³ One can see in this description that Mother endorses myths which presume archetypal characteristics of the female, but she fails in her project. Evelyn realises

that Leilah is only a construction and the myth of femininity which Mother upholds is erroneous. Indeed, Leilah is a construction made by Evelyn: “Leilah, Lilith: now I see you are mother’s daughter ... she can never have objectively existed, all the time, mostly the projection of the lusts and greed and self-loathing of a young man called Evelyn.”³⁴ Carter, therefore, demythologises the myths she constantly supports throughout the novel to show how cultural representations shape our lives. She attempts to create alternative spaces where new social conditions can be invented and put to trial. The cultural presuppositions that govern the society’s everyday life and that constitute a threat to the autonomy of human behaviour are also interrogated.

At the centre of these interrogations, there is a character who will be the object of demystification of the woman as Goddess and Holy Mother. Indeed, Carter deconstructs the myth which Mother enacts. The disparity between the role Mother performs at the beginning of the novel and the way she is delineated at the end is quite conspicuous. Evelyn describes her in the following passage:

Mother has made herself into an incarnated deity; she has quite transformed her flesh, she has undergone a painful metamorphosis of the entire body and become the abstraction of a natural principle. She is also a great scientist who makes extraordinary experiments and I was destined to become the subject of one of them; but I was ignorant of everything when I arrived in Beulah.³⁵

As a mythical figure with great strength, Mother will change Evelyn from a male to a female when he is captured in the underground realm called “Beulah.” She is a paradigm of the Great Mother with all the

connotations of fertility, nourishment, and fear that are associated with that figure. However, at the end of the novel, Mother represents the antithesis of the traditional qualities of motherhood when she expels Evelyn from the cave. She becomes mad and loses her power. Leilah describes her in the following passage when she tells Evelyn: "Don't be afraid; Mother has voluntarily resigned from the god-head, for the time being-when she found she could not make time stand still, she suffered a kind of... nervous breakdown. She has become quite gentle and introspective. She has retired to a cave by the sea for the duration of hostilities."³⁶ Indeed, Mother is portrayed here as powerless; she no longer deploys her power, for she retired to a cave where she is singing and on the verge of dying near the sea. Presumably, Evelyn is now in control of his own construction and, therefore, no longer feels circumscribed by Mother whose authority stems from the fact that she is a figure of speech, a type of language, which is basically patriarchal.

Even the world of mirrors in which women are constructed do not exist in the cave. In fact, the mirrors near Mother's cave are simply shattered so that Evelyn and Leilah are no longer confined within the tyranny of patriarchal representations symbolised by the mirrors. As a matter of fact, when Evelyn enters the cave to find Mother, he finds a mirror which fails to offer an image of himself: "There was a mirror propped against the rugged wall, a fine mirror in a curly, gilt frame; but the glass was broken, cracked right across many times, so it reflected nothing, was a bewilderment of splinters and I could not see myself nor any portion of myself in it."³⁷ At this stage, Evelyn no longer relies on the authority of the mirror to see himself or indeed the other. The mirror, therefore, does not influence his perception of reality, now that they are broken. Evelyn's mutability into a woman is due to the fact that he incorporates both male and female aspects of

representation within himself.³⁸ Consequently, it is this combination that Carter upholds as superior to either purely masculine or purely feminine constructs of identity. It is also this fusion of male and female principles which makes the symbolism associated with the formation of circles so crucial to the novel.

Indeed, the novel itself defies linearity and adopts circularity in its form. Circularity is clearly revealed in the open-endedness of the novel which leads us back to the beginning when Eve/lyn articulates the last words of the novel: "Ocean, Ocean, mother of mysteries, bear me to the place of birth."³⁹ The place of birth could be construed as the place where Eve/lyn's child is going to be born or the place where he/she was born. The latter refers to England, which takes us back to the beginning of the novel. By returning to the place where he was born or in order to possibly give birth, Eve/lyn is forming a circle and, therefore, connecting the end of the novel with the beginning. This circular formation is, furthermore, associated with possible hope since the child conceived by Eve and Tristessa is going to be born. I argue that the ending of the novel not only leaves a space for the fascination of what is not yet known, but also invites the reader to partake in the action and suggests that the child is going to be born and will, therefore, grow up with new concepts of masculinity and femininity.

To conclude, in *The Passion of New Eve*, Angela Carter deconstructs myths simply to alleviate the pain and, therefore, affords a resistance to the oppressed condition in which women live. The inference to be made is that Carter makes a shift in her writings from myths of femininity which uphold passive stereotypes to a note of hope which is redolent of a positive future. In this context, Elaine Jordan argues that while generating myths, Carter is at the same time making assertions to deconstruct the essentialist notions of patriarchy: "The moral of all

Carter's longer narratives is violently in contradiction with the fact that in demythologizing, she is also refusing old myths and symbols, setting them again. And that strong linear drive of her fictions is never towards conclusion and resolution, only towards the assertion of certain principles or negations in the light of which the struggle goes on."⁴⁰ Thus, Carter criticizes the essentialist notions of patriarchy in which women are oppressed and relegated to a subordinate position. She subverts the concept of polygamy in which women have to accept absolute subservience from men. The allusion here is to the myth of the patriarch, Zero, who is married to several wives and whom he denigrates as I have explained earlier in my analysis. However, Carter shows women in triumphant positions as autonomous beings who hold power and therefore accomplish a masculine role. In addition, Carter resists the image of sexuality imposed on women by the dominant society; she rather privileges the concept of bisexuality in which both male and female elements conflate. At the end, Carter affords a note of hope in which the power-relations between masculine and feminine are going to be overcome and the tensions between men and women are going to be solved in the future. Finally, I argue that *The Passion of New Eve* reveals the extent to which Carter is concerned with generating a specifically woman's mode of writing, which is not dependent on patriarchal modes of judgement and which, therefore, transgresses cultural codes.

Notes

- 1 Sage, Lorna. "Angela Carter: The Fairy Tale." *Marvels & Tales*, 12, no. 1 (1998): 52.
- 2 J.B. Angela Carter (1940-1992). *Merveilles & Contes*, 6, no. 1 (1992): 1.
- 3 Lesinska, Sophie, "Sixty Years after the Surrealist revolt: Epistemology and Politics in Angela Carter's "Heroes and Villains" and "The Sadeian Woman"." *CEA Critic*, 61, no. 2/3 (1999): 99.
- 4 Mitchell, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*, (London & New York: Pantheon Book Publishers, 1974), 404.
- 5 Mitchell, 404.
- 6 Carter, Angela, *The Passion of New Eve*, (London: Virago Modern Classics, 1977), 83.
- 7 Belsey, Catherine & Moore, Jane, *The Feminist Reader*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), 108.
- 8 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 86.
- 9 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 102.
- 10 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 87.
- 11 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 95.
- 12 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 99.
- 13 Jordan, Elaine 'Enchantment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fiction' In *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction*, ed. Linda Anderson (London & New York, Edward Arnold Publisher: 1990), 36.
- 14 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 28.
- 15 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 28.
- 16 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 30.
- 17 Carter, Angela, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*. (London: Penguin Books: 1979),
- 18 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 127.

- 19 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 148.
- 20 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 46.
- 21 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 148.
- 22 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 32.
- 23 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 31.
- 24 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 172.
- 25 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 173.
- 26 Belsey, Catherine and Moore, Jane, *The Feminist Reader*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), page 112, 113.
- 27 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 49.
- 28 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 174.
- 29 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 181.
- 30 Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 191.
- 31 Jordan, Elaine. "The Dangers of Angela Carter," in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London & New York, Routledge :1992), 123.
32. Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 172.
33. Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 173.
34. Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 175.
35. Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 49.
36. Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 174.
37. Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 181.
38. Eve/lyn , finally at the end of the novel , is a bisexual being who incorporates both male and female elements in his identity.
39. Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, 191.
40. Jordan, Elaine. "The Dangers of Angela Carter," in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London & New York, Routledge :1992), 123.

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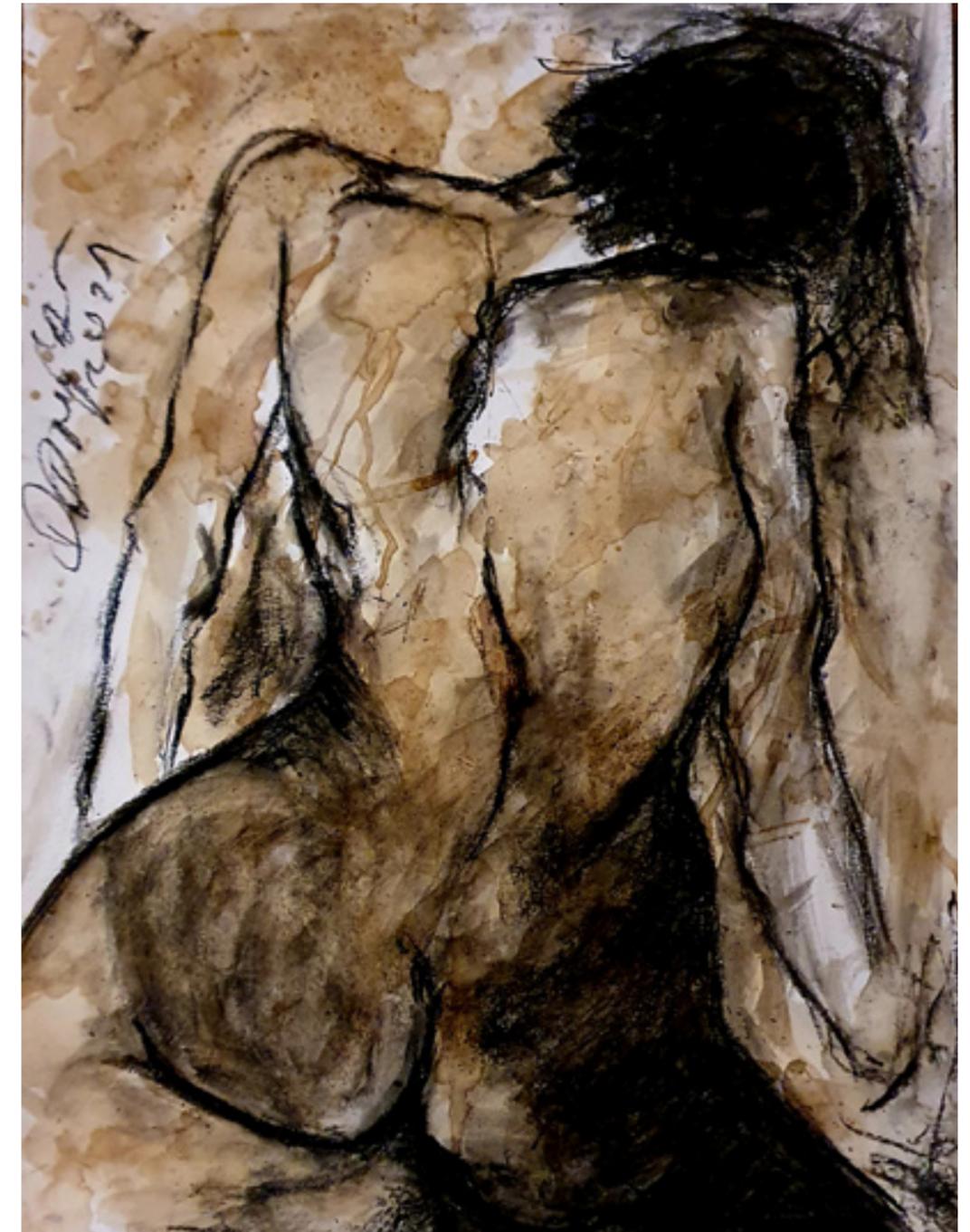
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Attaining Freedom through the Barrel of a Gun

Nandini Gupta

Abstract:

This paper explores the relationship between nationalism and feminism through a case study of the Women's Protection Unit in Kurdistan. Feminists such as Virginia Woolf have highlighted that women and their desires have often been excluded from the making of national histories. This paper, however, seeks to revisit this antithetical relationship by analyzing how Kurdish women actively defend their national boundaries in order to retain peace and freedom. By analyzing their reformulation of gender binaries at both societal and military levels, I will show how some women of Rojava have exemplified how grassroots democracies decentralize power equally across society. Some of the questions that I aim to interrogate through this paper are: how can women's imagination of a nation be different from the dominant way of imagining a nation; can women's participation in war serve as a vehicle for their agency and provide an egalitarian model in society; and are women inherently peaceful or is their peace activism a cry arising out of their political consciousness?

Introduction

*N*ationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope.

—Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*

The radical remark by Cynthia Enloe calls into question the intricate relationship between nationalism and gender. It has often been argued that women are excluded from the making of masculine nation-states. The aim of this paper is to question this hegemonic representation of nationalism by exploring the role of Kurdish women in defending their nation-state. The central premise of my argument revolves around the formation of the Women's Protection Unit (YPJ) in Kurdistan. It is a female combatant group that sprang up in 2011 to defend the Kurdish population of Syria from the repeated attacks of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The military personnel of the YPJ consists of 8,000 women in total from different parts of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. By examining their phenomenal role in nation building and women's empowerment, I attempt to show how female militaries like the YPJ can deconstruct the gendering of warfare at both a textual and contextual level. The three sections of this paper dwell on the militarised identity of the YPJ, illuminate their intersectional ideology, and finally theorize the transversal foundations of their feminist struggle. The paper explores the creation of an indigenous feminist politics which is beyond the narrow boundaries of patriarchy and androcentric culture.

Replacing the “Knight” in Shining Armour: Demasculinizing the Space of Soldiering

There have been long debates on the exclusionary models of military and war-making politics. Feminist critics have ostensibly argued that the participation in armed conflicts, which is an “integral aspect of the normative definition of citizenship,” has been exclusively male-centred.¹ Cynthia Enloe has been a vocal critic of this “exclusionary matrix” of warfare and accuses the military of being a patriarchal institution where combat exclusion policies envisage “women as nurturers and men as warriors.”² Enloe calls this a strategic attempt to perpetually reproduce traditional gendered divisions that can benefit both civilian and military society. Taking the thread from there, in this section, I will study how female combatants from the YPJ have constantly challenged these traditional gender roles by replacing them with a new model of “democratic confederalism.”³

Democratic confederalism is a radical concept by Abdullah Ocalan that deems feminism to be its central pillar. His idealization of a democratic nation presupposes the equal participation of women in society. The strident motive behind his idea of democratic confederalism is to bring “democracy back to its roots.”⁴ This essay seeks to show how the heroic struggle of thousands of YPJ women fighters against ISIS in northern Syria exemplifies Ocalan’s model. Through their unwavering courage, they have strongly sowed the seeds of democratic confederalism by being the role models for an entire globe where fighting is still considered a male prerogative.⁵ Their historic win in 2013 against the ISIS jihadists and the creation of Rojava reflect the implementation of these grassroots democracies that decentralize power equally across society. Rojava, a self-governing state, highlights how geographical location and cultural

ideology can play a significant role in providing equal opportunities to women in the military. The 2014 information report from the Canton Based Democratic Autonomy of Rojava elucidates that “the proportion of the representation of both genders in all institutions, administrations and bodies is of at least 40 percent.”⁶

This compelling equality between both genders is a signifier that the strength to fight is not just limited to military equipment but is also a political consciousness that invites equal participation of both men and women in defending their community. Evin Ahmed, a 26-year-old fighter of the YPJ, validates the above claim by stating that the Kurdish women use their participation in war as a venture to mobilize their agency and advance their equality in society.⁷ Therefore, the combatant roles for these women become a potent tool in challenging the predominant war narrative where women occupy the private sphere as caregivers and spoils of war without active agency in the public sphere.⁸ The military as a gender-neutral organization allows them to inhabit multiple identities. They can be a soldier, woman, and mother at the same time; none of these identities conflict with each other. This environment of unbridled inclusivity calls into question some of the great narratives that have been used in the West to restrict women’s mobility in the military. One of such important narratives would be the “Beautiful Soul and Just Warrior narrative,” coined and developed by Jean Elshtain.⁹

Jean Elshtain, a public intellectual and feminist thinker, uses this narrative to represent the exclusionary dynamics of warfare where the male identity of “armed civic virtue” is captured through the “Just Warrior” narrative, and women’s retreat from the battleground is the represented through “Beautiful Soul” narrative.¹⁰ Women, as she asserts, are the assimilated projection of unadulterated, self-sacrificing souls

who should be protected by men in shining armour. Women's consent and participation in the war is irrelevant and strictly prohibited. Evoking Hegel's postulation on this narrative, readers can see that she claims that women as beautiful souls are not only contained in patriarchal imagery as innocent beings but are also rendered incapable of handling the tactics of warfare.¹¹ These beautiful souls, therefore, become "the object of fighting and the just purpose of the war."¹² However, it is interesting to witness that the combatant roles played by women in the YPJ invert this proposition completely because women here become both the subject and the main perpetrators of the war. Figure 1. is a representation of how they assail all the homogenized notions that are associated with femininity. In other words, these Joans of Arc do not have to "act and appear" as men in order to claim their spaces in the military.¹³



Figure 1: The Women's Protection Unit

The women of the YPJ are the active makers of their actions, and their femininity neither acts as a justification for fighting a war nor a reason for resorting to peace. In this regard, there is a strong interrogation of gender as a cultural system of meaning that organises social life.¹⁴ They do not have to de-feminize themselves in order to fight a war, but they use war as a medium of replacing the traditional performance of femininity with an altogether new performance. In other words, they are "undoing gender itself."¹⁵ The words of Zilian Orkesh, from the YPJ, exemplify what I mean by saying they are undoing gender: "Fighting in this war empowered me to get my rights myself and to not wait for them to be given to me. I feel like a free woman now."¹⁶ As Orkesh unabashedly comments, the women are not living their lives under the strict compartmentalization of gender binaries but are instead giving rise to new meanings that allow life to be lived through choice and not essentialized norms. Consequently, it can be well argued that YPJ soldiers have not only deconstructed the hegemonic representation of male soldiering but also critiqued the rigid gender norms of their society. Their constant struggle is an attempt to bring an alternate representation, one where women supersede the patriarchal understanding of femininity and masculinity on the battleground, to the fore.

One War, Diverse Motives: Mapping the Different Causes of the YPJ Struggle

After exploring the remaking of the gendered nature of warfare by YPJ soldiers, this section examines their role in waging an intersectional war against multiple centers of oppression. As I have discussed before, the formation of the YPJ was not restricted to wars fought on the

battlefield, but it was a strategic attempt by Kurdish women to map out their spaces of subversion and resistance on multiple fronts. This section will discuss how these women destabilize the patriarchal structures of the society and aim for equality in all walks of life. Dilar Dirik, a conspicuous activist of the Kurdish women's movement, quite radically links their armed struggle with other forms of social revolution that these women are struggling to bring about: "Carrying a gun is like carrying a pen—we do it to change people's opinions about equality."¹⁷ Her words here shed light on their multidimensional and intersectional approach to their struggles. In the patriarchal world, guns are used to kill and terrorize people, but here they are used in an altogether different manner by YPJ soldiers. They are using their guns as weapons to create a new blueprint of society where all women, irrespective of their class, religion, and nationality will be given autonomy. Their fight is not limited to the fundamentalist regimes of the ISIS military but also resists against any encroachment of homogenization, be it religious jingoism, Western colonization, or neoliberal capitalism.

The guiding principle for the YPJ soldiers that helps them in actualizing this struggle is the concept of jineology, which is the "science of women."¹⁸ The PKK's Women Liberation Ideology describes jineology as a term that seeks to fill the gaps in mainstream histories, which other feminist theories have failed to fill. Jineology, therefore, situates itself on the premise that the political awareness for equality can only be brought about by bringing suppressed histories to light. The biggest example of these suppressed histories would be women's history because their contribution in the mainstream histories has often been left unacknowledged. Therefore, the practice of jineology recuperates their history by asking some probing questions such as the following:

How to re-read and re-write women's history? How is knowledge attained? What methods can be used in a liberationist quest for truth, when today's science and knowledge productions take knowledge away from us and serve to maintain the status quo?¹⁹

The above questions are the foundation on which YPJ soldiers initiate and perpetuate their battle. They go further in depth to find out the root cause of suffering and assert that "all other forms of exploitation begin after the exploitation of women."²⁰ Therefore, they battle an effective war against the hegemonic structures with the framework of a resilient liberation ideology. Their target is not restricted to the jingoist forces of ISIS. They also confront the prejudiced knowledge of Western feminists who inferiorize the Kurdish women's liberation struggle as an unfortunate escape from their lives of constant torture as "victims of a backward culture." In spite of creating a collective ground for feminist solidarity, Kurdish women only remain an object of the imperializing gaze which will want to "save" them from the misogynist tyranny and barbarism of their culture.²¹ In this regard, the forceful intention of the YPJ soldiers is to put themselves more vehemently into the domain of political power so that they can autonomously create their own cultural authenticity. Their resistance in defending their cultural and political norms is what J.C Young would call "an active challenge ... against a dominant colonial power ... depriving the imposed imperialist culture, not only of the authority that it has for so long imposed politically, often through violence, but even of its own claims to authenticity."²²

By postulating grassroot struggles such as numerous village uprisings, women guerrilla armies, and prison rebellions, women of the YPJ establish the self-reliance of their own culture and also

interrogate Eurocentric models of emancipation where only white women soldiers can personify female emancipation. To put it differently, they unanimously unite into one community and fulfil their task as guerrilla combatants. The victory in the Kobane war is one of the scathing examples of the Western exclusion of women from the battlefield by these guerrilla combatants. The resistance of YPJ soldiers during the war surpassed the boundaries of nationalism, statehood, and power that are usually the driving factors in state wars. The war was solely driven by their will to uphold the flag of human dignity and cultural honour. Their unwavering faith in guarding their cultural honour did not even deter them from the peril of sexual violation. One of the fighters of the YPJ, Shaho Burhan Abdalla, who had been captured by ISIS, unabashedly asserted that they can mutilate bodies of YPJ soldiers, but how can they smash “our incredible intelligence, courage, and strength?”²³ Her comment is a satire about the universalized notion of women being “helpless and vulnerable in the face of perceived threat of sexual violence.”²⁴

Another target of paramount importance for the YPJ soldiers is the political manoeuvring of Islam. It is a matter of great importance that YPJ soldiers never discarded their religious identity in accomplishing their goal of gender equality. In fact, their fight against ISIS barbarism accentuates how religion is mobilized in the political quest for power and colonization. Fatema Mernissi, a Moroccan feminist, exemplifies the above phenomena in the preface of her book *Beyond the Veil*: “Paradoxically, and contrary to what is commonly assumed, Islam does not advance the thesis of women’s inherent inferiority. Quite the contrary, it affirms the potential equality between the sexes.”²⁵ It is this lost solidarity that YPJ women are actively trying to reclaim from the distorted perspective of Islam delineated both by first world

Islamophobia and fundamentalist forces such as ISIS and the Taliban.

After looking at the YPJ’s struggle from multiple views, it can be clearly stated that their idea of freedom is neither the by-product of imperialist forces nor the instrumentalization of a national cause. It is a feminine quest of democratizing their society in such a way that people are allowed to make their own choices with freedom. Their fight is not against a unilateral institution but against a system of thought. Torin Khairegi of the Zinar base explicates, “We live in a world where women are dominated by men. We are here to take control of our own future. We are not merely fighting with arms; we fight with our thoughts.”²⁶ These sites of active defiance and confrontation not only relocate power but also decentralize it and finally invert it into a democratizing model of egalitarian society.

Mobilising the Grounds for Transversal Politics: A Practice of Peace Building

Political solidarity, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty defines it, is “the recognition of common interest” in order to fight against the symbolic violence of the repressive state.²⁷ This section seeks to bring together the two different frameworks of transversal politics and political solidarity that YPJ soldiers have used in mobilizing their struggle for peace. After exploring their encounters against the blazing issues of military chauvinism, imperial colonization, and religious fundamentalism, it can be stated that the disposition of their politics is to shun asymmetrical power relations in order to bring peace back into a world that has been ravaged by war politics.

This model of working can be further analyzed by viewing it through the lens of transversal politics, which is a term first used by Nira Yuval-Davis and was later utilized by Cynthia Cockburn in her works of

pacifist feminism. Davis describes the term as “a mode of coalition politics” that recognizes the differential positionings of the individuals and uses an interventionist approach in realizing their mutual goals without falling into the trap of identity politics.²⁸ By linking this section with the above two conditions, I seek to theorize that YPJ soldiers are using transversal politics to initiate peace processes. After tracing their journey through the aspects of military rehabilitation and intersectional dialogue with themes of imperial power, historical essentialism, and religious orthodoxy, it is worth asserting that YPJ soldiers’ cry for peace is not a biological need but an action of their political consciousness. To put it more coherently, it is a campaign “for peace with justice, for international strategies of social and political inclusion and economic equity.”²⁹ In realizing this common goal, they do not remain unilaterally situated but rather inhabit different positions. Some fight for the honour of their country, some battle for their honour as a female fighter, and others fight to “create a space where women can be effective without having to take up arms.”³⁰ There is plurality in their spirit and intention. The war is waged to ensure peace, and this plurality is what marks the democratic grounds of their resistance.

This democracy always upholds the value of acknowledging differences in identity by keeping the intersectional approach at the fore. By incorporating the ideas of constructive logic and shared actions, this community deals with differences that are usually killed, tortured, and erased in, for example, “British housing estates, on Irish streets, in Bosnian villages and Palestinian refugee camps.”³¹ Therefore, the whole movement of political uprising in the streets of Kurdistan in general, and the YPJ in particular, is an exemplification of how differences can be recognized and dealt with an affirmative outlook and used as a tool to establish equality in society. The words of YPJ commander

Narin Afrin on the occasion of International Women’s Day are an apt representation of how the ethics of transversal politics are brought to life: “YPJ is not only the defense of Kurdish women, but the defense of all women. Many fighters of different peoples and beliefs in the YPJ ranks have been actively fighting with their own colours.”³²



Figure 2: Kurdish women shout slogans during the funeral of a YPG fighter in the town of Suruc, Sanliurfa province, on October 14, 2014.
AFP PHOTO / ARIS MESSINIS/ARIS MESSINIS/AFP/Getty Images

The above words coupled with the powerful representation of figure 2 inevitably mark a revolution, which is promulgating new meanings and revised power-sharing practices. The fight of the YPJ, and other rebel groups like the YPD and PKK, is a deliberate effort to shake off oppressive practices such as polygamy, sexual coercion, and unilateral divorce. On every ground in the Kurdish fight, there is a will of forging a peaceful society, and this in itself is the second hallmark of transversal politics. It is important to point out that Cynthia Cockburn conceptualizes

transversal politics as a strategy used to attain a peace that involves shifting and radicalizing archaic views. It envisages a place in the future from where the past changes can be seen, but it also contains a cautious conditional tense for further development, what “may have become.”³³ Kurdish society would be the torchbearer for other nations because it has continuously revised the archaic models of misogyny and monism with a hope of becoming pluralistic, humanitarian, and feminist. The sheer fact that Kurdish society has women’s councils with equal representation in the decision-making offices is a signifier of a liberal society where women’s contribution is not only recognized but also heartily appreciated. Figure 3 is an emblematic representation of this attitude where the picture of a YPJ soldier in Rojava is placed on a billboard to pay tribute to her valor and strength.



Figure 3. Billboards in Qamishlou, Rojava, of martyrs who died fighting ISIS: “with you we live on and life continues.” © Newsha Tavakolian / Magnum Photos

It is a society where both women and men safeguard freedom and refuel the blaze of resistance. By using concepts like transversal politics and transnational solidarity, Kurdish women in general and YPJ fighters in particular are earnestly formulating associations to resist the coercive presence of militarization that can bring an end to wars and foster sustainable peace and freedom.

Conclusion

After analysing the Kurdish women’s revolution from different facets, I would like to conclude by stating that this unique model of female militancy can be a model for the entire globe. The irresistible spirit of attaining freedom can act as a resolution for problems like gendered warfare, misogyny, neocolonialism, and capitalism that we are grappling with in the contemporary age. The only solutions that could be grasped from their revolution would be “resistance is life” and “after peace, for us women, the fight only begins.”³⁴

Notes

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5 Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 46.

6 Kurdistan National Congress, "Canton Based Democratic Autonomy of Rojava," *KNK*, May 2014, 12.

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22 R. J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. (London: Routledge, 1995) 21.

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Virginie Foloppe is a lecturer in cinema at the Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris and a videographer and psychologist. Since 2019, social movements in France have become a great source of inspiration for her. The Yellow Vests, feminist gatherings, and demonstrations have allowed her to experiment with the photographic medium and sound recording while conducting her research on sexual violence (both rape and incest). Foloppe explores this issue of sexual violence through multimodal work with experimental video, photography, articles, creative writing, and in her course work at the Sorbonne Nouvelle.

Maria Markiewicz is a postgraduate student at Goldsmiths University of London, studying Contemporary Art Theory. She holds a BA in Culture, Criticism, and Curation from Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London (First Class Honors). Since 2017, she has worked as an art writer and a curatorial assistant, exploring contemporary feminist practices. Markiewicz is interested in gender, feminist, and queer theory, and she currently researches how drag practices, asexuality, and female masculinity can all challenge binary gender relations, inviting us to rethink sexuality and find other, often nonheteronormative, ways of being in the world.

Silvia Marcantoni Taddei was born in 1994. They are an Italian visual artist, filmmaker, performer, author, and musician with Massimo Sannelli in *AnimaeNoctis* (www.animaenoctis.net). Silvia has exhibited in Varese, Italy and has taken part in a virtual exhibition based in Turkey, curated by İbrahim Akinci. The magazine *The Working Artist* published their artwork in its March 2021 issue, and the publication *Art Hole* featured their work in April 2021. Silvia collaborated to publish several books by the independent publisher Lotta di Classico. They have directed music videos for public and private institutions.

Dr. Susan Signe Morrison is a distinguished university professor of medieval literature at Texas State University. Morrison has published scholarly books about the Middle Ages and medieval women and is also a novelist. She wrote *Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrð-Wife*, a feminist reinterpretation of the Old English epic *Beowulf*. Having taught in the former East Germany in the 1980s, she is currently working on a memoir about her Stasi (secret police) file, which has some unusual—and false—assertions.

Rinat Zemach is an Israeli multidisciplinary artist and art therapist. Her work with mixed-media pieces is influenced by activism and feminine social issues. Rinat graduated from New York Studio School and Visual Communication in Fashion Institute of Technology in NY. You can find more of her work at www.art-of-spirit.net.

Mali Aroesti is a portrait photographer and has a desire to find the insight of the people she photographs. She is an expert in photoshop, specifically in portrait retouching. She was an assistant at Moti Fishbain Photography Studio, and she graduated from Studio Gavra for studio photography. You can find more of her work at www.maliaroesti.com.

Dr. Hanane Yahyaoui is a part-time teacher at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences of Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco. She teaches English in the English, German, and Italian departments. She has obtained her master's degree in postcolonial studies at the University of Essex in England and completed a PhD degree in Literature in 2011 at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences in Rabat, Morocco. She has taken courses about feminism and feminist studies, both theory and fiction, at Essex University and found them fascinating. Her research interest is focused on feminism and postcolonialism. She has attended several conferences about feminism in both England and Morocco, and she hopes to attend additional conferences in the United States in the future.

Dacc E Dukjan is an artist originally from Latvia and currently based in Yorkshire. Dacc E Dukjan creates highly spontaneous and expressive art, using mixed media and different types of materials. Their practice

predominantly focuses on painting. They are self-taught and draw their inspiration from human relationships and everyday struggles with inner demons, emotional turmoil, and the melancholic meaning of time and space. They believe this passion is what makes them an artist and helps them remain connected to life. You can view their art at: ddukjan.co.uk.

Nandini Gupta is a PhD candidate at The Irish School of Ecumenics at Trinity College Dublin. Nandini is an Irish Research Council Postgraduate Scholar and an Andrew Grene Scholar in Conflict Resolution supported by The Conflict Resolution Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Her research is preoccupied with the role of women in investigating the importance of political identity in post-conflict reconstruction and the agency of unarmed political collaborators in bringing out the waves of sustainable change and practices of inclusion. Nandini has previously worked as a research assistant for H2020 "Pericles," an EU funded project, and she is currently working with the European research project "PAVE." Her research papers have been selected for presentation at the University of Oxford, Trinity College Dublin, National College of Ireland, and Dublin City University.