CONTROLLING (WOMEN'S) BODIES
“Analize – Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies” is an on-line, open access, peer-reviewed international journal that aims to bring into the public arena new ideas and findings in the field of gender and feminist studies and to contribute to the gendering of the social, economic, cultural and political discourses and practices about today’s local, national, regional and international realities.

Edited by the The Romanian Society for Feminist Analyses AnA, the journal intends to open conversations among eastern and non-eastern feminist researchers on the situated nature of their feminism(s) and to encourage creative and critical feminist debates across multiple axes of signification such as gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, etc.

The journal publishes studies, position papers, case studies, viewpoints, book reviews from practitioners of all grades and professions, academics and other specialists on the broad spectrum of gender and feminist studies.

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## Contents

**EDITORIAL** .................................................................................................................................................. 1

Women’s Bodies, Between Biology and Social Construction ................................................................. 1  
By Ramona Păunescu ........................................................................................................................................ 1

**ARTICLES** .................................................................................................................................................. 7

Controlling Women’s Bodies: the Black and Veiled Female Body in Western Visual  
Culture. A Comparative View ....................................................................................................................... 8  
By Elena-Larisa Stanciu and Bjørn Christensen ......................................................................................... 8

Why Adolescents Are Not Happy With Their Body Image? ............................................................... 37  
By Cristina Nanu, Diana Tăut and Adriana Băban .................................................................................. 37

Pregnancy Pragmatics Unveiled: On Bodies, Bellies, and Power in Cameroon .............................. 57  
By Erica Van Der Sijpt .................................................................................................................................. 57

State Policies and the Women’s Body: The Turkish Case ............................................................... 73  
By Ulaş Sunata ........................................................................................................................................... 73

Through Third World Women’s Eyes: The Shortcomings of Western Feminist Scholarship  
on the Third World ....................................................................................................................................... 96  
By Dr. Abeer Al-Sarrani and Dr. Alaa Alghamdi ..................................................................................... 96
Lesbian Mothers, Still an Oxymoron? Commitment and Agency in Lesbian Families

Planning for a Biologically Related Child ................................................................. 112

By Alexandra Gruian ................................................................................................. 112

The Discourse and Control of Reproduction in Communist and Post-Communist Romania
..................................................................................................................................... 128

By Adriana Iordache ................................................................................................ 128

REVIEWS..................................................................................................................... 160

Marxism, Gender and “the Transition”: A Comparative Review of Federici and Seccombe
..................................................................................................................................... 161

By Gary Blank .......................................................................................................... 161

Production and Patriarchy in Capitalist Society: A Comparative Review of Hartmann and Young
..................................................................................................................................... 172

By Gary Blank .......................................................................................................... 172

Book presentation : “Families – Beyond the Nuclear Ideal”. ed. Daniela Cutaş and Sarah Chan
..................................................................................................................................... 182

By Diana Elena Neaga .............................................................................................. 182
EDITORIAL

Women’s Bodies, Between Biology and Social Construction

By Ramona Păunescu

Analyze Journal carries on its inquiry on women issues by approaching a topic that constitutes a hallmark of gender studies: controlling women's bodies. The current number sets out to explore the theme of women's bodies from an interdisciplinary perspective and thus manages to bring to the fore a series of relevant analyses that contribute towards including this niche themes into the field of academic reasoning as well as to unveiling this major research topic for the feminist literature.

I think it is very important to mention from the beginning that I will employ a distinction between two facets of the women's bodies concept: the biological dimension (anatomical), on the one side, and the social construction of the body, on the other side. From the anatomic point of view, all that matters is the functional aspect of women's bodies. When we turn to the political sciences though, women's bodies, beyond being simple functional anatomic systems, represent social constructs, part of the cultural system that is continuously de-constructed and reconstructed. Acknowledging this dimension is mostly due to feminist writings and movements that have made a significant contribution towards a feminist interpretation of history, a perspective that had been mostly neglected. The
analysis of history from women’s perspective has always been closely linked with contemporary feminist politics as well as with evolutions in the academic subject of history itself. When women sought to question social inequalities in their contemporary lives, history turned out to be a starting point in unveiling the roots of their oppression. By analogy to the social construction of women's roles in specific historical contexts, rather than considering roles natural and universal, one could argue that not only their social roles, but also their more tangible characteristics, that are their bodies, are also social constructs and thus open to changing the perspective the society approaches them.

The social construction of the body is embodied in the assumptions about the way it works, it should look like, the functions it should accomplish. These assumptions are historically developed and vary both in time and across cultures. Between these assumptions may persist substantial differences between male and female roles, between the scientific and common knowledge accounts of women anatomy and women's reproductive capacities. The physiological assumptions are corner stones of the belief systems that define the moral, social and emotional characteristics of maternity.

The analyses on women's bodies from the political sciences perspective aim at identifying different social constructs associated to alternative cultural models and views of the body. In this perspective, we refer to analyses of the maternal body and the motherhood issues that raise identity questions from the own perception of the body and self-awareness to the relation between the self and its representation in society. The complexity of being a woman has always been the major difference between the genders. While the male identity has never been reduced to its paternal function, on the contrary, the female identity had been, for a long time in history, synonymous with either its maternal function or its social
status as a wife, lover, prostitute or servant, but never as a subject of history and citizen. What we know and think about conception, pregnancy, delivery, breastfeeding, motherhood in a nutshell, not only describes what women actually are, but shapes our expectations of what women as mothers should be and thus leads to moral judgements on what is good and bad, natural and artificial. These judgements then constitute the grounds of political decisions on maternity and fertility. More than that, the motherhood is not primarily a natural or biological function, but is a socially constructed behavior, constantly changed depending economic and social evolutions. A detailed analysis on the political control of women's bodies through controlling their reproductive functions and pro-natality policies in communist Romania is to be found in Adriana Iordache’s article Regulating Reproduction in Communist Romania (1966 - 1989). The issue of excessive medicalization of the pregnancy and delivery, but also of controlling the body through medical technologies are mentioned in almost all feminist accounts on motherhood. In the current issue we find an analysis of these issues from an alternative perspective - Lesbian Families Planning for a Biologically Related Child analysis carried out by Alexandra Gruian.

The state's interference with the most private sphere of the women's bodies is also analyzed in Ulaş Sunata’s article State policies and the women’s bodies: The Turkish case. The focus of the article is on women whose symbolic presence in political discourses and policies can be problematic for various reasons: who takes the governmental decisions and actions to strengthen women’s position in society; what are the purposes? What is the women’s role in the policy making process? The author argues that the design, adoption and
implementation of policies targeting women mostly by men reproduces a peripheral role of women in the society.

On the other hand, there are multiple other social pressures on the body, beyond the state and even more powerful than the state – cultural norms and expectations. The current issue of Analize Journal also includes interesting analyses on women’s bodies that originate beyond the European context thus revealing the huge differences between cultures when it comes to body self perception, understanding and managing pregnancy. An ethnographic material of Eastern Cameroon realized by Erica Van der Sijpt and called *Pregnancy pragmatics unveiled: on bodies, bellies, and power in Cameroon* shows that, although forces like patriarchy, biomedicine, and the state shape the field within which Cameroonian women give meaning and direction to their reproduction, women themselves have considerable leeway to circumvent existing powers or to use them to their own advantage.

Analysing the Muslim world, Dr. Abeer Al-Sarrani and Dr. Alaa Alghamdi argue that “western feminists have not succeeded in their assumed mission to ‘rescue’ third world women.” Writing in response to in response to Chandra Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1988, 1991), the article “Through Third World Women’s Eyes: The Shortcomings of Western Feminist Scholarship on the Third World” analyzes the problems that Western scholars face when struggling to call for third world women’s rights. The authors argue that “there is a tendency to universalize values such as freedom and agency, coupled with a misunderstanding of the meaning of social and religious conventions such as the wearing of the veil or headscarf. Furthermore, investigation of issues facing Muslim women is complicated by the fact that Western feminists are consistently seen as a threat and an indirect way to colonize this part of the
world”. The article concludes that the key to building new understanding is to avoid the tendency to essentialize or totalize the experience of women of an unfamiliar culture.

Though most commonly the studies on women’s bodies are related to pregnancy, state control, societal norms and expectations as regards the women’s role in reproduction and thus the alienation of their own bodies, the studies on body’s changes are in no way limited to pregnancy. The current issue provides a valuable analysis on the image of female teens’ bodies, taking into account the mechanisms that shape the attitude toward body image and exploring how messages from media and significant others are received and internalized. The analysis realized by Cristina Nanu, Diana Tăut, Adriana Băban and titled Why adolescents are not happy with their body image? proceeds from the idea that adolescent girls are highly aware of their appearance and invest significant cognitive and emotional resources in their relation with the physical body. Several studies show that girls become worried with weight and shape at quite young ages and thus become vulnerable in adopting unhealthy living and eating habits. The article aims at investigating the characteristics of body image in adolescence as well as the factors that contribute to body image concerns.

Moving forward the path of body image and its social implication, the article of Elena-Larisa Stanciu and Bjørn Christensen, Controlling Women’s Bodies: the Black and Veiled Female Body in Western Visual Culture. A Comparative View, sets out to investigate the black and veiled female body within particular regimes of power and visibility. The two types of bodies are considered cultural artifacts, the products of social norms and normative imperatives. The article builds on a theoretical framework centered on the notion of embodiment and on how the human body shapes the social interactions.
The volume thus gathers quite diverse perspectives and analyses on women's bodies and their social contingencies, ranging from pregnancy and state control to powerful teenage norms related to the ideal image of female body. This issue is very rich analytically as it features contributions that adopt both established perspectives such as Western feminism as well as alternative perspectives such as Muslim women approach towards the topic of women's bodies. The volume has thus a very strong theoretical thrust as well as empirical grounding in studying the consequences of the social and political control of the women's bodies.
ARTICLES
Controlling Women’s Bodies: the Black and Veiled Female Body in Western Visual Culture. A Comparative View

By Elena-Larisa Stanciu and Bjørn Christensen

Abstract

This article sets out to investigate the black and veiled female body within particular regimes of power and visibility. The two types of bodies are addressed as cultural artifacts, products of timely norms and cultural and political imperatives. The article builds on a theoretical framework centered on the notion of embodiment and the role played by the human body in the regulation of social interactions. Simultaneously, a critical commentary is given relative to the use and misuse of body image, projections, representations and reproductions of the female body.

Following the theoretical layout proposed, the article proposes an interrogation into artistic practice, in order to determine to what extent it can produce social critical commentary and eventually change.

Key Words: embodiment, black female body, power relations, Islamic veil, regimes of visibility.

Introduction

This article addresses various constructions of the female body as they emerge in contemporary Western cultural space and proposes a critical account of the cultural
practices that contribute to its formation. The analysis focuses on two distinct forms in which the female body is shaped within this cultural and conceptual space – the black female body in the modern and contemporary American socio-cultural layout, and the veiled (Muslim) female body, in Western European space. Despite the apparent incongruity of these two elements, a comparative view might bring to light a series of similarities in connection with processes of cultural inscription, fragmentation, deconstruction and re-signification of the racialized female body. All these practices are necessary, as they animate hetero-normative social structures and infuse the hetero-social practices of gendering within (Western) society, in the effort of regulating difference and the role it plays in the shaping of otherness. It is socially imperative to construct roles, images and models for and about women that are recognizable and can function complementary with other social roles within the matrix of given power relations. These phenomena appropriate the female body, altering its totality by means of epistemic violence and cultural aggression. It is the aim of this article to identify and analyze instances where female bodies enter these dimensions of violent inscription, becoming socio-cultural constructs that serve a particular cultural scheme. We identify a potential site of resistance in artistic practice. Visual art allows a wide array of investigation and critical interrogation.

*Embodyment. Questions of Identity and Materiality*

The process of observing and labeling women's bodies as female, physiologically distinct from masculine bodies, implies a series of assumptions, stereotypes and cultural habits that engage the feminine corporeality in a dimension dependent upon social reading, intentionality and fragmentation. These interactions have a liminal nature, as they regard various instances of simultaneity, difference, intentionality or spatiality of the body in relation to the world. Consequences and implications of these practices affect subjectivities they shape self-perceptions and alter the general vectors of knowledge production. In this perspective, the notion of embodiment gathers ideas and practices related to the existence of individuals as bodily entities in a world they experience starting from their bodies. In the past century, social studies and particular strains of philosophy (like phenomenology) came to see the human body as a mode of consciousness, a starting point in the creation of a view
of the world, and the ultimate space for the manifestation of individuals as active elements within their environment.

While making the argument that embodiment is a fundamental paradigm in the study of humanity, Thomas Csordas defines embodiment as a postulate resting on the core assumption of “the body [being] not an object to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the subject of culture, or in other words, the existential ground of culture”. From the perspective of a double function of the body – as object and subject in a socio-cultural environment – embodiment appears to refer to the very shift between the two categories. Waskul and Vannini touch this idea in Body/Embodiment: Symbolic Interaction and the Sociology of the Body (2006), where the sense of self and the wider social dispositions are related to human embodied experience: “embodiment refers quite precisely to the process by which the object-body is actively experienced, produced, sustained, and/or transformed as a subject-body”. This view is an obvious break with the Cartesian understanding of the human whole divided between mind and body. The reality of the human being is now corporeality the main viewpoint towards the world is a bodily one, a highly conscious presence capable of experiencing culture, the self, and the others. Waskul and Vannini tackle the matter of bodily being in the world from an interactionist standpoint, much in the tradition of American pragmatism, considering the body as “more than a mere skeleton wrapped in muscles and stuffed with organs; the body is also an enormous vessel of meaning of utmost significance to both personhood and society.” The acknowledgement of the body’s dispositions towards itself and the others depends on the recognition of such dispositions in the bodies of others.

As Csordas writes, the purpose and function of a body are shared, present in the experience of other people, maintaining cycles of interactions: “embodiment is a matter of

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3 Waskul, Vannini, op. cit.
shared, mutually implicating, and never completely anonymous flesh”\textsuperscript{4}. This interactional account of bodily experience may be underlying the formation and perpetuation of institutionalized representations within a social environment. The apprehension of gender structures, for instance, is symptomatic of the shared bodily experience; female individuals recognize their own bodily structures (defined often by sexual organs) in the bodies of others, becoming inclined to reproduce in their being the display of gender generally associated with female bodies. Body image and the presence of an exterior Other are basic starting points in the development of more complex social, cultural, and political hierarchies. In a critique of disembodied practices of social actors, Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott maintain that social interactions rest upon bodily negotiations, as “we recognize others through their bodies, we categorize them by age, gender, ethnicity”\textsuperscript{5}. This process identifies and validates an interesting double function of the use of body image – it is a tool in underlying both sameness and difference.

\textbf{Seeing and Believing: Performativity and the reclaiming of the interpellated body}

The notion of visibility plays an essential role in the emergence of the female body as a locus of producing and projecting difference. Cultural dichotomies at work in contemporaneity follow a rather long Western tradition of visual primacy, as a tool in developing and maintaining a trustworthy “objectivity of observation”\textsuperscript{6}. Robyn Wiegman proposes in \textit{American Anatomies} (1995) a critical reading of such objective accounts of reality, a critique that would paradoxically bring out the failure of visual categories (as race and gender are, in part) to “represent, mimetically, the observable body”\textsuperscript{7}. Instead, she

\textsuperscript{4} T. Csordas, \textit{op. cit}. p. 137.


\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Ibid}. 
argues, the “discursive production” of race, among other dimensions, will become clear, infusing some sort of cultural skepticism towards established categories⁸.

Besides gender, race and ethnicity are categories of existence marked by dimensions of visibility and structural changes occurred at the level of perception. As a historian of culture and human interactions, Michel Foucault analyzed visibility, with its various facets (invisibility, surveillance, hyper-visibility) as a means to understanding the wider order of producing knowledge and organizing society. In this framework, the emergence of race as a tool in the categorization of individuals is closely related to the general disposition of Western culture to manage difference and regulate identity, employing elements of the visible. The existence of gender and race as viable categories of social life in western society is dependent upon the mechanisms of the visible and the various fields of vision it inspires. Social seeing defines and regulates, institutes normativity and classifies transgression, all on the institutionalized assumption of the body being the primary locus of being. Relative to the necessity of cultural predispositions and pre-set structures of social meaning, Judith Butler argues in *Bodies that Matter* (2011) that the materiality of the body, the flesh or corporeality, is associated with reproduction, but also linked to “origination and causality”⁹. As Butler notes, the intelligibility of bodies is subjected to a particular rationality and power flux, which lead to a subjective reading of materiality¹⁰. In other words, identity and subjectivity depend on cultural scripts, which interpellate bodies in the process, rendering them meaningful relative to a particular social ethos. Althusser’s notion of “interpellation” brings new light to the nature and structure of the racialized female body, especially when connected with Butler’s concept of “performativity”. Individuals are “hailed” into becoming sexed, gendered or raced, on account of an already existing schema of meaning production: notions like black and white, man and woman are infused with a binary logic, which regulates difference by recruiting individuals and re-drafting their bodily presence according to a structure of subjectivity deemed reasonable. Individuals with female sexual

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⁹ Kaila Adia Story, *op. cit.* p. 38.

organs are likely to be *hailed* into becoming women and adopting the social dispositions set for their roles. Individuals with female sexual organs and dark skin tones are likely to undergo a split in subjectivity, as their bodies are visually prone to extensive reading of historical notions that evade their individuality. Likewise, a veiled body in a western public space will be primarily defined by the piece of clothing as an extension of the female body it covers. Since the body is imagined as the essential locus of being, the veiled body will become inseparably intertwined with the imagined subjectivity corresponding to it. The wearing of the Muslim scarf (referred to by the generic term “veil”) may be empty of religious symbolism; it may be used as an accessory, following social habit. Because of the complexity of individual choices and relationship to the act of veiling, it is difficult to define the veil as one consistent cultural or counter-cultural element. However, in a western field of vision, the intentionality of the act of veiling is irrelevant, as the western conceptions perform a divorcing of individual experience and general projections of a cultural product.

The naturalizations of bodily predispositions and corporeal elements under the primacy of visual are contested by Judith Butler, who coins the notion of “performativity”, an umbrella concept to foster the stylization of gender, ritualization, as a medium of cultural inscription, anticipation, as a driving force for appropriation of norms\(^{11}\). Performativity thus counters the existence of a “natural body”, pre-existent to its social and cultural inscription. Between interpellation and performativity, the female body image is caught between webs of habitual social seeing, which alter the projected and appropriated understanding of the female body, leading women's subjectivity in a state of tension with its own coordinates. The construction, distribution and control of “female-ness”\(^{12}\) pre-determine the existence of such feature as essential. This article argues that, within a postcolonial cultural ethos, western societies produce such pseudo-essential notions of identity starting from a mechanism of recognition and reproduction that is ultimately designed within a field of

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vision. In other words, to cite Frantz Fanon, “what is most visible” is essentialized as marker of difference.

The unsubstantiated naturalization of the visual and the primacy attributed to visual indicators of identity generate a field of cultural aggression that is projected at the level of bodily presence and corporeal dispositions: phenol-typical attributes, in the case of black women, or traditional clothing, in the case of Muslim women become notions of ontological value. Under the imposition of necessary visible markers of identity and the naturalization of embodied experience as manifest identity, the lines between having a body and being a subject are blurred.

Stuart Hall discusses the cultural signification and reproduction of difference in *What is This “Black” in Black Popular Culture?* (1992), where he underlines the “West’s fascination with the bodies of black men and women of other ethnicities” and the overall postmodern infrastructure that allows a “licensing of the gaze.” The recognition of others as exterior to one’s own body and the recognition of the other as different, based on body image, are symptomatic of prevalence of the visual, as a sense-making dimension, providing individuals with manageable tools for categorization and understanding. Differences of sex, race, culture, or ethnicity are inscribed with visual codes, culturally agreed upon, and projected on the most accessible surface – the body. Merleau-Ponty tackles the relation between the act of seeing and various lived experiences of individuals, emphasizing the quality of vision to constitute what is seen. Alia Al-Saji takes the point further in her article *The Racialization of Muslim Veils: a Philosophical Analysis*, where she argues that “the intentional structure of seeing and its reliance on habit” is what institutes difference, beyond the mere act of rendering things visible. Difference, instituted through the complex


mechanism of the gaze, is infused by “sedimented habits of seeing”¹⁶, which direct, regulate and maintain social predispositions. Race, violently extended to be an ontological category, is thus generated in the act of seeing, it is essentially a part of the general habitual social disposition of the seeing subject, rather than a natural feature of the body observed. Consequently, Al-Saji writes, “invisibility and visibility are not properties of the object, but are constituted relative to the position of the gaze in a visual field”¹⁷. Gender or race interpellations have specific dimensions according to the social milieu in which they occur. However, Al-Saji argues, they work towards a consistent “othering” of individuals visually marked as different. Just as the white subject constitutes the black subject through a process of abjection (Fanon), the non-Islamic subject constitutes the Islamic subject by applying the same traits of abjection, which further a naturalized logic of dichotomous embodied experience of the Self: to have a body identified as black is to be black. Correlatively, the veiled female body will be used as an indicator of identity, according to naturalized perceptions of the veil being a mark of gender oppression; a veiled woman will be an undifferentiated victim of gender oppression. This practice of constructing and defining social groups and individuals at an ontological level starting from mere visual traits of their corporeality is necessarily imbued with elements of social “habit,” which relies primarily on a visual register.

**The Body as Political Site: Difference and Power Structures**

In this layout characterized by complex regimes of visibility and various mechanisms of appropriating and regulating subjectivities, an essential role is played by the body. The body is a political site, insofar as it marks points of difference and sameness among individuals and allows for correlative regulations of these categories. In the generic understanding of a political process as one that emerges out of structures of power, and works towards the subsequent reinforcement of such structures, the body develops an

¹⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁷ *Idem.*
architecture of signs and markers of difference, “accounted for the distribution of material, spatial, temporal resources” and a necessary (in the late 19th, early 20th centuries) classification of population\textsuperscript{18}. However, the body is not a self-sufficient reality, but it is included in a larger flux of producing and projecting political power and maintaining cultural prominence. In this scenario, the black body is attached a series of axiological features, designed to control the projection and interpretation of images of black bodies. The primacy of the skin as source of identity resurfaces, laying the basis for what Wiegman calls “epidermal hierarchies,” as a means of applying discipline on the surface of bodies and organizing the social environment. Fanon’s “fact of blackness” attests to the same kind of epidermal priority in establishing selfhood: a “symbolic over determination of skin” is at work in the attempt to manage difference\textsuperscript{19}. The history of individuals identified as blacks in the United States of America is symptomatic of this kind of ontological violence, which naturalized black skin as a site of inferiority, and designated whiteness as “a political space, not a biological ‘race’”\textsuperscript{20}. Once again, the otherness of the non-white body is marked and politically employed in strategies of reinforcing social and cultural status quo.

As Merleau-Ponty notes, “the body is the place where appropriations of space, objects and instruments occurs”, a primary receptacle of ideological scripts\textsuperscript{21}. The role of difference as a mechanism of ideology is of importance, as it is difference and its institutionalized regimes of visibility that organize settings of democratic life. The (racialized) female body is used in constructing and delineating difference, being subjected to a process of ontological reduction – aggression manifested at a semiotic level, where meaning is attached to fragments of embodied experience, such as sexual organs. At this point, mere experiences of the body degenerate into representations of the body (Merleau-Ponty) – elements of biology are used to design cultural difference and naturalize it into otherness. A telling


\textsuperscript{20} R. Wiegman, op. cit. p. 37, 216.

\textsuperscript{21} M. Merleau-Ponty, \textit{op. cit.} p. 154.
example is the infamous phenomenon of the Hottentot Venus, discussed by Janell Hobson in *The "Batty" Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body*. The Hottentot Venus is the grotesque persona constructed for Sarah Baartman, a south-African woman whose body was exhibited in a so-called freak show in the 19th century Europe. Hobson discusses the process through which Baartman's body became an object upon which European fantasies, fears and desires were projected. Her fragmented body – mainly her protruding buttocks and genitalia – became a "colonized body," an example of sexual and racial alterity, the absolute Other, who bears in her body elements of a remote, exotic, savage society. Difference – sexual and racial – was thus ingrained in the anatomy of the Other, within an accessible field of vision, where social gaze could control and regulate knowledge. Sarah Baartman's was an individual body, produced and reproduced, fragmented and dismembered, controlled according to habits of seeing at work in a particular cultural time and space. Baartman's physiological experience and bodily structure entered, when meeting the mainstream signifying gaze, a regime of violent re-signification, where bodily dispositions were re-drafted and understood as layers of subjectivity. Such practices are maintained, Hobson claims, in contemporary visual culture, as female black bodies are included in specific categories of beauty, on account of historical echoes of the female body labeled "grotesque, obscene, strange, lascivious". 

**Cover and Uncover the Other: the Muslim Female Body**

In quite a similar way, power relations and violent regimes of visibility impact the image of veiled women in Western cultural spaces. As discussed so far, the veiled female body is a powerful social text, imbued with signs and symbols that echo a particular colonial imagery associated with the Islamic Orient. Homa Hoodfar makes this observation in *The Veil in Their Minds and on our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Image of Muslim Women*. Relative to the construction of the Islamic veil in western minds, Hoodfar writes: "By the

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19th century the focus of representation of the Muslim Orient had changed from the male barbarian, constructed over centuries during the Crusades, to the ‘uncivilized’ ignorant male whose masculinity relies on the mistreatment of women. In this manner, images of Muslim women were used as a building block for the construction of the Orient’s new imagery, an imagery which has been intrinsically linked to the hegemony of western imperialism”23. This narrative drafted for the Muslim Other relies, in contemporary Western society, on the perpetuation of the image of oppressed Muslim women. In colonial times, the middle-eastern woman was typically depicted as frivolous, sexual and dangerous. Edward W. Said points out that, women from the Middle East were often represented as belly dancers, temptresses, prostitutes, or silenced women in a harem24. Their bodies, just like the Orient, were open to be conquered and dominated. In contemporaneity, the image of the Muslim woman underwent a process of radical change, mostly because they became social agents in western societies, and were no longer perceived as distant, exotic Others or merely fictive characters. The physical presence of Muslim women in western societies collides with the static, rigid misconceptions of a (still colonial) western gaze.

Muslim women are turned into victims through an unsubstantiated process of naturalization of gender oppression on their bodies. The veiled body is de-subjectified, women’s agency is, in Al-Saji’s words, mutilated, and female bodies are appropriated into a re-signification of their very corporeality: they are symbols of victimhood, voicelessness, and coercion. As a pre-requisite of racialization of the veiled body, the act of veiling is made hyper-visible, over-determined, as a symbol of gender oppression. If, however, the western, white, freed woman, reflects herself in the image of the Muslim Other, the question is: what counters in the image of the western woman for the Islamic veil? The presence of the veil as an extension of the identity of the Other will function as a reinforcement of western values that are seen to be under threat. This is one of several ways in which the image of the


Islamic veil has been separated from its meaning. It is a practice of cultural aggression, a steady attempt to regularize the ever-present boundaries between the West and its imaginary (necessarily portrayed as under-civilized) counterparts.

Reflected Identities

Both the female black body and the female veiled body are cultural artifacts, mental constructions that serve particular functions in the process of regulating difference and defining alterity. The black and veiled bodies stand for silenced subjectivities and are used to maintain and reinforce imaginary borders between the West and the racial Other. In this process, following a Foucauldian frame of thought, black female bodies are imagined under the established power relations at work in society. Moreover, black and veiled female bodies are constructed on a binary logic of existence: victim and aggressor, over-sexualized and asexual, freedom and oppression. These categories limit agency and reduce identity to a set of modes of social existence, which need to be accessible in a field of vision, prior to their recognition and acceptance. In this sense, Hoodfar observes how individual lived experience of Muslim women are likely to be irrelevant in the context of a naturalized image of veiled bodies and a pre-set habit of social seeing: “The static colonial image of the oppressed veiled Muslim woman often contrasts with women’s lived experience of veiling. To deny this is also to deny Muslim women their agency”25.

The Black Female Body: artistic interrogations and visualizations by Kara Walker

The following section proposes a close examination of a selection of visual cultural products, which, when analyzed within the cycle of production – distribution – consumption, act as endemic features of a larger discursive practice in which the female

25 Homa Hoodfar, op. cit. p. 5.
black-body is regulated, controlled and re-signified in various ways. The art works selected belong to Kara Walker, a contemporary African American artist who investigates largely the antebellum American Southern imagery. She is best known for her larger-than-life tableaux containing black cut-outs silhouettes of figures representative of the chattel slavery society of mid-19th century. Walker interrogates given structures of knowledge, while addressing issues like racism, sexism, power relations and oppression in a mixture of reality and fiction, which makes her art both intriguing and revealing. Walker's artistic take on gender relations and sexuality produces a consistent body of work, which, in a frame of postmodern thought and cultural production, seeks to embody desires and aspirations of certain social and cultural groups that have been (and still are) marginalized. Walker constructs grotesque scenarios and turns her characters in paroxysmal versions of their abject Selves using irony and parody as instruments to dig into the nature of contemporary experience and underline simmulatory processes, which lay the basis for stereotypes.

Walker's artistic oeuvre creates a counter-discourse of race, gender and identity by deconstructing classic oppositions in race and gender ordering: her silhouettes are only black, regardless of their actual role in the panoramic scene. Another deconstructive artistic attitude is clear in the intentional complication of the process of labeling individuals as either victims or aggressors. It is our argument that Kara Walker makes a stand for the general post-structuralist attitude against the decision to represent individuals as bodies. Walker confronts the consequent objectification resulted from this cultural practice and uses figures and body shapes to stand for absent, yet active subjectivities. Figures of black women are present in her works, as receptacles for counter-discursive content and key elements in deconstructing stereotypes and questioning misconceptions. In relation to the social time and space (chattel slavery system in the American South), Walker includes stereotypes in an attempt to underline the almost exclusive materiality of women's (slaves) bodies. Her panoramic representations of a partly enchanting, partly demonic social layout
contain clear traces of practices the artists criticizes; various inscriptions upon female black bodies are recalled in most of her works, as a brutal reminder of the cultural mistreatment of black women, through different signs attached to their bodies: hyper-sexuality, lasciviousness, oppression. Walker uses feminine figures in order to re-draft their agency; she empowers her female figures by placing them in new relations towards other figures or the environment. Most of her female figures act and react in an empowered manner, seemingly taking back control over their own body movement and reversing established power relations.

**Figure 1**: Kara Walker

*World’s Exposition*, 1997

Cut paper on wall
Installation dimensions variable; approximately 120 x 192 inches (304.8 x 487.7 cm)

Walker’s scenarios seem to unravel, following a Bakhtinian frame of thought, recordings of a society defined by grotesque, deviance and an overall collapse of moral values into the materiality of abjection. In this perspective, most female figures are constructed on a pattern of the grotesque body, unfinished, always in tension with its own extensions. Female black bodies are identified according to classic stereotypical imagery (bodily predispositions) and represented with over-sized body parts, amputated limbs and self-inflicted violence, in a paradoxical attempt to re-affirm subjectivity (Fig 1). Walker brings forth and critiques the moral degradation that eventually led to a material degradation, appropriating in the process the female body as an object, a surface of projection (of fears, desires, power relations). Pregnancy, violence, or death defines an ever-creating body, holder of a heightened sense of self. The carnivalesque tone of most of Walker’s works illustrates a tension between pleasure and pain, while opening the space for critical judgment. Overall, Walker acknowledges and recalls a particular practice of knowledge production, specific to the historical time and space of the Antebellum
American South; in this layout, black bodies were defined as deviation from a western, white norm of bodily presence, which inspired the social and cultural trauma of slavery, and led to the moral and psychological incarceration of individuals.

Walker’s bodies echo the prejudicial frame of thought that considered the non-white body as deviant – a necessary step in the practice of othering. Much like the Hottentot Venus in Europe, the female slave body underwent a steady and inescapable process of inscription and signification, according to the cultural and political imperatives of the time. Black female body (along with the male counterparts) were refused subjectivity, thus citizenship, in a system that required them be regarded as mere instruments. Deviance and abjection are used to fill the space between figures and to link their movements. In Julia Kristeva’s perspective, the abject is constituted by what we throw away in order to survive and maintain a consistent corporeal existence. In this sense, Walker includes feces, bodily fluids, blood, amputated limbs and corpses in order to empower her figures: these elements reference self-awareness, awareness of the Other and a mindful attitude towards the limits of the body. Elements of abjection in relation to the figures of the female black body reference both the aggressive stereotypes that Walkers feels compelled to acknowledge and combat, and the relation of the interior with the exterior, a relation that her female figures are able to control and regulate. Female figures are thus empowered, presented as capable of violence, in control of their own bodies, expressing manifest sexual desires; through these artistic choices, Walker attempts to re-organize the division of power inside a system based on conceptual dichotomies: men and women; white and black; master and slave. Walker’s characters evade this prescribed social norm and work towards a dystopian visualization of a reversed master-slave dialectic, in which the line between victims and aggressors is blurred. Embodiment plays a central role, since it allows for a visualization of a strong discourse of empowerment, in a space of critical and subversive reading of history. Ramifications and extensions of the body act as markers of subjectivity, thus allowing female figures to move towards self-determination.

Walker’s works of art echo and comment on a specific, assumed to have ended, period in American history, but her artistic practice appears to be deeply rooted in the identification of present-day stereotypical frames of mind, which might be the result of
ideas and unsubstantiated conceptions characteristic to past times. In this sense, Walker’s medium is very telling: her all-black silhouettes, placed against white walls challenge social seeing, including the viewer in a gallery or museum in a web of production and re-signification of signs and texts. The austere tone of her works opens a space for viewer participation – the reading of the scenes requires a set of pre-given notions and assumption, which, Walker seems to underline, are not always free of prejudice. How do viewers fill in the missing elements in her works? How are we to tell between white and black female bodies? The answer could bring out the process of naturalization we mentioned before – knowledge about specific groups (here – black females and their bodies) is drafted and reproduced in a regime predisposed to a particular way of imagining and seeing, a phenomenon which eventually appropriates individuals and turns their bodies into commodities. Essentially, Walker takes an anti-racist and anti-sexist stand, which expands to include past and present possible alterations of the image of black women.

In order to analyze some of these aspects, we will select a number of Kara Walker’s works and will point to a series of visual elements that are visually enriched to become signs of racial and gender stereotyping, while also functioning as tools in reversing these stereotypes. A striking feature of Walker’s feminine figures is their freedom to move – their bodies interact with other figures (black male bodies, figures of masters or white women) and produce narratives of liberation, transgression and, essentially, empowerment.

One fundamental relationship is drawn between black female shapes and masculine masters’ bodies. The detail of World’s Exposition (Fig 1.) contains three white male figures, all in a state of movement and interaction with the rest of the tableaux. In the foreground, a black woman is beheading a white man, holding an ample body position. The male body appears to have recently lost an arm, which is thrown away. The gradual dismemberment of the white male figure references an on-going process of violence applied in a setting of reversed roles: the stereotypical victimized black woman becomes the aggressor, in full awareness of her body and movements: her position resembles an artist making a sculpture, which suggests authority and control.
In the same scene, another male figure that could represent a master is depicted as suffering from a recently inflicted act of violence. Although it is not clear who inflicted the pain, the figure suggests loss of authority and power.

A third male figure identified as a master is found in the background, constructing a pile of excrement. He is also lacking authority or power and is placed at the end of an abjection process started by a black woman, who seems oblivious of the consequences of her acts and simply satisfies some of her basic needs. The scene is built as a mixture of stereotypes (like hybridity – a concept visualized by the black woman in the tree) and critical takes on the master-slave and black-white power dialectic.

**Figure 2:** Kara Walker

*The Means to an End—A Shadow Drama in Five Acts, 1995*

Suite of 5 prints

Aquatint and etching on light cream Somerset Satin wove paper

Approximately 34.875 x 23.375 inches (88.6 x 59.4 cm) each

Edition of 2

Publisher: Landfall Press, Inc.
Another particular re-construction of the relationship between the black female body and the white male body is depicted in *A Means to an End... A Shadow Drama in Five Acts*. The breastfeeding detail (Fig. 2) shows a white boy in a position of dependence and powerlessness. He depends on the black woman to find satisfaction of a basic human need – hunger. The black woman is consequently placed in a position of power and authority, her body movements suggesting intent and self-control.

**Figure 3**: Kara Walker

*Consume*, 1998
Breastfeeding is the central motif of another work – *Consume*, 1998. (Fig. 3)

In this scene, Walker proposes a distorted process of breastfeeding, which references abjection and elements of subversive imagery on sexuality. Essentially, the piece is a commentary on perverted forms of dependency, in which the female black body is appropriated and re-signified according to prejudices and misconceptions. The objects attached to her body reference stereotypes – oversized shoes, offered maybe by her master, which embody the promise of freedom. She is wearing what it appears to be a banana skirt – symbol of a deeply rooted stereotypes founded on the racist notion of hybridity and sub-humanity of black individuals. The title of the piece suggests a critical position of the artist – Walker underlines the steady process of commodification of black women, which become images to be consumed and disposed of at will; in the piece, the black woman seems to be consuming herself, in a gesture that might suggests empowerment and resistance.

In her attempt to propose a new dialect of power between black and white, Kara Walker brings her black female silhouettes into contact with white female shapes. A detail of *Look Away! Look Away! Look Away!* shows a predominance of white figures (Fig. 4).

**Figure 4:** Kara Walker

*Look Away! Look Away! Look Away!*, 1995

Cut paper on wall

Installation dimensions variable; approximately 156 x 420 inches (396.2 x 1,066.8 cm)
The scene shows a black man rebelling against what could be his master. The master holds a whip, an object that projects power; he seems ready to use violence, but appears to be unable to do so. The white woman seems disturbed, but receives no (maybe awaited) help from the black woman (presumably a slave), who holds a sharp phallic object, resembling the one held by the master. Somehow discordant with the narrative of the scene, a white girl severs her own hand, but receives no help or attention. The only black feminine body in this scene is passive, showing no emotional reaction to neither of the violent acts that take place. She seems, however, highly self-aware and holds her arms ready to act, maybe in self-defense.

The selected works are endemic of Kara Walker's artistic oeuvre – she places liminal figures in the center of particular displays of power, making them move and react with control and awareness. By using the image of the black female in ways that might produce shock, Walker makes sure that stereotypes engraved in common memory are challenged, brought forth and thought upon, as a necessary step before their (desired) dissolution. Kara Walker’s art is, thus, highly political and critical, as it interrogates established hierarchies and challenges the way women’s bodies may be controlled and regulated in contemporaneity.
Artistic representations of Muslim female bodies. Questions of veiling and unveiling

This section proposes an analytical account of visual works of art that address the issue of the veiled female body. Given that the veil is often use as a political instrument in various anti-Islamic discourses, the veiled female body becomes consequently caught in the process of inscription and signification: gender, sexuality and family relations are re-worked on the basis of a particular cultivation of the Muslim veil as a symbol of gender oppression. The structure of visibility in most Western cultures allows the veil to become a hyper-visible object, over-determined and flooded with meanings produced and regulated following a specific ethos. In this perspective, resisting these aggressive scripts requires a plethora of consistent counter-discursive practices that must aim at deconstructing and re-defining the meaning of the veil, in such a manner as to permit the veiled female body to exit control and political regulation. We argue that visual arts may present the necessary accessibility for such an endeavor, and can offer the sufficient instruments for (politically) voicing some of these concerns. We will select three emergent artists who, among other tropes, employ in their art the veil, and interrogate the relationship between its use and female subjectivity. In terms of disseminating their works, all three artists have the selected piece available on a platform that brings together Muslim women and their voices26.

The art works selected are photographs, self-portraits of the artists, who use their body image in a counter-discursive take on the various inscriptions they receive relative to their corporeality27/28/29. All works share some similarities: they are self-portraits – an artistic choice that suggests self-awareness and acute artistic intention. The artists take upon themselves to embody a cultural trauma and visualize elements of common memory that

26 Available online at http://muslima.imow.org/
29 Feriel Bendjana http://muslima.imow.org/content/we-they-and-i last accessed 18.12.2013
are subsequently opened up for criticism. The aesthetic architecture of a self-portrait implies self-exposure, autonomy of bodily presentation, and control over what enters the field of vision. All three photographic works are suits of photographs, a choice which suggests a desired complexity on the part of the viewer – they construct a narrative that requires the reader to apply certain keys in decoding. Fragmentation is a common feature present in the photographs – the female veiled body is not depicted in full, however, the fact that it is veiled becomes clear, which points to the naturalization of stereotypes. All three artists underline the difficulty of defining identities. The series of portraits represent, in fact, anti-portraits, featured in the apparent refusal of the subject to be appropriated, contained within the frame of the picture. The constant attempt to escape containment forces the viewer to acknowledge the existence of another space, out of immediate sight, but real, nevertheless. This is an allegory relating to the historical reductionist practices applied to veiled female bodies, imagined as finite, defined by their physicality and appearance and reduced to immanence. The artists restore fragments of transcendence to the archetypal figure of the veiled woman, allowing mobility and free passage out of any aggressive gaze. All three artists are openly critical about one-sided views on Muslim women, often circulated in the Western social space. They include re-workings of the image of veiled women, juggling notions like invisibility and hyper-visibility, autonomy and submission, control and powerlessness – oppositions that, essentially, create the field of tension in which the Muslim female body exists in today’s Western society.

Mouna Jemal Siala’s *The Fate* (Fig 5.) references an aesthetic of repetition and reproduction, proposing 15 self-portraits in what becomes a narrative of veiling and unveiling. The play between visibility and invisibility is at work here, suggesting the existence of different layers of social or religious imperatives relative to the wearing of a veil. The main visual metaphor is, clearly, the act of veiling, extending the strong visual potency to include movement, body position and general self-awareness of the subject.

**Figure 5: The Fate, Mouna Jemal Siala**
The pose is fragmented, appearing guarded against an external looking subject, but also defiant of potential gazes. The fragment of the body presented forces the viewer to keep focus on the upper body and facial expressions, hinting at potential prejudices manifest in the act of seeing. The subject is suspended between repetition and difference, between the need for consistency, identity and desire for progress – the figures portrayed are not identical; the posing subject is in a shifting relationship with herself: she can move, but is apparently unable to leave the frame entirely; she seeks anonymity, but is bound to visibility and exposure, on the basis of an over-determination of her appearance (the veil).

The suite of photographs depicts a gradual covering of the face; the subject seems in control of the covering, as there is no other agent present in the scene. Her movements are ample, and maintain a steady level of freedom until the entire covering of the face. Her bodily consistency is not altered by the veil, just as her identity is not necessarily modified as her face is covered. This series of self-portraits unravels a critical take on social practice, as it comments on the inescapable feature of the veil as a marker of difference. The process of veiling is here a one-way route, from having the face completely revealed, to having it entirely covered. The artist includes no un-veiling routine, which stresses the idea that Muslim women are at all times, either covered or uncovered, defined in relation to a present or absent veil. There seems to be little if any space outside this binary representation, which is, evidently, an act of cultural aggression and reduction of agency.
Marwa Adel proposes a visualization of the attempt to escape conceptual containment and social inscription. In her *An Attempt* (Fig 6) she constructs a visual narrative of escape and entrapment, not making it clear which may prevail.

**Figure 6: An Attempt, Marwa Adel**


She employs the aesthetic of the veil, underlining at all times the double nature of the image of the veiled body: the veil is a vessel of meaning, identity for women who choose to control their appearance, but is also a site of projection of misconceptions and prejudices regarding Muslim women's gender relations, sexuality and social status. Adel visualizes stereotypical notions surrounding the veil, in a clearly stated attempt to escape socio-cultural tension. The interplay between visibility and invisibility is evident, referencing the defining power of the (western) gaze: she seems able to rip off the clothing and escape the perceive entrapment, but chooses not to, maybe to underline that it is only an illusion of coercion, one produced and multiplied within a specifically western field of vision.

Feriel Bendjama employs her own veiled body in a piece of photographic work that is essentially a commentary on the same issue of the Muslim veil and its various projections in the western social space. In *We, They, And I* (Fig 7), Bendjama explores the content and vectors of expectations, fears and desires in relation to the veiled body.
Her figures depict three different aspects that attempt simultaneously to define or categorize a veiled female body. In Bendjana’s own words, “These 12 self-portraits show at least three different perspectives on the Islamic head scarf. In the photographs we see a woman with the headscarf. On the one hand you see the headscarf from the desired perspective of Muslims, while on the other you see it from the clichéd perspective of non-Muslims. The women with the red headscarf represent the many facets of a Muslima, which usually do not conform to the usual stereotypes of a Muslim woman”30. The piece points directly at the over-determination of the veiled female body, its forceful appropriation in different and sometimes antithetic discourses which eventually hinder women’s agency and cripple subjectivity.

30 Quote available online at http://muslima.imow.org/content/we-they-and-i, last accessed 18.12.2013
Conclusion

This article was set out to explore the black female body and the veiled female body as cultural artifacts, products of sedimented habits of social seeing. Caught in a field of vision that attempt the perpetual othering of these two socio-cultural entities, the black and veiled female body have common features, in their cultural existence: despite being designed in different layouts, spatially and chronologically, they undergo similar processes of construction, inscription and fragmentation. The over-exposed and hyper-sexualized body of the black female (emerged during the slavery system and maintained long after the Emancipation) seems to counter the image of the veiled woman, hidden, inaccessible to white male gaze. However, both types of body undergo objectification and are used in a process of cultural consumption of images. The comparative view on these two cultural artifacts proposes critical interrogations regarding the notion of body exposure, the meaning of its immediately accessible exteriority, and the projection in a field of visibility dominated by power relations expressed in the dichotomy of the seeing subject (white, male) and the seen object (female, black).

The working concept of “Western gaze” has been understood here under the categories of “male dominance” and “white”. The main assumption is that the essential and most dominant gaze that the black and veiled female body-face is Western. However, there is a variety of other ways of seeing and objectifying gazes that these two types of bodies might come into contact with: the black male and Muslim male, other black women or other Muslim women. The multiplicity of social interactions in which the female body plays a central role points to the complexity of this cultural product, and it can be further analyzed in detail.

Bibliography

Alia Al-Saji, "The Racialization of Muslim Veils: A philosophical Analysis", Philosophy and Social Criticism 36(8), 875-902; 2010.


**Other Resources**

International Museum of Women “Muslima” [http://muslimaimow.org](http://muslimaimow.org)

Kara Walker homepage [http://learn.walkerart.org/karawalker](http://learn.walkerart.org/karawalker)
Why Adolescents Are Not Happy With Their Body Image?

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Abstract

Adolescent girls are highly aware of their appearance and invest significant cognitive and emotional resources in their relation with the physical body. A plethora of studies illustrate that in this developmental period, girls are over-concerned with weight and shape and are susceptible to adopt unhealthy appearance management strategies. The article aims to investigate characteristics of body image in adolescence as well as factors that contribute to body image dissatisfaction. We analyze the importance of appearance for adolescent girls by looking at its effects on self-esteem and at its role in social relations. We also focus on the mechanisms that shape the attitude toward body image by exploring how messages from media and significant others are received and internalized. Last, we analyze empirical data available for Romanian girls and suggest possible key areas for interventions

Keywords: adolescence, body image, thinness ideal, social relations

Introduction

Adolescence is a time period with significant physical changes to which the person has to adjust. Among significant challenges, first intimate relationships bring to front the relevance of physical attractiveness in self-evaluation. This context facilitates a focus of attention on the
physical body which is analyzed, compared and evaluated against the appearance of peers and the social norms. Body image, as “a person’s perceptions, thoughts and feelings about own body”, becomes one of the central focuses of adolescents (Grogan, 2008, p.3). The perceptive dimension refers to the mental representation of the physical body. Thoughts and feelings contribute to the attitude dimension. Regarding the attitude toward body, researchers distinguish between appraisal of appearance (satisfaction / dissatisfaction) and the importance placed on appearance (Cash & Pruzinski, 2002).

Studies show that, in adolescence, body image is more relevant for self-esteem compared to adulthood (Grogan, 2008). Girls’ ideal of thinness becomes evident even in preadolescence with some studies showing that around 50% of girls aged 9 to 12 years old would like to have a thinner body (Sands & Wardle, 2003). Also, girls prefer to be underweight rather than having a weight above average: girls aged 9 to 18 years old with BMI above the 50th percentile were more dissatisfied with their body image compared to girls below the 50th percentile (Calso, Sonneville, Haines, Blood, Field, & Austin, 2012). For these reasons, more and more adolescents resort to cosmetic surgeries in order to alter parts of their body. From less invasive procedures such as Botox injections to more extensive and complicated cosmetic surgeries, the interventions have a single purpose: to improve appearance. Studies show that these procedures are considered an option especially when a person experiences high levels of body shame and uses appearance fixing as a strategy to cope with dissatisfaction. In high developed societies, cosmetic surgery is perceived as a routine if the shape of body and/or face doesn’t correspond with the ideal standards. If in Asian societies, the tendency is to alter the traditional face traits, in Western Europe and United States of America, teenage girls are mostly preoccupied with their weight and body shape. They develop specific criteria of evaluating physical appearance such as a flat abdomen or a small waist. Another criterion, with high impact due to social media is the so called “thigh gap” which is the presence of a space between the inner thighs when a girl stands with her feet together (Tyler, 2013). It is known as thigh gap and it can be achieved only with severe dieting and in the presence of a specific body structure.

Therefore, the teenagers’ effort of altering appearance through unhealthy practices does not come as a surprise. Body image disturbance seems to increase the risk for smoking initiation in adolescent girls (Clark, Croghan, Reading, Schroeder, Stoner, Patten & Vickers, 2005) and is the leading cause of eating disorders (Thompson, Heinberg & Altabe, 1999). Also, dissatisfaction with weight and shape may conduct to unhealthy exercise (Holland, Brown & Keel, 2013) and
substance use such as laxatives, diuretics or diet pills. In a qualitative study, Rudd and Lennon (2000) showed that teenagers who practice these behaviors are aware of their unhealthiness but they ignore this risk in order to comply with social norms of beauty. Also, they hold the belief that the body is under individual control, therefore they experience guilt if they fail to follow their routine in managing appearance (Rudd et al., 2000).

Management of appearance comes as a personal responsibility. Feminists consider that women's perceived responsibility regarding appearance is linked to the gender role. For instance, Orbach Susie, a British feminist psychotherapist who adopts the social–constructivism perspective on body image, states that women's uncomfortable relation with their bodies lies in sex inequalities. Women are socialized to acquire a particular type of body in order to be attractive for men. Orbach considers this perception being rooted in a patriarchal society, where men are expected to act and exercise control over others while women are expected to present themselves and to exercise control only in the limited home environment or toward themselves (Blood, 2005).

In adolescence, when girls are preoccupied with gaining adolescent males' attention and with being popular, controlling appearance seems crucial. A trimmed look sends messages of self-discipline and it is a way of exercising power and agency over life (Bordo, 1993 cit. in Reicher & Koo, 2004). **Power** is another key concept extensively used by feminists to explain the management of appearance. Susan Bordo argues that the body is not just a symbol that reflects social and cultural meanings but also an instrument that can be used to exert power and control over environment. Also, behavior of others as well as social relations can be influenced through managing own looks. Therefore, the physical appearance can reflect the person's ability to manage own life and to exercise both self-control and control in the social context. Even though girls are aware that that a body in accordance with the social norms has plenty of benefits in the social arena, they also learn that self-control is a necessary cost. In this context, self-regulatory behaviors such as dieting and weight control are perceived as normal behaviors (Reicher et al., 2004).

If in traditional communities, the management of the appearance is dictated by the women's role in different life stages, modern society rather emphasizes women's agency in managing appearance (Callero, 2003). Being free to develop “personalized looks” poses risks in terms of vulnerability to recipes of success promoted through consumer culture. This phenomenon is obvious among teenage girls, whose identity is not well defined yet.
Together, all these facts draw attention toward the relevance of body image for teenage girls and the need to understand the motives that lie behind the high amount of attention directed toward appearance.

**Body image (dis)satisfaction: cognitive and emotional correlates**

The strong connection between self-esteem and body image has been widely documented. For instance, Goldenberg, McCoy, Pyszczynski and Solomon (2000) showed that a high body satisfaction significantly contributed to self-esteem. The authors combined negative versus positive feedback to a cognitive task with exposure to images of beauty promoted in media. Participants that were told that they failed in the cognitive task had higher levels of body image satisfaction compared to those who received positive feedback. Furthermore, data suggests that the variation of self-esteem during adolescence is mainly due to changes in the attitude toward body (Paxton, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan & Eisenberg, 2006). If body image satisfaction is a relevant resource of enhancing global self-esteem among adolescents, negative feelings toward their body image, corroborated with high awareness of appearance, seems to contribute to depressive symptoms. In adolescence, girls, more than boys, experience depressive symptoms and the onset of this gender imbalance is associated with increased body image dissatisfaction as well as with eating disorders (Benas, Uhrlass & Gibb, 2010). There is consistent evidence that girls’ depressive symptoms in adolescence are predicted by body image dissatisfaction as a consequence of pubertal changes (Ferreiro, Seoane & Sena, 2014). At some extent, distress is associated with any changes that occur in our lives. The distress girls feel during puberty is doubled by a high awareness of what their bodies should become. Due to pubertal changes, girls gain fat that is usually not distributed according to the ideal thin body promoted in the media.

Perfectionism is a relevant individual risk factor in developing eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction (Bardone-Cone, Wonderlich, Frost, Bulik, Mitchell, Uppala & Simonich, 2007). Perfectionist persons set high standards in different life domains and criticize severely their performance. Initially viewed as a one-dimensional construct, perfectionism is described as having multiple dimensions (Hewitt, Flett, Besser, Sherry & McGee, 2003). Relevant in relation with body image dissatisfaction is the distinction between social and personal dimensions of perfectionism (Hewitt, Flett, Besser, Sherry & McGee, 2003). The perception that
society sets high standards for an individual (socially prescribed perfectionism) was found to be associated with thin ideal internalization, weight dissatisfaction and bulimic symptoms (Tissot & Crawther, 2008; Grammas & Schwartz, 2009). The personal dimension of perfectionism includes having high expectations directed toward oneself. In the domain of eating disorders, self-oriented perfectionism was found to be related to restrictive eating behavior and to be a relevant predictor of anorexia (Bardone-Cone, Wonderlich, Frost, Bulik, Mitchell, Uppala & Simonich, 2007). Also, Tissot and Crawther (2008) showed that self-oriented perfectionism strengthens the relation between socially prescribed perfectionism and thin ideal internalization.

Being over-concerned with weight and shape can lead to misinterpretations of body related information. Distortions of weight are common features in anorexia (Collins, 1987). To a lower extent, they are also encountered among persons without eating disorders (Bergstrom, Stenlund & Svedjehall, 2000). First considered perceptive dysfunctions, distortions of weight and shape are recognized to be generated and maintained by cognitive biases such as attention bias or selective interpretational biases. Mussap, McCabe and Ricciardelli (2008) illustrated that errors in body size estimation were predicted by concerns with appearance. The evaluation of body weight is frequently inaccurate. Brener, Eaton, Lowry and McManus (2004) showed that almost half of underweight adolescents considered their weight were normal while almost half of normal weight girls thought they were overweight. McCabe, Ricciardelli, Sitaram and Mikhail (2006) showed that overestimation of body size was predicted by depression and by social and media influences.

Body image (dis)satisfaction: interpersonal and social correlates

When puberty sets in early or when the thin models of beauty are reinforced by significant others, girls are vulnerable in developing negative feelings toward themselves. The question of why the attitude toward body image has such a strong impact on general well-being can be answered only by taking into consideration the sociocultural meanings of appearance. As Fredrickson, Hendler, Nilsen, O'Barr and Tomi-Ann Roberts (2011) mentioned “teenage girls are all about their bodies. And when they were not, the world around them was” (p. 693). Along with serving biological functions, the physical body, through appearance, sends messages about the social status, the affiliation to a group and even personality traits.
Peers play an important role in the development of body image dissatisfaction (Littleton & Olledick, 2003) and their criticism toward one's body has a significant contribution to the internalization of thin ideal (Jones, Vigfustottir & Lee, 2004). Social interactions between adolescents create a context where thin ideal is promoted and reinforced while failure to attain a perfect body is severely penalized through teasing, negative feedback and even social exclusion (Jones & Crawford, 2006). The general belief among adolescent girls is that an attractive person is more socially desirable compared to an unattractive one. For instance, in a cross-sectional study, Xie, Li, Boucher, Hutchins and Cairns (2006) brought evidence that in early adolescence, attractiveness is considered the most important contributor to popularity. Moreover, it was found that attractiveness can diminish the effect of negative social behavior on popularity. Similarly, Rosen and Underwood (2010) documented that facial attractiveness influenced how aggressive teenagers were perceived. If aggressive, those with low facial attractiveness were perceived as being less popular compared to those with high facial attractiveness.

In adolescence, conversations about appearance management and fat reduction are frequent topics. A significant amount of studies documented an association between ‘fat talk’ and body image dissatisfaction (Tompkins, Martz, Rocheleau & Bazzini, 2009; Compeau & Ambwani, 2013). It has been suggested that adolescents who engage in those types of conversations are not necessarily preoccupied with appearance, but they are rather concerned with group acceptance and social integration (Tompkins et al., 2009). The involvement in general conversations about appearance leads to the spread of body image concerns and body dissatisfaction among teenagers by activating the internalization of thin ideal (Jones et al. 2004). Also, for adolescent girls, body image satisfaction is significantly connected to social competencies (Jones, 2004). Overweight teenagers and those who are visibly physical different receive more frequent negative feedback related to appearance compared to normal weight persons. This conveys the message that, in order to be socially accepted you have to look good.

On the other hand, having friends is a protective factor against the development of negative feelings directed toward their own body when it fails to conform to the standards of beauty (Caccavale, Farhat & Iannotti, 2012). Jones (2004) pointed that, for girls, body image is a much more social phenomenon compared to boys. The author examined the contribution of body talk, social acceptance and body ideal internalization in the development of body image dissatisfaction. While for girls, body talk and social acceptance were relevant contributors, for
boys only the internalization of the ideal body image mattered. Therefore, the belief that a perfect body increases the chances for social acceptance is not surprising among girls. They develop a culture of "appearance based acceptance" (Jones, 2004, p.824) with specific standards of beauty, standards that are irrational for others, such as the most recent so called thigh gap. In this context, the attitude toward their own body is dependent on the extent that a girl fits the social standards of beauty and considers these standards important.

Social context reinforces the media effects or favor the development of unrealistic expectations toward their own body. Significant others send messages regarding appearance expectations and standards. Parents, siblings, and peers influence attitudes toward appearance through direct comments, teasing or modeling. The girls' attitude toward appearance is initially copied from the mother who models the relevance of appearance. Studies show that mothers' concerns with her own appearance relate to her daughters' development of dissatisfaction, eating disorders and thin ideal internalization (Meesters, Muris, Hoefnagels & Gemert, 2007). The mother is the one who offers frequent negative feedback and encourages weight control (Kluck, 2012). The author show that parents attitude toward children's appearance becomes more negative as they grow older. Their purpose is to encourage weight loss. Usually parents are not aware of the negative consequences of criticizing a teenager's weight or appearance.

Parents provide positive feedback as well. The influence of positive feedback on body image satisfaction is a subject of debate, studies showing that positive feedback can also be detrimental. For instance, Herbozo, Menzen and Thompson (2013), in a cross-sectional research, concluded that for teenagers with some levels of body dissatisfaction, positive feedback had a negative effect. They speculated that this type of feedback might draw attention toward the relevance of appearance and activate negative emotions.

**Body image (dis)satisfaction: Objectified body image and cultural thin ideal**

A particularity that favors the belief that appearance is an instrument in social relations is the women's tendency to perceive the body as an aesthetic object that should be displayed rather than to focus on the functions of the body. The importance of the aesthetic aspect of different body parts, especially in social contexts, gives voice to the belief that the body is an object whose value is based on appearance. The phenomenon was conceptualized under the
name of Objectified Body Consciousness Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Direct consequences of this belief are frequent body surveillance, shame and the illusion that appearance can be controlled. Being used to think of the body in terms of how it appears to others, girls frequently scan their appearance in search for flaws. Socialized to rather dislike their body, girls will not focus on the beautiful features but on the unattractive ones. As a direct effect, when interacting with others, they feel anxious and ashamed because they somehow expect others to adopt the same critical position.

Studies confirm that when the body is objectified, girls are more sensitive to others feedback and rely on it when assessing own appearance. Fea and Brannon (2006) showed that, in this case, any positive comment influences the participant’s mood by providing reassurance of their appearance. If the positive feedback is not received, they conclude they are unattractive. For example, in body dysmorphic disorder (i.e. characterized by distress with an imagined or slight defect in appearance) both self-evaluation and the perceived evaluation from others are rather negative. In contrast, in the context of a healthy body image, even if self-evaluation of appearance is negative, teenagers consider they are rather positively evaluated by others (Anson, Veale & Silva, 2012). Thus, when considering body image dissatisfaction as a risk factor for unhealthy behaviors, it is more valuable to measure the fear of negative appearance evaluation instead of the personal opinion toward their own body (Choi, Leshner & Choi, 2008). Starting as a social issue, the management of appearance becomes a personal battle. The neglect of the internal symptoms, correlated with the need to control the image, encourages frequent diet or other risk behaviors.

One mechanism through which adolescents develop body image concerns especially in social contexts is thin ideal internalization, with studies showing that adolescent girls are especially influenced by the cultural thin ideal (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002). Thompson and Chad (2002) showed that girls with appearance anxiety would like a much thinner body compared to those with low levels of anxiety. The pathological relation with the body is developed and reinforced in a society that promotes models of success mostly impossible to attain. Then, the normal physical development of the woman’s body puts her further from the ideal body.

Another mechanism that is proposed to explain the association between viewing models of beauty the development of body image dissatisfaction and appearance anxiety is the social comparison process. We usually compare ourselves with others for many reasons: self-
evaluation, self-development or self-enhancement (Myers & Crowther, 2009). The targets in social comparison are chosen based on similarities. When comparing our own appearance, this rule does not apply. Although far from the normative standards, the thin ideal promoted in the media is considered a relevant goal. The reason behind this is the frequent natural exposure to such images which makes them highly available. It was showed that even a short presentation of thin models leads to increases in body image dissatisfaction. The effect is higher for girls that are overweight, are frequently on a diet, have a low self-esteem or high pre-existing levels of body image dissatisfaction (Want, 2009).

However, there are also teenagers who develop a critical discourse about media images of beauty. In experimental designs where participants had to analyze the appearance of the models, the effect on body image dissatisfaction was lower than in experiments where participants were given distracter processing instructions (Want, 2009). Also, Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk and Posavac (2005) illustrated that visualizing thin models does not lead to body image dissatisfaction if girls are asked to develop arguments against the thin models. The effectiveness of resistance is dependent on holding critical media skills in order to be able to undermine the credibility of the images. The development of critical media skills is an important objective in prevention programs. Still, as long as society penalizes unattractive and overweight women, these prevention programs have a small benefit on the long term (Donaghue and Clemitshaw (2012).

**Body image and Romanian adolescents**

There is a growing data pool on body image and weight related concerns among Romanian adolescents. For example, Health Behavior in School Aged Children (HBSC) is a WHO collaborative cross-national study that collects data every four years on 11-, 13- and 15-year-old boys’ and girls’ health, health behaviors and well-being. It has also extensive data on eating patterns, dieting and body image problems among adolescents (Currie et al., 2012). The 2009/2010 Romanian HBSC data reports that girls were increasingly unsatisfied with their body adiposity as they grew up: while 19.5% of the 11 years old girls perceived themselves as being too fat, 27% of their 15 year-old counterparts believed the same thing. More importantly, in the HBSC Romanian sample, 20% of the girls believing they were too fat had, in fact, a BMI falling within the normal range. Therefore, feeling fat may be a result of the culturally prescribed
ideal of thinness/beauty without necessarily having a relationship with the actual body size. These body image problems go hand in hand with pronounced body dissatisfaction, which in turn, proves predictive for using maladaptive strategies to control one's weight. Indeed, in the 13-15 years-old Romanian girls’ samples, an average rate of 15% of the girls were ‘disappointed with body’, 9% ‘hated’ their body, and 10% were ‘annoyed’ with their body. As a result, an average of 15% of the 11-15 years old was on a diet at the time of the HBSC study with 7% of the girls having been dieting for 5 times or more. Whereas most of the girls preferred classical ways of controlling their weight (exercising, eating smaller portions, drinking more water etc.), it is worrisome that 21% of those aged 11-15 stated that they restricted intake of foods from certain categories, 5% used purging, 3% used pills and 4% were smoking in order to lose weight (Tăut, unpublished).

Some other studies with Romanian adolescents point to similar conclusions. One of our studies explored the developmental patterns of body image, as well as the individual and social factors that contribute to the development of the attitude towards body image. We used a cross-sectional design and surveyed a sample of 250 girls, aged 15-20 coming from urban areas. Our results showed that satisfaction with appearance varied across age such as older adolescent girls were more satisfied with appearance compared to younger girls. Conversely, younger adolescents internalized to a higher extent the thin ideal. We also found that thin ideal internalization moderated the relation between weight and body image satisfaction. Girls who considered this standard relevant were more dissatisfied when having a higher weight compared to girls who did not value a very thin body. These results suggest that a more critical attitude toward media models might lead to a positive body image. (Nanu, Tăut & Băban, 2013).

In order to explore social factors associated to body image, we focused on appearance related feedback from significant others and on body talk as relevant contributors to the development of body image. The participants were 119 girls, aged 15-19 years old and the study was cross-sectional. We assessed the frequency of appearance related feedback and the frequency of getting involved in conversations regarding management of appearance. Both feedback and body talk were related to body image satisfaction. Adolescent girls who frequently participated in appearance related conversations were rather dissatisfied with their appearance. The relation was significant for both positive - as well as for negative valence appearance conversation. Also, thin ideal internalization mediated between general conversations about appearance and body image dissatisfaction, pointing it as a potential mechanism behind the
relationship. Therefore, our results showed that body talk leads to body image dissatisfaction only if a girl adopts the thin ideal as a personal standard (Nanu, Tăut & Băban, 2013). However, feeling socially accepted had also relevant influence in the relationship between negative feedback and body image satisfaction, pointing it as another potential mechanism. Therefore, girls, who stated they received frequent appearance related negative feedback, but had friends and were accepted by the others, had a higher satisfaction with body compared to those that reported they were not socially accepted (Nanu, Tăut & Băban, 2013).

**Concluding remarks**

It is obvious that body image concerns in adolescence cannot be ignored. Among adolescent girls, appearance is a relevant way of expressing identity. Teenage girls are highly aware of their appearance once they enter puberty and they understand that the body is a strong instrument in social relations. In this context, perhaps the most worrisome aspect is that media is the main voice asserting meanings to different body shapes. Through media, clear norms of how girls should look like, what should they eat and what products could be used to improve appearance are transmitted. The purpose of these standards is not just to make girls more likeable but also to conform to cultural norms of beauty, just like one has to conform to other cultural standards as well (in terms of food habits, family relations, position in society etc.).

Also, media inoculates the belief that we can control appearance and we can be as aggressive as we want if the purpose is to achieve perfection. The society reinforces these beliefs by associating beauty with success and severely penalizing failure. In a society with increasing rates of obesity, parents are concerned about their children weight and often verbalize this concern by giving messages about weight control, dieting and the relevance of being thin. A teenager, for whom health is not perceived as a relevant concern, attributes these messages to the importance of appearance for a successful life. In this matter, the best practice to promote a
positive body image might be to actually ignore the image and focus on the functions of the body. While this strategy is frequently used by elderly people, it might be beneficial for teenagers also. Indeed, studies show that physical activity has positive effects on self-esteem and on body image (Lyu & Gill, 2012).

Empirical data as well as theoretical approaches mentioned in this paper do suggest that there is no simple causal relation between the physical body and satisfaction with appearance. Feelings about the physical body are influenced by cultural representations of beauty, by the gender roles, and by how an individual creates meanings around body image. Along with individual interventions, public health institutions should develop programs for educating the society to question and reconsider the value of appearance.

**Bibliography**


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Pregnancy Pragmatics Unveiled: On Bodies, Bellies, and Power in Cameroon

By Erica Van Der Sijpt

Abstract

Over the last few decades, anthropologists interested in reproduction have increasingly focused on the relationship between women’s (limited) reproductive agency and (bio)political forces such as patriarchy, medicine, the state, and the global political economy. In their quest for understanding local and global ‘politics of reproduction’, some have turned their gaze towards the female body, considered to be a symbolic arena in which multi-level power relations are played out. These scholars have studied minute ‘body politics’ as reflections of wider ‘reproductive politics’. This paper contributes to this growing field of study by adding a nuanced perspective of the role of the material body – rather than its symbolic representation

- in such reproductive politics.

Drawing on long-term fieldwork in eastern Cameroon, I describe how women’s pregnancy pragmatics are informed by existing (bio)political forces on the one hand, and by their material bodies on the other. My detailed ethnographic material shows that, although forces like patriarchy, biomedicine, and the state shape the field within which Cameroonian women give meaning and direction to their reproduction, women themselves have considerable leeway to circumvent existing powers or to use them to their own advantage. I argue that this freedom is inherently connected to some bodily attributes of the reproductive process: the invisibility of early pregnancies grants women time and space for secret bodily interventions. At the same time, I show that the (unpredictable) body can also become a constraining force complicating women’s reproductive navigation. Thus, by attending to both social and material dynamics, new light is shed on the arena
of forces that impact upon reproductive practice, as well as on women's own agency within that arena.

**Keywords:** reproduction; body; power; Cameroon.
Introduction

Ever since the development of the ‘anthropology of birth’ in the 1970s, anthropologists have shown an explicit interest in the minutiae of human reproduction and its social and cultural dynamics. Whereas their first accounts presented mainly *normative* descriptions of local, holistic birthing cultures, from the 1990s – when the influence of the work of Foucault and of third-wave feminists started to be felt within anthropology – more attention was paid to reproductive discourses, politics, and contestations. Anthropological studies of reproduction increasingly focused upon the (global and local) power struggles and differentials that permeated the domain of reproduction (Ginsburg & Rapp 1991; Van Hollen 1994, 2003). A key concept that gained currency within this transformed field of research was the one of ‘stratified reproduction’, referring to the inequalities in reproduction that result from the fact that different people occupy different positions within a larger field of power relationships (Ginsburg & Rapp 1995).

Many of the anthropological investigations that were inspired by this paradigmatic shift studied reproductive ideas and practices in relation to big (bio)political forces such as patriarchy, biomedicine, the state, and the global political economy. Often driven by feminist concerns, they tried to unravel how such forces subjugate differently positioned women and constrain them in living their reproductive lives, producing social suffering in the process (Kleinman, Das & Lock 1997). At the same time, such studies also attended to the nature and degree of reproductive agency that women would still be able to display, even if only minimally or almost invisibly (Carter 1995; Ortner 2006). In this quest for understanding (the limits to) women’s reproductive agency, some anthropologists turned their gaze towards the female body. Embedded as they are within the wider fabric of social forces, women’s bodies came to be conceptualized as symbolic arenas in which multi-level power relations and discursive struggles are played out. Through a focus on ‘body politics’, then, these anthropologists sought to understand the intricacies and implications of wider reproductive politics (Greenhalgh 1995; Lock 1993; Lock & Kaufert 1997).

My work on reproduction in Cameroon is inspired by the insights generated in this growing sub-discipline, and with this paper I intend to contribute to ongoing discussions in the field. Yet, I will also present some pregnancy pragmatics and dynamics that have often gone unnoticed in the above-mentioned studies, which mainly focus on the socio-symbolic realm. I will show that, although forces like patriarchy, biomedicine, and the state clearly shape the
reproductive field within which Cameroonian women give meaning and direction to their childbearing experiences, women themselves have considerable leeway to circumvent existing powers or to use them to their own advantage when plotting their own reproductive trajectories. I will argue that this freedom is inherently connected to some bodily attributes of the reproductive process. At the same time, I will show that the body can also become a constraining force complicating women’s reproductive navigation. By presenting a nuanced view of the role of the material body in women’s pregnancy pragmatics, I hope to advance our understanding not only of the arena of forces that impact upon reproductive practice, but also of women’s own agency within that arena.

Methodology

The insights presented in this paper are based on 15 months of anthropological fieldwork between 2004 and 2009 in the East province of Cameroon. In this research, I explored local notions and experiences of pregnancy loss in a village inhabited by approximately 1,000 Gbigbil people. Most of the data were gathered through participant observation, which implied accompanying women to their plots of land, churches, markets, hospitals and healers, and participating during their deliveries and abortions. Further, numerous in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were held in French with 25 women having different ages, economic backgrounds, educational trajectories, marital statuses, and reproductive histories. These women’s partners and family members, as well as the indigenous healers, midwives and biomedical personnel in the region, were also involved in the study. Furthermore, through a comprehensive household survey I documented the marital and reproductive histories of 290 village women who were over 12 years old and had been sexually active.

To unravel Gbigbil ideas about foetal and pregnant bodies, I used a technique that I call ‘body mapping’. My informants were given three white papers showing only the contours of a ‘transparent’ female body and were asked to draw the contents of a pregnancy of one month, three months, and seven months, respectively (see also van der Sijpt 2010). During this exercise, they were explicitly asked to elaborate upon the physical symptoms, sensations and events that accompany the different gestational stages. The information thus gathered, combined with the detailed insights that I obtained through long-term involvement in women’s reproductive lives, forms the starting point for the discussion presented in this paper.
Positioning women and their children: discourses and divergences

Social life in the east of Cameroon has long been portrayed as dominated by men. The earliest anthropological accounts of this region, for instance, never failed to emphasize the existence of male dominance – reflected in material power and symbolic authority – which directly resulted from men's positions as household heads and exchangers of wives in a patriarchal system. As men established rights over women (and their fertility) through bride-price transfers, the rights of women were noted to be virtually absent in these wife-exchanging communities. Invoking local sayings like ‘a woman has no voice’ or ‘a chicken does not sing in front of a cock’, these sources indicated that women were not only considered subordinate to the orders of men, but also excluded from socially acknowledged powerful positions (Balla 1991; de Thé 1970; Laburthe-Tolra 1981; Vincent 1976). Laburthe-Tolra even speaks of an extreme ‘objectivation’ of women, who are:

...at most reduced to the state of economic instrument deprived of subjective expression. In all circumstances, she first has to shut up, to keep silent. Won, sold, lost at a game, hired, lent, deprived of every capacity in the juridical sense of the term, not able to possess anything, the woman is held at the margins of all domains, without any other bond to humanity than the connection more or less held with her lineage of origin and the advantages associated with maternity (Laburthe-Tolra 1981, p. 890, my translation).

In such a context, then, women would only be able to assume subjectivity as ‘producers of food and reproducers of people’ – contributing with their labour force and childbearing capacities to men's status and the continuation of their patrilinies. In this line of interpretation, reproduction is a domain fully controlled by, and benefitting, men – an affair that gives the (male) wife-givers a bride-price and the (male) wife-receivers their much-wanted descendants. Women, on the other hand, would only be granted a social position and status if they bear the children that their husbands and in-laws long for.¹

Somebody who studies daily life in a Gbigbil village in present-day Eastern Cameroon
will recognize only snippets of this story. The patriarchal order that has been so neatly described in earlier ethnographies seems to exist merely in the normative accounts that people invoke when talking about the past or about an ideal order; reality looks much different. Contrary to the norm according to which bride-price exchanges should frame gender relationships, conjugal arrangements and childbearing practices, the so-called ‘marital’ affairs in which babies are conceived and borne today are often highly unstable and unconsolidated by any bride-price transactions. Men claim to be unable to fulfill their marital obligations due to the economic crisis that has plagued Cameroon from the late 1980s onwards (Abega 2007; Johnson-Hanks 2006; Meekers & Calvès 1997). The result is that both men and women are relatively free to abandon any relationship and replace it with another one. The belonging of children born in such relationships is often unclear and contested; in the absence of any bride-price payments, even the relatives of the woman (i.e. members of the child’s matriline) can lay claim to the children of their daughter. Rather than strictly controlled by patriarchal powers, then, Gbigbil women and their children move relatively freely between different households and affinities.

This sexual flexibility and marital instability does, however, not preclude the presence of patriarchal expectations and strong pronatalist sentiments: both men and women can only attain respected adulthood by, eventually, having a large offspring within the framework of a virilocal marriage (Johnson-Hanks 2006, 2007); when babies are conceived and born, men are expected to take care of mother and child; and when childbirths have been multiple, men face growing hopes and expectations from women and their families regarding an eventual bride-price transfer. Thus, in this Gbigbil village, patriarchal and patrilineal ideals are powerful factors shaping people’s ideas, expectations and perceived possibilities – but, at the same time, they are complemented by alternative modes of action.

Beyond the village level, in the realm of national policies and propaganda, one can detect similar gender constructions and pronatalist visions. Representations of women as wives and mothers are omnipresent, and have a long history. Both during colonial times and in the first decades after 1960, when Cameroon became independent, population growth was explicitly encouraged. The underlying idea was that a larger workforce would enhance the productivity and development of the sparsely populated colony/country (Bell 1990; Feldman-Savelsberg 2002; Geschiere 1982; Gubry & Wautelet 1993). Among the many pronatalist measures were tax
reductions and financial benefits for large families, public propaganda and praise for those parents who ‘contributed to the nation’ with their 12 children or more, and several laws prohibiting the sale of contraceptives, anti-conceptional publicity, as well as abortion and infanticide (Bell 1990; Tantchou & Wilson 2000).

From the 1980s onwards, Cameroon’s population policies became increasingly influenced by international programs and pressures to move toward a limitation of demographic growth. This move materialized itself very slowly, however. The law prohibiting the sale and publicity of contraceptives was only gradually relaxed, and president Paul Biya reluctantly started to include a rhetoric of ‘family planning’, ‘responsible parenthood’, and ‘reproductive health and rights’ in his official statements only from the year 2000 onwards. Since Cameroon joined the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative in the same year, its national health policies and programs have become even more dependent on international conditions, standards and priorities. This (inter)national framework is implemented at all levels of Cameroon’s pyramidal health structure – including at the dispensary in the village in which I did research, where posters warning against unwanted pregnancies and promoting family planning methods decorated the walls in the waiting room.ii The mission of the local doctor was to have all pregnant women visit the clinic for their prenatal consultations and deliveries, and to make them aware of the possibility of preventing another pregnancy in the future.

Yet, like with the patriarchal norms on the village level, these national policies and biomedical discourses are contradicted by practical realities. While the official approach towards reproductive matters turned from explicitly pronatalist to ‘supportive to family planning’, in practice access to birth control methods remains hampered by legislative as well as practical barriers. For example, only pharmacies are legally permitted to sell contraceptives, sellers often demand the authorization of a partner before releasing contraceptives, women can only access sterilization if they are at least 35 years old and have five or more children, and the prohibitive abortion law has remained unaltered (Beninguissé 2003; Kamdoum 1994). The reproductive messages and measures of the Cameroonian state are thus contradictory: an insistent promotion of medicalized fertility regulation co-exists with an implicit pronatalist legislation and explicit representations of women as mothers.

To conclude, the local patriarchal order, biomedicine, and the state – some of the most
important forces identified by feminist anthropologists in their studies on reproductive politics and stratification – do shape the field in which Gbibil women enact their womanhood and motherhood. They provide a set of norms, aspirations, options and constraints that have a direct effect on women’s positions and practices. Yet, these frameworks are not necessarily consistent, nor are they fully exclusive; in their daily life practices, Gbibil women may draw upon alternative frames of reference as well. This is especially so in the secretive domain of reproduction, to which we now turn.

Reproductive practices and powers

When asked about their general reproductive aspirations, most of my Gbibil informants would answer that they wanted to bear ‘as many children as possible’. They often justified their position by stressing the different values of children: they perform household chores and work in the fields, take care of their parents in old age, allow the Gbibil community to populate and exploit the vast rainforest area in which they live, but most of all, as children contribute to their father’s patrilineage, their presence grants their mothers a stronger position within their fragile marriages. The more children you have, the better your situation; ‘with only one or two children, you are not even a person’, many women asserted. Stories about the repudiation of infertile women or about the humiliation of those who repeatedly miscarried abounded. Together, such accounts suggest a close connection between women’s reproductive aspirations on the one hand, and patriarchal norms and patrilineal desires on the other.

Yet, when we look at what actually happens around the conception of pregnancies, a completely different picture emerges. In the uncertain sexual and marital relationships that women currently maintain (often with more than one man at a time), pregnancies are not always clearly wanted. Instead, reproductive desires are often temporal (i.e. a pregnancy might be initially wanted and unwanted afterwards, or vice versa), contradictory (i.e. a pregnancy might be wanted for one purpose and not for another), or situational (i.e. a pregnancy might be wanted with one man and unwanted with another). As a result, women may refuse to carry their pregnancies to term, despite the strong condemnation of abortive practices by local pronatalist discourses and by the national abortion law.iii My household survey revealed that 11% of all declared pregnancy losses were induced, but the real incidence of abortion can be assumed to be much higher; indeed, all informants that were close to me acknowledged to have aborted a
pregnancy at least once in their lives.

Interestingly, many induced abortions are directly motivated by the perceived clash between patriarchal ideals and daily-life experiences. The patriarchal framework prescribes men to take financial care of their wives who, in turn, bear children for their patriline; however, as we now know, in practice these reciprocal expectations tend to be contradicted by conjugal fragility and neglect. As men and their families fail to assume their financial responsibility, women may decide to neglect their prescribed duty of childbearing. Attention is thus diverted from what is expected from women – that is, children – towards the duties normatively prescribed for men – that is, the exchange of bride-price payments or at least financial care for their partners and children. Paradoxically, then, patriarchal norms are used against men; women tactically deploy these norms to justify their abortion practices (Van der Sijpt 2013a). The statement of Angélique, who aborted her twins out of anger against her neglectful husband and in-laws, illustrates this line of reasoning:

I aborted, because I was very angry with my husband and his parents. My family hasn't eaten anything! So I told myself, ‘If I conceive another pregnancy, I will suffer a lot’. And we were already with two women in the house. Life was not good when I was all alone; how bad will it become when my husband has already two wives? No, I preferred to abort. My mother supported my decision. She has first suffered to bear and raise me. Now I bear my own children already and she suffers again with them. So I told myself, ‘I will not bear a child anymore before he pays his debt to my parents and treats me better as well’.

That so many Gbigbil women can and do resort to reproductive practices that are openly condemned by both local and national frameworks – i.e. patriarchy and the state – is related to both physical and social dynamics around pregnancy. First of all, in the first few months of gestation, there are few clear physical signs of pregnancy. Although women indicate that they themselves can recognize a pregnancy on the basis of bodily sensations such as a quicker heartbeat, increased temperature, fatigue, headache, nauseas, internal cravings, and the interruption of menses, these symptoms can easily go unnoticed by outsiders. As long as the belly is not protruding – an event that leads to the public recognition of a pregnancy, called ‘belly’ (abum) in the local Gbigbil language – women have the time to decide on the course of its
development.

Secondly, Gbigbil traditions of pregnancy management prescribe secrecy and silence during the first few months after conception. Since early pregnancies are believed to contain only ‘blood’, they are attractive targets for witches, who are generally known to ‘suck people’s blood’. Such occult threats come mostly ‘from within’: witches are believed to operate at the most intimate level, preferring to attack close relatives (Geschiere 2003; Mallart Guimera 1981). In order to protect a beginning pregnancy, then, it is important to not attract attention to it; especially a woman’s family members and in-laws should remain ignorant of the developing foetus for as long as possible. Thus, in this Gbigbil village, there is a well-established tradition in which women hide their pregnant state and explicitly deny all allusions to it (Beninguissé 2003; Van der Sijpt 2013b). Although meant to be a protective measure, this concealment also offers women the possibility, space, and time to secretly bring their pregnancy to an end if they so desire.

The methods they use to do so are, again, confined to the intimate bodily sphere. Most commonly, women insert sharp objects or needles into the cervix, vaginally administer herbal products or liquid chemicals, or ingest an overdose of pharmaceutical drugs (see also Abega 2007; Calvès 2002; Johnson-Hanks 2002; Koster 2003; Renne 1996; Schuster 2005). Such intimate practices can easily be performed out of the sight of others. Even the resulting bleeding can often be hidden – and, if not, it can just be presented as an unexpected period or a spontaneous miscarriage. Indeed, any instance of bleeding is always ambiguous because women’s underlying intentions and secret strategies can only be suspected, but never fully known, by others.

In conclusion, it is because a beginning pregnancy is an invisible, intimate, and, ultimately, individual affair – a bodily state beyond the gaze and reach of men, biomedicine and the state – that women have plenty of room for decision-making and manipulation. Despite the attempts of various (male) others and institutions to control women’s fertility, it is in the first place women themselves who exert control over their reproductive bodies. Yet, at the same time, this control is not without limits. The body, as we will see, sometimes has a will of its own.

Some reflections on the body

When looking closely at the minutiae of bodily practices in the domain of reproduction, we
discover that reproductive lives are in fact full of intimate interactions between women and their material bodies. Gbigbil women, for instance, do not only try to intervene in the physical course of action when they want to get rid of a pregnancy. Rather, they attempt to achieve a broad range of reproductive outcomes – from the prevention of a pregnancy, to conception, a successful gestation, the prevention of pregnancy loss, and a safe birth – by regulating their bodies. The methods they use to influence reproductive processes are numerous: they wear cords around the waist, make skin incisions in the lower abdomen, rub or evaporate herbal substances in the vagina, administer enemas, or ingest concoctions or pharmaceutical drugs. No matter the diversity of women's social positions and fertility aspirations, the material body always takes centre stage in their reproductive practice.

Yet, such bodily interventions are not always successful. Among the many reproductive stories that I heard and witnessed during my fieldwork, a considerable number ended differently than anticipated because of unexpected bodily dynamics. Women who tried to prevent a pregnancy suddenly found themselves pregnant; those who did everything to protect their pregnancies lost their foetuses nevertheless; quite a few women who were determined to abort their pregnancies failed as their bodies wouldn't release the foetus; and there were those who desperately tried to conceive but remained childless throughout their lives. Such physical surprises affected the fertility-related options women had. When their bodies did not 'collaborate', my informants had to abandon their previous aspirations and adapt to a new material reality.

As such, women's bodies are not only potentially enabling – secret spaces that allow women to influence their reproductive trajectories – but they can also be constraining factors.

Indeed, the body does not only allow for women's reproductive navigation in the social world, but also needs to be navigated itself. For, women have to constantly manage the broad range of unpredictable options, outcomes, and obstacles their bodies present to them. They are confronted with a material world in which anything can happen. Seen in this light, the relationship between women and their reproductive bodies is less one of strategic manipulation – no matter how much my informants tried to establish such a relationship, and sometimes successfully so – than of tactical manoeuvring (Cornwall 2007; de Certeau 1984; Earle & Letherby 2002). As reproductive outcomes hinge directly on bodily states that cannot always be
fully controlled, eventually women have to go with the physical flow.

Such an insight adds a new element to our understanding of reproductive agency in a world permeated by local and global power relations. Women's reproductive practices and power should not only be studied in relation to the actions of (more or less powerful) others – men, in-laws, relatives, doctors, state representatives, and global reproductive health agents – but also in relation to the actions of their material bodies. As much as patriarchy, biomedicine, the state, and the global political economy present a structural context affecting women's reproductive options and constraints, their bodies constitute a parallel power that may help or hinder women in realizing their fertility aspirations. In addition to representing a symbolic arena in which multi-level power relations are inscribed and contested (as feminist anthropologists like to argue), reproductive bodies also matter in themselves. As Margaret Lock (1993, p. 136) once stated, 'The question of the body requires more than reconciling theory with practice. It brings with it the difficulty of people both having and being bodies'. This, I have argued in this paper, is especially the case in the domain of reproduction – as it is not only inherently social, but also intimately material.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the Gbigbil pregnancy pragmatics described in this paper thus nuance some of the insights that dominate the existing (and growing) body of literature on reproductive politics and stratification. I have shown that women may have more agency in relation to existing (bio)political forces than is often suggested (since the management of their ‘bellies’ can happen beyond the gaze of men and medicine), while their material bodies may pose certain limits that have often been ignored in the existing literature. Only a detailed investigation of both social and material dynamics can unveil the complexities of women’s reproductive agency in a world full of unpredictable forces.
Bibliography


There are a few sources, however, that show the possibility for female revolt within this patriarchal order. Not surprisingly, the rebellious acts that these sources describe mainly centre upon women’s sexuality and childbearing activities (Ardener 1973; Barbier 1985; Copet-Rougier 1985).

Apart from the national public health system, Cameroon’s sanitary map includes health establishments of the (Catholic and Protestant) confessional sector, as well as numerous private clinics. While the services and programs in these establishments mostly reflect the ones implemented in state institutions, faith-based clinics in particular remain reluctant to provide family planning services.

Section 337 of the Cameroonian Penal Code prohibits abortion at all times except when a pregnancy results from rape or endangers a woman’s life.

In this light, it is not surprising that, despite the insistence of the local doctor, Gbigbil women do not attend prenatal consultations in the first few months of pregnancy. For them, having to reveal an early pregnancy in a public space does not reduce risks – as the medical discourse has it – but rather increases them.
State Policies and the Women's Body: The Turkish Case

By Ulaş Sunata

Abstract

This article examines the question of how women are embodied in state feminisms. The focus is on women whose placement in political discourses and policies is problematic in some cases for some reasons, such as who make governmental actions to strengthen women's position in society; to what end; women's role and participation in the policy making process; legislative, executive and juridical representation of women; and their relation with feminist movement. How women are located in the society defines not only that women's position but also the position of men in relation to women. That is the reason why this paper considers state policies on women not always to improve women status but to locate women in, or attach them to the related political visions.

The notion of bio-politics is central to Foucault's work in the context of body and population. He uses the term bio-politics, derived from his own notion of bio-power, as the implementation of state power over both the physical and political bodies of a population. Thus, state policies on physical bodies of women are highly significant for an analytical understanding of both social structures and transformations.

I shall present the Turkish case to illustrate a kind of state feminism. The emergence of Turkish state feminism at the turn of the 20th century is a master key to analyze state policies on the women's body regarding to the Turkish transformation. However, we recognize a line of rupture from the primary policies at the turn of the new century. Besides supranational

1 Special thanks to my dear student Bahar Ayça Okçuoğlu for her editorial support in the preliminary version of this study.
policies, the recent state feminism has a new paradigm for women of Turkey. This paper attempts to question not only the paradigm shift from the Westernist to the post-Islamist reason but also the negative impact of their existence on women as individuals and feminist solidarity.

**Keywords:** state feminism, embodiment, Turkey

There is a claim that feminist movement began with the suffrage movement that rapidly spread out in West continental Europe after the 1789 French Revolution, then in England, America, New Zealand and Australia. As a matter of fact, this right demand is the first confrontation moment between state authority and feminist movement. The first-wave feminism continuing from the 19th century to the early 20th century firstly struggled with *de jure* inequalities and won first legal rights for women. The second-wave feminism that appeared in the 1960s and 1970s has mainly a resistance, or even an opposition, to make cooperation with the state in the context of social policies, since many feminists argue state apparatuses and the related bureaucracy are not only men dominated but also male biased and patriarchal (Ferguson, 1985; Martin, 2013). However, second-wave feminists still challenged to nation-states, particularly in equality demands. In order to realize their demands, it is generally known that most of states construct their own institutions to improve women status and make legal transformations. The emphasis of third-wave feminism, initially appeared in the 1990s, shifted to women's diversity and differences from the essentialist definition for women. In fact, the framing of *Menschenrechte für Frauen* (human rights for women) started to gain more validity rather than *Frauenrechte* (women's rights) by underlining inequalities and other discriminations based on women's different identities such as class, ethnicity, age, disability, religious and sexual orientation. The international and transnational organizations becoming more effective in the 1990s and 2000s by the impact of globalization waited for governmental changes from state-oriented women movements to convenience them through their own agendas. This leads to the entrance to the age of reforms in the name of women in the global scale. On behalf of national feminist movement, international organizations coping with subordinate statuses
address non-governmental organizations for women and bureaucrats dealing with women’s issues. Being in tune with the times, third-wave feminism in the national level generally develops *de jure* concerns and struggles in the defined indicators and parameters.

It is obvious that feminism sustains a bargain relationship with state authorities in terms of demanding rights. However, the problem of state has not any place in the feminist theories until the 1980s. As a matter of fact, MacKinnon (1983:635) determines “[f]eminism has no theory of the state”. At the end of the 1980s, women and state started to be discussed together in the context of changing political hegemonies and patriarchal forms (Hernes, 1987; Showstack Sassoon, 1987; Siim, 1988; MacKinnon, 1989). Even, the studies during the 1980s and 1990s displayed the existence of the term “state feminism” as a social fact in many countries. Since the word “state” interrupts feminists and the word “feminism” interrupts patriarchal state institutions, “state feminism” has stayed out of usage. For a long time, most who read a binary contradiction of two words in the term have tried new formulas, and added new concepts like “gender mainstreaming,” “women’s policy agencies,” and “gender equality agencies” into the terminology in the social welfare societies at the end of the 1990s. But the suggested terms remain weak in the conceptualization of the phenomenon (See Outshoom and Kantola, 2007:2-6). For this reason, feminist theorizing has progressed since the 1990s through encountering with the realities that lie under the concept of “state feminism” (Gordon, 1990; Kandiyoti, 1991; McBride Stetson and Mazur, 1995; Skjeie and Siim, 2000; Rankin and Vickers, 2001; Lovenduski, 2005; Kantola, 2006; Outshoorn and Kantola, 2007).

The term “state feminism” is defined in many ways. The most optimistic definition is the adherence of women movements’ demands in the state (Lovenduski, 2005:2). This definition based on a thesis that there is a direct interaction between women movement and state institutions through the non-governmental organizations’ mediation. For example, McBride Stetson and Mazur (1995:274) developed a typology for analysis of comparative state feminisms and it assesses two criteria: policy influence and policy access. Nonetheless, this definition can only be used with an operating stable representative democracy for

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2 Also, the terms of “sub-state feminism” (Celis and Meier, 2007) and “supra-state feminism” (Woodward and Hubert, 2006) were added into the literature.
welfare social state model analysis. This definition does not enclose different experiences with unstable state structure, as well as does not take the possibility of making docile feminist movement by governmental activities into consideration. In this article, “state feminism” is used as “activities of government structures that are formally charged with furthering women’s status and rights” (McBride Stetson and Mazur, 1995:1-2). In other words, it is the attempts of state authorities with their own parameters to develop women’s socio-political situation with public policies.

It is argued that state feminism is well short of the feminism in general, because of its reliance on bureaucracy. In addition, much of the debate concerning the effectiveness of state feminism is about whether it is understood as working within or changing existing paradigms. By means of state feminism, the main purpose of the movement is restricted to convert any bureaucracy into an instrument of social change. However, feminism in general advocates and supports rights of women as well as deconstructs gender inequality and patriarchy as social facts. As a matter of fact, feminist movement engages all patriarchal and hegemonic forms in life. But our critic on state feminism is not only narrowness of its targets in the name of feminism but also its potential handicaps in the movement. The main danger could be breakdown of solidarity among national feminist organizations due to competition with each other in the scope of benefiting from funds. Most importantly, feminism defends that the emancipation of women must be the acts of women themselves. In other words, the feminist claim is for self-emancipation. The point here is not that men should not be involved in any way, but it is that women should lead the movement and the related organizations. Unfortunately, state feminism does not require women as the leading actors. The main agents in state feminism are bureaucrats, politician and senior civil servants who deal with strengthening women’s status and rights. Their gender is not questioned from the perspective of state feminism, since this approach intrinsically regards for whom, not by whom.

Jayawardena (1986) analyzes Third World feminism with a cross-national research from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. The included countries are Turkey, Egypt, Iran, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan. She claims that feminism is not a strange ideology to Third World countries contrary to traditionalists and
Eurocentrics who state “feminism is a phenomena just for West.” On the contrary, she suggests that feminism develops with the women’s struggles for equal rights and against the subordination of women in houses and society that is unique to Asia and Middle-East. The visibility of same tendency mostly in Muslim countries is a result of the study. Kandiyoti (1987:335) suggests Eurocentric feminist theories to instead of major on the victimization of women through the unmediated dictates of Islam, there is a need to think again on the collective concrete forms of controlling the women body and sexuality that is not just special to Muslim societies. Out of Western experience, feminist theories should try to understand women’s different experiences’ varieties and different feminisms in this context. Jayawardena (1986) maintains that the emergence of feminist movement is related within the frameworks of anti-imperialist and nationalist struggles, a general drift to secularism, modernization with social reforms, and the rise of “enlightened” middle-class. Eventually, understanding women’s circumstances is possible with the basis of the changes of regulations with religion in the paths of post-independency states, different nationalisms, state ideologies and opponent social movements. Berktay (2003:96) points out the specificity of feminism(s) and the complexity on women emancipation that transferred from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, due to Islamic reflections of the Sharia period not just on religion but also on culture and due to nationalist concerns both on saving the state and on combining Islam and Westernism. How women are represented in political discourses, the steps for legal emancipation, women’s involvement ways to economic life and articulations of their gender interests to social movements are closely related to the nation-state building process and the related transformations (Kandiyoti, 1991:3-4). In fact, the state feminism of Turkey that appears immanently with the process of nation-state building and the related East-West argumentation is the main topic of this work. By taking the transition process of state structure and government models into account, Turkish state feminism history should be read syntagmatically and paradigmatically. Thereby, not just relations with women movements, but also the new paradoxes in patriarchal systems that enter with state mechanisms to female citizens’ lives should be examined.

While Western European counterparts also establish a direct or an indirect relation with the state almost in every phase, the feminist history of Turkey has different features in
this context. Tekeli (1993:30-3) divides this history into three stages: (i) *first-wave feminism* that reaches to top with the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918) and continues up to the Republic’s first years, (ii) “*state feminism*” (the Republic’s first years – the 1920s and 1930s) and (iii) *second-wave feminism* after 1980. Correspondingly the history of women in Turkey is separated by Çaha (2004) into five stages: (i) *women’s participation to social life* (from the 17th century to 1876 - the announcement of the First Constitutionalist period), (ii) *women’s becoming a social actor in the public sphere* (from 1876 to 1923 - the announcement of the Republic), (iii) *women’s isolation from their femininities* (from 1923 to the 1980s), (iv) *identity seek of women* (since 1980 - Turkish coup d’etat), (v) *the rise of local feminisms* (starting from the 1980s and well became clear in the 1990s). Although there is a denotation that state feminism phase corresponds to the Republic’s first years, like most academicians, Tekeli also believes that this phase’s clear marks could be followed during the last periods of the Ottoman Empire. Kandiyoti (1991) betrays that state feminism started with the announcement of the Second Constitutionalist Period (1908) and Sirman (1989) asserts that the first-wave called is also state feminism. It is important to re-evaluate state feminism doubtlessly to be named in the first years of the Republic and interposing to women movement history in Turkey.

The emergence of Turkish state feminism at the turn of the 20th century is a master key to analyze state policies on the women’s body regarding to the Turkish transformation. However, we recognize a line of rupture from the primary policies at the turn of the new century. Besides supranational policies, the recent state feminism has a new paradigm for women of Turkey. This paper attempts to question not only the paradigm shift from the Westernist to the post-Islamist reason but also the negative impact of their existence on women as individuals and feminist solidarity. This study reveals similarities and differences between state feminisms of Turkey at the turn of the 20th century and at the turn of the 21st century. If we want to understand better how state feminism works in practice we need to pay closer attention to analyzing what they do and why they do it.

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3 This wave was criticized by leftist ideologies in Turkey, because the orthodox leftists considered feminist movements as "bourgeois deviation" in the 1960s (Abadan-Unat and Tokgöz, 1994).
Turkish State Feminism at turn of the 20th century

Integration Policies for Women

Although the 1839 Tanzimat reforms did not directly mention women as an issue, this period procreated the result of intimacy of religious, class and sex based parallel communities to one another, especially in big cities of the Empire. In this context, the debates on women’s visibility in public space and participation to social life started. Actually, it could be said that the happened thing is the passing from the sex-segregated social spheres - haremlık (the living area reserved for women) versus selamlık (the living area reserved for the men) - to the private versus public sphere separation. The problem that usually named as “women’s participation to public space” could actually be read as the shared social areas with men, such as public transport vehicles, cinema, education institutions or working places, that separated with “curtain” previously. This circumstance could be read as male participation to public space from female gaze. But different forms of patriarchy propose different strategies to improve women’s security and provide resistance mechanisms towards male domination by defining women in their own paradigms (Kandiyoti, 1988). Since the precedence of male gaze in classical, religious, modern and Western patriarchal forms, women participated to public sphere and it perceived as coping with this circumstance left over to men. Thus women seem guests as if they were invited to male social spaces.

In 1856 with the effects of committed education reforms, women’s education appears as a topic. After, while the Committee of Union and Progress that came to administration with the Second Constitutional continued to debate the woman problem as defining it as a reason of imperial’s backwardness; it said that they target initially women’s education to provide women’s participation to public sphere. Ottoman Empire’s new political governmental purposes probably indicate the beginning of the state feminism. Maybe the best historical example of state’s women problem is the news that given with the heading of “For Emancipation of Moslem Girls Admires European System” in November of 19th 1911 in New York Times. In this news, Ahmed Rıza Bey who is a significant name of Young Turks Movement and Second Constitutional’s new council of ministers’ chair:
“... We have women enough, but we have no life companions, no sisters, no wives, no mothers in the proper sense of the word. [...] The chief object I have in view is the elevation of the sense of motherhood and of its sacred responsibilities in the minds and hearts of our daughters. I was greatly struck during my long exile by the splendid beneficial results that accrue European countries from good women brought up with the ideal of gentle, sweet, self-sacrificing, yet strong and rational motherhood. Give us such motherhood and our country will be saved, prosperous, and happy. Nothing else will do it.”

Rationalist, positivist, progressive, Western-oriented, and reformist Turkish men (Young Turks) in the duration of establishment of the new Republic, while pointing out emancipation of women as the key of civilization and a premise for improvement of nation, primarily aimed at woman body’s education in their own social imaginations. This aim is the formula of integration of women to new society order. They Orientalized not only their past, but also women by referring to their European fellows, particularly in the context of their roles in family. Opposing to the argument of fragmented Western family by traditionalist, religious, and conservative Turkish men, they argued that women would be responsible from Turkish men’s well-being and future’s enlightened generations. In order to raise responsible citizens, women should recover from the past’s traditions and superstitions and should be educated and enlightened, according to them. The new Republic’s male dominated state removed polygamy with Civil Code and divorce with man’s one word, as well as presented equality between men and women in all social places as national policy. Women did have right to vote in local elections in 1930, and in general elections in 1934. In spite of these political rights, “Kemalist reforms do not aim to be liberalized woman or contribute the improvement of woman consciousness and woman identity, they aimed to prank Turkish women with the education and skills that make them better peer and mother,” to Arat (1998:52). By the Law on Unification of Education as much as the unity principle in education and supporting of coeducation, women’s education and active participation to working life were especially promoted in the state discourse of the Republic era. The Republic of Turkey presents a role model figure for women, as “enlightened mother of nation” (Tekeli, 1988; Kandiyoti, 1987). At the end, there is a common sense “Atatürk/the Republic/the State gave their rights to women”. As if women
would not strike actively for their rights in Turkey, as if there were no series of rights that gained after a strike, as if all rights for women were given by the state. The impression makes Turkey’s women as if they were “debtors for the state”. Due to the feelings of “indebtedness” to the state, the women have more actively presented their protection for the Republican principles, especially nationalism and laicism.

As one of the key figures of post-colonial theories, Spivak (1999) maintains two social types that have a voice on “brown woman’s body”: the brown man who claims that he is protecting local traditions and the white man who puts forward that he is bringing universal human rights and saving brown women from brown men. While this debate on brown woman’s body continued between these men, black woman’s utterance on her own body is not listened; even she has not the right to comment on her own body. The above-mentioned Westernist and reformist elite men’s in the Turkish state feminism experiences perform the role of the white man who came as colonizer in the Indian case. In the Turkish case, the men could use the “woman problem” for their more effective strategic aims. They listen women while women talk in their way of thinking and they create women speakers to themselves. Thereby, the role model women is not just modern, enlightened, educated, working mother and peer, they had adjectives like patriotic and altruistic at the same time. All in all, the role model of women that presented by state feminism as integration policies to Republic regime in the nation-state model that could be summarized, performed the socio-political function of inducement to public of secular reforms and national purposes, which women’s symbolic and economical value is indispensable for the Republic.

Woman Body’s Symbolic Value

In accordance with state-women relations, Şeni (1984), by considering that the process contains a linear continuity from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, mentions social control on women with their body and sexuality. In this context, by underlining symbolic value and its meaning, she argue that women’s clothing and their standing ways in the city locations that composed through the medium of firman (imperial edict) in the late periods of the Ottoman Empire is in the same analytical level with the
Republic’s “endowment” of political rights to women. Although Kandiyoti (1987:336) agrees with Şeni on symbolic value’s importance in this context, she still argues that Şeni’s argument is inadequate to explain reforms’ political and economic necessities.

Turkish state feminism firstly created “ideal man” model by the common label “hat revolution,” taking place in 1925, which Lewis defined as “big symbolic revolution”. Merely like religious icons; Atatürk’s portraits, busts and sculptures promoted this model. Ideal man figure, as governmental representation too, was introduced as fair, prescient, open minded, right-giver father. Also, in this framework the new modernist nation-state was announced presented public consent metaphorically. It is not coincidence to prefer “Atatürk” as his surname which refers to the “father of Turks” by the Surname Law in 1934, since he symbolically gave very well the state character portrait. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is publicly presented by separating from Ottoman Empire’s sultans. He is remembered with being a symbol father who protects and shows favor to his “children” (young citizens), particularly to his “daughters”, in spite of his authoritarian character. It can be said that this ideal father model has carried him beyond charismatic leadership in Weberian sense. In addition to this, the ideal woman model especially represented by Turkish woman teacher was presented as seems like a privilege to women by Atatürk. These “privileged women” are mentioned under the name of “daughters of the Republic”. A solid femininity image combined with modernity was created and Turkish woman became a symbol of both enlightenment-progressiveness and darkness-backwardness (Bora, 2004).

Atatürk did not have a biological child but he undertook many kids’ protectorate and adopted many of them. The importance that he gave for education has been portrayed in public opinion by his father figuration, particularly through his spiritual daughters, such as Ülkü Adatepe, Ayşe Afet İnan, and Sabiha Gökçen. Being the “head teacher” of the country, photographs taken when he visited girls’ vocational schools and photos of the gestures of starting to waltz that are for inciting everyone at balls are some visual elements, jogging to memories, that completes this portrait. The creation of ideal woman is a process

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4 Weber (1968:215) defines charismatic authority as “resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him.”
that maintains with Atatürk's wife's portraying. Such that Latife Hanım drawing a key figure to Turkish woman⁵.

Especially the "ideal woman" figure used to overcome socio-political, economic and symbolic backwardness and signed that a new age started (Kandiyoti, 1991). This figure has symbolically respectable amount of role in the context of Turkish Republic's both internal affairs and foreign affairs. In this same time, as opposed to Hitler Germany's and Mussolini Italy's “Kinder-Küche-Kirche” (Child-Kitchen-Church) slogan, Atatürk Turkey “presented itself as a country electing women to its parliament and thereby symbolically claimed its rightful place among other Western democratic nations” (Kandiyoti, 1987:321). Even it could not rhapsodize itself in internal politics by being the first country that gave right of suffrage to women in Europe, but it is not the first one.

Family, which is considered as “the building block of society”, is given importance to be increased in the new established state of Turkey, to provide unity and to obstruct differentiations. Nicole Van Os propounds the existence of “familial feminism” (“ailesel feminism”) in Turkey. As if women would make sense within the family; in fact woman is just defined as mother or as spouse or as daughter.

The reforms in the Second Constitutionalist period could be pointed as the beginning of bio-politics on women in Turkey. The changes in education system, the coeducation that girls and boys had courses in same classes, the introduction of teaching as the best job for women are the first steps of women's participation to education system and changing given meanings to their values. From this period, the understanding that they need to be educated about medical knowledge and the given importance to this, which is for more healthful mothers and children is a concrete example of why women’s value began to be change. Hence the “household economy” (ev ekonomisi) course for girls and the “work knowledge” (iş bilgisi) course for boys, which were given in the 1980s and 1990s in secondary schools, are important in terms of given roles to girls and boys. The learning

⁵ Latife Hanım was portrayed in the studies and narratives as self-sustained, independent, notably informed about world languages, very beautiful, skilled, alive, dynamic, and having curious to art, literature and music, and ability to use weapon splendidly. In her period, she was represented as a public portrait of educated, patriotic, enlightened, intelligent, and free-standing women (Çalışlar, 2006).
outcomes of the “household economy” lessons were designed as being able to stitching, vignette, cooking, and evaluating wastes. This gendered course was used as a tool to make women good housewives.

The constituted similarity between homeland and woman body is the most encountered scenes of memoirs and novels that are about Istanbul’s occupation (Kaynar, 2007:248). The production of this knowledge is not coincidence. Delaney (1991), who conducted a village study in the 1980s of Turkey, mentions that the woman's body becomes a family icon through reproduction as well as the related ties and all kinship relations, and transforms home, village, homeland and world for men. Home’s master, village's headman, state and God are male. “Mother land” and “benevolent state” model are still two important symbolic references used in political arena. Through the social and cultural capital created by patriarchal phenomena, Turkish state feminism may be the most “successful” example of utilizing this symbolic value. Actually, it is to demolish the traditional discourse and patterns for the new nation-state patriarchy and fulfill new sexist patterns by bringing Western patriarchy in place of Islamic patriarchy (Berktay, 2001).

**Turkish State Feminism at the Turn of the 21st Century**

**Supranational Regulations, Extra-Supranational Regulations and Changing Paradigm**

The first decade of the new millennium was crucial years for stepping forward in terms of empowering women legal status by means of supranational regulations. In the extent of accordance process to the European Union, Turkey signed *Accession Partnership Document* in 1999 and priority change areas were determined. The plans were arranged according to these change areas based on short, medium and long terms, and the procedures aimed at removing discrimination against woman and involving gender equality (Özerdem, 2010). The United Nations’ contract - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was confirmed and signed by Turkish government in 1986. Until 2002 the Turkish government did not however give importance
to sign the related protocol of the Convention that confirmed previously. In 2002, items in civil code that involve discrimination against woman were revisited in accordance with the gender equality. The concept “head of family” was removed from the codes; and also equal right and responsibilities for spouses were specified. For instance; the right to speak given to women about domestic and children issues, the incapacity of deciding one-side where to live as a couple specified to husbands, the ability for women to press a divorce charge in the case of cheating by husbands, and equally distribution decision of goods that obtained during marriage union in the case of divorce. In 2004 by means of revision in the 10th Article of the Constitution, the sentence “women and men have equal rights” was written. The item “State is responsible to provide realizing of this equality” was attached (Dedeoğlu, 2009). With the changes in Labor Law, equal treatment and equal valued work, equal wage principle were identified between sexes.

Another point that could not practice successfully in the accordance process to the EU is childcare issue. The Union made a decision that the Turkish state should provide care service for 90 percentages of children over the age of three until 2010 (Dedeoğlu, 2009). But childcare in Turkey including pre-school education possibilities still remains very weak. Although many workplace do not realize the regulation, in Labor Law, “workplaces of 100-150 female workers have to constitute child care rooms, workplaces of above 150 female employees have to open kindergarten” (Dedeoğlu, 2009). The great gap in childcare should be re-considered in order to criticize reproduction policy on enforcement to motherhood explained below in the name of the new paradigm shift.

Apart from the legal changes by the effect of supranational organizations in recent years overlapping the time of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, it is clear that the Turkish state brings woman-focused issues, in particular body-related theme, up to the political agenda more frequently compared to past. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan usually puts these three subjects into words: (i) pre-life approach against pre-choice, (ii) stance against cesarean delivery, (iii) slogan of “three children.” All these issues related with reproduction are explanatory tools to debate Turkish state feminism’s continuation, to analyze its new qualification, and to show an emerging new paradigm for state feminism of Turkey today. Notably the debated issues in the recent period are
considered as not only controversial but also provoking because of the governmental approach to have the right to decide over women's body. Erdoğan has announced that his government gives the contraception game away (Today's Zaman, 2011; Hürriyet Daily News, 2013; TRT Haber, 2013). He harshly criticized birth control campaigns conducted in Turkey, making CHP (Republican People's Party) - founded by Atatürk - “scapegoat” for it and aging population. This can be read as a critic of the second state feminism to the first one, but it is actually a focus point of the new Turkish state feminism – “reproductive governmentality” (Altıok, 2013), pro-natal policy.

In a comparison with the previous state feminism, there is a different reason under the decision to limit abortion’s reasons and to shorten legal term for the related process, by not debating women’s right to decide freely on their own bodies. It will probably push women seeking unhealthy solutions. The cesarean section of the related law draft has similar features with abortion issue. Both abortion and cesarean operations will not be realized by not obtaining the husbands' permissions. This means non-recognition out of wedlock relationships and disapproves of them, and intervention to woman rights. But Erdoğan’s decisions and advices are obvious over women by correlating them to family. The “three children” issue turning up in his discourses of the new century's first years is a new motto that how the state politicizes, manages, canalizes and educates the notions of woman and family. In fact, the previous state feminism provided a mother role for women, but not dictated. In the past, the reproduction topic is even only evaluated in the framework of family planning procedures. Erdoğan who believes that power and country will strengthen by increasing population openly expresses his purpose of “a new generation” underlining “religious generation”. The emergent paradigm to create its new citizens is comparable with the previous one of state feminism. Still, it is obvious that the paradigm is shifted from Westernist to post-Islamist political vision at the turn of the 21st century.

The most distinctive indicator of this shift is the altered state policy on turban. The phenomenon of turban has always been disputed in Turkey since its establishment, the discussions even stretching back to the last period of the Ottoman Empire. Westernist ruling elite and Islamist elite, as the opposite poles of the debate, discuss whether women should be allowed to cover their hair in public spaces. The turban debate has occupied an
important place and remained in the political agenda of Turkey, which is the unique constitutionally laical example among the countries, where the clear majority of the population consists of Muslims\(^6\). In the changing paradigm at the turn of the 21\(^{st}\) century, the Erdoğan government did take however remarkable steps to overturn the turban ban.

Turban question cannot be considered without understanding laicism experience in Turkey. Laicism in Turkey, as one of Atatürk's six main principles, is partly different from secularism. Secularism provides freedom from government imposition related to religion upon the people, within a state that is neutral on matters of belief, and gives no state privileges or subsidies to any religion. The word \textit{laiklik} in Turkish comes from the French word \textit{laïcité}, which is also the core concept of the French constitution\(^7\). The term was originally the French equivalent of the term “\textit{laity}”, which encompasses everyone who does not belong to the Catholic clergy. After the French Revolution this meaning changed into the practice of keeping religion separate from the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government. The same principle is valid in the constitution of the Republic of Turkey. In practice, however, the state has controlled and funded Sunni Islam as the religion of the majority through the Presidency of Religious Affairs (\textit{Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı})\(^8\). This of course is in stark contrast with the law accepted in the 1900's France, which separates church and state according to three principles: the religious neutrality of the state, the personal and social freedom of religious exercise, and the right to establish public powers related to the church. The law shows that “the Republic neither recognizes, nor salaries, nor subsidizes any religion”\(^9\). In addition, it continued the ban on wearing conspicuous religious symbols in public space, especially in educational contexts. Although the laicism principle in

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\(^6\) The country has hence witnessed more negotiations in comparison to the rest of Europe, where confusion over turban emerged in the last decades only after encountering female Muslim diasporic identities.

\(^7\) Article 1 states: “\textit{La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale.}”

\(^8\) Since the multi-party system in 1946, Turkey witnessed Islamization that was suppressed for many years. After the military coup in 1980, the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” began to be stressed by the Atatürkist military. This ideology, claiming to cooperate with the laicism principle, has three pillars: the family, the mosque, and the barracks.

\(^9\) Its application is, however, controversial in the country, especially the exception of the Alsace-Moselle.
the Republic of Turkey is confined to the definition of the separation of religion from state affairs and the freedom of religions as individual faiths, including Sunni Islam, all independent religious communities that are deemed political are nonetheless illegal. Moreover, laicism in Turkey corresponds to a kind of secular behavior in public spaces. Therefore, religious dress codes, including veiling, are forbidden inside all official and military institutions. The public servants cannot cover their heads with turban. The students do not have the right to have their Islamic dress codes coming to the universities. As such, the current turban debate appears entangled with the nature of the state laicism in Turkey and differs from the French experience.

The turban debate also deals with the so-called “dressing reform”. In the initial phase of the Republic, the first parliament headed by Atatürk made a lot of radical changes on dressing, replacing Islamic- or traditional-style dress with western-style dress and accessories, hence the above-mentioned “hat reform”. The Turkish Civil Code in 1926, inspired by the Swiss Code, outlawed veiling. The most controversial changes introduced by the reform have been about the women’s dresses. Afterwards, the debate has hence been concentrated on whether the turban has a symbolic meaning against the secular social order. Indeed, by stressing its difference from the traditional headscarf, laicists argue that it is a political symbol of reactionary and retrogressive activities. Nevertheless, advocates of the turban say that it is a religious requirement. In a related vein change of female dress codes in Turkey points to the end of separation of women and men in the public spaces.

**Conclusion**

This work does not particularly enter into the debate on the relationship between political representation of women and state feminism, but masculinities in the practice of governing. It is clear that the state feminism experiences in Turkey have not significantly affected both descriptive and substantive representation for women in the political process. Almost all the political leaders in the experience of the former state feminism were male. For the contemporary experience, all the bureaucrats in the government dealing with women’s issues may female but not feminist. In the end, male politicians, senior civil
servants and bureaucrats play an active role in state feminisms of Turkey.

The ongoing political discussion concerning the women body in Turkey leads to some blind spots by keeping the women and their subjective experience out of the center of sociological accounts. The deadlock of the women question in Turkey reminds sociologists of Spivak, one of the key figures of post-colonial theories. She underlines the discourses employed by brown and white men concerning the brown woman body, and the silence of brown women on their own bodies. Inspired from this sociological approach, feminist literature and Foucault’s theory of biopolitics; I debate the Turkish case of state feminism and its different paradigms. I argue that Turkey has experienced a shift from sex-segregated social spaces to a division between private space and public space, via the former state feminism paradigm. Participation of women in the public space does nothing but revealing the patriarchal gaze towards women since women are still perceived as “invited” to the space of men. Men hence debate how women bodily integrate to the public space and how they deal with this challenge. As a consequence, Islamists defend turban as a human right of conscience freedom since it keeps women from “sinful” gaze, whereas Kemalists are against it in the name of protecting the “enlightened” woman position in laicism. It is obvious that the way women are supposed to look and be perceived entails the question of emancipation of women in general.

Foucault explains the dependence of bio-politics on knowledge as power apparatus. Accordingly, both state feminism experiences in Turkey use woman body by producing their own paradigmatic knowledge. The former one prefers to save itself from its recent history, reminds the history of backwardness relating with Islamism. Furthermore, it attempts to produce a new local knowledge and to write a fictionalized woman history in this road. For example, Kandiyoti’s mention of “pre-Islamic golden age for women” and exploration of woman’s place with equal rights as powerful in egalitarian and democrat Turkish far past in a contradiction with Ottoman Empire’s experience are meaningful in this context (Sirman, 1989). In fact, Atatürk assigned to one of his spiritual daughters, Prof. Dr. Ayşe Afet İnan especially for this work. This fictionalized historical knowledge function the “isolation from their femininities” (Çaha, 2004) while giving self-reliance to women and creating “docile bodies”. Nowadays, Erdoğan by declaring pro-natal policy of Turkey
emphasizes the reproductive and motherhood roles of women. Both the former and the latter state feminism paradigm experience Turkey within “authoritarian modernization,” referring to working authoritarian and disciplinary power together from Foucault’s viewpoint.

Yuval-Davis (1997) explains the patriotic orientation of women in a nation-building process and its ways to the positioning of women as citizens. She mentions a kind of axes shift in roles of women from biological reproductions of the nation to cultural constructions of nations. The Turkish government at the turn of the 20th century – the period of establishment of the nation-state – determined gendered constructions of nationhood via rights and duties of citizenship and fictionalized its female citizen (See İnan, 1964; İnan, 1969). However, the new paradigm concentrates on biological-theological reproduction. Turkish experience is out of step with everyone else; even it has a reverse direction in women’s role for the nation-state, namely from cultural to biological-theological reproduction.

With the mediation of governmental discourse and reforms, Turkish state feminism experiences show a different picture for gender studies. Regarding the Turkish case, state feminism becomes a highly controversial topic, since it shows the difference between institutionalization of woman movements and institutionalizing the woman movement. As well as, it unrolls the necessity of reconsidering on possibilities of suppression or weakening of woman movement via institutionalization. As a result, feminists of Turkey still consider whether the women movement should be institutionalized from above.

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Through Third World Women’s Eyes: The Shortcomings of Western Feminist Scholarship on the Third World

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Abstract

There is a growing consciousness among Muslim scholars of feminist scholars’ tendency to generalize and make unwarranted assumptions regarding the position of women in the Muslim World. Western feminists have not succeeded in their assumed mission to “rescue” Third World women. This article is written in response to Chandra Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1988, 1991). The problems that Western scholars face if attempting to promote Third World women’s rights include the failure of some campaigns by Western feminists through analyzing some of the Western feminism limitation in areas such as the geopolitics, especially the history of colonialism, and cultural and religious specificities of these Third World societies. This article analyzes problems that Western scholars face when attempting to participate in calling for Third World women’s rights, following Mohanty identification of three main problematic analytic principles. There is a tendency to universalize values such as freedom and agency, coupled with a misunderstanding of the meaning of social and religious conventions such as the wearing of the veil or headscarf.
Furthermore, investigation of issues facing Muslim women is complicated by the fact that Western feminists are consistently seen as a threat and an indirect way to colonize this part of the world. The article concludes that the key to building new understanding is to avoid the tendency to essentialize or totalize the experience of women of an unfamiliar culture.

Keywords: Mohanty, feminism, Islam, Orientalism, human rights.

Women in Muslim Arabic countries continuously encounter many challenges in their Third World societies and in the World in general, one of which is to secure social status for themselves in a mostly male-dominated society. Tracing this topic, historically, one could observe that many Western feminist scholars participated directly and indirectly to help their sisters in that part of the world. Unfortunately, most of these Western efforts did not succeed due to the fact that Western scholars viewed the challenge through their own Western perspective concerning gender equality while neglecting specific religious, cultural and traditional Arabic and Islamic notions of gender relations, historical economical, geopolitical notions, specifically the history of colonialism. Gayarti Spivak may have been the first to point this out in her article entitled “Can the Subaltern Speak” (1978). Pointing out that the Indian custom of suttee is very easy for Western critics to denounce as a drastic example of the devaluation of women’s lives, Spivak questions whether the women who live in societies which practice suttee themselves have a voice with regard to this issue, and if so, who would be willing to listen? In denouncing a foreign practice that many women appear to freely choose, are not Western scholars and critics likewise shutting off the voices of “subaltern” women, albeit with the intention of empowering them? Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in her article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, claims that Western feminists have failed in their attempts to define and locate the actual circumstances of women and feminisms in the Third World, let alone theorizing and criticizing them. Mohanty goes farther by stating that Western feminism has erased historical and geographical Third World conditions and therefore “colonized” Third World women by constituting them as a “single monolithic subject” due to their lack of knowledge.
of the real circumstances that “Third World women” face in their countries.

Due to the fact that I belong to the group of “Third World women” and would like to academically participate in the area of “Third World feminism” in the future, I would like to counter, while referring to Mohanty’s previous article and her other article titled “Under Western Eyes: Revisited,” that some Western feminists did not succeed in their mission of claiming to rescue Third World women. To state and prove such argument, I believe it is important to discuss numerous points, starting with an examination of the problems that Western scholars face if attempting to participate in calling for Third World women’s rights, as Mohanty describes them. Then, it is important to explore the reasons that led to the failure of some campaigns by Western feminists through analyzing some of the Western feminism limitation in areas such as the geopolitics, especially the history of colonialism, and cultural and religious specificities of these Third World societies. After that, I think it would be useful to provide a general overview of some of the current feminist movements led by Third World women in different parts of the Third World such as the ones taking place in Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Finally, such argument will be concluded by laying out the possible ways in which Western scholars can participate in different feminist movements in the Third World countries. However, given the limits of this paper, the focus will be on analyzing the problems that Western scholars face if attempting to participate in calling for Third World women’s rights and categorizing the limitations they experience in areas of geopolitics and religious specificities. A broader examination of the topic may be a subject for future research and analysis.

Because Western feminists’ efforts have entailed an application of Western culture and understanding of gender equality to the Arabic Muslim world without really taking into consideration the specific geopolitical, religious, cultural, and traditional notions of the Muslim societies, people from many Arabic Muslim societies have, understandably, rejected this interference. Western feminists’ contributions have been regarded as either a planned strategy to destroy the culture and tradition of the Arabic Muslim world, or an attempt to westernize the society. Therefore, Western feminists generally face a two-fold problem when discussing the status of women in the Third World. Shadi Hamid in his article “Between Orientalism and Postmodernism: the Changing Nature of Western Feminist Thought Towards the Middle East,” explains that if Western feminists neglect the
traditional and cultural nature of the society, an Arabic society will consider them as a threat to their social order because their interference will be seen as an attempt of Westernization. On the other hand, if they chose not to help women in these societies, they will be also considered as another agent of oppression against Third World women (p.77). So, it seems that either way they choose to position themselves; they will still face criticism.

I believe that many Western scholars fall in the first category; they participate in calling for Third World women’s rights without really having adequate knowledge about the nature of such societies. In “Under Western Eyes”, Mohanty identifies three main problematic analytic principles used in Western feminist scholarship when discussing “Third World women”. She starts by exploring the “strategic location of the category <<women>> vis-à-vis the context of analysis” (MCS, p.399), to show the danger of Western scholarship’s representation of “women” as a “coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally” (MCS, pp.399-400). So, according to Mohanty, Western scholars tended to describe “Third World women” as victimized, poor, uneducated, and sexually constrained inferiors. Indeed through my experience as an international Saudi student while studying at American institutions, I actually observed such overgeneralizations and stereotypical constructions used to describe women’s conditions in countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Iran. Many Western audience and intellectuals, for instance, miss the fact that there is a huge difference between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the way of dealing with women due to the fact that Saudi Arabia is a Sunni country whereas Iran is a Shia one. According to their different religious sects, each one of these countries has its own complex and distinct histories regarding the statues of women that could be discussed in a comparative study. In some Muslim countries – for example, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia – education levels for women are as high or higher than those for men; literacy levels and health outcomes are similarly favorable for women (CIA Factbook 2013). It may be understandable that generalization may occur when one is dealing with a culture far removed from one’s own, but in this case, ignoring the specific differences between societies in the Middle East leads to a shallow and easily invalidated analysis. Unfortunately, theory based on such generalization is far too frequently accepted as valid.
So, it is important for Western scholars or any group participating in any issue in a different culture to fully study the specificities of that culture to guarantee a successful or at least an appreciated result and avoid any kind of rejection or possible failure. Therefore, I totally agree with Mohanty insofar as she explains that in knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully (p.505). That is precisely the kind of knowledge that Western feminists must acquire before attempting to participate in the Third World’s feminist issues.

However, it is equally important to discuss the current status of the Western feminists’ participation in the Third World and locate and examine the kinds of limitations that these Western feminists experience there. I believe that one of the major limitations that Western Feminism suffers from is the fact of neglecting the geopolitical specificities that shape the Arab and Muslim worlds. Colonial history played a major role in shaping the image of the Western world and consequently Western interference in that part of the world. Therefore, as Hamid explains, it is really important for Western scholars to realize that previous Western interference in the Muslim Arab world have led Arab Muslims to reject Western engagement, especially in the area of feminist analysis (p.88). In the same vein, Leila Ahmed notes in her article “Feminism and Cross-Cultural Inquiry: The Terms of Discourse in Islam”, that “the colonial powers and their agents, and in particular the missionaries through the schools they founded did indeed explicitly set out to undermine Islam through the training and remolding of women” (p.144). As a result, Western feminists are consistently seen as a threat and an indirect way to colonize this part of the world. Furthermore, the colonial ideology has set the Western society as the “norm” generalizing about other civilizations as the “Other”. Such ideology did not only affect the colonized group; it has extended its reach to the colonizers themselves. Therefore, I believe that this colonial ideology is probably the reason that made the Western feminists want to apply their own perspective about women’s rights because according to them it is the norm. In the same vein, Lila Abu-Lughod in her essay titled “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others” states that:
Rather than seeking to “save” others (with the superiority it implies and the violence it would entail) Western feminist scholars might better think in terms of working with the Third World women in situations that are always subject to historical transformation and consider their own larger responsibilities to address the forms of global injustice that are powerful shapers of the worlds in which they find themselves (p.783).

Mohanty also ties those two notions together in her following assumption where she explains that the “assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality... and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the <<Third World>> in the context of a world system dominated by the West... characterize a sizable extent of Western feminist work on women in the Third World” (MCS, p.398). If Western feminist scholars fail to interrogate the effects of the colonial mindset and thus do not appreciate their own stance within it, the chances are much higher that they will universalize their own values and neglect to consider legitimate variations from those values. Of course, this is hardly a failing of feminists in particular – the universalizing of one’s own values is a common deficiency or liability in the views of scholars from a dominant culture. Differences are not authenticated and therefore almost not noticed. However, feminist scholars may be particularly vulnerable to such fallacies if their attention is focused on a generalized consciousness of the subjugation of women. Empathy with women in other cultures and the assuming or forcing of a similarity in conditions and mindset across cultures may lead to cultural blindness and an unwillingness to notice or give credence to differences.

The other limitation of Western Feminists’ experience in the “Third World” is their misunderstanding of some of the religious practices concerning women in Islam. Mohanty in the section titled “Methodological Universalism, or Women’s Oppression is a Global Phenomenon”, reveals the false assumptions made by Western scholars regarding indications and meanings of wearing the veils in different Islamic countries. For example, she states that Fran Hosken is wrong when regarding “[r]ape, forced prostitution, polygamy, genital mutilation, pornography, the beating of girls and women, purdah (segregation of women) [as] all violations of basic human rights” (p.409). While, I agree with Mohanty that Hosken’s clustering of the purdah with rape, domestic violence and forced prostitution emphasizes its ’sexual control’ function as the primary explanation for
purdah, whatever the context” (p.409). I would also like to add that Islamic laws state that women have the choice whether to wear the purdah or only the veil. The veil in Islam is defined as “a scarf that covers the hair and not the face”. Therefore, covering more than the hair with a scarf is not required by the theological tenets of Islam, although, cultural practices and regulations vary. Muslim women are free to cover their faces if they wish to do so. Moreover, Muslims have the choice of following one of four schools of thought: Hanbali, Hanafi, Shafai and Maliki. These groups have different opinions regarding some Islamic tenets, including the covering of the face. In both Shafai, and Hanafi sects, women have the freedom to decide whether to cover their faces, whereas Maliki and Hanbali sects consider that covering the face is a must that women should follow. In addition, there are certain countries as Afghanistan where women are forced to cover their faces regardless of the religious sect they follow. Such regulations, in my point of view, are due to the pressure practiced by Islamic fundamentalists who usually follow or even at certain occasions make up the most strict rules and obligations in religion and eventually force the public to follow them without questioning them. In any case, it is clear from these variations in rules and practice within Islam that covering the face is not religiously forced on women; rather, if there is any coercion to do so, it is social and political rather than religious. By the same token, there is no universal ‘sexual control’ over Muslim women as mandated or necessitated by the religion itself. On the contrary, Islam gives women the choice to interpret the directive to veil. By definition, therefore, wearing the veil is not to be regarded as a ‘sexual control’ over women, and to imply that it is must indicate an over-simplification and an exaggeration of the coercive aspects of the veil. The variations in the practice and women’s adoption of it may be overlooked by Western observers, to whom the concept of any mandatory covering may appear oppressive, even if these critics were to understand the differences in practice across the Muslim world. Of course, this viewpoint also ignores the fact that the wearing of head coverings is or has been the custom for many in the Judeo-Christian tradition as well.

Of course, the fact is that there are many Muslim women who do not wear the veil at all, and the Muslim society does not have the right to regard them as non-Muslims. Wearing the veil is a religious specificity that is practiced by some women and neglected by others. So, the choice to cover the face or even wear the veil is one of the rights that some Muslim
feminists reinforce. However, in some cases, Islamic fundamentalists along with the controlling male-dominated society have deprived women of the right to make this choice, a dilemma which reveals the fact that Western feminists’ concerns may be misplaced. Rather than denouncing the practice of wearing the veil or headscarf, for example, they could have helped their sisters in calling for their right to choose wearing the veil instead of viewing it as a sexual control on women that has to be banned. The issue, perhaps, is that the wearing of the veil has taken on a symbolic presence in Western thought – a connotation that obscures the very significance that the garment may have for those whom it concerns most closely – Muslim women.

It is, perhaps, no accident that the strongest Western opposition to the wearing of the veil has come about in the present socio-political climate, where, in the wake of 9/11, there has been a mistrust of the Muslim subject in Western countries. Muslim women themselves have become “… increasingly important symbols in struggles over war, feminism, immigration, and civil society while rarely having the space to communicate about themselves and their perspectives” (Ceretti 2012). While often conceptualized as an attempt to “liberate” Muslim women from the “oppressive” custom of wearing the headscarf, there can be little doubt that singling out the practices of a particular minority or immigrant culture and banning those practices has overtly racist or discriminatory overtones and may be construed or conflated with a societal rejection of those who practice them. Moreover, it appears that these nuances may exist whether or not they are consciously imposed. The problem with conceptualizing a class or group of people in terms of their symbolic connotation is the dehumanization of that group. If the concerns and oppressions of women in the Islamic world are condensed into a single symbol – the headscarf – this constitutes a vast oversimplification and a deep neglect of the issues those individuals actually face. These become less engaging to occidental observers; as one critic puts it, “… many non-Muslims are fascinated with unveiling and see wardrobe change as the only change they can believe in” (Ceretti, 2012).

In the same vein Abu-Lughod discusses the limitations of Western feminism concerning the meaning of the veil through a consideration of the burqa and the many meanings of veiling in the Muslim world. She argues that feminist scholars need to develop “a serious appreciation of differences among women in the world as products of different
histories, expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structured desires” (p.783). Judith Butler also discusses Mohanty's article and agrees that “focusing on ostensible lack of agency signified by the veil or burka, not only misunderstands the various cultural meanings that the burka could carry for women who wear it, but also denies the very idioms of agency that are relevant for such women” (p.47). Hamid also explains that due to the lack of understanding the meaning of hijab and women's choice to wear it, French feminist groups unconsciously participated in the oppression against Muslim women when they endorsed President Jacques Chirac's 2004 call to ban the headscarf (p.82). However, there are grounds for disputing Hamid's claim. This controversial ban that came about in 2004 did not single out the headscarf, but was constructed as a prohibition on the wearing of all obvious religious symbols in French public schools. These would include, for example, a large crucifix as well as a headscarf or hijab (Ezekiel, 2006, p. 256). The stated intention was to preserve the secularism of the French state by eliminating the public wearing of ostentatious signs of religious affiliation. Overall, the prohibition on the public display of religious symbols in France is best understood when contextualized within French history and culture with its longstanding emphasis on secularism, since the time of the French Revolution.

Misunderstanding these origins, many critics and commentators appear to overlook the extent of the ban. Most isolate the banning of the headscarf as the true intent of this law and the point of interest in its social adoption; obviously, it is the aspect of the law that catches the public imagination. Although the law was controversial, it is evident that it did indeed have supporters who viewed it as a potential liberation of Muslim women from an antiquated and repressive custom. Steven G. Gey in his article, “Free Will, Religious Liberty, and a Partial Defense of the French Approach to Religious Expression in Public Schools”, states that:

Sixty prominent French women in the arts and professions signed a petition sponsored by Elle magazine that supported the new law and interpreted the law from a feminist perspective as a ban on “un symbole visible de la soumission de la femme”—“a visible symbol of the submission of women (p.7).

It is a remarkable example of sophistry that the loss of personal freedom of choice (to
wear or not to wear the veil) was sublimated to a supposed noble cause by some proponents of the French law, as the preceding quotation implies. The impulse to ban the wearing of the headscarf for women’s ‘own good’ and often against their express wishes, of course, smacks of paternalism – very ironically, coming from a supposedly feminist perspective. James Graff in his article “Should France Ban Head Scarves?” released in the Times magazine states that “[t]hose favoring a ban on the head scarf often present themselves as feminists, fighting a symbol of oppression” (www.time.com). Of course, ironically, because Western feminists did not understand Muslim women’s choice to wear the veil, they also participated in the oppression those women faced. Hamid also reinforces this oppression and agrees that with this ban, many Muslim women are now deprived from their right to choose whether to cover their hair or face (p.82). Moreover, the focus on the headscarf and its symbolic connotations takes attention away from opportunities to support. Rottmann and Ferree (2008) discuss a parallel situation in Germany – shortly after the banning of the headscarf in schools in France, Germany, likewise, debated over passing a similar law. Rottmann and Ferree (2008) note that the issue of the headscarf drew “intense feminist involvement”, but another issue that arose at the same time and had the potential to affect Muslim women, changes in antidiscrimination law, was largely ignored by feminist media (Rottmann and Ferree, 2008, p. 481). Again, the symbolic value of the headscarf supercedes addressing the real needs and concerns of Muslim women. Rottmann and Ferree (2008) argue for the importance of intersectionality – the ability and practice of regarding more than one issue or type of oppression simultaneously. Intersectionality does not guarantee that Western feminists will be better apprised of the needs of Muslim women. However, it does present a more flexible and responsive model that is preferable to an over-emphasis of a single simplistic and easily misinterpreted issue, such as the focus on “liberating” Muslim women from the headscarf!

In general, as Mohanty points out, Western feminists have certain limitations in understanding the nature of gender inequality among Muslim women. The Iranian feminist scholar Ziba MirHosseini in her article “Muslim Women’s Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism”, explains that perceived Islamic inequalities towards women are actually due to the false interpretations by Islamic fundamentalists who interpret the Quran and the Prophet’s sayings in a way that guarantees them control over the society in
general and women specifically (p.641). According to MirHosseini, Muslim feminists claim that the source of gender inequality is not Islam but rather the “cultural norms of early Muslim societies” that assume that:

Women are created of men and for men; women are inferior to men; women need to be protected; men are guardians and protectors of women; and male and female sexuality differ and the latter is dangerous to the social order. These assumptions and theories are nowhere more evident than in the rules that define the formation and termination of marriage, through which gender inequalities are sustained in present-day Muslim societies (p.643).

Furthermore, Islamic feminists are also showing that the oppression and inequality towards women contradict divine justice in the Quran. While it is true that Islam (like Christianity and Judaism) is a patriarchal religion, the Quran specifically asserts the equality of men and women on several occasions. The erosion of women’s social rights was not the product of Islam but of social mores, many of which were in place prior to the tenets of the Islamic religion. MirHosseini explains that Islamic feminists show that men’s claimed right to freely divorce and unconditionally marry multiple wives “were not granted to them by God but by Muslim male jurists” (p.642). So, we are able to see here that Third World women feminists are actually aware of their rights that have been given to them through Islam but are stolen by men. Therefore, they are trying to retain them through their own channels. Thus, Western feminists also have to understand some aspects of the cultural essentialism that takes place in the Arab Muslim countries which have been misunderstood as religious aspects. For instance, Sondra Hale in her article “Gender, Religious Identity, and Political Mobilization in Sudan”, mentions in her interview with the feminist Sudanese lawyer Wisal al-Mahdi where al-Mahdi explains her well-known view (she always repeats it in different occasions) on female equality through the following statement:

We know our rights; we have learned the Quran and Sharia; we know what Sharia gives us... we are standing up for our sex. We are as equal... as efficient... as educated... as good... and as great as men (apud Hamdi, p.160).
So, if Western feminists were able to treat the limitations they have in the areas of geopolitics, religious practices and gender inequality in the Third World and specifically in Arab Muslim countries their contributions would have been welcomed and also to a certain extent successful. Therefore, I see the importance of having Western feminists cooperate with Third World women feminists in their solidarity to correct their status in their societies. Nevertheless, this kind of cooperation, as Mohanty explains, must be based on suitable theoretical and practical approaches that mainly depend on intersectionality in which women are constructed in a “variety of political contexts that often exist simultaneously and overlaid on top of one another” (MCS, p.407). Intersectionality, a concept which has already been mentioned briefly in this paper, is a term that has been in use since the early 1990s. It refers to the “intersection” of various types of subordination or oppression – for example, gender and racial oppression. An understanding of these various forms of subordination leads to a more accurate and therefore powerful description of them. Intersectionality is a flexible concept and allows one to examine both the commonalities and the particularities of intersecting forms of oppression, and as such, it has the potential to promote a complex understanding across cultural barriers. Cultural patterns of oppression are interrelated and mutually influenced by “intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity” (Collins, 2000, pg. 42).

Judith Butler responds to Mohanty’s call for the need of an intersectional approach and optimistically explains that there could be a chance now for “international coalition” that should be modeled on new modes of cultural translation, and would be different from appreciating this or that position or asking for recognition in ways that assume that we are all fixed and frozen in our various locations and “subject – positions” (p.47). Therefore, it is appropriate for Western feminists to help Third World feminist movements in organizing themselves and in providing those who live in poor countries with sufficient funding.

It is important to remember that in order for any change to be accepted by the society members, those who want to change should not neglect the cultural, religious, and traditional cornerstones of the society along with the geopolitical conditions that could have shaped it. Mohanty explains that aspects of progress within feminism cannot be equated with assimilation to Western notions of agency and political mobilization (p.413). She
argues that the comparative framework in which first world feminists develop their critique of the conditions of oppression for Third World women on the basis of universal claims not only misreads the agency of Third World women feminists, but also falsely produces a homogeneous conception of who they are and what they want (p.407). So, if feminist scholars would like to help their sisters in the Third World, they need to understand the real sources and reasons of oppression by cooperating with Third World women feminists who are part of that world. Mohanty states that:

It is this particular model that provides a way to theorize a complex relational understanding of experience, location, and history such that feminist cross-cultural work moves through the specific context to construct a real notion of the universal and of democratization rather than colonization. It is through this model that we can put into practice the idea of "common differences" as the basis for deeper solidarity across differences and unequal power relations (Under Western Eyes: Revisited, p.518).

So, in order for Western feminists to help their Third World sisters in their solidarity to achieve gender equality it is important for them to take into consideration the different geopolitical, cultural, and religious, specificities that had shaped that part of the world. An Arabic proverb states that “judging a thing should be the sequence of deeply knowing it”. Mohanty, in her essay also claims that it is scholars’ responsibility for really knowing the Third World before critically engaging in its feminist issues.

What can Western feminists do to truly further the cause of women’s empowerment movements worldwide, including in the Muslim world? It would appear that the key is avoiding the tendency to essentialize or totalize the experience of women of an unfamiliar culture. As a visible, outward sign of and identity often perceived as oppressive, the headscarf has become a symbol of an oppressed state of being in which women’s social participation and freedom to present themselves as they wish is thought to be limited. However, the dangers of concentrating on this particular aspect of culture as a symbol are manifold, as outlined here. The insistence upon the headscarf as a symbol obscures its real social meaning and use. Moreover, it may deflect attention from more relevant issues. Western feminists in the 1970s famously states that the personal is political – that is, that
the small, personal manifestations of the performance of gender as socially mandated are in fact politically influenced and mandated acts. In considering the situation of women of other cultures, however, Western feminists would do well to avoid an over-dependence on that axiom. The personal is, above all, personal, and must be open to individual interpretation, just as Muslim women can and must decide for themselves what the veil means, and whether they wish to wear it. For those observing from the outside, such an individual interpretation of the wearing of the veil is, perhaps, more difficult to understand than a homogenized symbol of oppression. However, it has the advantage of being authentic and a potential gateway to genuine understanding – a process that is not finite, but broadly encompassing and continuously evolving.

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Lesbian Mothers, Still an Oxymoron? Commitment and Agency in Lesbian Families Planning for a Biologically Related Child

By Alexandra Gruian

Abstract

Lesbian couples are dependent on the medicalization of pregnancy and birth if they wish for a genetically related child. Most countries are unprepared to tackle the issues of same-sex families to say the least. Whereas in social and political contexts that are mostly hostile to LGBT persons the fear of “coming out” renders lesbians invisible, in less oppressive environments lesbian families make efforts in order to “normalize” their condition. Based on the existing literature on the subject, in the current paper I intend to underscore some of the main types of agency that lesbian women employ in order to become biological parents and claim legitimacy as mothers. I will discuss issues related to agency in the medical, social and legal realms.

Introduction

The issue of the medicalization of women’s bodies has been of interest for scholars for some time now, bringing ethical, social and political questions from a feminist perspective into discussion. While the medical discourse and practices have enlarged their area of authority over most of our embodied experiences, the medicalization of pregnancy and
birth are of special relevance due to their powerful symbolic associations with patriarchy and gender stereotypes. Nevertheless, there is a danger that when talking about the ability of giving life one assumes we are dealing with a homogenous category of women. Intersectional identities shape life experiences, attitudes and behaviors, giving way to different types of agency. This becomes more obvious in the context of the advent of technoscientific bio-medicalization (Clarke et al, 2003) and of changing family structures (Asch, 2012, Graham, 2012, Gurnham, 2012, Scheib, Hastings 2012, Shanley, Jesudason, 2012). For lesbian couples, not until long associated with bareness (Hayden, 1995), the possibilities offered through assisted reproduction have an impact on what motherhood and parenting entails.

The process lesbian couples undergo once having decided to have a baby implies somewhat different decisions, actions and negotiations from that of heterosexual couples in general and those facing the problem of sterility. However, in the medical world and in the social and political milieu that they live in, lesbians who wish to become parents find little support and understanding for their discrete struggles, having to find ways for counteracting hetero-normative assumptions and procedures.

In this context, in my paper I wish to point out a series of concerns related to the efforts of lesbian couples for having a genetically related child, based on the existing literature on the subject. I will focus on agency as a central concept that underlies their actions in their medical endeavor, however underscoring the fact that pregnancy, birth and mothering for these women unravel essential social and legal facets as well, which undermine the power of medicalization to a certain extent.

Method

The current paper is the result of a process of literature review focused on the subject of lesbian couples employing assisted reproductive technology in order to have a baby. The
analysis was made in January and February 2014. The purpose was to discover and synthesize the key issues related to the obstacles they face from a medical, juridical and social point of view. Jstor and Ebsco databases were used for retrieving articles according to several combinations of key words: “lesbian pregnancy”, “lesbian mothers”, “medicalization of pregnancy”, “lesbian kinship”, “black lesbian mothers”, as well as a combination between “lesbian mothers” and “intersectionality”. Main criteria for articles selection was the focus on pregnancy in lesbian couples. Eventually, seven articles were selected according to their relevance, published no more than twenty years ago, a time frame that I considered to be short enough so that the older articles were not surpassed by technological and legal advances, but long enough so that I could include a more various set of issues.

The two databases did not retrieve any articles that focused on the experiences of marginalized groups of women based on other further criteria than sexual orientation (for instance, black lesbian parents, low-income lesbian parents etc.). Most of the findings in this paper are based on the accounts of white, middle-class women.

Unfortunately, the discussion presented here is based on research done in other countries than Romania, since here marriage or civil partnership for same-sex couples is not permitted. As a consequence, LGBT persons are deprived from a series of rights, including those regarding the possibility of co-parenting. What is more, homophobia is still strong among Romanian citizens (Sondaj CNCD, 2013).

Identity and personal agency

The decision of having a child is embedded in ethical issues\(^1\). Charles Taylor (1989) makes a strong connection between identity, ethics and agency, combining the three

\(^1\) Of course, there are other determinants to whether a person decides on having a child or not and these include the availability of resources – financial or temporal, the existence of social support, the cultural interpretations given to pregnancy and parenthood, or the legal framework, which will be discussed later in the paper.
according to the following definition: “My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good or valuable or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.” (Ibidem, p. 27). Thus, one’s sense of self is dependent on the choices one has to make, according to a framework that distinguishes between desirable and undesirable pathways and outcomes. Identity is therefore related to initiative, in the sense of a continuous negotiation of one’s alternative ways of actions.

Agency and autonomy have been long-debated concepts in feminist political theory and practice. Drawing on liberal political theory, early liberal feminism has embraced independence and individualism as its central values. Thus, under the protection of the laws that guaranteed gender equality, all individuals could employ a maximum of autonomy and agency in order to follow their interests (Miroiu, 2004). Consistent criticism arisen from two distinct directions: feminist care ethics and socialist feminism. Joan Tronto (1993) argued for the acknowledgement of the fact that all individuals, at certain moments during their lifetimes, are somehow dependent on the support of others. Thus, independence as a concept is replaced by autonomy, defined by Iris Marion Young as following: “within the bounds of justice, to be able to make choices about one’s life and to act on those choices without having to obey others, meet their conditions, or fear their threats and punishments” (Young, 1995, p. 15). This definition does not elude support and help from others in the pursuit of certain goals. Moreover, thinking of oneself as part of a social milieu is a step towards understanding that one’s actions have political implications and depend on power relations and access to resources in a society (Ibidem.). It thus becomes clear that, unlike the theoretical citizen in classical liberal theory, societies comprise different social groups, with a varying degree of power, depending on their members’ identities. This brings the discussion of agency to the realm of intersectionality.

The choices one can make regarding his/her life course depends on the multiple identities of one’s self. The concept of intersectionality was created especially in order to describe the fact that, in our case, women do not face the same obstacles unanimously, but may actually face circumstances of discrimination that vary according to some other factors,
such as race, which Crenshaw focused upon in her first article on the subject (1991), ethnicity (Magyari-Vincze, 2006), class (Magyari-Vincze, 2006; Bell, 2009), age (Cherrington, Breheny, 2005; Brubacker, 2007), sexual orientation (Hayden, 1995; Hequenbourg, Farrell, 1999; Dunne, 2000; Chabot, Ames, 2004; Levine, 2008; Peel, 2010) etc. Social, economic and cultural factors come at play to orientate and limit the choices of each person according to their interlocking identities (Gill, 2007). As reality shows, it is even possible that the availability or unavailability of a certain alternative path/resource to create opposing perceptions of what is desirable or not (Johnson, 2008).

Women’s agency is closely connected to embodiment, since due to their capacity of giving birth their bodies have always been controlled for political purposes (Miroiu, 2004). The sexual revolution was the first manifestation of women reclaiming control over their reproductive capacities (hooks, 2000). However, once again, health policies ignored differences in race, ethnicity, class, age etc. and once again favored the ones already privileged (white, middle-class), continuing to do so even today (Hooks, 2000, Magyari-Vincze, 2006). Cultural prejudices and ideologies are both at play in creating structural inequalities that restrict the choices of marginalized groups of women, who are thus deemed more or less desirable by the political powers (Cherrington, Breheny, 2005; Magyari-Vincze, 2006; Waldby, Cooper, 2006; Johnson, 2008). The types of family that are culturally and politically encouraged (usually this is the case of the traditional, nuclear and heterosexual family), also determine the amount of autonomy and dependency that women experience (Cherrington, Breheny, 2005).

The centrality of agency in the case of lesbian parents is of special relevance due to the fact that they have two conflicting identities that require numerous adaptations in order to cope with the cultural, social, legal and medical settings. After deciding for a child, these women will be pressured towards negotiating the hierarchy between their lesbian and mother identity (Hequemburg, Farrell, 1999). Culturally, motherhood has been traditionally associated with heterosexuality, while gay couples were thought of as barren, since it was impossible for them to have genetically related children without heterosexual intercourse. Due to techno-scientific developments that took bio-medicalization to new grounds, lesbians now have the opportunity to procreate. Nevertheless, the harmonization of the two
identities is dependent on the relationships with the significant others (*Ibidem*), which is in accordance with Taylor's assumption that "a self can never be explained without reference to those who surround it" (Taylor, 1989, p. 35).

The issue of conflicting identities has different relevance for the women in lesbian couples. This is the reason for which, before moving on, I would like to give some attention to the terminology used in the literature about lesbian families, in the context of assisted reproduction. The use of assisted reproduction in the case of lesbian couples usually implies three parties: the two women involved in the relationship and the donor, the supplier of male gametes. The *biological mother* is the woman actually undergoing the procedures of assisted reproduction, the one providing the female gametes, thus being genetically related to the baby (Hayden, 1995; Hequembourg, Farrell, 1999; Dunne, 2000; Chabot, Ames, 2004; Levine, 2008). Sometimes, the biological mother also appears under the name of *birth mother* (Dunne, 2000; Peel, 2010). The biological mother's partner is usually called *co-mother* (Hayden, 1995; Hequembourg, Farrell, 1999; Levine, 2008), *non-biological mother* (Hayden, 1995; Chabot, Ames, 2004), or *social mother* (Hayden, 1995; Dunne, 2000; Levine, 2008; Peel, 2010), since she is usually not genetically related to the child, but takes on the social role of parent. The picture becomes more blurry when one woman offers to give her gametes in order to be fertilized *in vitro*, and then the embryo is transferred to the first woman's partner, who then gives birth. In this case, both women develop a physical bond with the future child, but the mother who only bears the child is, again, genetically unrelated to it. In this type of cases, one woman is often called *genetic mother*, the other, the *birth mother* (Hayden, 1995). The third party in this equation is the donor, which can be known or unknown, depending on the couple's wishes.

Returning to the issue of identity negotiation, while this process may be simpler for the biological mother, for whom the genetic bond with the child gives her legitimacy as a parent, the co-parent faces the risk of a more marginal role (Hequembourg, Farrell, 1999). By tackling with the medical practices involved in assisted reproduction, some women symbolically take on the biological role of the “father” while assisting their partners during the medical procedures done by professionals or inseminating them themselves, thus negotiating the bond with the future baby (Hayden, 1995). Although lesbian couples may be
regarded as challenging heterosexual families by displacing the blood tie as the foundational element with choice (Hayden, 1995; Levine, 2008), it is clear that biology still plays an important role in shaping lesbian women’s relationships with their baby (Hayden, 1995). However, lesbian families usually build different types of kinship than heterosexual ones, between the couple and the children on the one hand and between the family and the extended families and other social networks on the other (Dunne, 2000; Scheib, Hastings, 2012). There are several strategies that can be used for this purpose; the most frequent employ medical, legal and social agency.

Agency in the medical realm

In the last years, lesbian family structures have changed – while in the past most lesbian couples had children from formal heterosexual relationships, today more and more appeal to donor insemination programs (Scheib, Hastings, 2012), thus requesting medical interventions. However, women, in their efforts to have a child, do not completely give in to the techno-medical imperatives and practices, combining subjective and scientific knowledge, low-tech and high-tech practices, underscoring a continuous negotiation between nature and culture (Mamo, 2007).

Unlike the case of heterosexual couples, lesbian women undergo a complex and lengthy process of deliberation and preparation before having a child – in this case, there is no risk of children by mistake (Chabot, Ames, 2004; Peel, 2010). There are a few aspects that need to be taken into consideration and one of the first is the source of the sperm for insemination. Generally, there are two types of choices: most of the women rely on donors from their social milieu, usually friends, but some may turn to unknown donors, with the help of specialized clinics.

Irrespective of the insemination strategy they choose, lesbian women rely on medical expertise in order to get pregnant. Nevertheless, the extent to which they techno-medicalise
their experience varies greatly, with women combining high and low-tech methods both during the preparation period and the insemination itself (Mamo, 2007). For instance, what is essential for a successful procedure is determining the ovulation period as accurately as possible, which can be done with the help of a more classical instrument, like the calendar, or by using an ovulation predictor kit (OPK), which is already a much more sophisticated method. Nevertheless, women do not entrust technology with 100% authority, as they often include their own bodily experiences in their decisions and actions. Subjective knowledge based on embodiment comes into play here, as women learn to read their own body signs, which for example may sometimes be better predictors of fertility than OPKs (Ibidem).

Alongside the lay, non-scientific knowledge that is involved in becoming pregnant, alternative discourses accompany the process, softening the “objective”, detached medical discourse. They play an emotional role and facilitate the bonding between the future baby and the non-biological mother. The lesbian discourse related to lesbian insemination tends to picture a romantic endeavor that is based on technology, but only to a certain extent; most lesbian couples prefer the coziness of their home to that of clinics or hospitals. The whole event is staged so as to favor the intimacy between the partners. The non-biological mother is usually the one performing the insemination, symbolically reifying her role as a parent. In the cases in which medical support is needed and the operation has to take place in a clinic or hospital, the presence of the co-parent is crucial in experiencing a less traumatic intervention (Ibidem).

Although probably it is not the main motivation for lesbian couples preferring to do the insemination at home, the heterosexist culture of many medical institutions has an effect on many lesbian’s experience with the medical staff and procedures (Peel, 2010). Homophobia is still a major problem among doctors and nurses, whose attitudes become visible in their interactions with LGBT persons. Behaviors ranging from ignorance to lesbian’s special problems, inattentiveness and a low level of involvement to rudeness only build up to the anxiety that lesbian patients already bear because of their efforts for having a baby (Irwin, 2007; Peel, 2010). The hetero-normative culture of the medical staff and institutions is also revealed by the forms that patients often need to fill in and which automatically presume their heterosexuality. As a consequence of all this, when it is possible, lesbian women refuse
to 'come out' even when faced with hetero-normative biases in diagnosis and treatment (Irwin, 2007).

One of the greatest problems faced by lesbian couples during their efforts for having a child resides in the lack of acknowledgment for the non-biological mother as an authorized party to be involved in the process. This is actually a legal issue that reflects on the way lesbian women negotiate the medical, psychological and emotional facets of the endeavor. Pregnancy and birth are not only physical events, since they have ethical implications and psychological and social consequences. For the biological mother, the support of the co-mother reduces the impact of the medicalised procedures, while for the non-biological mother, her involvement in the process is, as I have already stated, a means for compensating her genetic non-participation in the procreation (Hequembourg, Farrell, 1999; Mamo, 2000; Scheib, Hastings, 2012; Chabot, Ames, 2004; Peel, 2009). This should not be understood as a disadvantage of lesbian couples since, as interestingly as it may seem, some women desire the status of mothers, but without having to pass through the biological processes of conceiving, bearing and delivering a pregnancy (Dunne, 2000). Nevertheless, social, non-biological mothers are most of the times the most important person offering support for the biological mother. However, the lack of an appropriate legal status often makes their attendance at various medical appointments together with the biological mother impossible. The lack of an official, legalized relationship between lesbian women, due to unrecognized same-sex marriages, together with a certain degree of homophobia determines the medical staff to marginalize or ignore co-parents during medical procedures (Chabot, Ames, 2004; Irwin, 2007; Levine, 2008; Peel, 2010).

**Legal and social issues intertwined**

While it is difficult to separate medical issues form social and legal ones, it is impossible to do so when it comes to the latter two. Not only that heterosexual relationships are so deeply ingrained culturally that they appear to be natural, but when a legal heterosexual
framework is applied to nontraditional types of family, their social acceptability of the latter increases. Consequently, this is the case with lesbian families in relation with their extended families. In regard to lesbian couples’ interaction with the medical staff, I have already underscored the main concerns that involved legal problems.

Lesbian couples usually create a vast social network and it is quite usual for friends to occupy a more central role in their lives than their extended families. This is explicable since, as I have mentioned earlier, blood ties are still seen as the centerpiece of kinship. Although lesbian families do not reject the role of genetics, they succeed in adding other foundational elements, like choice and love, to the definition of kin. Motherhood is thus redefined through a continuous negotiation between biological and social involvement, so as to accommodate both mothers (Hayden, 1995; Levine, 2008).

Despite the initial optimistic view that lesbian families would be free of power imbalances, due to the lack of gender hierarchies, the genetic connection between the biological mother and the child may cause tension between the two parents or between the social mother and the extended families. Hetero-normativity and the nuclear family model, in which the children are biologically connected to both parents, are still very powerful not only at a social and cultural level, but also at a political one, where this family ideal is still, consciously or not, supported at a discourse and policy level (Cherrington, Breheney, 2005). Therefore, the lack of genetic contribution on the part of the non-biological mother results, in the eyes of those outside the couple, in a reduced legitimacy over the child – it is like the partner of the biological mother is a lesser parent (Hayden, 1995; Levine, 2008). As a consequence, inside the couple, the lack of genetic bondage may lead in some countries to legal restrictions regarding co-parenting, especially for LGBT persons. The fact the biological mother’s partner has no legal rights over the baby can bring in the couple certain instability, since one parent is deemed by an external authority, the state, as more important than the other (Hayden, 1995). When it comes to the relationships with the extended family, it is the social mother who benefits from the existence of an inclusive legal framework. The possibility of co-parenting, that gives the social mother the same parenting rights as that of the biological mother, strengthens the co-mothers’ relationship with her partner’s family. The explanation rests with the fact that the lack of blood ties is to a great
extent compensated by the juridical arrangements that link the child to the social mother. However, this possibility is not available for couples in which at least one of the partners has a child from a heterosexual relationship (Hequembourg, Farrell, 1999).

Besides the extended families of the lesbian couple, there may be other parties involved requiring special attention from a legal point of view. The biological fathers of children that have remained with their mothers who later chose to enter a lesbian relationship may maintain close relationships with their former family; however, there have also been attempts on the part of fathers for trying to gain the custody of their child invoking the mother’s sexual orientation (Ibidem). This raises the question of what “good mothering” entails, pointing towards the patriarchal and heterosexist assumptions that underlie the concept and practice of motherhood (Barlow, 2005).

The claims that biological fathers may have towards their children are also taken into consideration by lesbian couples who use donor insemination. The fear that a known donor might one day request custody over their offspring influences lesbian women in their choice (Chabot, Ames, 2004). The need for a masculine presence is sometimes dealt with differently. Male friends or ex-husbands may participate in parenting; some lesbians have expressed their preference in having gay friends around because of their alternative, more positive masculinity; relevant to this latter choice is also the smaller probability for gay male friends to claim any rights in connection to the child, due to unfriendly legislation (Dunne, 2000).

**Conclusion**

In their efforts for having a baby, lesbian couples need to employ different types of agency in order to cope with the medical, social and legal hindrances. Women have to permanently negotiate their lesbian and mother identities in the quest for “normalizing” their kinship model. With this scope in mind, they make use of technology and scientific
knowledge, which they combine with embodied subjective knowledge that underscores their proactivity in challenging medicalised discourses of pregnancy in general and lesbian pregnancy in particular. This whole medical process is enmeshed in symbolic interpretations and social networks that may require legal adjustments in order to become acceptable.

Lesbian families challenge traditional family arrangements by reconfiguring the basis for kinship and power. This subject still leaves enough room for future research, especially due to the fact that most studies lack a longitudinal approach, which is understandable in the context of social and political animosity towards LGBT persons. What is more, most of the lesbians included in the papers analyzed have the same socio-demographic characteristics: white, middle-class. Little is known about lesbians with a less privileged position in society. Returning to my home country, the picture is even dimmer, since for most LGBT persons the idea of “coming out” is unappealing and there are serious reasons why this is still so. Learning about the lives of lesbians in Romania will require some more time, depending on the political and cultural advances.

**Analyzed papers**


Bibliography


The Discourse and Control of Reproduction in Communist and Post-Communist Romania

By Adriana Iordache

This article analyzes the prevalent discourse and policies in the field of reproduction in Romania starting with the 1966 ban on abortions and culminating with recent public statements and proposed regulations. It will argue that the severe control on women’s bodies exercised during the communist regime was primarily motivated by nationalist ethos and traditional attitudes towards sexuality. Meanwhile, contemporary political discourse and proposed measures are often shaped by a mixture between nationalist and conservative ideology. The ethnic dimension of these doctrines is also being discussed in the paper, as well as the social impact of the regulation of reproduction upon gender relations.

I. Introduction

This paper explores the evolution of discourse and policies regulating reproductive behavior in Romania during the communist period and afterwards. The question it aims to answer is: "Which were the main arguments for regulating reproduction presented in the discourse on the topic, and is there any difference between these arguments before (1966-1989) and following the collapse of communism, in contemporary discourse (2010-2013)?". The main thesis of the paper is that the discourse on abortion is based on two main axes. First, both during the communist period, and after the transition to democracy the
dominant discourse regarding reproduction was of nationalistic orientation, regarding giving birth as a "patriotic act". Up to the fall of communism, abortion was prohibited for the collective goal of increasing the population, which was equated with a strong nation. After the regime change, nationalist tendencies inherited from the previous period were mixed with elements of neo-conservative influence. This ideology equates abortion with murder, and emphasizes personal responsibility for reproduction. It claims that abortion can be forbidden based on the right to life of the unborn fetus.

The first part of the paper analyzes the regulation of reproduction in communist Romania, following Decree 770/1966 until the revolution of 1989. It features speeches and regulations as well as the social reaction to Decree 770. The second part refers to the post-transition period (2010-2013), analyzing the contemporary political discourses which reflect the societal and demographic consequences of repealing the decree immediately after the fall of communism. This period selected for analysis, has been chosen for two reasons. First, there were no significant developments in this area in the beginning of the transition, after the lifting of the abortion ban. Secondly, this time gap (1989 - 2010) allowed for a full reflection on the long-term consequences of the previous regime’s intense control of reproduction, as well as for political responses to the current social context.

Through discourse analysis, the paper discusses the main features of nationalist and neoconservative discourse, providing a grid for analysis which can be further used in other contexts. In terms of data, the paper analyzes demographic statistics, the key regulations in the field of reproduction and childcare as well as public statements of prominent politicians on these topics.

The paper first presents the key elements of the nationalist and neoconservative discourses and attitudes on reproduction. It thus provides a grid for analysis which can be further used in other contexts. Then, the paper employs demographic statistics, analyzes laws regulating reproduction and childcare and political speeches on these topics through the lens of these concepts.
II. The post ‘66 communist period

The literature on the regimes existent in Central and Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1989 names them in several ways. Different authors call these regimes either communist, or state-socialist or real-existing socialism. All these terms are used to denominate the political organization of the Central and Eastern European Countries. On the other hand, the discourses that politicians in power employed to legitimize their rule varied dramatically. A properly communist or Orthodox Marxist discourse echoed the official canonization of Lenin's interpretation of the works of Karl Marx. It featured highly the theory of history, which claimed that the Communist party was entrusted with leading each country through the intermediary phase of socialism, to the bright communist future, one of significant material abundance. The rule of the party was legitimated through its historical mission. On the other hand, the orthodox Marxist discourse was complemented and at times, supplemented, by the nationalist discourse. This had the ethnic nation as a lynchpin and saw its aggrandizement in competition with other nations (or citizens of another ethnicity) as the goal. Thus, the ruling parties legitimated themselves by their coordination of the efforts towards this goal. Romania represented a particularly interesting case of a blend of orthodox Marxism and ethnic nationalism, culminating with a cult of personality which presented Nicolae and Elena Ceauşescu as both embodiments of best of Romanian history and as leaders towards the glorious communist future.

The article will employ the term communist or state-socialism for the regime existent in Romania between 1945 and 1989 and nationalist for its discourse during the rule of Ceauşescu. Concerning the regulation of abortion, no orthodox Marxist arguments were offered, especially because they would recommend its liberalization.

1) Theoretical background
The literature on nationalism has differentiated between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism aims for a political community composed of citizens who share a common ancestry, language and religion. It is especially problematic for minorities, be they ethnic, linguistic or religious, who are not seen as properly belonging to the nation. On the other hand, civic nationalism opens membership to anyone “residing in a politically defined territory”. Ethnic nationalism is particularly interested in gender roles, imagining and idealized past, in which traditional gender divisions exist and where women are relegated to the “role of mothers and guardians of cultural identity, symbolizing stability in the face of change”.

Žarkov has shown that the nationalist discourse frequently employs engendered feminine symbols to depict the nation as a wife or mother. This narrative emphasizes the conservative ideal of gender norms, and places the patriarchal family at the core of the social organization, the former shaping the latter. Within this structure, women’s role is primarily related to child bearing and child-rearing, and is best performed in the private sphere, within the family, while denying them any meaningful role in the public life. Meanwhile, men are responsible for deciding on the key political issues and defending the nation. In such a gendered representation of the nation, “the family is the best place to foster the ‘moral cleanness and willingness to sacrifice’ necessary for [its] survival and growth.”


2 King (2002) “Demographic trends, pro-natalism”


5 Lilly and Irvine, "Negotiating Interests: Women and Nationalism in Serbia and Croatia", p. 112.
Vojvodic has analyzed the public discourse related to the instrumentalization of women during the armed conflict in former Yugoslavia. She emphasizes the “gendered construction of the nation” as originating from a woman; identifies the gendered factors for ethno politic resentment through woman as traitor, and its “gendered consequences of ethno political violence through woman as victim”. In order to express the “dependence” of the Yugoslav women, Vojvodic also cites the view of the man as analogous to “a political party” and woman comparable to the “country over which the party exercises its power”\(^6\).

Another example, coming also from the post-Yugoslav space is offered by Wendy Bracewell. She discusses the radical reversal of gender roles which took place in Serbia around the period of the break-up of Yugoslavia. As ethnic nationalism was used as the lynchpin of political mobilization, Serbian women were affected. From the official policy of gender equality practices under Tito, the discourse changed to conceptualize women as “mothers of the nation”. Especially, it was claimed that Serbian women are shirking their duties to the country and allowing the Kosovar Albanians (who had much higher birth rates) to “squeeze” the Serbs out of Kosovo. Communism and individualism were blamed for making women believe they could be equal to men and avoid motherhood\(^7\).

#### 2) Public discourse and policies regarding reproduction

An extensive literature has been written on the ban on abortions instituted by Decree 770/1966. Most authors focused on the horrors of the Ceauşescu regime or on population growth, while less attention has been paid to the discourse supporting it. Both the language and the official implementation of the decree were an expression of a civic form of nationalism. The law did not distinguish between ethnic groups in Romania, and there is no evidence to suggest otherwise. (As will be seen below, the relatively scarce data


does not show an overrepresentation of Hungarian or Roma women among those who received legal abortion easier.) Nevertheless, Ceauşescu’s justifications of the Decree point to a degree of ethnic nationalism. Given that the regime was also undertaking ethnic assimilationist policies, Ceauşescu’s emphasis on a numerous population could be understood as implying a nation of many (ethnic) Romanians.

In September 1966 when the banning of abortion was first discussed at the top levels of the Romanian Communist Party, doctors were invited to give their opinion. They expressed reservations, but these were easily dismissed by Ceauşescu himself. He argued that a 14.6 per thousand inhabitants was an unacceptably low birthrate and that something has to be done to restore it. Moreover, he stated that collectivist goals of a numerous nation trumped individualist claims by women to liberty. He rejected the arguments of the National Council of Women (a mass organization of women, supervised by, but outside the Communist Party itself) which claimed that liberalizing abortion had been a significant achievement. Nevertheless, Ceauşescu considered that the 1957 decree liberalizing abortion had been an „antinational measure” which had done “much damage”. He concluded that “everybody must understand, men and women alike, that the problem of raising the birthrate is a duty for each citizen of the country and that liberty must be understood as the responsibility each has for the future of the nation”.

The ban on abortions was established by Decree 770/1966. It stated that abortion was illegal unless: “1) the pregnancy was endangering the woman’s life 2) one of the parents was suffering from a hereditary disease 3) the pregnant woman was severely physically or mentally disabled 4) the woman was older than 45; 5) the woman had given birth to four children and is taking care of them 6) the pregnancy was the results of rape or incest”.

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The Romanian example of intense pro-natalist policy evades the traditional legal debate between the right to life and the right to choice. The widely encountered contemporary argument against abortion, results from “juxtaposing the civil rights of the pregnant woman with those of the unborn child”\(^{10}\) (emphasis added). This rationale did not play any role in Ceauşescu's decisions to outlaw abortion on demand. While the final goal was to stimulate population growth, for the regime, the policy was also branded as one contributing to women’s empowerment, not in the detriment of their independence. Every year, on International Women's day - reinterpreted by the regime as “Mother's day” - Ceauşescu would pay special homage to women's contributions to the nation. This contribution was centered, but not limited, to their maternal role. They were encouraged to have four or more children in order to achieve the national population target of 25 million by 1990\(^{11}\).

According to Keil and Andreescu, the pro-natalist policy of the Ceauşescu regime was puzzling to Western academics and observers who expected post-war economic recovery to be associated with a decline in birthrates and an increase in human welfare. Yet, in the view of the two authors, the communist planners followed an “essentially Physiocratic” way of thinking. They believed a large population was the solution for reducing labor shortages, for creating a large military and for offsetting an aging population\(^{12}\).

Ceauşescu’s over-preoccupation with obtaining a large sized population was mainly rooted in a brand of “right” political ideology which was a component of the regime. By democratic standards, opposition was virtually inexistent in communist Romania; therefore the values of the “right” were not officially represented by the Party. However, the Romanian type of communism under Ceauşescu departed from Marxist orthodoxy and even

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\(^{11}\) The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, Final Report, Bucharest, p. 412

from the Moscow-model. Ceauşescu had his own version of communism combined with strong nationalism, which advocated the greatness of the Romanian people and their culture, history and pure ethnicity. As citizenship was defined in terms of ethnicity, and the Romanian “blood” had to be carried on into the “glorious future of popular proletariat” women happened to play an important role in this process. Hence, right-wing ideas were present in the ideological mix of the Ceauşescu regime. It is this source of Ceauşescu’s doctrine, which placed family and motherhood at the core of the Romanian nation.

This vision then translated into the regime’s opposition to abortions, contraception, homosexuality, and even abstinence, thus exercising pressure on both men and women to conform to the “compulsive heterosexuality” and mandatory parenthood. According to Articles 200 of the Romanian Penal Code, homosexuality had been classified as “socially deviant behavior” and legally sanctioned. Otherwise said, “heterosexuality, as a cultural (and political) norm engaged men and women in the reproduction of the family”. Sex education lessons were offered to employees in state enterprises, in view of the state interest in reproduction. As part of this program, people were offered “instructions about normal sexual relations” (emphasis added). It was presumed and stated as a fact that “non-sexually active adults would fall victim to psychological conditions such as depression and anxiety”, while somewhat similar health risks were considered to be posed by the practice of coitus interruptus. In addition to the latter practice, the calendar method and abstinence were the only widespread contraception methods available to all citizens.

Under Romanian state socialism, the family was considered to be the “basic social cell” and therefore an ideal to which each and every citizen should aspire to. By the nature of their body, as well as of the traditional division of labor in addition to compulsory employment, women were, to a much larger extent victims of the pro-natalist policies. In


15 Gail Kligman, The politics of duplicity, p.143.

16 Gail Kligman, The politics of duplicity p 143.
addition to the permanent scrutiny upon their bodies, negative experiences with botched abortion procedures, and sometimes death, emphasizing motherhood as women’s primary mission “reinforced the already strong patriarchal values of Romanian society. This contributed to their continued subordination to men in the household and in the larger society”\(^\text{17}\).

Ceaușescu’s nationalism could suggest that the ban on abortions would treat women of different ethnicities differently, either formally or informally, by granting them differentiated access to abortion. However, there is no clear evidence to support either top–down instructions in this regard, nor statistical data showing such a pattern\(^\text{18}\). On the contrary, annual reports on the number of abortions country-wise revealed that rate was "significantly below average" in the Harghita County (where ethnic Hungarians are the majority population)\(^\text{19}\). Moreover, statistic data from 1979 on legal abortions from medical causes revealed that women of Romanian ethnicity had 93.3% of the total number of procedures, while, Hungarian and “Gypsy” (Roma) women had 5.6% respectively, 3%\(^\text{20}\). Thus, we could conclude that, the prevalent discourse on reproduction is best characterized by ethnic nationalism, while the laws and regulations in practice would support a civic type of nationalism.

3) Social context

\(^{17}\) Keil and Andreescu, “Fertility Policy in Ceaușescu’s Romania”, p. 489.

\(^{18}\) The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, Final Report, Bucharest, p. 521.

\(^{19}\) The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, Final Report, Bucharest, p. 521

\(^{20}\) The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, Final Report, Bucharest, p. 521
In 1966, Romania was experiencing a severe drop in birthrates, which was characteristic for many European countries. By the mid 1950’s, the birth rate in Romania was approximately 25 per 1,000 persons, following a sharp and gradual decline until reaching the number of 14.3 in 1966. Meanwhile, the death rate had only decreased from 22.0 in 1947, right after the war to 8.1 in 1964\textsuperscript{21}. It is important to note that within this period of time, both contraceptives could be found on the market and abortion on demand was available since 1957\textsuperscript{22}. Methods of avoiding or terminating and unwanted pregnancy were soon held responsible by the Ceaușescu regime (1965-1989) for standing in the way of the “natural” augment of the Romanian people to his target of 25 million\textsuperscript{23}.

The regime placed no value on individual life and health, but only on the overall numbers. While great importance was placed on the need for the creation of new life, the preservation of already existing life carried very little weight. “Dystrophy, characterized by inadequate nutrition...was among the principal causes of infant death, representing 33.1 deaths per 1000 live births; its increased incidence has also been linked to maternal malnutrition”\textsuperscript{24}. The same could be applied in the case of soon-to-be born life - the situation of pregnant women who did wish to give birth. “The absence of adequate nourishment for pregnant mothers may have contributed to the number of premature births which in 1989 constituted 7.3 percent of all births”\textsuperscript{25}. This situation was, of course, contrary to the official propaganda and official “public opinion” that chose to record only the normative aspects of “blissful maternity” at the detriment of stating the existing state of affairs. Overall, in 1989

\textsuperscript{21} Statistic annual bulletin of the Romanian Socialist Republic, p. 23.


\textsuperscript{24} Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity}, p. 141.

\textsuperscript{25} Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity} p. 141.
Romania “had one of the highest infant mortality rate in Europe and the highest maternal mortality rate in Europe”\textsuperscript{26}.

Despite its self-proclaimed communist character, the regime’s strong control of reproduction had a disproportionate effect upon working-class women. The main reason for the death of so many women was their desperate attempt to seek illegal abortions which led to health complications. As one of the doctors interviewed well pointed out “those [women] unable to pay for the medical expertise – that is, working class women or housewives – accounted for the majority of maternal deaths. Intellectuals who died as a result of an abortion were few in number”\textsuperscript{27}. Operations carried on by untrained personnel or performed without the adequate instruments – which were not easy to reach as they were closely supervised by the police – often resulted in health complications for women.

The precarious socioeconomic condition of most citizens, contributed to the perceived illegitimacy of the abortion ban and a certain degree noncompliance. However, as many of the gynecologists interviewed declared: “doctors tried to help women, but no one would risk his or her own life... those who continued to do it [after having been arrested] do so for profit”. Accounts have also revealed that those women who were themselves – or had family members - in the Communist Party or otherwise had the necessary connections and financial resources could generally obtain a safe abortion performed by a doctor or a medical assistant\textsuperscript{28}. Other groups of women, who had their family support and who could manage to promptly obtain significant amounts of money required for the bribe, also had access to an abortion but often not performed by a person with medical training\textsuperscript{29}. Generally, abortions were performed in hospitals – under some alibi – or at the house of the

\textsuperscript{26} Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity} p.147.

\textsuperscript{27} Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity}, p.153.

\textsuperscript{28} Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity}, p 190-191.

\textsuperscript{29} Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity}, p. 182-194.
doctor or other person hired to perform, if there was no time or room for finding a credible explanation.\footnote{Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity}, p. 189-194.}

Another way in which some doctors manifested their resistance to the pro-natalist policy of the state was through the masked communication of family planning information during the sex education courses they were required to deliver. This type of relative noncompliance was provided free of charge, but implied a significantly smaller risk for doctors. The state-provided sexual education courses strongly advocated against contraceptive methods (in addition to them not being available on the market)\footnote{Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity} p 142.}. Many doctors admitted to indirectly promoting ideas contrary to official guidelines when conducting these classes. Tacit resistance was a common practice, yet there were limits to what could be said, since they were always accompanied by “representatives from the prosecutor’s office, from the state police or [by] a party secretary”\footnote{Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity} p 152.}. Yet, the manner in which instructions for a “normal” sexual life were presented allowed employees to obtain information which was relevant to them. For example, one doctor recounts that he would tell women “that if they wanted to have a child, they should have sexual relations during this recommended period” and that “they were not to douche or use weak vinegar solution or use contraceptive or spermicidal tablets”\footnote{Gail Kligman, \textit{The politics of duplicity} p152.}. Thus, women could easily deduce what could be done in order not to become pregnant.

In an attempt to increase the degree of application of the decree, the state had also tried to address the socioeconomic factors hindering reproduction. Accordingly, fiscal incentives both in favor of reproduction, as well as discouraging childlessness had been introduced. Since the beginning of 1967, families with children were granted allowances, in inverse proportion to their salary and higher with the birth of every living child. Another
axis of classification was urban vs. rural, in which city life was considered more costly and this was reflected in the allowance. Additionally, women were also being granted various material compensations similarly to the general allowance, but also as “birth bonus” that was increased progressively. There were also state offered allowances and benefits for an extra family member, but they hardly matched the monthly expense of a child. Such benefits were mostly nominal and did not significantly increase the purchasing power, or standard of living of families, thus having a limited effect towards Ceaușescu’s goal of encouraging reproduction.

Additionally, tax disincentives for being childless were also established. Both men and women, over the age of 25 who did not have children, were progressively taxed regardless of their marital status. For salaries of under 2000 lei citizens paid 10%, while those earning over 2000 owed the state 20% in taxes. The only exceptions are people who have had children who died, certain invalids, and persons who marry someone who has children by a previous marriage.

All in all, the ban on abortion and the lack of access to contraceptives did manage to delay the manifestation of the demographic decline in Romania, until the end of the end of the communist period. The original impact of the prohibition of abortion was significant, but the effect was lower in later years. As Keil and Andreescu have shown, the policy was resisted as much as possible. According to their time-series study, whenever official controls were relaxed, the fertility rates dropped immediately. Conversely, when stronger controls were applied, the birthrate rose, but never to the same extent as the increases achieved by the initial introduction of the policy. For example, the birthrate increased


37 William Moskoff “Pronatalist Policies in Romania”, p. 605.

immediately after 1966, reaching 27.4 births per thousand in 1967 and 26.7 in 1968, after a low of 14.3 in 1966. Yet, between 1980 and 1989, the birthrate oscillated between and 18 births per thousand\textsuperscript{39}. Fertility rates (the average number of children per woman) rose to about 3.00, after oscillating around 2.26 between 1956 and 1966. Between 1984 and 1989 it was 2.29. As a comparison, immediately after the collapse of the communist regime, it plummeted to 1.42\textsuperscript{40}.

The rate of legally obtained abortion (under a real or false pretense) was also an indicator of the relative failure of the illegitimacy of the policy. According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Health, the rate of abortions per 1,000 live births increased significantly between 1970 and 1980 and subsequently declined in 1989. After 1989, it reached a peak in 1990\textsuperscript{41}. Thus, in 1970, 684.7 abortions per thousand live births were recorded; in 1980 the rate increased to 1035.6, reaching in 522.5 in 1989, and rose to 3152.6 in 1990, right after the legalization of abortion on demand.

\textbf{III. The post-'89 period: consolidating democracy (2010-2013)}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textbf{Theoretical background}
\end{enumerate}


\textsuperscript{40} Keil and Andreescu, “Fertility Policy in Ceauşescu's Romania”, p. 483.

A crucial ideological element which defines American conservatism is its close association to religion, either protestant or catholic. According to Bibbee and Viens, conservatives trace their genealogy to disillusioned Marxists of the 1940s and 1950s. When abandoning Marxism, the initial neoconservatives looked to religion as an underpinning of their theories. Thus, they came to establish an ideology centered on a market constrained by moral-religious values. According to this ideology, technological innovation falls into two categories: that which furthers human welfare without interfering with God's plan for humanity and that which does. The first one is to be encouraged, while the second prohibited. In the neoconservative framework, technological innovation and market practices should show a reverence for God's plan and should not abuse the freedom of choice which God gave to humans. Abortion and in vitro sterilization are definitely such technologies.

Similarly to Bibbee and Viens, Wendy Brown analyzed the, not always functional, alliance between neo-conservatism and neoliberalism. While the latter glorifies the market and believes the outcomes of a free market are not only natural but normatively desirable, the former wishes to employ state power for achieving moral-religious aims. Neoliberalism, according to Brown, wishes to extend market mechanisms to all spheres of life and judges an individual's success as the ability to care for himself, either as welfare recipient, medical patient or university student. On the other hand, Brown cites Fukuyama, who defines neo-conservatism as the “possibility of linking power and morality”. Morality, of course, is defined in religious terms. Neo-conservatism opposes such policies as affirmative action, poverty reduction and integration and looks to older social patterns, where women were relegated to cooking and caring for children while men took on “the burden of manliness”.

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43 Bibbee and Viens, „The Inseparability of Religion and Politics”

Fertility and reproduction has been a staple of neoconservative discourse. It aims to promote “family values” and relatively large families, but only for the middle class population. In situations in which a generally poorer racial minority exists, it is required that its reproduction be controlled. Because neoconservative ideas center on the market and individual responsibility, it is believed that only middle class individuals have a sufficiently high standard of living to raise children on their own. A study in the U.S. found that the reproduction of ethnic minorities is condemned. One object of fear was the “Black welfare mother”, which has been accused of “perpetuating social problems by transmitting defective genes, irreparable crack damage, and a deviant lifestyle to their children”\(^45\). Another was the belief that Latina women were having many more children than white Americans and then using this to claim welfare benefits and to overuse public medical services, as opposed to working and paying private healthcare. As opposed to rational white women, discourse constructs Latina women as “irrational, illogical, chaotic, and, therefore, threatening”\(^46\).

From the point of view of empirical research, several studies have shown that conservative attitudes are strongly correlated to opposition to abortion. In one particular study, the impact of several interrelated concepts on abortion attitudes was measured. Not surprisingly, it was found that those who are socially conservative believe that life begins at conception, are frequent church-goers and support traditional gender roles (either separately or all together) are those most likely to oppose legalized abortion. On the other hand, people subscribing to an individualist, liberal or feminist ideology are most likely to support it\(^47\).

As potential replies to neoconservative criticisms of biotechnology, including stem cell research and abortion, a progressive reply has been articulated. Firstly it centers on

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\(^{46}\) Chavez, “A Glass Half Empty”, p 175.

education and explanation of the crucial aspects of biotechnology, in order to rebut over simplistic definitions offered by neo-conservatives. It also aims to acknowledge the burden on women’s well-being due to their being the primary caregivers and the suffering brought on the poor due to expensive medicine being protected by patents. Thus, informed individual agency as opposed to state sanctioned morality is seen as the proper way to defend from conservative critiques of abortion.

The theoretical framework presented above could be criticized for its limited applicability to the region, as it was developed in the United States to describe the reality there. However, as it will be seen, the influence of the neoconservative discourse in Romania has been tremendous. Neo-conservatism fared extremely well as a lens through which the communist past could be understood and condemned. It also served as a discourse of justification for the pro-market policies adopted in transition and for the reduction of social benefits, including childcare services and financial support. The discourse on abortion came as an offshoot of this prevalence.

2) Public discourse and policies regarding reproduction and childcare (2010-2013)

While there have been no significant initiatives aimed at restricting abortion, in the first twenty years following the 1989 Revolution, the predominant public discourse on reproduction in the post-communist period, continues to be characterized primarily by nationalist ideology. The Orthodox Church also condemned the voluntary termination of a pregnancy but did not advocate its outlawing. As demographic trends became more evident


in the early 2010s, this has triggered a series of political stances and legislative proposals aimed at regulating reproduction.

The ethnic element which had been overshadowed by the communist assimilationist thinking has also become more evident in the post-transition years. This trend has been increasingly complemented by a conservatism of American inspiration, which includes religious morals, individual and family responsibility for reproduction, as well as the idea of the “undeserving minorities”. Romanian politicians relied on some claims grounded in conservative rationales, such as the over-use of public services by disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities. The mixture between the Romanian type of ethnic nationalism and the conservative notion of the “underserving minorities” have also taken a new turn on the public discourse, especially in regard to the predominantly poor Roma population.

In terms of general attitudes, a 2011 survey revealed that most Romanians either support or are neutral to abortion, while only about one third would potentially support banning it. When asked if abortion on demand is morally acceptable when parents do not want the child, only 31% of Romanians firmly disagreed, condemning such action, half of the respondents were "neutral", while the remaining about 20% agreed. Similar percentages apply with regard to the legal regime of abortion: 60% of respondents support the right to have an abortion; a similar 30% of the population believes abortion should be restricted on moral and religious grounds, while 10% have no opinion on the subject. While the percentage of conservative responses has been decreasing over the years, such attitudes are most prevalent among women, persons with low-income, low level of education and living in rural areas. At the opposite side of the spectrum, liberal approaches to abortion are more often held by persons with high incomes, high educational achievements, residing in large cities.

Chavez, „A Glass Half Empty”, 177

Ovidiu Voicu “Abortion: recognized right, morally rejected and widespread practice”
In this section, a series of public statements made and policy proposals formulated by politicians will be analyzed and discussed. The information was selected by monitoring the press releases of the National Council for Combating Discrimination (the main authority responsible for sanctioning cases of hate speech and discrimination) as well as by monitoring policy initiatives in the field of reproduction, after 2010. While not all discriminatory statements were selected for analysis (many were targeted against other groups), those including views on the role of women and reproduction were chosen. Mostly made by prominent politicians, these statements reflect, to a wide extent, certain stereotypes and conceptions which society holds and which are reinforced.

One formulation of the economic argument of responsibility has been offered by President Traian Băsescu in 2010. He was aiming to justify austerity measures which implied a radical cut of parental allowance and a reduction in maternal leave. He appealed to the individual responsibility each has for their own children, deriding women who use public maternity benefits, as opposed to going back to work quickly after giving birth. Traian Băsescu declared in an interview with public television: “Lately I have noticed that Romania no longer has women, but mothers. It doesn’t have children, but babies. This country has become a one of mothers and babies”52.

Yet, almost three years later, when the burden of justifying tough budgetary cuts was no longer on him, Traian Băsescu could afford to use nationalist rhetoric, pointing to women’s patriotic duty to give birth, and the necessity of having a large and populous ethnically Romanian nation. While the two statements might not be contradictory (one can imagine a large nation coming about without any maternity benefits), the idea that women should give birth and raise children without any state support, just out of “patriotic duty” harks back to the policies of the communist regime.

In June 2013 President Traian Băsescu expressed his concerns regarding the current pace of population decline in Romania, which is estimated to reach 15 million

inhabitants in 2030 (from 19 million in 2012). Moreover, Băsescu fears that the ethnic structure of the population will also change, as the Roma minority is, on average, more fertile than the majority ethnic group.

During a meeting organized by the magazine “Business Woman”, Băsescu estimated that Romania will have only 15 million by 2030, which he labeled as “a huge loss”, further amplified by the existence of the Roma minority, which is “extremely productive”, according to the president. Our big problem is not the economic migration, which characterizes this process for Romanians at present, but the birth-rate. Thus he wonders: “How on earth can Roma women have five or six children, and [ethnic] Romanian women cannot?” Sure, the first is not a manager”. Then adding: “I wouldn't want to ask how many of you have any children. Listen, I have been working hard to convince my daughters to have children, whether married or unmarried, 'Girls, have at least one child, after all it’s a patriotic act”. Well, eventually I managed to convince my younger daughter, but not the older one (...). I think giving birth is one of the key missions of women in Romania, which they should uphold. Please excuse me for saying this so bluntly.”

Romanian ethnic nationalism can be easily combined also with the mantra of the “undeserving poor” as can be seen in the statement of Rares Buglea, a local councilor of Alba-Iulia. He posted the following on his Facebook profile, in February 2013:

“"It will be too difficult to enter the mindset and education there especially in my opinion, sex education .... I know that I will be criticized by false humanists, but I argue for the sterilization of Roma women, if after a first child, the social investigation concludes that they do not have the material conditions, or the intention to look after the child in decent conditions!"”

53 Realitatea.net, 4.02.2013 “The shocking statement of a local Liberal politician 'I support the sterilization of Roma women' (DeclarațiaŞocantă a unui lider local PNL: "SusţinSterilizareaFemeirome),

He added that Roma women should not be allowed to give birth to their second or fifth child, while “collecting state welfare benefits”\(^54\).

A relatively new situation for the regulation of reproduction in Romania occurred due to the legislative initiative of Marius Dugulescu. He was a former Baptist pastor in the U.S. and has a B.A. in Theology\(^55\). While the Romanian Orthodox Church staunchly opposes abortion it has not attempted to influence regulation on the topic either during the communist period or after. On the other hand, Dugulescu has offered religious arguments, inspired directly by the American religious movement.

In 2012, the Romanian Parliament has discussed a “legislative proposal for the establishment, operation and organization of the Counseling for Pregnancy Crisis”\(^56\). The initiative required that women seeking an abortion would have to first be counseled by professional psychologist and watch a graphic representation of the abortion procedure, as well as an echography of the fetus. The draft law also included a mandatory waiting period of 5 days, after the counseling\(^57\).

The expression of motives annexed to the legislative proposal emphasized predominantly medical and psychological arguments. In terms of social and medical grounds, the initiators note ‘the severe lack of information and sex education, as well as the large number of abortions, highlighting the causal link between the two. Moreover, the initiative was meant to prevent the negative psychological and physical consequences of abortions, such as the post-abortion syndrome, and other medical complications. Finally,

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\(^{54}\) The shocking statement of a local leader Liberal politician ‘I support the sterilization of Roma women’


\(^{57}\) Pl-x no. 348/2012
protecting the “physical and mental health of our nation” is also a medically-oriented argument included in the motivation.

In regard to legal grounding, the patient’s “constitutional right to information” was mentioned, as well as the reference to the legal provisions of other European countries that impose a waiting period of 2-7 days before undergoing an abortion. Lastly, the document also included a case-study: the “positive” example of an NGO outreach program which has manage to reduce the number of abortions by counseling and education.

Despite the apparent legalistic motivation, the less publicized ideology behind this initiative was inspired by religious and conservative ethos. This could be observed by the content of the application form attached to the legislative proposal that patients requesting an abortion would be requested to completed, if the law had been adopted. This document included the following terms: “the age of the pregnancy”, “Patient pregnancy and abortions record”, “I have received information (written, photography, video) on the abortion procedure, the risks associated to it [...]. “I have seen an ultrasound record of the pregnancy and obtained photography of it”, and “I was informed that abortion means the end of a life, because the fetus is a living human being from the moment of its conception.” The initiative was rejected by the Parliament in March 2012.

Another way of stimulating the increase of birthrates is to focus on the responsibility of the extended family. Rather than investing in public high-quality childcare, the Conservative Party aimed to mobilize those who have taken a large part of the burden of child-rearing in the late communist and early transition period: grandparents. A policy initiative in the field of childcare came from the Conservative Party in April 2013. The

58 PI-x no. 348/2012
59 PI-x no. 348/2012
60 PI-x no. 348/2012
61 PI-x no. 348/2012
62 PI-x no. 348/2012
legislative proposal amends the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 111/2010 on parental leave and monthly allowance for raising children, by allowing grandparents to receive a monthly amount for child care in case that the child’s parents return to work. Representatives of the party argued that the initiative is meant to determine an increase in the higher birth rates by encouraging young families to have children. According to Conservative Party MPs, in Bulgaria adopted a new labor law in 2008 “to stimulate employment by establishing a grandparent allowance”, as to allow them to take up childcare responsibilities from the parents. As of 2009, grandparents are eligible for receiving the amount of 123 euros per month, in order to look after their grandchildren until the age of 3 years old.

The Conservative Party shows that Hungary is granted “home care allowance” in the amount of 107 euro, parents who care for children up to age 3 years and 10 years for children with disabilities or for grandparents who care for grandchildren aged 1-3 years at home parents. The Conservatives also added that both in Bulgaria and Hungary are giving grandparents the possibility of earning an amount roughly equal to the minimum old-age pension, while looking after grandchildren. An additional argument in favor of the proposed legislation was that “Romania does not receive a sufficient number of alternative childcare for children ages to 2 or 3 years old”. The public nursery system fails to respond to all requests for pickup and childcare alternative private nurseries or nannies services would imply prohibitive costs for most families. While this initiative takes a step forward from the nationalist and neo-conservative paradigms, there is still a certain degree of emphasis on family responsibility for childcare.

3) Social context


64 “Grandparents who care for grandchildren could receive compensation.

65 “Grandparents who care for grandchildren could receive compensation.
The first effect of the transition to democracy was the legalization of abortion. This policy, along with several early-transition social factors such as the degradation of living standards, unemployment, uncertainty and stress led to an accelerated decline in Romania’s birth rate. These factors are supplemented by other, more complex, influences which, together, will continue to shape the phenomenon. Since the initial boom 1990 of the abortion rate per 1,000 live births, which had reached over 3000, the rate decreased steadily during the following transition years. In 1995 it touched 2124.9, and by 1997 - 1465.3, and in 1998 it was 1141.1. The rate remained roughly the same until 2003. In 2004, the number of abortions fell below one thousand per 1,000 live births, totaling only 883.4 in 2004, 684,5 in 2006, 639,1 in 2007, 576,4 in 2008; 522,6 in, and 480.3 in 2010.

The current developments in the birth rate are part of what has been termed the second demographic transition. In addition to a decline in the birth rate, this transition is accompanied by an attitude and behavioral change. Views on marriage, cohabiting couples, divorce, children outside of marriage, contraception and sexuality have been radically altered. On the long term, the way the Romanian pension system was organized (a pay-as-you-go system) can lead to a furtherance of the imbalances in the public pension system. It also poses a great risk to democracy and social cohesion. The factors responsible for the decline in fertility since 1991 are the same as those which, already in the 60s and 70s, had triggered the massive recoil of fertility in most developed European countries. These factors are: economic and social progress which allowed constant emancipation of women, their


68 “The Ministry of Health: It would be useful if physicians advise women who want to have an abortion”
growing participation in economic activities, increasing social mobility, the high cost of raising children, the diminishing importance of the economic role of the child and particularly its role in the economic security of the elderly, the advent of modern contraceptives and other factors.\footnote{National Institute of Statistics, The evolution of birth and fertility in Romania \url{http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/publicatii/Evolutia%20natalitatii%20si%20fertilitatii%20in%20Romania_n.pdf}.}

Romania’s low birthrates and massive emigration have led to a significant decrease and aging of the population. According to the 2011 census, Romania’s stable population is approx. 20 million, dropping over 1.5 million (of which 779 200 women) since the previous census, mainly due to external migration\footnote{Avocat.net, “Census 2011 final results: Romanian population marginally exceeds 20 million inhabitants”, 4.07.2013. \url{http://www.avocatnet.ro/content/articles/id_33662/Recensamant-2011-rezultate-finale-Populatie-Romaniei-depaseste-cu-putin-20-milioane-de-locuitori.html#axzz2pcfVL7nZ}, Accessed 15.12.2013.}. The age distribution of the population reflects the following age groups: children (0-14 years) account for 15.9% of the total resident population, the young population (15-24 years) represents 12.3%, the mature people (25-64 years old) make up the majority (55.7%) and people aged 65 and over represent 16.1% of the total. Persons aged 85 and over account for 1.3% of the total resident population\footnote{Census 2011 final results: Romanian population marginally exceeds 20 million inhabitants}.

IV. Conclusion

The strong control on reproduction and sexuality predominant public discourse during the post ’66 years was dominated by ethnic nationalism, placing the emphasis on building a strong nation by increasing the population for the advancement of national goals. The prohibition of abortions in communist Romania under the Ceauşescu regime was largely perceived as immoral and illegitimate. The consequences of this ideology have had a disproportionate effect upon women - especially those with limited connections or resources. Despite the fact that the discourse on reproduction was rooted in a nationalist...
ideology, the abortion ban on did not discriminate against women of different ethnicities neither *de jure* or *de facto*.

The popular resistance to the decree banning abortion led to its repeal on 26th December 1989, within days after the regime change. Combined with precarious economic conditions and poor family planning services, it determined a massive increase in the number of pregnancy terminations in the initial transition period. As contraceptive methods became available and their use increased in the second part of the transition, the number of abortions decreased. However, birth rates have not recovered due to socio-economic as well as other factors.

By the 2010s, the medium and long term effects of these demographic changes had become very evident, exacerbated by the massive emigration to Western Europe. Thus, the topic of controlling reproduction has resurfaced in the political discourse and new policy proposals have been brought forward. Recent discourse on governing reproduction continues to be characterized by ethnic nationalism, but with an even more pronounced ethnic component. Meanwhile, the ethnic nationalism present in discourses and policy proposals is being increasingly complemented by the conservative ideas of religious influence and free market. Given the experience of the Ceauşescu regime, potential avenues for actions should combine measures aimed at discouraging ultra-religious, populist and right-wing sexist speech; as well as policies and state provided child-care infrastructure.

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REVIEWS
Marxism, Gender and “the Transition”: A Comparative Review of Federici and Seccombe

By Gary Blank

When socialist feminists discussed the potential and pitfalls of Marxism in the “domestic labor debate”, the specific relationship between patriarchy and capital emerged as a defining concern. The debate, however, was highly abstract and theoretical, and most of its historical concern revolved around the formation of the “family wage” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This discussion was certainly important, but it often arose from (and reinforced) a misleading conflation of industrialism and capitalism. Thus, while socialist feminists engaged with orthodox Marxism on a variety of terrains, they largely left to one side the question of capitalism’s origins. The two works reviewed here — Silvia Federici’s Caliban and the Witch and Wally Seccombe’s A Millennium of Family Change — are among the very few which strive to challenge and revise existing Marxist accounts of “the transition” by posing feminist questions and offering feminist insights. In pointing to such factors as the sexual division of labor, social reproduction, the control of women’s bodies and reproductive power, and the dynamic influence of family forms, Federici and Seccombe highlight processes which must occupy a prominent place in any materialist treatment. Ironically, however, both works are deeply flawed by their retention of problematic assumptions from the more orthodox Marxist narratives. These assumptions prevent the

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authors from explaining the specific dynamics of capitalism as a social form, and therefore undermine their larger project of integrating sex/gender into the transition.

Of the two contributions, Federici’s is the boldest but also the most problematic, so it is helpful to begin analysis with her *Caliban and the Witch* before turning to the refinements and nuances that Seccombe brings to bear. Federici explicitly situates her work within the theoretical heritage of the domestic labor debate, drawing on Dalla Costa and James’ argument that the exploitation of women in the capitalist sexual division of labor and unpaid work plays a central function in the process of capitalist accumulation. Federici agrees with the Marxist argument that primitive accumulation was a foundational process for the existence of capitalist society, but “departs” from Marx in two ways. First, whereas Marx of course placed primary focus upon the formation of a (male) waged proletariat and commodity production, Federici shifts the spotlight to women and their role in the production of labor-power itself. Three phenomena are regarded as especially decisive: 1) the development of a new sexual division of labor subjugating women’s labor and reproductive functions; 2) the construction of a new patriarchal order based upon the exclusion of women from waged work; and 3) the “mechanization” of the female body into a machine for the production of new workers. In this reconstructed account of primitive accumulation, the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries allegedly figure as importantly as colonization and the expropriation of the European peasantry.

Second, Federici draws upon the world-systemic work of Maria Mies to suggest that, under capitalism, violence itself is a “productive force”, making primitive accumulation a recurring and necessary aspect of capitalist development. Marx’s suggestion that exploitation and disciplining of labor occurred “mostly through the workings of economic laws” was deeply mistaken, especially with reference to women.

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4 Ibid., p. 12.

Caliban and the Witch praises on a number of levels. Most obvious is the sheer evocative power of its narrative — there can be little doubt that Federici possesses more than an academic interest in the histories of the oppressed, exploited, and marginalized. Her vivid and often terrifying depiction of “proletarian” women’s lives cannot but convince the reader that the disciplining and “mechanization” of the female body is a pertinent, but woefully uncharted, facet of early modern European history. Whether the number of victims claimed by the witch-trials runs into the hundreds of thousands or the millions, it is indeed striking that this holocaust has received such scant attention from historical materialists. Beyond the witch trials, subordination of women’s bodies, and repression of “deviant” sexuality, Federici highlights crucial aspects of the lives of male and female direct producers. Particularly crucial is the observation that, in the feudal village, “no social separation existed between the production of goods and the reproduction of the workforce; all work contributed to the family’s sustenance.” Although somewhat misleading, this suggestion does speak to a dramatic difference between capitalist and pre-capitalist societies, with profound consequence for gender relations. Also commendable is Federici’s detailed account of the importance of the “commons” for direct producers, and women in particular. The fate of common land (and more broadly, of common right) must indeed be central to any account of the transition.

As impassioned, compelling, and expansive as Federici’s account is, we should not be blind to its severe deficiencies. While the number of specific errors and shortcomings is too large to be itemized here, they can be summarized with reference to a single theme: Federici’s temporally- and geographically-overextended notion of the transition. Betraying the influence of Marxian world systems theory, Federici regards the transition as a

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6 Federici, p. 25.

7 See Ibid., p. 18, n. 1. Marxian world-systems theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, and Andre Gunder Frank understood the emergence of capitalism as temporally and geographically extended process, predicated upon the metropolitan bourgeoisie’s exploitation of the “periphery” through mercantilism and colonialism. Various forms of coerced labor and generalized violence are thus given prominence as forms of “primitive accumulation” preceding industrialization and generalized “free” wage labor. For a further analysis of Marxian world systems theory and its influence on the work of Federici and other socialists feminists, see Gary Blank, “Gender, Production, and the ‘the Transition to Capitalism’: Assessing the Historical Basis for a Unitary Materialist Theory,” New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry 4:2 (2011): 6-28.
A centuries long process encompassing not only the entirety of Europe but the New World as well, and entailing not only enclosures, land privatization and the witch hunts, but also colonialism, the second serfdom, and slavery. In fact, Federici (echoing Pierre Dockes) suggests that slavery is “that form [of exploitation] toward which the master always strives”\(^8\). Despite Federici’s insistence that “one single [capitalist] logic” governed these processes, and without denying striking geographical parallels (e.g., witch hunts in both the Old and New Worlds), what actually stands out is the profoundly distinct nature of these forms of exploitation. Indeed, some of the richest and cogent passages of *Caliban* are those which offer a detailed explication of the modes of exploitation in the New World (*mita* work in Peru and Mexico, trading in French Canada, plantation slavery in the Caribbean) and the differential patterns of gender relations each entailed. There seems to be little linking these forms to specifically capitalist imperatives, aside from the broad suggestion that they all transitioned to capitalism in the end. The notion of “transition” here operates as convenient shorthand rather than a causal explanation of the process by which capitalism emerged from non-capitalism.

Federici’s failure to clearly explicate capitalism’s “laws of motion” is highly unfortunate, for in the end readers are not given any theoretical guidance for anchoring her rich description of gendered work and subordination to any rigorous theory of capitalism, aside from the suggestion that capital, capitalists, or the ruling class functionally required certain outcomes. Throughout *Caliban*, Federici erroneously conflates specifically English social processes (enclosures, proletarianization etc.) with those in continental Europe, calling into question every component of her reformulated notion of primitive accumulation. The witch hunts may have subordinated women’s reproductive knowledge and labor, the German guilds may have excluded women, and continental science may have legitimated the “mechanization” of women’s bodies—but how are we to understand their connection with capitalism? Federici fails to provide the answer. This does not mean that these phenomena have nothing to do with capitalism, or even if they do not, that they are somehow unimportant — only that if we are to fully comprehend their significance, we

\(^8\) *Ibid.*, p. 65. For Pierre Dockes’ analysis, see his *Medieval Slavery and Liberation* (York: Methuen, 1982).
must surely require a more historically nuanced and geographically-specific account which clearly explicates the specificity of capitalism.

Wally Seccombe’s rather different account of the transition partially addresses these shortcomings. Rather than relying upon world systems theory, Seccombe draws on Marxists of a more historical bent, especially Perry Anderson. In fact, Anderson’s epic account of Western class society from antiquity to capitalism seems to provide the theoretical basis for Seccombe’s understanding of the production mode, which he then “expands” to include family forms (and therefore gender relations). This is a promising start. Anderson’s theorization of feudalism, in particular, is one of the most nuanced in the Marxist tradition, and makes some strides towards overcoming the misleading base/superstructure, economic/political distinction which has long plagued historical materialism. In this vein, Seccombe rightly notes that the economist error has stemmed not from an exaggeration of the weight of the socioeconomic dimension but instead from a false narrowing of its field, and a failure to conceptualize adequately the integration of the socioeconomic with politico-legal relations of the state and the cultural formation of groups and classes.

An analytical expansion of the socioeconomic field enables the integration of that form of production characteristic of families, and of women’s domestic labor in particular: the production of human labor power. Such recognition is important not only because it helps to address feminist concerns, but also because family forms have a discernible causal influence on the mode of production, shaping it and being shaped by it in turn. The social regulation of fertility, evidenced especially in particular marriage patterns, deserves a central place in historical materialist inquiry.

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Seccombe’s narrative is certainly more staid and less evocative than Federici’s, but his theoretical rigor and attention to historical and geographical specificity ultimately renders a superior account. Like Federici, Seccombe considers the “early modern period” from the Black Death to approximately 1750 as “transitional”; however, his dedication to mode of production analysis allows for a much less functionalist account than that found in Caliban. Rather than linking all social struggles and phenomena during this period to the presumed imperatives of capital or a nascent capitalist class, Seccombe is at pains to distinguish between different forms of exploitative social relations, the dynamics underlying them, and the unique family forms they engendered. Whereas Federici labels any and all direct producers as “proletarian”, Seccombe takes care to elaborate the differences between different forms of peasant servitude, semi-proletarian and cottager production, and “free” wage labor. According to Seccombe, broadly “feudal” (peasant-dominated) social relations persisted through the transition period, and must be distinguished from capitalist (proletarian-dominated) relations if family forms are to be adequately understood.

This leads to a number of insightful contrasts with Federici. Rather than positing the emergence of capitalism as being an unmitigated disaster for women, Seccombe prefers to chart opportunities and restrictions across the women’s entire life cycle\(^{11}\). While there may have been a certain unity of production and reproduction within peasant households, it should not be concluded that there was even a rough equality between men and women\(^{12}\). Indeed, the imperatives of lordly surplus extraction and peasant subsistence required a legally and politically enshrined regulation of women’s reproductive function — women’s bodies were likely more “mechanized” in those conditions than under capitalism! It was in old age, in particular, that women’s status was most sharply debased by capital accumulation\(^{13}\). While placing less emphasis on the witch hunts, he also seems to offer a more compelling explanation for their occurrence, tracing them to the diminished

\(^{11}\) Seccombe, A Millennium, p. 120.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. B6-7.

\(^{13}\) See Ibid., p. 244.
population levels after the Black Death and seigneurial (not capitalist) concern for the maintenance of a tax- and rent-paying populace\textsuperscript{14}.

Despite offering a more theoretically and historically compelling account of the transition, Seccombe does not avoid falling into difficulties which also afflicted Federici, albeit in a slightly different manner. In drawing upon such Marxist authors as Anderson, Rodney Hilton and E.A. Kosminsky, Seccombe too relies upon problematic assumptions regarding the dynamics and specificities of capitalism. While drawing sharper geographical/national distinctions than Federici, his analysis is explicitly a “regional” one, but in practice relies largely on English examples\textsuperscript{15}. Secombe does not regard this as problematic, suggesting that regional variation was largely a matter of “uneven and combined development”. The same process of capitalist development was experienced by both “vanguard” and “laggard” regions at different times and paces\textsuperscript{16}. This process seems to be rooted in the orthodox Marxist notion of peasant differentiation/polarization. The assumption here is that capitalism emerged with the commutation of labor rents in Western Europe following the Black Death, when relative freedom from lordship enabled peasants to respond to market opportunities and stimuli by innovating, specializing, and accumulating, eventually engendering a polarization of the peasantry into rich yeoman farmers and landless laborers\textsuperscript{17}. Thus, when suggesting that the Western European late/non-universal marriage pattern may be the “missing piece of the puzzle” in explaining the West’s unique rise to industrial capitalism, Secombe points to seven ways in which the pattern facilitated an already existing process of capital formation, efficiency gains, and productivity enhancements\textsuperscript{18}.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 151.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 5-6.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 6.


\textsuperscript{18} Seccombe, A Millennium, p. 239-41.
Seccombe may be quite correct to point to the significance of the late/non-universal marriage pattern. The problem is that his underlying assumption — that peasant differentiation played a causal role in the emergence of capitalism — is flawed. As “political Marxists” such as Ellen Wood and Robert Brenner have pointed out, the various Marxian theories of the transition, including those that both Federici and Seccombe draw upon, assume what they have to explain: capitalist “laws of motion” themselves. What we need to reveal is the historical process which gave rise to distinctly capitalist imperatives. The exploitation of wage labor and market exchange existed for centuries and even millennia prior to the emergence of capitalism, but they did not yield the requirement to compete, profit maximize, and improve labor productivity. Capitalism emerged not simply from the quantitative extension of previously existing social relations, but from a qualitative transformation of “rules of reproduction” 19.

Importantly, the “political Marxists” suggest that this rupture occurred specifically in early modern England, and was not matched by similar developments in continental Europe until the nineteenth century. All class societies prior to the emergence of capitalism were characterized by politically-mediated forms of surplus extraction—that is, there was no separation between the economic and the political, the “base” and the superstructure because political powers were at the same time extractive powers (usually wielded over peasant producers) 20. In the aftermath of the Black Death, lordly relations of feudal exploitation were thrown into crisis by depopulation and peasant struggles. In Eastern Europe, feudal relations were re-established on a firmer basis, while in France peasants claimed effective possession of the land from their lords even as state-directed taxation provided a new basis for political accumulation (i.e., the absolutist mode of exploitation). Only in England did capitalism emerge as an unintended consequence of class struggles, as lords lost their capacity for surplus extraction through coercive means and turned to


20 For a more detailed explanation of the “political Marxist” understanding of capitalism and its implications for socialist feminism, see Blank, “Gender, Production, and the <<the Transition to Capitalism>>: Assessing the Historical Basis for a Unitary Materialist Theory.”
“economic” (market-determined) rents. Contra Federici, it was the “economic” form of surplus extraction which was a unique and defining element of capitalism, without which its “laws of motion” cannot be understood.

To point to the political Marxist tradition is not to suggest that it somehow has all the answers; in fact, its body of analyses is often as deficient as previous Marxist frameworks in integrating gender and social reproduction. While “political Marxists” have placed central emphasis on what they term “rules of reproduction”, the agents of reproduction are usually assumed to be male, and family forms are under-explained and under-theorized\(^\text{21}\). The point is simply that “political Marxism” has (thus far) offered the most cogent account of capitalism’s origins because it, unlike other Marxist accounts, does not assume what needs to be explained. Attempts to integrate gender and families into a new account of the transition would be more successful if they proceed from this work, rather than the insufficient assumptions and concepts of previous Marxists work (world systems theory, Hilton, etc.). “Political Marxism”, in turn, could be reshaped for the better by integrating gender and family forms. There is already a strong affinity between Seccombe’s broad theoretical project and that of the Brenner \textit{at al.} There is of course much greater distance with Federici, but no reason to think that her concerns cannot be addressed within a reworked “political Marxist” framework. In fact, the witch hunts might finally receive an adequate historical materialist treatment if their feudal and absolutist social context is recognized. After all, it was lawyers, judges, advocates, councils and other officials, as well as feudal landholders, who gained from the trials—not capitalists\(^\text{22}\).

\(^{21}\) One of the best “political Marxist” writers on these questions is Benno Teschke. But even his \textit{The Myth of 1648} makes no reference to Wally Seccombe’s work, despite the fact that it covers essentially the same geographical expanse and historical period.

\(^{22}\) See Mies, p. 83-88. In fact, I find Mies’ account of the witch hunts to be far superior to Federici’s because she provides a relatively detailed explanation of who actually profited or otherwise benefited from the trials. Apart from occasional references to the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, there is little serious indication that capital was somehow involved.
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Production and Patriarchy in Capitalist Society: A Comparative Review of Hartmann and Young

By Gary Blank

The social struggles associated with the New Left in the late 1960s and early 1970s sparked a popular resurgence of Marxist and feminist theory and practice. In the early phase of these struggles, many left-wing social activists regarded the two traditions as inherently compatible, and urged (or even assumed) their “marriage”\(^1\). Over the following decade, however, socialist feminists noted that the marriage was at the very least “unhappy”, sparking a vigorous debate over the extent to which the “sex-blind” categories of Marxism could be utilized to address feminist concerns. This review essay assesses two foundational contributions to the debate: Heidi Hartmann’s “dual systems” theory and Iris Young’s “single system” response\(^2\). While the two accounts are seemingly counter posed, a comparative analysis of their respective strengths and weaknesses points the way toward a truly historical materialist theory of women’s oppression in capitalist society. Such a theory must seek to explain the material basis for a specifically capitalist patriarchy, without employing trans-historical structures (as Hartmann does) or functionalist reasoning (as Young does). In the end, I suggest that an alternative Marxist framework can be utilized to

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\(^1\) For background on this social and political context, see Lydia Sargent, “New Left Women and Men: The Honeymoon is Over” in Sargent (ed.), Women and Revolution: A discussion of the unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism (Montreal: Black Rose, 1981).

integrate the greatest insights of both accounts, while overcoming their debilitating limitations.

Heidi Hartmann’s essay, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism”, is undoubtedly one of the key touchstones in socialist feminist thought and of feminist political economy in general. Although her specific articulation of “dual systems” theory has largely fallen out of favor, it was the first systematic attempt to overcome the limitations of various Marxist approaches to the “woman question,” and thereby gave voice to a generation of academics and activists who had concluded that “Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism”³.

Hartmann notes that while not all Marxists have ignored women's oppression, they have usually taken as their question the relationship of women to the economic system, rather than that of women to men (the “feminist question”). Women's oppression cannot be adequately understood as simply “another aspect” of class oppression⁴. Marxism, as theory of the development of class society, enables an understanding of capitalism's “laws of motion”: the structure of production, the generation of a particular occupational structure, etc. However, these categories are sex-blind, and can only trace the development of “empty places”⁵. Why these places are occupied by particular sexes can only be explained by reference to patriarchy as a distinct system of social relations between men. Like capitalism, patriarchy too has a material base, predicated upon male control of female labor power and maintained by excluding women from access to essential productive resources and restricting women’s sexuality⁶. Although Hartmann suggests that a “healthy and strong” relationship exists between patriarchy and capital, the partnership was not inevitable. Both working class men and capitalists sought to secure their claim on female labor power in the early days of industrial capitalism, and this competition was only resolved with the

³ Hartmann, p. 2.

⁴ Ibid, p. 9.

⁵ Ibid, p. 10.

⁶ Ibid, 15.
adoption of the “family wage” norm. Lower wages compelled women to choose wifery as a career, while also ensuring a future labor force for capital.

There is much to value in Hartmann’s account. While she may paint “Marxism” with too broad a brush at times, she is certainly justified in pointing out that traditional Marxism has often been “sex-blind” theoretically and politically. Asking the “feminist question” opens a whole field of social relations that had previously been ignored, and is therefore of immense importance for social-scientific inquiry as a whole. Hartmann also delivers a strong critique of the radical feminist answer to this question, correctly suggesting that previous theories of patriarchy were profoundly ahistorical, projecting “male and female characteristics as they appear in the present back into all of history”. Her resulting conclusion that neither traditional Marxism, nor radical feminism has offered a sufficient explication of capitalist patriarchy, and her call for a materialist analysis of men acting as men and as active oppressors of women, must be taken seriously by those seeking to develop an historical materialist understanding of women’s oppression. The strongest aspect of Hartmann’s account, for our purposes, is her compelling refutation of functionalist analysis. Hartmann allows for an analysis of the abstract tendencies of capitalism as a mode of production, while insisting that these tendencies do not in themselves require women’s subordination. In a particularly pertinent passage, Hartmann notes that “Capital accumulation encounters pre-existing social forms and both destroys them and adapts to them. The adaptation of capital can be seen as a reflection of the strength of these pre-existing forms to persevere in new environments”. This opens the door to an historical account of how capitalism instantiates and transforms patriarchy, rather than why capitalism somehow logically requires patriarchy.

Unfortunately, while Hartmann does make recourse to historical examples, her account is more structural than historical. The pivotal series of events in the construction of

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7 Ibid., p. 22.
9 Ibid., p. 24.
patriarchal capitalism, according to Hartmann, were those associated with the “family wage”. However, the formation of this wage norm (which was in fact the norm for only a small minority\(^{10}\)) appears less as a product of an historical process than as an articulation of two distinct systemic structures (“dual systems”). This has at least two problematic implications. The first is in accounting for the origins and dynamics of the structures themselves. Hartmann, of course, implicitly accepts the Marxist historicization of capitalism; but her account of patriarchy is essentially ahistorical, and only differs from that of the radical feminists in its identification of male “material” interests, rather than psychological or biological characteristics, as the driving force behind male’s oppressive behavior. The problem here lies not with the suggestion that patriarchy must have some material root, but rather with the notion that men oppress women as a group, with a single (and seemingly eternal) motive force. Like the radical feminists, Hartmann seems to assume the motivating force underlying patriarchy, rather than seeking to explain the origins and dynamics of that force itself. Interestingly, while Hartmann references the actions and rhetoric of the Cigarmakers International Union (CMIU) as a textbook example of male patriarchy in action\(^{11}\), Johanna Brenner points out that this was hardly a universal response among male unionists. Even within the cigar-making industry, a union called La Resistencia, formed in Tampa by radicalized Cuban émigrés, sought to organize female tobacco strippers and lampooned the CMIU as “the voice of virile labor”\(^{12}\). Male patriarchal “interest” was not fixed, but was contested and redefined in the context of industrial and class struggle across gender boundaries.

This complex and dynamic interaction of gender and class oppression highlights a second problem in Hartmann’s account. By sharply separating two distinct material structures (capitalism/production of goods and patriarchy/production of people), dual systems theory is unable to trace the dynamic integration of the two within a single socio-

\(^{10}\) See Lindsey German, *Sex, Class and Socialism* (London: Bookmarks, 1994), p. 36.

\(^{11}\) Hartmann, p. 21.

economic system of production and reproduction. This does not mean that we should not make an analytical distinction between production and reproduction—under capitalism the two have indeed become uniquely separated. However, in previous class-stratified societies (i.e., all of those predicated upon the politically-mediated exploitation of peasant labor in one form or another), patriarchal norms were inextricably tied to the production of goods as well as people. Reference to two, trans-historically-separated systems of production of people/goods inhibits an appreciation of capitalism's specificity, and therefore provides an inadequate understanding of the relationship between patriarchy and capital.

Some of these concerns are taken up by Iris Young in her critique of Hartmann's dual systems model. Young draws attention to a glaring tension in Hartmann's analysis: while Hartmann insists on the separation of capitalism and patriarchy, she nevertheless admits that both are manifest in identical social and economic structures. Any attempt to “isolate the mechanisms of patriarchy,” as Hartmann counsels, is therefore misguided. Far better to recognize that class domination and relations of production and distribution, on the one hand, and women's oppression, on the other, are aspects of “the same socio-economic system.” Patriarchal relations are therefore “internally related” to production relations as a whole. Hartmann's central error, according to Young, is in accepting the Marxist theory of production. Class analysis is simply too abstract to capture the relations of production and material bases of domination. Pointing to Marx's early emphasis on the division of labor in *The German Ideology*, Young maintains that a more concrete investigation at the level of the sexual division of labor is best equipped to explain women's oppression. At this level of analysis, the category “relations of production” refers to “any

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14 Young, "Beyond," p. 47.

15 Hartmann, p. 29.

16 Young, "Beyond," p. 56.

17 Young, "Beyond," p. 49.
task or activity which the society defines as necessary”, therefore encompassing not just factory production but also “traditional women’s tasks” (i.e., unpaid domestic labor)\(^{18}\). From this perspective, capitalism does not simply use, or adapt to, pre-existing gender hierarchies; it was *founded* on gender hierarchies, and generates forms of gender oppression which are “essential to its nature”\(^{19}\).

Young’s critique of Hartmann is compelling. Her central thesis—that class domination and women’s oppression need to be analyzed as aspects of the same socio-economic system—helps to overcome Hartmann’s ahistorical and under-theorized notion of a separate patriarchal system. Yet the efficacy of this approach is largely dependent upon how the dynamics of this single system are explained. It is of course true that the division of labor operates at a more concrete level than that of class analysis, and can therefore be fruitfully utilized to analyze the social relations of labor in gender specific forms. Yet class and division of labor analyses should not be counter-posed. If division of labor analysis is to offer an *explanation* of women’s place in capitalist society (rather than merely a description of the same), it is necessary to rely upon some underlying (and analytically prior) theorization of class relations.

As some Marxists have pointed out, a central problem of Marx’s reliance upon division of labor analysis in *The German Ideology* is his implicit reliance upon a liberal materialist understanding of class relations\(^{20}\). If Young does not rely upon a liberal materialist conception of class, it is only because her entire theorization of class relations remains muddled and unspecified. It is certainly valuable and necessary to affirm that women’s unpaid household labor is as socially necessary as factory production; but it is also essential to point out that factory labor is subject to directly capitalist imperatives, while household labor is not. In the end, Young’s “explanation” of women’s situation in capitalism does rest upon class analysis, albeit of a purely structural-functionalist variety. Referencing


the work of Heleieth Saffioti, Young suggests that the key to understanding women's situation is the capitalist system's requirement for a reserve army of labor. Patriarchal ideology and the burdens of childcare “operated to make sex the most natural criterion by which to divide the workforce.” It seems as though we have come full circle, with Young (inadvertently) returning to the reductionism and functionalism of the orthodox Marxists that Hartmann had so trenchantly criticized.

Both Hartmann and Young make considerable strides in formulating an historical materialist understanding of women's oppression, but in the end neither contributor provides a solid theoretical base for such an understanding. Still, taking stock of their respective strengths and weaknesses helps to clarify the major issues that require resolution. Hartmann, it was suggested, had usefully pointed out the need to address the “feminist question” in a materialist manner, while avoiding the crude class reductionism of traditional Marxist accounts. Crucially important is Hartmann's observation that patriarchy cannot simply be deduced from the logic of capital, but may have its origins in social forms that precede (but are nevertheless transformed by) capitalist development. However, Hartmann's trans-historical conception of male material “interest” only begs the question, and ultimately inhibits the sort of historical investigation she would seem to encourage. For her part, Young argues strenuously against the notion that patriarchy is a structure unto itself, and correctly urges that class and sex oppression be analyzed as facets of a single socio-economic system. Yet, the dynamics and causal processes which drive this system remain largely unspecified; thick description (division of labor analysis) is overlain with an exceedingly thin functionalism (the reserve army requirements of capital).

How, then, to develop a materialist theory of women's oppression that is attentive to both the “feminist question” and the specificity of capitalism, but avoids lapsing into reductionism, functionalism, or structuralism? Although a full answer to this question would of course require another paper, here we can at least point the way forward. The most problematic aspects in both Hartmann and Young were prompted by a common


22 Young, “Beyond,” p. 58.
assertion that the sex-blind categories of Marxism are inadequate to the task of explaining
gendered social relations. Given the inadequacies of Marxist concepts, entirely new
structures and processes had to be given prominence (trans-historical patriarchy and the
gender division of labor). But in what way are Marxist categories sex-blind, and does this
actually render them incapable of explaining women’s oppression? Previous Marxist
analyses of the “woman question” departed, like Hartmann, from Engels’ flawed notion that
there was a sharp separation between the production of goods and the production of people
with the emergence of class society, and that this separation corresponded to male and
female spheres. Focusing on the production of goods as the material “base” of the mode of
production, these accounts were certainly sex-blind, and this blindness precluded an
adequate understanding of production itself. More recent scholarship in the “political
Marxist” tradition has challenged this sharp distinction between base and superstructure,
the production of people and the production of goods, and has called attention to the
different ways in which direct producers and exploiters sought to reproduce themselves,
given certain overarching structures of politically-mediated exploitation. Although these
accounts have often understated women’s oppression, they nevertheless provide a
framework for understanding patriarchal forms and gender relations as defining features of
pre-capitalist modes of exploitation.

However, like Young, “political Marxists” have noted the specificity of capitalism in
its separation of production from reproduction, as well as the “political” from the
“economic.” These separations point to something unique about capitalism: unlike all
previous modes of exploitation, its abstract “laws of motion” can be explained without direct
reference to political and ascriptive factors. In this respect, the sex-blind categories of
Marxism, when used to describe the specificity of capitalism, are not only analytically
justified but necessary if we are to truly understand its dynamics. Indeed, Ben Fine, Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas have convincingly argued that the sex-blind Marxist

23 For an outline, see Robert Brenner, “Property and Progress: Where Adam Smith Went Wrong” in
Chris Wickham (ed.), *Marxist History-Writing for the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

categories permit a dynamic understanding of women’s oppression that correct many of the shortcomings of dual system and single system analyses. Brenner in particular has shown how capitalist imperatives and class conflict have yielded changing patterns of gender relations and gendered work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as men and women of all classes employed distinct “strategies of self-representation”\textsuperscript{25}. Taken together, these scattered political Marxist and Marxist-feminist contributions have demonstrated that it is possible to take class relations of exploitation as the point of departure in understanding women’s oppression in pre-capitalist as well as capitalist societies. Their synthesis in an alternative Marxist framework may yet provide answers to the unresolved theoretical and political questions of socialist feminism.

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**Book presentation : “Families – Beyond the Nuclear Ideal”. ed. Daniela Cutaş and Sarah Chan**

*By Diana Elena Neaga*

The core concept of the book edited by Danila Cutas and Sarah Chan, “Families – Beyond the Nuclear Ideal” is without doubt, one about which most of us all, if not all, could have thoughts, opinions, predictions, standards, experiences and projections. In Romania, for example, the sintagm “the family – the vital cell of the society” is still very circulated, even tough, being associated with the Communist regime and the pronatalist policy of Ceausescu, it has also some pejorative connotations. Therefore, one can make a simple correlation – people are social human beings, the family is the vital cell of the society, so people have to be engaged with this type of structure, cohabitation, thus with the nuclear, or traditional family. Therefore, it appears a form of desirability for connection, for being part of a wider social structure, which, furthermore, is being charged with a moral sense and finally becomes a norm. If we go further with this analysis and try to give a definition of “the family”, we will definitely use social norms and constructions imposed by the valorization/praising of a type of “family” – namely the traditional, nuclear, patriarchal one.

Referring to the state of the art in the field, the literature could be divided into two main categories: studies about the traditional family structures – usually associated with the nuclear family – “children should be conceived naturally, born to and raised by their two young, heterosexual, married to each other, genetic parents; that this relationship between parents is also the ideal relationship between romantic or sexual partners; and that romance and sexual intimacy ought to be at the core of our closest personal
relationships” (Cutaş, Chan, 2013); the studies that are approaching alterations in traditional family structures as a product of socio-cultural change - electively or circumstantially single parents, unmarried couples, homosexual partnerships and parenting by homosexual couples, life-long close friendships preferred over sexually intimate alternatives, polyamory, poly-parental families, electively or circumstantially childless families, families created with medical or social assistance, sexual families, the two parent family model, parental dimorphism, and so forth – category of the volume presented here. The desirability is then taking the form of a prescription, it becomes institutional, it becomes law and is setting out rights and obligations for the individuals: “whose private life is more, or less, scrutinized; who can be a parent and what sorts of organization of private and family life are encouraged, tolerated or even allowed at all; which associations will be supported, both socially and materially etc” (Cutaş, Chan, 2013);

In essence, the Cutas and Chan’s study is putting under a magnifying glass every term used to define the traditional, nuclear, idealized family; it is adding some ingredients about the evolution of the medical technology, social dynamics and rights claim of some minority and marginal groups (LGBTQ, surrogate mothers, commissioning parents, financial, and social parents), sketching the complex view of what really means to throw into reality the concept of family.

I will shortly present some of the questions and themes that are being raised in this volume: What does it mean to be the mother of somebody? It means to be the one giving birth to that child? And if so, what is happening in assisted reproductive cases, artificial insemination, or surrogate mothers? A family should be formed with to parents? They have
to be man and woman? The parents are the biological ones, or the ones that are giving the material and social support needed for raising a child? In this context, could we have families with more than two parents? What role could/ must they fulfill in a family and in relation to children resulted trough assisted reproductive technology? What is the meaning of the concept of “child interest” and the deciding authorities regarding this? What is the meaning of the concept of “parent’s interest”? Does the children raised only by mothers have some specific problems? Are the single, heterosexual women who are becoming mothers, contesting the role of men in the reproduction act, as far as single motherhood is no longer only the result of circumstance, but also actively created from the outset? Could this be understood as a radical feminist position or as “the feminist dream come true”? Which are the ethical premises of monogamy and how do these cultural practices perpetuate unequal relations between men and women? Trough asymmetrical relations, does the polygamy is imposing tougher power relations than monogamy? What are the practical and ideological consequences when human cloning is used for having children?

In this volume are also caught the changes and challenges that are on going in the occidental world (United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand) regarding the understanding and rethinking of the family: the separation of genetic parenthood from social and legal parenthood; the formal recognition of non-heterosexual couples; the recognition of a couple and of parenthood outside the marital relationship; the acceptation of a second female parent (parental dimorphism); reproductive possibilities for transgender parents, promoting increased inclusivity of existing ART, not only on the basis of direct interest of children and their progenitors, but also by socio-political objectives as acceptance of diversity and pluralism, increasing tolerance; the increasing number of predominantly
heterosexual women in their thirties and forties who are well educated and financially independent to achieve motherhood via attending fertility clinics for treatment with donor sperm; the greatly improvement of scientific research of cloning technology over past fifteen years that make possible for humans to reproduce by cloning in the near future and this fact is already rising substantive debates about moral and legal constraints of this act (the nonidentity logic and “no harm logic” vs alternative better route to come into existence etc) etc.

The book presented here becomes in this way a good attempt, not only of a critical analyze regarding the nuclear family as a social ideal, but also a model of reflection towards the social complexity and dynamics of relationships which have the scope and/or effect the reproduction, affection, sexual intimacy, romanticism, the common management of resources, etc. Moreover, the novelty element comes from the fact that, “while there has been a proliferation of self-help literature that aims to inform, explain and provide practical guidance as to how to manage these ‘alternative’ relationships, and considerable work has been done in the fields of sociology, social anthropology and psychology in this area, much less exists in the academic literature by way of philosophical and ethical analysis” (Cutaş, Chan, 2013), the aim of the authors being to “re-examine and critically evaluate the norms and normativities surrounding personal relationships and families in Western societies, and to challenge the widespread assumption that nuclear families are the best, or even the only acceptable units at the core of personal relationships” (Cutaş, Chan, 2013).

In the end, a wider view over the volume distinguishes the consistency of the approaches which emphasize the formal-legal dimension of the issues presented, of the
existing debates, and the ways in which they have been integrated within the legal system of the different analyzed countries. It could be created the image of a slightly arid volume, if the editors wouldn't have integrated a consistent ethical and philosophical dimension to the chapters that is adding substance to the legal perspectives, always underlining the symbolic impact of such recognition in the context of the dominant traditional paradigm regarding family.