Re-Growth: Scholars of the Centre for Women's Studies

Contents

Editorial

Hello!

Let me begin with a big 'welcome back' to Cultivate! It has been two years since our last issue (Bodies, June 2019) and a lot has changed since then. 'The pandemic', as it has come to be known, has affected all of us and left an indelible mark on our collective histories. Here at the Centre for Women's Studies (CWS) we have done our best to keep lifting each other up, supporting each other's research and keeping the community going. As O'Dessa and Gemma so beautifully penned in their founding editorial, Cultivate aims to nourish and encourage feminist activism and scholarship by being a space where feminist thought can be explored through multiple modes of expression.

It has been an absolute joy to work with our (entirely new) Cultivate team on our third issue, "Re-Growth: Scholars of the Centre for Women's Studies". We decided to focus the theme of this issue on the phenomenal work of our current postgraduates – but non-CWS readers can be assured our future CfPs will continue to be open to all scholars! We have a mixture of both critical and creative pieces from current MA students and PhD candidates. If you are interested in finding out more about the feminist scholar haven that is the CWS, you can read more on the Centre website.

"Consider mushrooms." – Anna Tsing (2012, p.141)

When considering what we could title this issue, and what cover art we might choose, I was immediately drawn to nature for its perpetual regeneration, renewal and regrowth. We wanted to acknowledge the pandemic and how we are surviving it, how we are emerging from our collective grief and trauma to allow new life to grow. As a Centre, we had our physical connections severed and were scattered across the globe but, as Cultivate attests, we continued to come together as a community to support each other. We are an ever-evolving network, much like mycelium we connect to each other across diasporas and across generations. Mushrooms are, in the words of Anna Tsing, "what manages to live despite capitalism" (2015, viii). We, as feminists, as marginalised people, manage to live despite. Fungi takes darkness and decay and evolves anyway, nourishing the earth with their existence, growing and re-growing. We had found our inspiration, our title, and then we found our cover art – with thanks and credit to wildlife biologist and artist Alexandra Nicole.

Continuing on the theme of thanks and acknowledgements, thank you to the lovely CWS staff for their knowledge and wisdom, and particularly to Dr Rachel Alsop who has been a close advisor to the team throughout the publication process. Thank you to our peer reviewers who volunteered their time and submitted thoughtful and insightful feedback to our contributors. A special note of thanks to the new members of the advisory board who have joined us in 2021, particularly Dr Blu Tirohl, Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Gender Studies, now also housed within CWS.

Thank you to our fantastic editorial board for your tireless work and support through every stage and every (remote!) meeting. It has been a delight to work alongside such dedicated feminist colleagues – I think it is safe to say we have all learned a lot from each other and the publishing process. Lastly, but in no way least, a huge thank you to our contributors who have worked so hard on their submissions, graciously receiving and responding to feedback and who have truly made this issue come alive.

Warmly,

Lauren

Editor-in-Chief

Cultivate (2021)

Positive Energy and Negative Incidents

The Role and Strategies of Chinese Journalists in Reporting Sexual Assault Cases Against Women in China

Siyu Chen

Abstract

Via in-depth interviews with twenty-two journalists based in China, this article explores how Chinese journalists recognise and construct sexual assault against women within the Chinese socio-political context. Analysis of the interviews indicates that reporting sexual assault cases does not satisfy the Chinese authorities' political requirement to disseminate 'positive energy'(*zheng nengliang*) in the media, which has greatly limited the wider development of the Chinese #MeToo movement and news reporting of sexual assaults in the Chinese press. As a result, Chinese journalists (and those who work for state-owned news outlets in particular) begin to justify sexual assault news reporting via employing official/authoritative sources and attaching importance to the education function of sexual assault news reporting, which marginalised the experiences and testimonies of victim-survivors and forged stereotypes, myths and gender inequalities in Chinese society.

The global #MeToo movement and its extensive media coverage have brought together female victims/survivors from different cultural backgrounds to resist sexual assault and harassment collectively. Responding to #MeToo, the Chinese official media outlet *China Daily* published an opinion piece in October 2017, stating that China has fewer incidents of sexual harassment compared with Western countries (see Hassan, 2017). 'Chinese traditional values and conservative attitudes tend to safeguard women against inappropriate behaviour from members of the opposite gender,' according to Hassan (2017, para.8).

However, data published by Chinese NGOs and higher education institutions reveals the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in China. In 2010, a study found that 25.4% of college students studying in Guangzhou, China had been perpetrators or victims of sexual violence (Wang et al., 2015). In 2017, a Chinese feminist activist Wei Tingting collected 6,592 questionnaires on sexual harassment at colleges and universities from all

over the country, revealing that nearly 70% of the participants said they had been sexually harassed to varying degrees, and most of them were women (Wei, 2017). Moreover, when the #MeToo movement swept across China in 2018, sexual assault cases against women were revealed in business, academic, public welfare, and religious sectors (Chen, 2018; Zuo, 2018).

News reporting of sexual violence against women can have positive or negative consequences. News reporting, on the one hand, can draw public attention to sexual violence issues and help disrupt rape myths and gender stereotypes (Saint-Jacques et al., 2012). On the other hand, it can justify/reinforce prejudicial and stereotyped beliefs about gender, sex and power in society (Easteal, Holland & Judd, 2015; Wood, 1994). At present, studies of news reporting on sexual violence against women are mostly based on Western contexts (e.g. Askanius and Moller Hartley, 2019; Hindes and Fileborn, 2019), whereas discussions on the Chinese #MeToo movement focus primarily on social media and cyber resistance to censorship (Fincher, 2018; Sun, 2020; Zeng, 2019, 2020), overlooking Chinese journalists' role and reporting strategies in dealing with this movement and reporting sexual violence.

To address this, this article explores the role and strategies employed by Chinese journalists in covering sexual assault against women in China. I interviewed twenty-two Chinese journalists in four different Chinese cities; six were male, sixteen were female. Of these participants, nine described their workplace (*danwei*) as a party news organisation; another seven stated that they worked for commercial news outlets. In addition, two independent journalists work professionally in making news but without institutional backing. The remaining four were citizen journalists who self-publish online news content on women's rights issues. In this article, I protect these participants by keeping these four cities confidential and giving them an English name at random.

#MeToo versus "positive energy"

Discussing the limited impact of the #MeToo movement in China, a number of researchers (e.g. Fincher, 2018; Sun, 2020; Zeng, 2019; Zhou and Qiu, 2020) have attributed it to online censorship and government suppression. Analysis of the interviews reveals that some journalists were not aware of #MeToo. When I asked them about #MeToo, their accounts offer insights into the constraints under which journalists work in the Chinese context. For instance, Bill asked, 'is there a #MeToo movement in China?' Eudora inquired, 'can you explain a bit what #MeToo is?' While other participants knew what #MeToo was, they associated it as a taboo subject; Grace said, 'I know #MeToo, I suddenly remembered that we are not allowed to use this word at all.'

Participants mentioned a specific socio-political factor that restricted the development of this movement and news reporting of sexual assault cases, namely the political agenda of disseminating positive energy required by the Chinese authorities. They pointed out that sexual assault cases are not promoted because they are incompatible with the wider socio-political environment that requires promoting 'positive energy'. As Bandurski (2014) argues, disseminating positive energy in the Chinese context of news control means suppressing the dissemination of negative news from all walks of life and preventing public opinion from discussing China's negative issues in society. Under the

3

circumstances, Lucy, who works for a market-oriented news outlet, commented, 'sexual assault news that does not promote positive energy (*zheng nengliang*) will be hit.' Likewise, Anna, who has been working in the party media for eight years, described the press environment promoted by her current employers.

> Now the leaders also ask us to highlight the central themes of the times (*hongyang zhu xuanlv*), disseminate positive energy (*chuanbo zheng nengliang*), and build consensus (*ningju gongshi*). As such, we have to make sure there is such a shift in our mind, and then be more inclined to such a tone when reporting news. Sexual assault cases tend to be negative, so we will not follow them up easily.

The requirement to 'disseminate positive energy' reflects the Chinese socio-political context. Since the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2012, promoting ideological and cultural work has occupied an important place for Chinese President Xi Jinping (Xinhua Net, 2017). At the National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference in 2013, Xi emphasised that the whole country must persist in consolidating and strengthening mainstream ideological and public opinion; that is, highlight the central themes of the times, disseminate positive energy, and empower society to unite and forge ahead (Communist Party website, 2013). Since then, 'positive energy' has become a crucial propaganda term emphasised in news reporting and propaganda work for consolidating the regime and reducing criticism and negative content production (Bandurski, 2014; Chen, Valdovinos Kaye & Zeng, 2020; Yang and Tang, 2018). Simultaneously, all media, especially the state-owned news outlets, has begun to disseminate the propaganda and report under the purview of the ruling party.

Within this 'positive energy' context, news reporting of sexual violence against women is inevitably categorised as 'negative', since it exposes social problems such as power asymmetry, gender inequality and the problematic judicial system. Women's resistance against hegemonic gender order (China's #MeToo movement, for instance) also poses dangers to China's male-dominated rules and the stabilities of the Chinese regime (Ho et al., 2018). Therefore, sex-related topics such as sexual violence against women become a key area curbed by the regime (ibid.).

My research shows that the participants' daily practices of reporting sexual assaults are influenced by the political climate of disseminating positive energy. Two participants (Anna and Ada) said that they would consider giving up reporting sexual violence and paying more attention to the positive achievements of the ruling party. Nonetheless, most of the participants indicated that reporting sexual assault cases is conducive to preventing sexual crimes, helping victims, and driving media traffic. As such, they argued that it is necessary to report on sexual assault cases and employ strategies to 'harmonise' sexual assault news reports with the socio-political context. In other words, they need to exercise self-censorship and report sexual assaults in a correct/positive way.

Self-censorship means employing non-critical perspectives on power holders and thinking twice before publishing a news report relating to politically sensitive topics (Lee and Chan, 2009). Regarding self-censorship, many scholars (e.g. Hassid, 2008; Lee and Chan, 2009) point out that this poses great harm to press freedom and suppresses

4

journalists' ability to report factually. As Lee and Chan (2009) note, exercising self-censorship requires journalists to be cautious when choosing topics on which to report since what is considered sensitive changes with the socio-political climate. Journalists' ambivalence about topic selection and fear of breaching sensitive borders make media self-censorship a potent means of controlling the press (Hassid, 2008). Tong (2009), however, suggests that Chinese journalists' self-censorship helps increase media freedom, since it helps to 'bypass political minefields' (p. 593) and increases the likelihood of making politically sensitive issues visible via implied criticism and euphemistic expression.

Participants in my research, especially those who work for state-owned news outlets, conducted self-censorship/strategies to justify such reporting, despite its potential negative consequences. An analysis of my interviews indicates that the strategies for reporting sexual assaults can be categorised into two main themes: attaching educational significance to reporting sexual assault cases and relying on official/authoritative sources. Some participants argued that sexual violence reporting needs to educate readers. Clara, who is working for a state-owned news outlet, said:

> Along with disseminating the facts, I also hope that it can play a role in educating the public and then popularise related laws and regulations. After reading our news reporting, the public gradually becomes interested in talking about this issue and seeking legal help after suffering from sexual assault. This means that they are educated by news articles.

Likewise, Anna, working for a state-owned news agency, stated:

> The most important thing is to think clearly, what kind of message you prefer to convey or what you expect the public to learn from your article after reading it, instead of role-modelling to them how to behave like perpetrators and sexually assault others. This would be a failure.

In the 'positive energy' setting, it can be seen that these journalists are trying to find good reasons for covering sexual assault cases. These efforts include guiding the public to care about the issue, enhancing the public understanding of sexual violence and popularising relevant laws and regulations. These participants attach importance to the education function of sexual violence news rather than media sensationalism, which from their perspectives helps to develop journalistic objectivity and establish the stable and safe social environment required by the state.

In addition, the participants (especially those who work for state-owned news outlets) also stressed the significance of ensuring the accuracy of sexual assault news, which means they prefer not to report contested sexual assault incidents. For instance, Colin, working for a state-owned news outlet, said:

> Our priority is to be accurate, which is the most important thing. I don't post anything that I am unsure about, especially sensitive

topics such as sexual violence. Under what circumstances can we report? If the police have filed an investigation and posted a statement, we can report the case; because the official entity has spoken.

Molley, who worked for another state-owned news outlet, commented:

Even though a particular rape case draws a lot of attention and causes intense cyber discussions, we insist on waiting for the official statements before reporting. It doesn't work if I report on this controversial case. We really need an official, authoritative answer.

According to these participants, waiting for official statements is necessary in reporting sexual assault cases, since it makes the news appear accurate and credible. Simultaneously, integrating official information into their reporting also offers implicit permission to publish sexual assault news, since it emphasises the crucial role of the state organs (the police and courts in particular) and regards their investigation and statements as authoritative. This practice reduces the media exposure of controversial cases. Nevertheless, this practice also illustrates that whether sexual violence happened primarily relies on the investigation results published by the police and judges rather than the experiences and testimonies of the victim-survivors, disempowering the voices of women in the news reporting.

This kind of 'positive' sexual assault news shaped within the Chinese 'positive energy' context is not always in the interests of victim-survivors, especially from feminist perspectives. Feminist studies indicate that journalists should shape credible media images of victim-survivors in news reporting rather than accusing them of lying (Waterhouse-Watson, 2012). But in China, when a court has not convicted the accused offender (e.g. Liu Qiangdong's rape case, Bao Yuming's rape case), rape complaints are prone to be labelled as lies by news outlets (see for example, Zhao, 2018). Many studies (Pugach, Peleg & Ronel, 2018; Serisier, 2017; Tanner, 1994; Vandervort, 2012) note that criminal justice systems in many countries (e.g. China, Canada, Israel, India) perpetuate sexist stereotypes that discredit rape complaints. I therefore argue that media images (liar/victim) of sexually assaulted women should not be firmly tied to the outcome of the criminal justice system, which is contrary to building gender-sensitive news media and empowering victim-survivors.

Conclusion

This article revealed how the Chinese journalists I interviewed adjust their news reporting of sexual assault cases to keep within the boundaries of what is acceptable to the party and state. They discussed how to make news reports of sexual assault against women more valuable and accurate so that the Chinese authorities can see the positive side of reporting these 'negative' incidents. These journalists working for state-owned news outlets suggested that they attach educational value to these stories and recount official statements to ensure accuracy and consistency. Nonetheless, since the participants relied on the voice of state organs and their spokespersons, they may neglect and

6

marginalise the experiences and testimonies of victim-survivors. Likewise, I argue that the verdicts of the criminal justice system should not serve as the only reliable sources for journalists reporting on sexual assaults, especially when it forges stereotypes, myths, and gender inequality.

References

Askanius, T. and Moller Hartley, J. (2019). Framing gender justice: A comparative analysis of the media coverage of #metoo in Denmark and Sweden. *Nordicom Review*. 40 (2), 19-35. [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0022 [Accessed 1 February 2021].

Bandurski, D. (2014). "Positive energy," a pop propaganda term. *China Media Project*. [Online]. 12 November 2014. Available at: https://chinamediaproject.org/2014/11/12/positive-energy-a-pop-propaganda-term / [Accessed 1 February 2021].

Chen, A. H. (2018). China's top Buddhist monk has resigned amid sexual harassment allegations. *Time*. [Online]. 16 August 2018. Available at: https://time.com/5367775/china-monk-metoo-sexual-harassment/ [Accessed 5 February 2021].

Chen, X., Valdovinos Kaye, D.B. and Zeng, J. (2020). *#PositiveEnergy* Douyin: constructing "playful patriotism" in a Chinese short-video application. *Chinese Journal of Communication*. 14 (1), 97-117. [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-190637 [Accessed 5 February 2021].

Communist Party Website. (2013). *Xi Jinping zai quan guo xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo huiyi shang qiangdiao xiong huai da ju bawo da shi zhuo yan da shi nuli ba xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo zuo de geng hao [At the National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference, Xi Jinping emphasised that with the overall situation in mind, grasp the general trend, focus on major issues, and strive to do better propaganda and ideological work]*. [Online]. Communist Party Website. Last updated: 21 August 2013. Available at: http://news.12371.cn/2013/08/21/ARTI1377027196674576.shtml [Accessed 5 February 2021].

Easteal, P., Holland, K. and Judd, K. (2015). Enduring themes and silences in media portrayals of violence against women. *Women's Studies International Forum*. 48 (2015), 103-113. [Online]. Available at: 10.1016/j.wsif.2014.10.015 [Accessed 3 February 2021].

Fincher, L.H., (2018). *Betraying Big Brother: The feminist awakening in China*. London; New York: Verso.

Hassan, S. (2017). Weinstein case demonstrates cultural differences. *China Daily* [Online]. 16 October 2017. Available at: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201710/16/WS5a0c0771a31061a7384064ea.html [Accessed 17 January 2021].

Hassid, J. (2008). Controlling the Chinese media: An uncertain business. *Asian Survey*. 48 (3), 414-430. [Online]. Available at: 10.1525/as.2008.48.3.414 [Accessed 22 January 2021].

Hindes, S. and Fileborn, B. (2019). "Girl power gone wrong": #MeToo, Aziz Ansari, and media reporting of (grey area) sexual violence. *Feminist Media Studies*. 20 (5), 639-656. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/14680777.2019.1606843 [Accessed 22 January 2021].

Ho, P.S.Y.et al. (2018). Sex with Chinese characteristics: Sexuality research in/on 21st-century China. *The Journal of Sex Research*. 55 (4-5), 486-521. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/00224499.2018.1437593 [Accessed 23 January 2021].

Lee, F., and Chan, J. (2009). Organizational production of self-censorship in the Hong Kong media. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*. 14 (1), 112-133. [Online]. Available at: 10.1177/1940161208326598 [Accessed 23 January 2021].

Pugach, D., Peleg, A., and Ronel, N. (2018). Lingual injury: Crime victims between the criminal justice system and the media. *International Review of Victimology*. 24 (1), 3-23. [Online]. Available at: 10.1177/0269758017730199 [Accessed 17 January 2021].

Saint-Jacques, M-C et al. (2012). The role of media in reporting child abuse. *Journal of Social Service Research*. 38 (3), 292-304. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/01488376.2011.627232 [Accessed 17 January 2021].

Serisier, T. (2017). Sex crimes and the media. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.118 [Accessed 16 July 2021].

Sun, W. (2020). Rice bunny and #WoYeShi: Online reactions of overseas Chinese to the #MeToo movements in China and the West. *Howard Journal of Communications*. 31 (3), 245-263. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/10646175.2019.1666069 [Accessed 22 January 2021].

Tanner, H. (1994). Chinese rape law in comparative perspective. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*. 31, 1-23. [Online]. Available at: 10.2307/2949898 [Accessed 1 February 2021].

Tong, J. (2009). Press self-censorship in China: a case study in the transformation of discourse. *Discourse & Society*. 20 (5), 593-612. [Online]. Available at: 10.1177/0957926509106412 [Accessed 1 February 2021].

Vandervort, L. (2012). Lawful subversion of the criminal justice process? Judicial, prosecutorial, and police discretion in Edmondson, Kindrat, and Brown. In: E. Sheehy, (Ed). *Sexual assault in Canada: Law, legal practice and women's activism*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, pp. 111-150.

Wang, C., et al. (2015). Sexual violence experienced by male and female Chinese college students in Guangzhou. *Injury Prevention*. 21 (e 99-e 104). [Online]. Available at: 10.1136/injuryprev-2013-040893 [Accessed 1 February 2021].

Waterhouse-Watson, D. (2012). Framing the victim: Sexual assault and Australian footballers on television. *Australian Feminist Studies*. 27 (71), 55-70. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/08164649.2012.648260 [Accessed 1 February 2021].

Wei T. (2017). *Zhongguo da xuesheng zai xiao he bi ye sheng xing saorao zhuang kuang diaocha [Investigation on the Sexual Harassment Situation of College Students in China]*. [Online]. Chinese Feminism. Last updated: April 2017. Available at: https://chinesefeminism.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/e9ab98e6a0a1e680a7e9aa9ae689b0e68aa5e5918a2be58d95e9a1b5.pdf [Accessed 3 February 2021].

Wood, J. (1994). *Gendered lives: communication, gender, and culture*. United States: Wadsworth Pub.

Xinhua Net. (2017). *Zhu xuanlv geng xiangliang zheng nengliang geng qiangjin——dang de shi ba da yi lai xuanchuan sixiang wenhua gongzuo zong shi [The central theme is louder, and the positive energy is more potent: A summary of the propaganda and cultural work since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China]*. [Online]. Xinhua Net. Last updated: 20 September 2017. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2017-09/20/c_1121697587.htm [Accessed 1 February 2021].

Xinhua Net. (2019). *Xi Jinping: Zai jinian wu si yundong yi bai zhou nian shang de jianghua [Xi Jinping: Speak for commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the May Fourth Movement]*. [Online]. Xinhua Net. Last updated: 30 April 2019. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-04/30/c_1124440193.htm [Accessed 12 February 2021].

Yang, P. and Tang, L. (2018). "Positive Energy": Hegemonic intervention and online media discourse in China's Xi Jinping Era. *China: An International Journal*. 16 (1), 1-22. [Online]. Available at: https://muse-jhu-edu.libproxy.york.ac.uk/article/688045 [Accessed 1 February 2021].

Zhao, J. (2018). Wu zui! Liu Qiangdong xing qin an: mei guo jian fang jue ding bu yu qi su [Not guilty! Liu Qiangdong's sexual assault case: US prosecutors decided not to

8

prosecute]. *Global Times* [Online]. 21 December 2018. Available at: https://m.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKgc0g [Accessed 1 February 2021].

Zeng, J. (2019). You say #MeToo, I say #MiTu: China's online campaigns against sexual abuse. In: Fileborn, B., Loney-Howes, R., (Eds). *#MeToo and the politics of social change.* New York City: Springer International Publishing, pp. 71-83.

Zeng, J. (2020). #MeToo as connective action: A study of the anti-sexual violence and anti-sexual harassment campaign on Chinese social media in 2018. *Journalism Practice.* 14 (2), 171-190. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/17512786.2019.1706622 [Accessed 2 February 2021].

Zhou, Q. and Qiu, H. (2020). Predicting online feminist engagement after MeToo: a study combining resource mobilization and integrative social identity paradigms. *Chinese Journal of Communication.* 13 (4), 351-369. [Online]. Available at: 10.1080/17544750.2020.1725077 [Accessed 3 February 2021].

Zuo, M. (2018). China's #MeToo revival: Famed activists, TV host and writer named. *South China Morning Post* [Online]. 27 July 2018. Available at: https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2157204/wellknown-activists-among-accused-metoo-campaign-gathers-pace. [Accessed 1 February 2021].

C

The Vaginal Hierarchies of the 'Womanhood Clubhouse'

Lauren Cowling

Abstract

In this article I explore how vagina-owners navigate sociocultural meanings of vulvavaginas and conceptualisations of gendered selfhood (particularly 'womanhood') through experiences with their genitalia. I draw upon my preliminary doctoral research data, having interviewed 26 people that have vaginas about their bodies and experiences. Whilst there has been research on 'vagina' (for example, Braun and Wilkinson 2001, 2003, 2005), it remains a relatively under-researched area. My thesis looks to bridge this gap and attempts to knit together thinking from across many topics that 'touch on' the vulvavagina (such as research on menstruation, sexual assault and gendered identities) but that often don't connect to the vulvavagina directly. In this article I posit the concept of a 'womanhood clubhouse' in which the vagina acts as a pass-key and where members must continually navigate internal hierarchies of what it means to be 'enough'. Within this piece I focus particularly on the physical attributes of vulvavaginas and the role they play in contributing to 'enough-ness' as well as two landmark 'vagina events': penetration and reproduction. I use these landmarks as a lens through which to explore in what ways people with vaginas negotiate various interpretations of 'womanhood', positively, negatively and in, as one participant phrases it, "a neutral way".

My research aims to unpack the sociocultural meanings of the vulvavagina, from the point of view of vagina-owners. I interviewed people with vaginas (whom I dub 'veeple') to find out how we communicate and learn about our genitalia, the embodied processes of having a vulvavagina (and associates: the uterus, ovaries, etc) and the sociocultural meanings of sex and gender that intersect with the physical body. My 26 participants varied in their ages (21-79), ethnicities, sexualities and gender identities (all names have been changed), but all were AFAB[1] and all still had their birth-genitals intact[2]. I talked to them about all things vulvavagina, from the words we use and how we communicate

---

[1] Assigned Female at Birth
[2] This is simply due to the participants that responded to me; none had undergone any gender affirmation surgery.

about our genitals, to the embodiment of being a vagina-owner and the meanings laced in and amongst those embodiments.

Considering my research focuses on vulvavaginas and is situated within the Centre for Women's Studies, I am often asked if I am simply, 'studying women'. Whilst notions of womanhood are key to my research and many of my participants identified as women, I did not only interview cisgendered women, but also non-binary people, trans folk and other gender non-conforming beings. The deliberate inclusion of trans* people in my research was a deeply personal as well as political decision, but one that also contributes to my methodology: only by examining many genders can we begin to unpack the tightly bound gendered constructs that hold and shape our societies. For this reason, when recruiting my participants and interviewing them, none of my information or questions referred to 'woman', only to 'vagina' or 'vulvavagina'.

Nonetheless, the sociocultural link between 'vagina' and 'woman' arose spontaneously in every interview, with the concept of 'woman' surfacing in many different areas, as a thread returned to in and out of the interview schedule. Sewn tightly alongside the notions of womanhood (and femininity) was the issue of being considered 'enough', with a particular emphasis on being 'woman enough', or a 'real woman'. When examining these hierarchies, it became clear that the proverbial goalposts were constantly moving. An analogy I have been working with is the idea of the 'womanhood clubhouse' in which the vagina acts as an admission 'pass-key'. Once your key has been accepted, you enter a clubhouse in which you must constantly negotiate the hierarchies set out before you, many of which take the form of 'vulva-vaginal events' (including menarche, penetration, childbirth and menopause).

The idea of not being 'woman enough' extends to the physical vulvavagina in several ways; for some it might be prominent labia (two participants made explicit reference to feeling embarrassed that their labia could appear *not dissimilar enough* to that of a penis bulge). For others it could be about managing their pubic hair or their vulvavagina smelling not 'feminine enough'. Elle expressed, for example, that the way her vulva looked was of particular importance to her femininity because, she said, her small breasts did not "count for much". Elle's use of "count" pertains to the 'womanhood clubhouse'. Despite being allowed entry due to having a vagina, Elle appears to be battling an internal hierarchy of 'counting' womanhood points. Whilst Elle felt her small breasts left her with a lower womanhood 'currency', others I interviewed might be concerned about their labia size/shape, or their choice to not shave their body hair, "endors[ing] the assumption that a woman's body is unacceptable if unaltered" (Toerien and Wilkinson, 2003, pg 333). The term "unacceptable" here relates directly to this eternal battle of 'being woman enough' that many of my participants described.

One important facet of being 'enough' (particularly but not exclusively framed as 'woman enough') is tightness (a 'tight' vagina is a 'good' vagina, (Braun and Kitzinger, 2001)) which, for many cultures, links to a status of virginity, much like the ideas around a 'broken hymen' and hymenoplasty to 'reinstate virginity' (Kaivanara, 2016). For example, Hamia (who identifies herself as an Arab Muslim) mentioned she would be worried to use tampons as she had heard from her friends that they take away your 'virginity', something of cultural and personal importance to her. Whilst hymenoplasty was not something that

surfaced in my interviews, labiaplasty was. Two participants admitted they had considered surgery to 'correct' their prominent labia, something they felt was an aesthetic issue, rather than one that caused them physical discomfort (i.e. would be considered as not medical but cosmetic surgery). Labiaplasties and 'cosmetic cutting' have been steadily on the rise in the West for the past 20 years (Braun, 2019) with 'designer vaginas' receiving much more media attention as well (Braun and Kitzinger, 2001; Braun, 2005, 2009).

For trans* people, being considered 'enough' can be about passing[3] which can be directly linked to their safety as well as simply 'fitting in' (Wong and Lawrence, 2015). Gender attribution, as described by McKenna and Kessler (1978), works here in that genders are ascribed to all people by a process of "rapidly scanning bodies and making assumptions about their morphologies and orientations" (Halberstam, 2018, p.58). My trans* participants described attempts at passing, but precisely *what* they were passing *as* was subject to change, and not only in relation to their identities (such as genderfluid, for example). Kit spoke about how they bind their chest (and are awaiting top surgery) for their own comfort but also to avoid being feminised – however when presented with binary public toilets they try to "pass as female enough" in order to use the "women's" toilet because that is where they feel safest (and have had a lifetime of experience using). Kit told me they felt "lucky" that the "worst that's happened is a funny look". Here Kit refers to the social punishment one faces for not being successfully 'read as' one of the two binary genders, which can be anything from a prejudicial 'double take' glance to assault and murder (Lee and Kwan, 2014). The negotiation of gender performance that Kit describes highlights the different interpretations and consequences of the need to be 'enough' across gendered identities.

Much of this negotiation begins at the doorway to the clubhouse: your pass-key must first be accepted. While a detailed discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that prior to (and within) the thresholds for 'enough', one has to be included as a woman. Megan described being regularly mistaken as trans* despite identifying as a cis woman, and also as being wrongly assumed to be non-heterosexual. Whilst Megan stated she did not take these assumptions as contrary to her status as a woman (i.e. in her opinion, being trans* or non-heterosexual would not negate her womanhood) she was aware that others were making those connections. The issue here is that others were not able to accept Megan's performance of womanhood as *acceptable* (cisnormative) womanhood, and thus challenged her status in the hierarchy. By asking her if she's "actually gay" or "actually a trans woman", others are attempting to make sense of traits they deem to mark her as an outsider. Importantly, Megan's childhood, adolescent and adult status as a "tomboy" was something that others anticipated would lead to a 'realisation' of her coming out as either gay, trans* or both. As Halberstam writes, this is actually a "part of a struggle with the narrow scope of conventional womanhood" (2018, p.70) and demonstrates the fine lines of acceptable womanhood within the clubhouse.

---

[3] Passing or 'being read as', in this context, is the idea that a stranger/onlooker would observe you and assume your correct gender (which may not align with that which you were assigned at birth).

12

In addition to physical attributes, there are also events (sometimes considered 'functions' of the vagina) that occur throughout the average vagina-owner's life. Braun and Wilkinson (2005) found that the cis women they interviewed in their research on gendered identity "affirmed a link between having a vagina and being a woman" and explored this link "through associated functions (heterosex and reproduction)" (pg 511). The heterosex function also specifically calls upon a penetration imperative, while the reproductive function becomes relevant as soon as menarche arrives. Lydia, who was diagnosed with vaginismus at age 18, discussed her vagina's refusal of penetration as contributing to feeling "less of a woman", particularly in how she was treated by cis men partners near the time of diagnosis. Lydia talked candidly about this, as the realisation she preferred to have relationships with veeple came "hand in hand with realising I just didn't want or need to be penetrated". Whilst she didn't explain it as the 'reason' why she preferred sex with veeple, she saw it as complementary. It made her life easier – removing penis from the equation meant sex could be negotiated differently. This pertains to the penetration imperative; that penetration is the pinnacle of sexual encounters. Lydia's discussion of how her vaginismus was handled by her GP and by her previous partners builds on the harmful idea of the 'coital imperative', i.e. that sex cannot be considered 'real' or 'proper' without penile-vaginal penetration (Jackson, 1984; Potts, 1998; McPhillips, Braun and Gavey, 2001; Potts et al., 2003).

The coital imperative is derived from prioritizing a reproductive view of sex. Thus, another important 'womanhood threshold' that emerges is motherhood. Maureen conceptualized her vagina as serving the purpose of enabling her to have sex as well as to "give her" her child, a sentiment shared by all the mothers I interviewed. Maureen later reflected on many women feeling they are not "whole women" unless they have children and referenced her daughter-in-law who is paraplegic and unable to have children. Maureen discussed the greater acceptance "these days" of having non-biological children, perhaps by adoption, and recognised that some people may choose to not have children. Whilst this may not seem directly linked to the vagina, when we consider the connection Maureen makes from womanhood to motherhood (and with the western understanding of the word vagina to represent a wider sociocultural meaning of all the associated reproductive organs), we can see that the decision to not have children and thus 'reject' motherhood could have implications on one's perception of one's own selfhood, particularly womanhood.

In discussing the *decision* not to have children, we must also consider the navigation of motherhood space by those not *able* to have biological offspring. For example, the impact of infertility and the desire to follow a 'biological' route to have offspring of 'one's own' through assisted reproduction rather than to opt for fostering or adoption. This issue has been widely discussed as a 'biological imperative' for prospective parents to have children that are genetically linked to them rather than the "unwanted" or "leftover" children put up for foster care and/or adoption (Matějček, Dytrych and Schüller, 1978; Brinich, 1995; Bitler and Zavodny, 2002). Aside from the negative conceptualisation of 'unwanted' children, there is also the impact on the parent/s, who wish to be considered 'enough'. This can be particularly important for veeple given the societal expectation and pressure to carry one's own offspring.

Assuming one 'reaches' childbirth, the ways in which it occurs also has an impact on the birther. For example, according to reports by De Jong and Kemmler (2003), women who prepared for a vaginal birth but end up having a caesarean delivery often say they feel they are (or will be perceived as) not being a complete woman having failed to give birth vaginally. Kim, who was induced, discussed how the birth left her feeling "like a failure", and that she "hadn't done the job right". Within the clubhouse, being able to conceive, carry and vaginally deliver biological offspring works as a series of thresholds for women to meet.

Within the confines of this short piece, I have explored a few of the multitudinous ways in which the 'life-cycle' of the vulvavagina impacts and is impacted by one's own gendered identity and is shaped and affected by sociocultural concepts of sex and gender. I argue for the conceptualisation of womanhood as a clubhouse with restricted access, with a complex array of hierarchical 'rooms' that can only be reached through navigation of certain vaginal 'events', leading to veeple constantly negotiating 'enough-ness'. The vulvavagina is an area of sociocultural interest for its conceptual role in shaping identities, behaviours and attitudes. Thus, researching veeple's reported experiences with their genitalia contributes to a wider understanding of how gender, the self, and identity intertwine.

References

Bitler, M., and Zavodny, M. (2002). Did abortion legalization reduce the number of unwanted children? Evidence from adoptions. Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 34(1), pp. 25–33.

Braun, V., and Wilkinson, S. (2005). Vagina equals woman? On genitals and gendered identity. In: Women's Studies International Forum, 28, pp. 509–522.

Brinich, P. M. (1995). Psychoanalytic perspectives on adoption and ambivalence. Psychoanalytic psychology, 12(2), pp. 181-199.

Halberstam, J. (2018). Trans*: A quick and quirky account of gender variability. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Jackson, M. (1984). Sex research and the construction of sexuality: A tool of male supremacy? Women's Studies International Forum, 7(1), pp. 43–51. [Online]. Available at: doi:10.1016/0277-5395(84)90083-9.

Kessler, S. J., and McKenna, W. (1978). Gender: an ethnomethodological approach. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lee, C., and Kwan, P. (2014). The trans panic defense: Masculinity, heteronormativity, and the murder of transgender women. Hastings Law Journal, 66(1), pp. 77–132.

Matějček, Z., Dytrych, Z., and Schüller, V. (1978). Children from unwanted pregnancies. Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, 57(1), pp. 67–90.

McPhillips, K., Braun, V., and Gavey, N. (2001). Defining (hetero)sex: How imperative is the "coital imperative"? Women's Studies International Forum, 24(2), pp. 229–240. [Online]. Available at: doi:10.1016/S0277-5395(01)00160-1.

Potts, A. (1998). The science/fiction of sex: John Gray's Mars and Venus in the bedroom. Sexualities, 1(2), pp. 153–173. [Online]. Available at: doi:10.1177/136346098001002002.

Potts, A. et al. (2003). The downside of Viagra: Women's experiences and concerns. Sociology of Health & Illness, 25(7), pp. 697–719. [Online]. Available at: doi:10.1046/j.1467-9566.2003.00366.x.

Toerien, M., and Wilkinson, S. (2003). Gender and body hair: Constructing the feminine woman. Women's Studies International Forum, 26(4), pp. 333–344. [Online]. Available at: doi:10.1016/S0277-5395(03)00078-5.

14

Wong, W., and Lawrence, F. N. (2015). Am I man/woman enough: Using trans-youth 'self-portrait drawing' to analyse their body image. In: Camoglu, D. Y. (Ed). Re/presenting gender and love. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, pp. 107-118.

Chinese Feminist Comedy? An exploration of the opportunities and challenges faced by female stand-up comedians in China

Huawen Cui

Abstract

In 2020, as the third season of the Chinese show 'Rock and Roast' (a talent competition for stand-up comedy that airs weekly in China) launched, female comedians have become 'rising stars' in stand-up comedy in China. Their success has unprecedented importance to the development of the stand-up comedy industry and the spread of feminist consciousness in China. Through case study and interview reflections, this article aims to explore some factors that impact the popularity and success of female comedians, which has resulted in heated discussions of gender among the young Chinese generation. Furthermore, this paper attempts to discuss the challenges faced by female comedians in China, and details some increasingly public debates about gender and sexuality among Chinese netizens after the show was broadcasted. In short, this paper will explain the reasons why female stand-up comedians have become 'rising stars' from the perspectives of performers, audiences, the stand-up comedy industry and the wider social environment to analyse this popular phenomenon.

Stand-up comedy has a short history in China, but in recent years it has become more popular with the development of Internet and program production. Stand-up comedy in China (known as the "Talk Show" industry) is relatively young, having only been established 12 years ago with a small audience following (Feng, 2019). In 2012, Dragon TV (东方卫视) launched the "Talk Show of the post-80s tonight"（今晚80后脱口秀）, as an online programme which eventually attracted a wider range of audiences. The subsequent talent competition show 'Rock and Roast' (first produced by Xiaoguo Company, 2017) broadcasts on multiple Internet platforms, gaining a great following amongst young people. The show gathers stand-up comedians from across the whole country, in order to select the stand-up champion of the year. In doing so, stand-up comedy has become a new form of public entertainment in China.

Although stand-up comedy has gained significant popularity among young people in China, academic research on the Chinese stand-up industry has been lacking. Because the 'Talk Show' was introduced from the West, this cross-culture humour in China has a diverse structure and utilises various methods of comedic expression from the Western context (Piwowarcyzk, 2019). Thus, research on stand-up comedy often focuses on European and American cultures. Therefore, research on stand-up comedy in China lacks attention, and research on feminist humour in Chinese stand-up comedy is even scarcer.

Gender imbalances in stand-up comedy

Whilst the development of stand-up comedy in China has made many male comedians become famous, the number of female stand-up comedians is far fewer. Since the beginning of 'Rock and Roast' in 2017, male comedians have outnumbered their female counterparts significantly. Not only is this reflected in the participation of the show, but male winners of the show also outweigh female winners. In my interview with Liang, the principal of Xi'an Cola Comedy Club (西安可乐俱乐部)[1], he revealed that the imbalanced gender ratio of men to women in the talk show industry is about 4:1. He noted that the reason there are such a small number of female comedians in the Talk Show industry was because women are traditionally the subject to be pleased: men are usually responsible for making women laugh, while women may not be so keen to make fun of others on stage. American stand-up comedy also had this kind of misunderstanding, but feminist comedians have gradually subverted the patriarchal culture using feminist humour (Votruba, 2018). In the third season of 2020, "Rock and Roast" (which aired in 2020), a total of three female talk show comedians had entered the top ten for the first time. They used humorous power to spread female voices surprising many people in China and reconstructing stand-up comedy by challenging patriarchy. This is an achievement that female talk show comedians have never achieved before.

Why they are so popular?

I have identified three main factors that have influenced the success of female stand-up comedians in China.

Using feminist jokes

In recent years, several female stand-up comedians have become well known by audiences because they start to introduce comedies from female perspectives. The success of the first season of "Rock and Roast" in 2017 brought a female talk show performer named Siwen into the public eye. She identifies herself as an independent woman, and often explores how women balance the relations between work and family, such as, the relationship between husband, wife and mother-in-law. Siwen's success is manifested by her being the first popular female stand-up comedian known to the mainstream, but her performance of being an independent woman only involves her own family and does not mention men more broadly, so her performance is considered non-aggressive to the majority of audiences. By 2020, several young female stand-up comedians had become popular, such as: Yang Li, Li Xueqin, Zhao Xiaohui, Yanyi and

---

[1] On 15th February 2021, I interviewed Liang via Wechat.

Yanyue. They, as female comedians, have begun to become more adept at intervening and observing issues from a female perspective and expressing feminist ideas (Chen, 2020; Yangchengwanbao, 2019). They evolved from Siwen's 'non-offensive' comedy to a slightly more offensive piece to reimagine the topic of gender.

Female comedians continue to integrate women's consciousness into their own text creation and performances. For example, in Yang Li's performance in the "Rock and Roast", each of her 'hot topics' reflects the concerns of current young Chinese women's concerns. For example, she tried to use Black Widow[2]'s status and superpowers to satirise women's employment discrimination and stereotypes of women as weak and subordinated:

> It is a normal phenomenon that there are fewer women than men in every industry, isn't it? Just like the most modern and international industry now- the Avengers.
>
> There is only a woman, Black Widow, among the first six superheroes.
>
> And how dare this organization can be called 'Fulian复联' (Women's Federation妇联/Fulian)[3]
>
> Do you know what Black Widow's superpowers are?
>
> Because her genes have been modified, so she is aging much slower than others.
>
> So how does this superpower save the world? Is it because she can live and survive longer than the bad guys?

Why is everyone's fantasy of women always young, beautiful, and good-looking. Why can't the superwoman be old? Why can't she be a 60-year-old superwoman?

She goes on to express her admiration for supermodels to satirise the male gaze on women's bodies:

> Because when [a supermodel] walks in front of you, she was very proud, as if she was saying: "Hmph, what are you looking at? What you like more is the thing I have less of."

She also talks about the common problems that young couples might face, to discuss young Chinese generation's attitudes toward relationships:

> When men argue with women, they usually say 'Why do you always make trouble without reason? Can you be more reasonable'.

---

[2] Black Widow is a character in Marvel's film who has superpower (The Avengers, 2012).
[3] In Chinese, Avengers and Women's Federation have the same pronunciation as 'Fulian'.

18

> So every time I want to say: 'hey, bro, do you think she chose to fall in love with you just because she is more intellectual than others?'
>
> If she wants to be reasonable and want to show her logical thinking ability and cultural knowledge level, why does she want to talk with you? She can talk to her boss instead and maybe she can be promoted.

Not only Yang Li, other female comedians who performed in "Rock and Roast" also talked about women's anxieties, and the issues of women who were expected to get married by their families（被催婚）. They created and performed the comedy through criticising the same problems that other young Chinese women are facing, and they achieved successful results.

Their voices resonate with women

Another reason for female comics becoming successful is because they resonate with a wide range of female audiences. Although Yang Li often used cynical language to satirise masculinity, she was strongly echoed by online and offline female audiences. When Yang Li was attacked by some male audiences on the Internet, she said that her stories were popular because they resonated with female audiences.

Watching stand-up comedy has become a new way for young people to release their tension. As John Limon defined, "stand-up is uniquely audience-dependent for its value because joking is, essentially a social phenomenon and a fully embedded phenomenon" (Limon, 2000: 12). As one of the topics that young Chinese people care about, gender has become one of the popular themes which are often used in 'Rock and Roast', especially by female comedians. Topics of gender usually help them to achieve better scores, and it indicates that stand-up comedy is more popular among young female audiences. Young Chinese women are paying more attention to gender and women's issues because there is a rapid development of feminism in China recent years (Lindberg, 2021). Even though the Chinese Communist Party put forward the policy of "gender equality " in 1949, women still bear the constraints of traditional Confucianism on women's identity and the unequal treatment they have suffered in society and workplaces (Liu, 2007). Thus, young women pursue comedy, not only because comedians can use humour to express the difficulties and pressures which they are facing in their daily lives, but also this humorous way could create a sense of resonance with their audiences and release their tension. This is reflected within the fans statistics of the Xi'an Cola Comedy Talk Show Club, where, up to 15 February, 2021, 63.6% of the WeChat followers of the Cola Comedy Club are women, in comparison to only 36.28% that identify as men (with 0.12% where the audience's gender is unknown).

Breaking gender stereotypes

Female stand-up comedians have faced serious gender stereotypes, but they shatter those with their outstanding comedic abilities, and this breakthrough made them gain more attention. In an interview with Zhao, who is a fan of stand-up comedy, he bluntly said that he prefers the performance of male talk show comedians because he believes

that male comedians show more depth, more logic in content, and more tension in their performances. And he thinks that if female comedians exaggerate "too much", he will consider them as less intelligent. Even if he has high standards and low expectations for female comedians, he still admits that "female comedians are getting more and more funny than before".

Even when 'female perspective comedy' complains about men, men find these claims hard to refute. The Chinese business celebrity Luo Yonghao also expressed: "Although I may be the one they criticised, I still want to watch their performances" (Tencent Video, 2020). Their success shows that female comedians were welcomed and resonate with audiences through their funny punchlines and excellent comic ability, even if some stories might cause men's complaints.

Opportunities bring challenges: The obstacles faced by female comedians

At the end of 2020, a familiar name once again appeared on Sina Weibo[4]'s the most popular 'hot topic'. The name of Ms. Yang Li has become a 'hot topic' many times in 2020, and each time it is accompanied by intense discussions on gender relations among Chinese netizens. This time, she became the centre of attention because she again mocked Chinese men in her talk show, but also because she was reported to the Chinese State Administration of Radio and Television (CSART) by male netizens, on the grounds that: "The content of the show was suspected of gender discrimination. Being discriminated against by insulting men, inciting internal contradictions in democracy, creating gender antagonism, is not conducive to the harmonious development of socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Wan, 2020-12-29). For example, Yang Li expressed her attitudes towards men many times during her performance, regarding those men as ordinary but full of confidence, she also points out that men may consider themselves as the 'protagonist of the universe', etc. Some male journalists have publicly stated that Yang Li's performance was an attack on "straight men[5]", claiming that Yang Li's 'bourgeois' gender politics may threaten the solidarity of the working class (May, 2020). The practice of reporting Ms. Yang to the CSART has aroused applause from the male community on "HuPu", (a Chinese sports BBS[6]) forum. Why can Yang Li, as a comedian, provoke discussions about gender identity and gender relations in China? The reasons behind it involve multiple factors such as social-policy, social-culture, and gender relations. I argue for three reasons behind the phenomenon of resistance.

Firstly, the image of a popular female comedian conflicts with the stereotypical female role. In the past, the stand-up comedy industry was dominated by male comedians, with women using self-deprecating ways to perform to identify themselves in traditional gender roles like housewives (Votruba, 2018). However, Chinese female stand-up comedians have aggressively criticised the gender inequality within the stand-up industry. Their critical performances challenged the patriarchal comedy industry and social structure.

---

[4] Sina Weibo is a Chinese microblog website which is one of the biggest social media platforms in China.
[5] "Straight man" is a Chinese Internet word, which originally refers to heterosexual men. The post-derivation is more negative to describe men who obstinately support traditional gender roles by Chinese feminist.
[6] BBS stands for Bulletin Board System.

20

Secondly, the Internet was perceived as male technology where men have more power than women in the cyberspaces (Wajcman, 2006). A quarrelsome behaviour commonly targeting women which also happened in social media was defined as 'gender-trolling', and male netizens become the dominant group (Mantilla, 2013).

Thirdly, male netizens' backlash exposed the class gap and the changing gender relations in China's society. For example, online misogyny has been increasing for a while. As illustrated by the online debates on "The vagina's way/say[7]", active male commentators used social media to vent their displeasure of feeling behind upper-class men, turning to attack women (Wu & Dong, 2019: 484). From men's perspectives, women's shifting social status highlighted the current struggles of the lower-class men. For instance, the young female generation in China, who were raised under the one-child policy, enjoy unprecedented opportunities to receive higher education. Therefore, young women are beginning to experience increasing autonomy which is the reason for gender relations changing.

Liang, as a stand-up comedian, however notes that female comedians have advantages in performances. For example, he suggests that female comedian's speeches on gender issues are more acceptable to audiences than male comedians. In his 'Talk Show' comedy club, when a female comedian teases her husband, she can achieve a good stage effect. However, when male comedians ridicule men, some female audiences might have no sympathy, and the audience's reaction is less ideal. If male comedians ridicule women, it will trigger gendered opposition and disgust in the audience. But female comedians are also facing various difficulties. He noted that female comedians are usually sentimental on the stage, and their talks are often accused of lacking depth in context. To some extent, his opinions represented the gender inequality within the stand-up comedy because female comedians are not supported by their male colleagues, so female comedians are facing obstacles in the male-dominated industry.

Conclusion

Stand-up comedy is still a niche culture in China. I research this topic because I discovered that this phenomenon in stand-up comedy reflects the situations of most feminists in the digital era in China. Gender topics have become increasingly popular due to the broadcast of the 'Rock and Roast' comedy show. In this article, I have described and illustrated the current situation faced by Chinese female stand-up comedians such as gender imbalance in the Chinese stand-up comedy industry, and the progress they have made to become popular. Then I summarised three main reasons for the success and popularity of female comedians in China: using feminist jokes, resonating with women, breaking gender stereotypes. Also, in considering the phenomenon of resistance by male netizens after female comedians becoming well-known, I analysed the reasons behind it: the conflicting female role of female comedians; the male-dominated cyberspaces; and the class gap and gender relations in China's society. By analysing the reasons for female comedians' relative success and the difficulties they have faced, I argue that the success of female stand-up comedians, as the new heads of comedy, has a certain correlation with the progress of Chinese feminism. The awakening of feminism in recent years has

---

[7] The backlash faced by Beijing Foreign Studies University performance adaptation of Eve Ensler's The Vagina Monologues

made women pay more attention to the pressure on women and gender inequality more broadly. Women's awakening awareness has promoted the development of Chinese feminism, and female comedians have been influenced by this progression. Through their performances on the stage, Chinese feminism has been spread in a humorous way. Furthermore, the novel approach of comedy reinforces the influence of feminism on young Chinese women. In this process, female comedians' performances have been changed from a non-direct approach to confronting gender contradictions to tease men. This change has not only exposed female comedians to attacks from male netizens, but also brought more attention to feminism due to the gendered conflict online.

Overall, the progress of female stand-up comedians as 'rising stars' in comedy proves the breakthrough and resistance they have made under the patriarchal system of stand-up comedy. Their success has played a leading role in stand-up comedy and also Chinese feminism, expressing women's courageous and optimistic attitudes in a witty way to combat the gender injustice faced by women.

References

Can Kao Xiao Xi. (2020). 港媒：以最温和方式冷嘲热讽，中国女脱口秀演员声名鹊起 ("Hong Kong Media: Chinese Talk Show female comedians use the gentlest way to ridicule and satirize" in Chinese version). Can Zheng Xiao Xi Net, November 17. Available at: http://www.cankaoxiaoxi.com/china/20201117/2424921.shtml [Accessed 01 February 2021]

Chen, C. (2020). In China, women stand-up comedians offend their way into the mainstream. SupChina, October 27, 2020. Available at: https://supchina.com/2020/10/27/in-china-women-stand-up-comedians-offend-their-way-into-the-mainstream/ [Accessed 01 February 2021]

Feng, Y. (2019). 中国脱口秀这十年 ("China Talk Show Industry in the past ten years" in Chinese Version). Phoenix Weekly, October 25. Available at: http://www.ifengweekly.com/detil.php?id=8646 [Accessed 13 January 2021]

Fu, D. (2017). "Disguised Collective Action in China." Comparative Political Studies, 50 (4): 499–527.

Han, X. (2018). Searching for an online space for feminism? The Chinese feminist group Gender Watch Women's Voice and its changing approaches to online misogyny. Feminist Media Studies, 18 (4): 734-749.

Huang, Y. (2016). "War on Women: Interlocking Conflicts within the Vagina Monologues in China." Asian Journal of Communication, 26(5): 466-484.

Limon, J. (2000). Stand-up Comedy in theory, or, abjection in America. Duke University Press.

Lindberg, F. (2021). Women's rights in China and feminism on social media. Institute for Security & Development Policy, June 14, 2021. Available at: https://isdp.eu/publication/womens-rights-in-china-and-feminism-on-chinese-social-media/ [Accessed 01 July 2021]

Liu, J. (2007). Gender and Work in Urban China: Women workers of the unlucky generation. London: Routledge.

22

Liu, T. (2008). "Cyberactivism in the Women's Movement" In Chinese Women and the Cyberspace, edited by Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. pp. 95-116.

Mantilla, K. (2013). Gendertrolling: Misogyny adapts to new media. Feminist Studies, 39 (2): 563-570.

May, T. (2020). She mocked men's bluster, then came the complaints. The New York Times, December 31, 2020. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/30/world/asia/male-confidence-comedian-china.html?_ga=2.185317545.1699770439.1625521955-2135258199.1625521955 [Accessed 1 June 2021]

Mao, L. (2020). 女脱口秀演员，线上线下两重天("Female Talk Show Comedians have two different zones, one online and one offline"). Jiemian, October 18. Available at: https://www.jiemian.com/article/5129564.html [Accessed 13 January 2021]

Piwowarczyk, K. (2019). Chinese and western comedy- an introduction into cross-culture humour research between China and the West. Nowa Polityka Wschodia, 1(20): 23-29.

Tencent Vedio, (2020). The Session 5 of Rock & Roast S3. Upload 20 August 2020. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WT-gQeuJooc [Accessed 02 February 2021]

The Avengers. (2012). DVD. Marvel Studios. Burbank, California. Directed by Joss Whedon. Produced by Kevin Feige.

Votruba, A.K. (2018). Redefining feminist rhetoric in stand-up comedy: Offering cultural critique through subversion and silence. Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations. Available at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/16481/ [Accessed 17 April 2021]

Wan S. (2020). 杨笠被举报了，男网友这么没有幽默感吗？("Yang Li has been reported. Do male netizens have a sense of humour?" in Chinese Version). The Paper News, December 29. Available at: https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_10570307 [Accessed 02 February 2021]

Wu, X. & Dong, Y. (2019). What is made-in-China feminism(s)? Gender discontent and class friction in post-socialist China. Critical Asian Studies, 51(4): 471-492.

Wajcman, J. (2006). TechonoCapitalism Meets TechnoFeminism: Women and Technology in a Wireless World. Labour & Industry: A journal of the social and economic relations of work, 16(3): 7-20.

Xiao, M. (2015). "China's Feminist Awakening." The New York Times, May 13. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/14/opinion/xiao-meili-chinas-feminist-awakening.html. [Accessed 01 February 2021]

Yang Cheng Wan Bao. (2019). 女性脱口秀演员在崛起("Chinese Talk Show female comedians are on the rising" in Chinese Version.) Xin Hua Net, September 13. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/ent/2020-09/13/c_1126486762.htm [Accessed 13 January 2021]
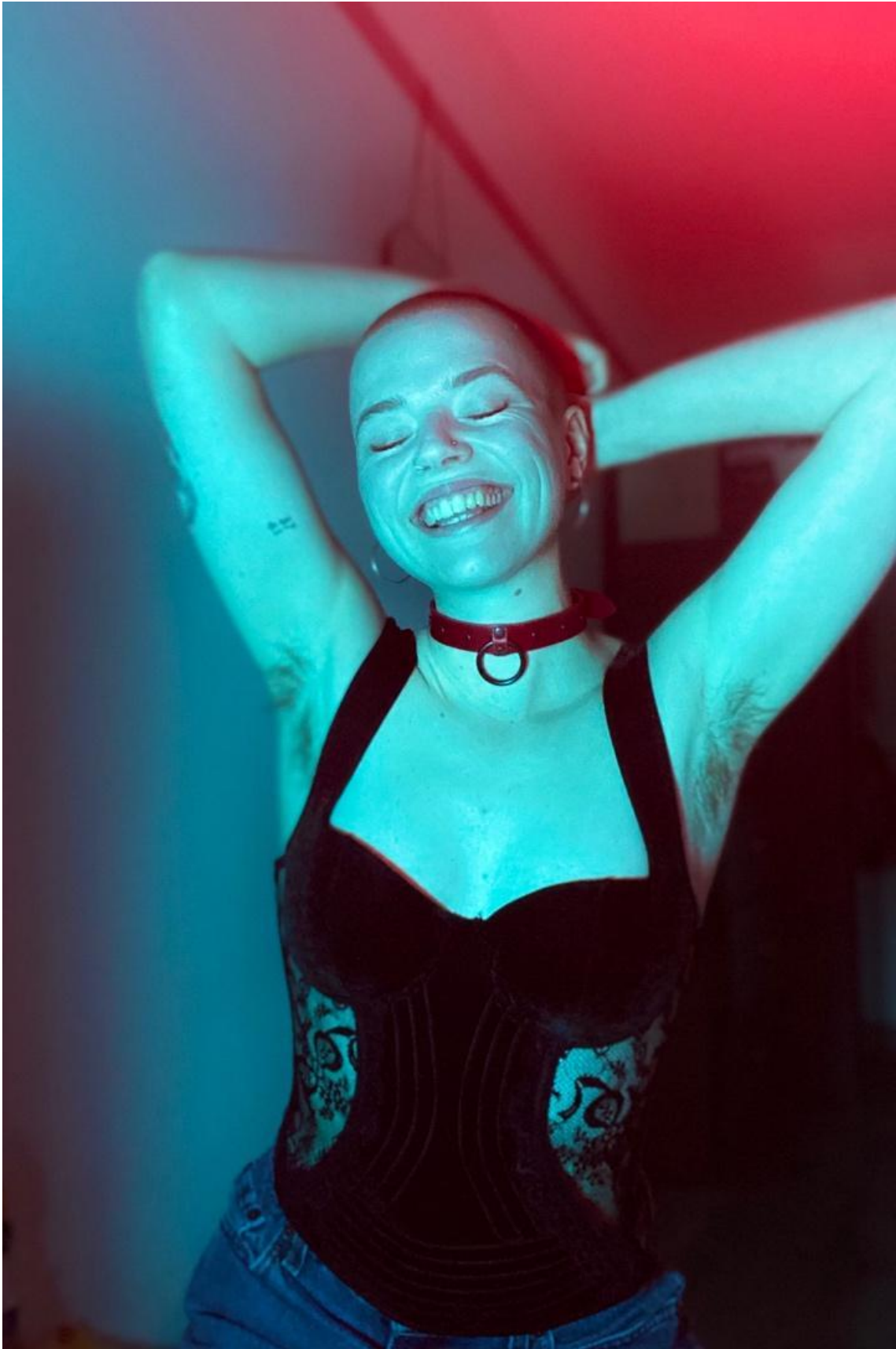
GIRL, BOY, EUPHORIA (Photo series)

Izzy Hall

GIRL

BOY

EUPHORIA

33
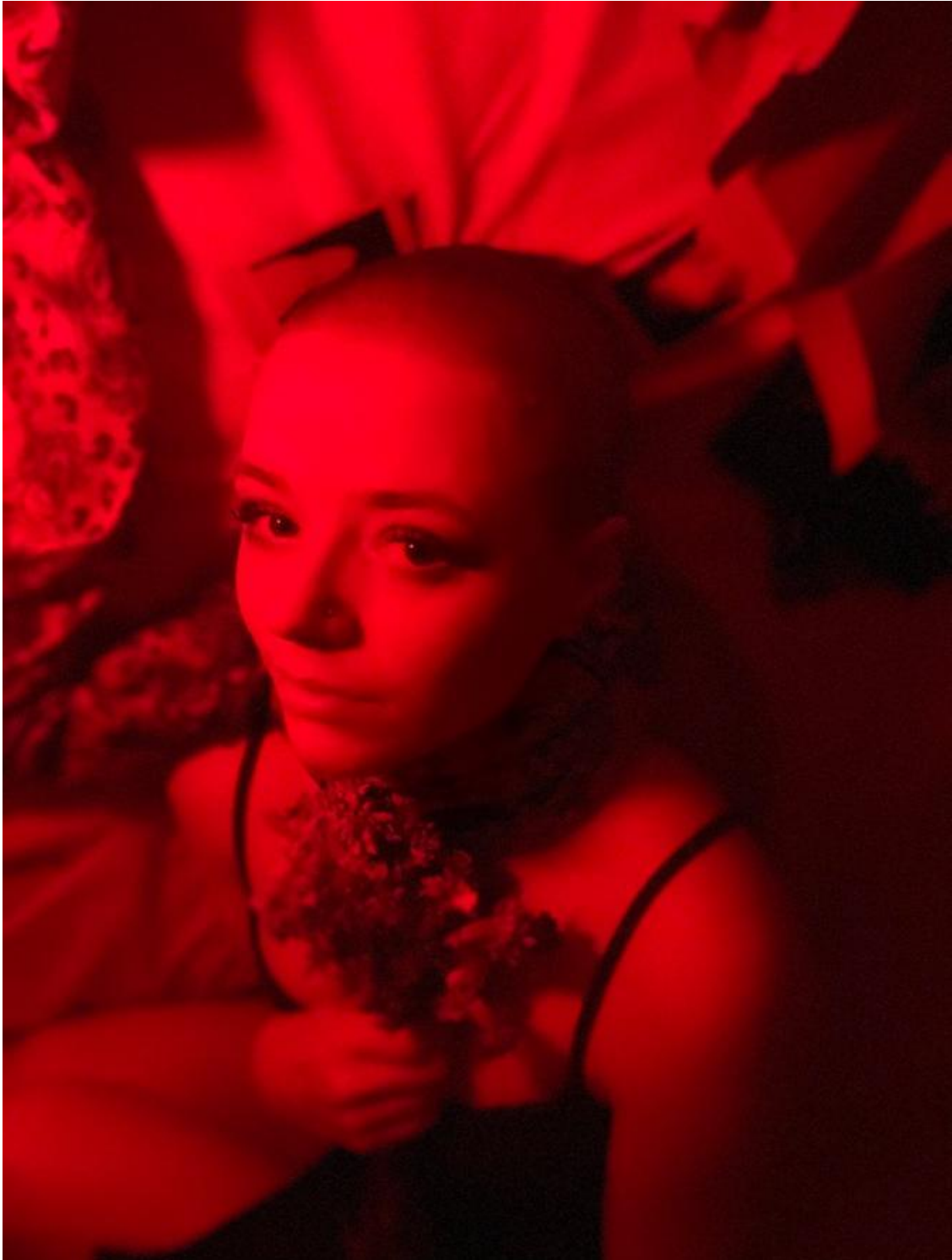
In GIRL, BOY, EUPHORIA I use essentialist ties between gender and colour to explore the conflict between my gender identity and how I am gendered by others based on aesthetics or surface impressions. Touching on themes of fertility, life expectancy, body dysmorphia, passing, I use 'gendered lightng' - reflective of essentialist ties between colour and gender - to emulate being misgendered as a woman or a man. In the final photo of the series, EUPHORIA, I combined both blue and red lighting to depict my desire to be viewed as an eclectic mix of what is constituted masculine and feminine while existing as neither one nor the other. Ace Lehner's work studying trans self-imaging praxis guided me to focus on what they describe as 'internal feelings' of trans identity; allowing me to set free the impossible task of visualising my complex and fluid gender identity in a single frame. This internal feeling of gender euphoria, for myself, is depicted in EUPHORIA not by certain aesthetics, but by joyous movement where my non-binary body can extend into space unrestricted by the traditional binary parameters of gender identity. By articulating trans subjectivities and disrupting hegemonic practice in self-portraiture we can begin to dismantle the cisgender-heteronormative gaze that perpetuates violence against transgender and non-binary bodies.

34

The Body of Mary:

Critiquing Gender in Profane Marian Images

Aurèlia Puigdomènech

Abstract

This paper offers a glimpse into preliminary findings in my doctoral research, an Arts-Based Research project in collaboration with 11 artists – who created original artwork for the project – exploring meanings of femininity in contemporary non-devotional images of the Virgin Mary. The image of Mary provides an effective symbol of social understandings and expectations of womanhood and femininity, and the majority of the participating artists use it to explore and denounce gender-based oppression, stigma, and inequalities. Mary's body becomes a focal point in the artworks as her image gets re-purposed and re-shaped, not only as a reference to patriarchal values – sexualised violence and double standards – but also as a relatable (cis)woman combating contemporary struggles – the taboo around menstruation and the ejection of the realities of early motherhood from public spaces. In order to access the meanings emerging for viewers, I ran a focus group where participants considered the artwork and discussed their views on Mary, femininity, and gender. Although the focus group's views mirrored those of the artists, the viewers did not perceive the artists' creative and political use of Marian imagery, and instead interpreted the Marys in the artworks and their bodies as 'traditional'.

For centuries, the Virgin Mary's body has been a vehicle to transmit and reinforce power structures, morals, and systems of gender. Her status as the purest woman made her a model for womankind and femininity, and she has successfully embodied societies' ideals. Alongside the gender roles and expectations she successfully embodied, Mary's image has been denounced as an instrument of control, a problematic and oppressive model, setting an impossible standard. Although she remains a religious icon, her image has spilled into the secular realm, and is present in countless profane cultural artefacts and artworks. It is this type of images that my doctoral research focuses on. The aim is to explore the relation between femininity and Mary's imagery in the (perceived) secularised West, by examining the different dimensions of meaningfulness in profane Marian

images. I set out to access the three sites of meaning-creation as proposed by Rose (production, the image itself, and 'audiencing') by designing an Arts-Based Research project centred on an art exhibition: I recruited artists to participate in the research by producing original artwork for the project and to later interview them; I studied the images through the curation of a public exhibition displaying the artwork; and I engaged with the images' audience by running a focus group with visitors to the exhibition, where we discussed the artwork and the participants created their own profane images of Mary. This is a collaborative project, where I draw from the artists' contribution of the results of their research on Mary and their artistic practice: a diverse and rich corpus of images, exploring various social issues, most of them gender-related. The 11 artists come from five countries (Ecuador, Mexico, Spain, the UK, and the USA) in which Western Christianity predominates. In this article I will present a summary of how the artists worked with Mary's body to engage in social critique and how, in turn, the focus group participants interpreted the bodies depicted as adhering to tradition rather than challenging it.

Overall, the artists that focused on critiquing gender expectations in their artwork did not pursue creating an alternative new image of Mary, but rather mostly re-purposed existing Marian imagery to visibilise certain attitudes towards women and taboos surrounding the female body. The clearest examples are the Ecuadorian artists Pamela Pazmiño and Tania Lombeida Miño's work, as both reproduce existing classical religious artworks created by men in their photoengravings and look to change their meaning by surrounding them with new text and images. Pazmiño's *Entre santas y pecadoras* (Between Saints and Sinners) plays with the age-old Madonna-whore dichotomy. She selected four images, two containing saints and two containing whores, and changed their titles to mock patriarchal attitudes towards female sexuality. The sinners are marked by their nudity and their torture: in *La de los pechos es mi mujer* (The One with the Breasts Is My Wife) a woman is being held against her will while two men are being crucified in the background, indicating that she might be next; and *Deliciosa, vana y adúltera* (Delicious, Vain, and Adulterous) shows a hellish vision full of naked people being tortured by demons. The humorous titles diffuse the ghastliness of the images and highlight the role (deviant) sexuality still plays in judging and punishing women. The casual tone of *La de los pechos es mi mujer* – as if the speaker was simply identifying their wife in a photograph – lightens the scene while it brings our attention to the woman's breasts, emphasizing her nudity and sexuality in an absurd way. Similarly, the use of the word "delicious" in *Deliciosa, vana y adúltera* gives the phrase a sensory overtone of guilty pleasure that makes the title almost comical: in Spanish, it has strong food connotations – it reminds me of a sensual yogurt or ice-cream advertisement – although it can be used (not commonly) to describe someone as being sensual. Moreover, it almost renders the moral judgement ridiculous, as an inherent quality (being sensual) is put on a par with the sins of vanity and adultery. By contrast, in the images of the saints, the humour is more directly targeted towards them. In *La quita piojos* (The One Who Removes Lice), a nun (Santa Mariana de Jesus) is catechising the poor and evangelising Indigenous children, showing her pious and caring nature, but the title removes any aura of sanctity by referring to her as a "lice remover". *La que lo tiene todo* (The One Who Has It All) also teases the Virgin Mary, who is depicted with her child and wearing the crown of heaven. Although Mary is "blessed [...] among women" (Luke 1:42), revered around the globe, crowned queen of

54

heaven, she most certainly does not have it all – she has no sexuality, and even no personality.

Lombeida Miño's work takes a darker turn, as it revolves around sexualised violence against women. The seven pieces of _Un Ensayo sobre "La Dormición de la Virgen"_ (An Essay on the Dormition of the Virgin) juxtapose depictions of the dormition of the Virgin Mary with snippets of forensic reports of femicides in Ecuador. The reports describe the gruesome aftermath of the murders of seven anonymous women, most of them including abuse, and some committed by jealous (ex)partners. These are connected to the peaceful dying Marys and dead saints (Santa Teresa, Santa Rosa, and Santa Cecilia) through medicalised images of the female reproductive system, underlining the physical consequences on Ecuadorian women's bodies that the colonial system enforced and continues to impose through images of the Virgin Mary and religious values around sexuality brought to South America by Jesuit missionaries. The piece creates a stark contrast between the idealised Virgin Mary who goes to heaven "_sin passar por la muerte_", spared from the ordeal of death, and the violent and sexualised deaths of so many anonymous women. Mary is revered for her motherhood and her virginity, while the rest of womankind is almost worthless, killed and abused for their gender, sex, and sexuality.

In _Untitled,_ Gabriela Corradini also uses a pre-existing Marian image to deliver her criticism of rigid gender expectations for women, in her own words: "it restricts your femininity, when a femininity is imposed on you". The piece pictures a trapped female figure fighting to free herself from a mould of _la Virgen de Guadalupe_. It expresses the notion of an ill-fitting and even oppressive social ideal against which one must battle in order to claim the right to exist differently. Amongst the artists, there was a generalised acknowledgement that womanhood and femininity are socially understood to encompass the roles of mother and wife, but many of them expressed having a different personal sense of how to be a woman. For instance, Celia says she is "claiming the rights of women, to not just be a mother and wife, but also to be a woman.", and Gabriela notes that "one thing is how I feel as a woman and another is how people believe I should be because I am a woman". Similarly, when asked if femininity and maternity are linked, Silvia replied: "Not to me. I believe they are culturally. It's like, like the first clear characteristic used to define us. To me, personally, they are not.", and Pamela also expressed that "you can deconstruct femininity. You cannot follow the patterns, the traditional roles and, be a woman. Perhaps not necessarily feminine".

The artists respond to this constraining and inhibiting prescriptiveness with their critique, but they do not present an alternative. Although from an iconographic point of view some of these images are quite innovative, they all use a traditional body for Mary: a young, slim, female body. The artists have established a connection with Mary through their shared, lived experience as cis-gendered women and using it to denounce issues they face as women. Moreover, their critiques of the oppressiveness of the gender expectations that Mary symbolises rely on pointing them out rather than subverting them. And so, none of the artworks depict Mary doing anything unexpected in relation to gender.

In contrast, there are also pieces that use Marian imagery to highlight what the artists consider to be positive and overlooked aspects of womanhood. In _La Virgen de la Leche_ (Our

Lady of the Milk) Victoria Inglés denounces the hypocrisy of a society that sexualises the female body but cannot bear public breastfeeding. Her tender depiction of Mary as a young mother breastfeeding her child is a very classical image in its composition, reminiscent of innumerable paintings of breastfeeding Virgin Marys, but the modern Mary and Jesus are relegated to a public toilet. Similarly, Maria Amparo Gomar Vidal's _Our Lady of the Menstruation (Bloody Mary)_ tackles head-on the taboo of menstruation by presenting the viewer with the artist's period blood, shaping a Virgin Mary with it, and by forcing the viewer to consider whether Mary bled or not. The cloth is carefully and deliberately stained with blood, creating an almond-shaped stain evoking medieval mandorlas, and the contour created by so many Virgin Marys and their veils. Menstrual blood is still a taboo that transcends geographical and cultural borders, and this was in fact the only piece censored in the exhibition I curated at YorkExplore – York's city centre public library. Interestingly, there was no issue raised with _Un Ensayo sobre "La Dormición de la Virgen"_, despite the graphic nature of the medical images of vulvas and the horrific forensic reports. This censorship implied that female genitalia are acceptable to be seen but their product is not, and that violence against women is more palatable than menstrual bleeding. Unfortunately, I never received an explanation from senior management as to why the piece could not be shown, but I was able to circumvent the censorship by providing viewers with a QR code linking to an online image of the artwork, making public the censorship of _Bloody Mary_. Not only did this accentuate the taboos tackled by the artwork, making it even more poignant, but it also brought greater attention to the piece and compelled the viewer to reflect on why such a piece would have been censored.

As part of the exhibition, I organised a focus group in the form of a workshop in which viewers discussed their impressions of the artworks and created their own profane images of Mary. The participants' discussion focused on their views of Mary and gender and mirrored the artists': critiquing the constrictive gender expectations Mary has come to represent; while also admiring Mary's strength and questioning social attitudes towards women, particularly around menstruation and motherhood. The images the participants produced also echoed the artists': they, too, connected with Mary through their personal womanhood and created images of Mary after themselves (figure A), as a "normal woman"(figure B), or as a mother (figure C). This reflects how historically Mary's body and lived experience – her motherhood, her suffering – have been a means to connect to the construct of 'woman' and inculcate in us patriarchal gender norms. The focus group, and many of the artists, recognised in Marian imagery those patriarchal values and they worked against them by also using Mary's body and lived experience to create alternative connections to those affirmed by patriarchal imagery. Interestingly, despite the parallels between the focus group and the artists – in their views and images – the former interpreted the artworks displayed as a corpus of mostly traditional, blue, passive, praying Marys. Although the artists critiqued social attitudes towards gender and experimented with iconography, they largely relied on traditional Marian imagery, without subverting Mary's gender or her performance of it, which prevented the focus group from recognising their shared concerns behind the images.

Figure A Drawing by Aida

Figure B. Drawing by Isabel

Figure C. Drawing by Nadia

With this short piece I have summarised how some of the artists collaborating in my research engaged with the Virgin Mary to critique social understandings of, and attitudes towards, womanhood and femininity; and how a group of viewers responded to, and mirrored, their work. In the artists' work Mary represents (cis)womanhood, mostly embodying the constrictive social aspects of it: Pazmiño teases dichotomous attitudes towards women's sexuality; Lombeida Miño denounces the violence female sexuality can bring; and Corradini highlights how stifling the construct of 'woman' can be. But the (cis)womanhood embodied by Mary is also vulnerable to oppression: Inglés brings to light the duplicity of social attitudes towards breasts as public sexualised objects, and private abject lactating flesh; and Gomar Vidal publicly displays one of the most prevalent taboos around female bodies. The artists have engaged with Mary's body, both by reproducing it in its traditional female form – Pazmiño, Lombeida Miño, Corradini, and Inglés – and by referring to it as a (relatable) female body – Corradini, Gomar Vidal, and Inglés. As reflected by the focus group's responses, the resulting images do not challenge viewers' expectations, Mary is still a cis-woman and she does not defy gender through her body or actions, and are viewed as traditional despite being effective and biting critical artworks that make viewers question social attitudes towards (cis)women.

References

Chambouleyron, Rafael. 'El Manto Del Orden: El Plan Evangelizador Del P. Manuel Da Nóbrega'. In Un Reino En La Frontera: Las Misiones Jesuitas En La América Colonial, edited by Manuel M. Marzal and Sandra T. Negro. Quito, Ecuador: Abya-Yala: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2000. https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/abya_yala/182.

Corradini, Gabriela. Untitled. 2019. Digital print on paper, 30 x 21 cm.

Gomar Vidal, María Amparo. Our Lady of the Menstruation (Bloody Mary). 2019. Mary's blood on canvas, 69 x 58 cm.

Inglés, Victoria. La Virgen de La Leche. 2019. Digital print on paper, 42 x 30cm.

58

Lombeida Miño, Tania. Un Ensayo Sobre 'La Dormición de La Virgen'. 2019. Photoengraving on paper, 35 x 25 cm.

Maeckelberghe, Els. Desperately Seeking Mary: A Feminist Appropriation of a Traditional Religious Symbol. Kampen, The Netherlands: Pharos, 1991.

Pazmiño, Pamela. Entre Santas y Pecadoras: Deliciosa, Vana y Adúltera. 2017. Photopolymer print, 35 x 25 cm.

———. Entre Santas y Pecadoras: La de Los Pechos Es Mi Mujer. 2017. Photopolymer print, 35 x 25 cm.

———. Entre Santas y Pecadoras: La Que Lo Tiene Todo. 2017. Photopolymer print, 35 x 25 cm.

———. Entre Santas y Pecadoras: La Quita Piojos. 2017. Photopolymer print, 35 x 25 cm.

Pinto, Joaquín. Santa Mariana Catequista. 1895. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional de Ecuador.

Ribas, Mario. 'Liberating Mary, Liberating the Poor'. In Liberation Theology and Sexuality, edited by Marcella Althaus-Reid, 123–35. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006.

Rose, Gillian. Visual Methodologies : An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials. 3rd ed. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2012.

Warner, Marina. Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary. 1st American. New York: Knopf: distributed by Random House, 1976.

On Female Muslim Bodies and Morality:

The *Tawaif* in the Indian Subcontinent

Syeda Rumana Mehdi

Abstract

This paper examines the historic role of the *Tawaif*, or courtesan in the Indian subcontinent through the analysis of "Umrao Jaan," the first popular novel written in Urdu in South Asia. Through the biographical account of Umrao Jaan, I explore themes of female empowerment, gender roles and the representation of the female Muslim body in the Indian subcontinent. A further broader theme is the role of women in religious conflict. Through my analysis of "Umrao Jaan," I discuss how *Tawaif* does not fit into the mold of a decent Muslim woman in colonial and contemporary India.

Tawaif is a fluid term, one which has changed over the years in terms of both meaning and context. Doris Srinivasan (2006) describes the *Tawaif* as "[t]he keepers of culture in pre-colonial India", who were revered as such before British colonization introduced the court system which degraded the status of the *Tawaif* in Indian. Today, the descendants of the *Tawaif* who popularised and carried on the performance traditions remain stigmatised and are synonymous with 'prostitute' for most Indians (especially in the Northern regions) and Pakistanis (Maciszewski, 2006). The word *Tawaif* in Urdu comes from the Arabic word *Tawaf* which refers to the ritual of circling the Ka'aba in Mecca (Waheed, 2014). The link between the *Tawaif* and *Tawaf* becomes even more interesting when one realises that both refer to an action that involves frequent visits. This essay will analyse the importance of the *Tawaif* in the historic Indian novel, Umrao Jaan, as a case study to highlight the role of the *Tawaif* in debates around chastity, purdah (veiling) and communal identity; issues that continue to be relevant in the Indian subcontinent today.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, South Asian literary culture experienced a crucial change (Shandilya, 2016). The issues addressed in novels shifted from themes of foreign travellers and supernatural encounters to a serious interest in questions of social reform, mainly regarding women. This is related to the introduction of colonial laws in India such as the Abolition of Sati Act (1828), the Widow Remarriage Act (1856), and the Resolution on Native Female Education (1868) as these laws raised the question regarding the status of women in Indian society. The Abolition of Sati Act banned the practice of Sati while the Widow Remarriage Act legalised the remarriage of all Hindu widows, and the Resolution on Native Female Education Act allowed girls to seek education. These laws changed the vernacular meanings of gender and sexuality as

women now began to be seen as independent of their association with men. A nineteenth century novel that brings together all these debates and raises even more questions is Umrao Jaan. Umrao Jaan was written by Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa and was first published in Lucknow in 1889. The novel centres around the life of an esteemed Muslim courtesan named Umrao Jaan and it is written in the form of a first-person account as Umrao Jaan shares the story of her life with Ruswa during a Mushaira (poetry gathering) in Lucknow. The novel is considered to be first of its kind in Indian literature mainly due to its usage of poetry and prose in storytelling.

The story is that of a young girl, Amiran, who is kidnapped by Dilawar Khan in Faizabad and taken to Lucknow in 1840 after her father testifies against him in court. She is sold to a brothel where she changes her name to Umrao Jaan and begins to court Nawab Sultan, a man of high status in the Indian society. Eventually, the Nawab leaves her after being disowned by his father and Umrao Jaan falls in love with someone else who turns out to be a fraud. During this time, Umrao Jaan flees to Lucknow during the mutiny of 1857 and as Lucknow is captured by the British, she gets the opportunity to revisit Faizabad where she is rejected by her family because of her profession as a courtesan. When Umrao Jaan returns to Lucknow after the revolt, she finds the city in ruins and, ultimately, she sells her gold and uses her savings to live a comfortable life and finally gives up her career as a *Tawaif*.

There are several aspects of this novel that render it to be a classic to this day. Firstly, the writer, Mirza Hadi Ruswa seems to speak to the reader in an indirect way. The novel is a performance that develops the character of Umrao Jaan through a double narration as narrated by Ruswa who portrays himself as a writer while the Umrao Jaan uses the art of self praising. Ruswa includes a detailed description of her physical features, her character, lifestyle, and visitors. The novel plays with the contrast regarding her innocence and virtue and her profession as a courtesan (Faheem et al., 2020).

Most importantly, Umrao Jaan lays emphasis on the portrayal of the Muslim body in particular and Muslims in general. With the Revolt of 1857, colonial Indian society underwent a social change which is reflected in the literature from that era (Shadilya, 2016). While the Muslim elite had once been respected and accepted, after the Revolt of 1857 Muslims were blamed excessively for the revolt. In this context, Muslim reformers attempted to regain their lost respect and two opposing movements were formed. The first was the Aligarh movement which aimed to educate Muslims whereas the second one was the Islamic revival movement which attempted to educate Muslims regarding Islamic teachings (Mufti, 2000). Although these movements had different aims, they presented a united front with regards to the rights and depiction of women in India. Both movements supported the notion that women should be taught codes of conduct that would enable them to become pious Islamic subjects.

It is worth noting here that the *Tawaif* was questionably absent from this discourse of education and honor as they were educated in literature and music and were thus regarded as immoral. Even though the reformers and novelists described in great detail the education of housewives and the enforcement of the practice of veiling, they openly avoided defining the role of the *Tawaif* because the wife was supposed to be everything the *Tawaif* is not. This is why Umrao Jaan is considered groundbreaking because writing within such a specific cultural context, Ruswa depicts a *Tawaif* who is neither a 'chaste housewife' nor a 'shameless prostitute' but instead offers a third unique mode (Shandilya, 2009).

As a *Tawaif*, the restrictions that applied to housewives in terms of limited mobility, less access to the public sphere and restricted interaction with men did not apply to Umrao Jaan. However, Umrao Jaan recreated the rules of seclusion for herself by giving up her profession. By doing this, she not only gave up the freedom given to her by the Indian

48

society but also the luxuries and comfort that were considered perks of being a *Tawaif*. Hence, a *Tawaif* dangles between the desire to be admired and the desire to be respected and Umrao Jaan highlights this tension in various powerful ways. By establishing herself in a profession that requires her to seek validation from the male gaze, Umrao Jaan uses her literary knowledge and poetry to be at par with what was considered a decent Muslim woman.

Throughout the novel, Ruswa analyses this tension between morality and respect and sheds light on the conflict between voice and silence (Shandilya, 2009). Ruswa uses a layered first-person narrative voice to give agency to his protagonist's experiences, but also inserts himself as an interlocutor for her to hide her from the direct gaze of the reader. Umrao Jaan's narrative voice is thus doubly controlled and mediated; first by Ruswa the author and then by Mirza Ruswa the narrator. She is shielded from the prying gaze of the reader which is an irony as Umrao Jaan is a prostitute and an entertainer and yet Ruswa wants to protect her from lustful eyes. This once again points towards the tension between the female Muslim body and its association with morality.

Not only does Umrao Jaan elucidate the prejudice in provision of education for females and the hypocrisy that existed in the Indian society towards courtesans, but its literary features also highlight the role of Muslims in India; a theme that is poignant even today. This can be seen in the use of poetic couplets. The ghazal couplets figuratively throw a veil over the actual truth which remains concealed. In the case of Umrao Jaan, she uses her performance of the ghazal to give us a glimpse of her complicated relationship with her society and her sexuality.

Umrao Jaan describes the meaning of her life as a *Tawaif*, and also tells the reader about her failures and disappointments whereas in the second part, she expresses her admiration for the women in purdah but also claims at the same time that she can never return to that life. The novel ends with her exclaiming that even though she regrets her career, it was her only means of establishing a career but having collected enough savings, she has now resigned to a life of chastity. Thus, Umrao Jaan belongs neither to the world of the *zenana* (traditional women quarters) nor to the world of the *kotha*(prostitutional abode) because she lives on the periphery of both worlds.

Ruswa captures these intense debates in poetic couplets. When Umrao returns to the ruins of Lucknow after the revolt of 1857, she can barely recognise the city and asks "*Yeh kia jaga hai, yeh kaunsa dayar hai* (What is this place, what is this locality?)" (Ruswa, 1889). This can be compared in painful contrast to the contemporary slogan of "*Jao Pakistan ya jao qabristan* (Go to Pakistan or go to the grave)" that echoed during Prime Minister Modi's election campaign in India (Van der Veer, 1997). Umrao Jaan's inability to recognise Lucknow mirrors this difficulty of belonging and of situating one's culture in an ever-changing hostile environment. It also mourns the loss of home, a sentiment that is shared by thousands of people that migrated from India to Pakistan and vice versa in 1947.

Overall, Umrao Jaan is timeless and a novel that provokes nostalgia (Jhala, 2011). The discrimination between Hindus and Muslims, between career-oriented women and housewives, and the demarcation of religious issues on political lines are all themes that are applicable in India and Pakistan even today. It also points towards the multiple identities that South Asian women possess and the role of literature in presenting these identities in a meaningful way. Much like South Asian heritage itself, Umrao Jaan paints a colourful yet multi-layered picture of Muslim women in pre-colonial India and establishes a legacy that continues to win hearts of those who seek to learn more about the history and culture of colonial India.

References

Ali, Kamran Asdar. "Courtesans in the Living Room." Minds@UW. University of Wisconsin. 2005. http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/18560.

Ansari, Usamah. "'There are Thousands Drunk by the Passion of These Eyes'. Bollywood's *Tawa'if*: Narrating the Nation and 'The Muslim'." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008): 290-316. doi: 10.1080/00856400802192929

Bautze, Joachim K. "Umrao Jan Ada: Her carte-de-visite." In *Prajñādhara: Essays on Asian Art, History, Epigraphy and Culture, in Honour of Gouriswar Bhattacharya*, edited by Gerd Mevissen and Arundhati Banerji, 137–49. New Delhi: Kaveri Books, 2009.

Brown, L. "Performance, Status and Hybridity in a Pakistani Red-Light District: The Cultural Production of the Courtesan." *Sexualities* 10:4 (2007): 409–23.

Chakravarty, S S. "Can the Subaltern Weep?' Mourning as Metaphor in Rudaali." Essay. In *Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory and Cinema in the Third World*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.

Chatterjee, Indrani. "When 'Sexuality' Floated Free of Histories in South Asia." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 4 (2012): 945–62. doi: 10.1017/S0021911812001246.

Faheem, Amara, and Akmal Basharat. "Comparative Discourses on Language Variation: A Study on Prostitutes in the Novels of Indo-Pak." *University of Wah Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2020): 71–98.

Hurlstone, Lise Danielle, "Performing Marginal Identities: Understanding the Cultural Significance of Tawa'if and Rudali Through the Language of the Body in South Asian Cinema" (2011). *Dissertations and Theses.* Paper 154. https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.154

Islam, Maidul. "Imagining Indian Muslims: Looking through the Lens of Bollywood Cinema." *Indian Journal of Human Development* 1, no. 2 (2007). https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0973703020070208.

Jhala, Angma. "Shifting the Gaze: Colonial and Postcolonial Portraits of the Zenana in Hindi and Euro-American Cinema." *South Asian Popular Culture* 9, no. 3 (October 2011): 259–71. https://doi.org/https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1080/14746689.2011.597957.

Kabir, Humayun. *The Bengali Novel*. Calcutta, Bengal: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay , 1968.

Khan, Abid, and Akshay Chavan. "Umrao Jaan Ada: The First Modern Indian Novel." Live History India : Stories that Make India. Live History India. March 21, 2020. https://www.livehistoryindia.com/history-daily/2020/03/20/umrao-jaan-ada-the-first-modern-indian-novel.

Lal, Vinay. "The Courtesan and the Indian Novel." Indian Literature 38, no. 5 (1995): 164–70. http://southasia.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/2016/09/The-Courtesan-and-the-Indian-Novel.pdf

Maciszewski, A. "Tawa"If, Tourism, and Tales: The Problematics of Twenty-First Century Musical Patronage for North India"s Courtesans. I." Essay. In *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Mani, Lata. "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India." Essay. In *Recasting Women: Essays on Colonial History*, 88–126. New Delhi: Zubaan Books, 1990.

Massey, Reginald. *India's Kathak Dance: Past, Present, Future*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1999.

English Summary. "Mirza Hadi Ruswa Umrao Jaan Ada: Analysis." February 23, 2017. https://englishsummary.com/mirza-hadi-ruswa-umrao-jaan-ada/.

Mufti, Aamir. "A Greater Story Than God: Genre, Gender and Minority in Late Colonial India." Essay. In *Community, Gender and Violence*, 1–37. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

50

An Exotic Escort's Diary…"Normal Men Don't Marry Prostitutes – Who Will?" June 3, 2019.
        https://exoticescortdiary.com/category/facts-about-the-sex-industry/.

Patel, Sujata. "Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi." *Economic and
        Political Weekly* 23, no. 8 (1988): 377-87. Accessed February 6,
        2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4378142.

Roy, Rituparna. *South Asian Partition Fiction in English*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University
        Press, 2010.

Shandilya, Krupa. "Sacred Subjects: Gender And Nation In South Asian Fiction." Cornell
        University Library. October 14, 2009.
        https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/14037.

Shandilya, Krupa. "The Widow, the Wife, and the Courtesan: A Comparative Study of Social
        Reform in Premchand's Sevasadan and the Late Nineteenth-Century Bengali and
        Urdu Novel." *Comparative Literature Studies* 53, no. 2 (2016):
        272–88. https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.5325/complitstudies.53.2.0272.

Shah, Svati P. "Sedition, Sexuality, Gender, and Gender Identity in South Asia." South Asia
        Multidisciplinary Academic Journal. Association pour la Recherche sur l'Asie du
        Sud, May 2, 2019. https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/5163.

Taqui, Roshan. "Umrao Jaan Ada." The Lucknow Observer. December 5,
        2015. https://lucknowobserver.com/umrao-jaan-ada/.

Sharar, Abdul Hakeem. "The Lucknow: the Last Phase of an Oriental Culture." Essay. New
        Delhi, 2001.

Srinivasan, Doris. "Royalty"s Courtesans and God"s Mortal Wives: Keepers of Culture in
        Precolonial India." Essay. In *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross Cultural Perspectives*. Oxford:
        Oxford University Press, 2006.

Taneja, Anand Vivek. "Review: Stereotyping the Muslim in Bombay Cinema." *Economic and
        Political Weekly* 45, no. 4 (January 2010): 30–32.
        https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/25664041.

Taylor, Woodman. "Penetrating Gazes: The Poetics of Sight and Visual Display in Popular
        Indian Cinema." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36, no. 1-2 (2002).
        https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/006996670203600110.

Veer, Peter Van Der. "The Victim's Tale: Memory and Forgetting in the Story of Violence."
        Essay. In *Violence, Identity and Self-Determination*, 186–200. Stanford University Press,
        1997.

Waheed, Sarah. "Women of 'Ill Repute': Ethics and Urdu literature in colonial India." *Modern
        Asian Studies* 48, no. 4 (2014): 986-1023. doi: 10.1017/S0026749X13000048

Reaching for Feminist Praxis:

Reflections About My Own Positionality as a Feminist Activist and Law Student in Brazil

Isabela Hümmelgen

Abstract

This paper aims at exploring the tense yet critical intersections between feminist theory and feminist activist practice, taking as a case study my own experiences within the feminist community and the academy, as a Law student and activist in Brazil. I adopt the Freirean concept of "praxis" to articulate how feminist thought/research and feminist practice/activism can relate to and inform each other. Praxis presumes that theory and practice are not irreconcilable or isolate spheres, but rather a dialectical unity, which provides a useful explanation of how action and theory mutually inform each other to transform reality. In order to further articulate these ideas, I recount my experience as an activist in the grassroots popular feminist project Promotoras Legais Populares (PLPs), commenting on the liberatory possibilities and obstacles of shattering the dichotomy between theory and practice. My engagement in feminist political activities thus serves as an example to address how the challenges of intersectional feminist activism could be faced and expressed through liberatory and politically situated theory. By reflecting on my own questions navigating both the academy and feminist collectives, I reach for a feminist praxis that can serve as a basis to tackle the tensions of being a feminist in the legal field and a researcher engaged with feminist politics.

It is a common practice in academia to provide a small "biography" when submitting a paper or doing a presentation at a conference. In my case, I have frequently felt the need to not only mention I was a Law student, but also that I was part of the grassroots popular

feminist[1] project *Promotoras Legais Populares* (referred to as PLPs)[2]. Similar to Laura Pulido (2008, p. 342), a central part of who I am and how I interact with the world relates to both *studying* political activism and *being* politically active. As I began to understand that combining scholarship and activism is not straightforward (Pulido, 2008, p. 346), I have questioned how my political involvement with feminist activism has informed my research. I realised, reflecting on my academic work, that the theoretical perspectives I adopt, the subjects I decide to explore, and the conclusions I reach are often inferred from my political engagement. At the same time, feminist theory has affected how I interact with the collective knowledge-building process of feminist communities.

As I searched for a suitable theoretical frame that can encompass both my academic and activist work, I found the concept of *praxis* valuable to reflect upon my positionalities. Here, in order to further articulate these ideas, I recount my experience as an activist in the PLPs, remarking that my contribution to the group was not directly related to my interest in research, but to my own political notions of social justice and my willingness to participate in a liberatory popular project. My political involvement, then, serves as a case study to indicate how the challenges of intersectional feminist activism can be faced and expressed through politically situated theory.

I understand *praxis* as a liberatory possibility to shatter the false dichotomy between theory and practice (Fernandes, 2016, 2019; Freire, 2011, 2019; hooks, 1994). Praxis, in that sense, does not correspond to practice: it can be comprehended by how action and theory mutually inform each other to transform reality (Fernandes, 2016; Freire, 2019, p. 35). It presumes that theory and practice are not irreconcilable or isolated spheres, but rather a dialectical unity, as suggested by Paulo Freire (2019). To further elaborate: according to Freire, who relies on a Marxist perspective, praxis "is reflection and action of men[3] about the world to transform it; without it, it is impossible to overcome the contradiction oppressor-oppressed" (Freire, 2019, p.52, my translation).

Because this is a dialectical relation, contradictions and limitations between reflection and action are expected and even desired to generate political transformation. Practice that dominates theory may stagnate because it does not fully recognise how oppression operates: when action is emphasised exclusively, then, it is converted into mere "activism" (action for action's sake), that denies the possibility of dialogue (Fernandes, 2016, p. 492; Freire, 2019, p. 108). Theory that intends to be prevalent over practice is unable to transform reality, as it risks becoming an alienated and alienating "verbalism" for not being truly committed to transformation (Freire, 2019, p. 108). Therefore, understanding reflection and action as a unity means there is no need to choose one or the other; rather, they should both be mutually articulated to work through the contradictions and limitations (Fernandes, 2019, p. 56).

---

[1] I use the concept "popular" throughout this essay referring to its meaning in Portuguese/Spanish, which is related to the "popular classes", that is, the marginalised groups in Latin American societies, such as workers, peasants, indigenous and black communities (Lebon, 2013).
[2] Briefly, the PLPs provide a feminist training-course, based on the popular education method of Paulo Freire, in order to collectively engage women on liberatory feminist practices - I later provide a better explanation of the project and how it is a major part of my understanding of feminism.
[3] I decided to keep the translation as close to the original as possible, even if it implies reproducing the hegemonic masculine form of Portuguese. I am aware of Freire's sexist and exclusionary use of the language, as noted by Fernandes (2016, p.495) and hooks (1994, p.49).

36

It is not then sufficient that individuals adopt a critical perception of the world and recognise the oppressions to which they are subjected; they should also engage in the struggle for their liberation (Freire, 2011, 2019). It means that, although Freire's liberatory pedagogy aims to overcome oppression through a process of critical consciousness, he also understands that is not an end in itself (Freire, 2019, p. 49). After all, "the power of liberatory education for critical consciousness" (hooks, 1994, p. 69) can provide actual transformations in the conditions that reinforce oppression and exclusion only when embedded in meaningful praxis (Fernandes, 2016; hooks, 2014).

In view of this framework, I can reflect on how I experienced many of the possibilities (and obstacles) of feminist praxis during the years I was a coordinator of the PLPs.[4] Since the group's purpose is to organise a six-month feminist course that provides a liberatory education for *mulheres populares*, our practices are based on Freire's popular education (Freire, 2019), which we transformed into a version of feminist pedagogy. Our jobs as coordinators is to conceptualise the course, which includes deciding on the themes that are discussed[5] and the facilitators of the debates.[6] Additionally, we organise the weekly sessions and activities, select and contact the participants and, in general, interact with the community by participating in events and running workshops (Melo et al., 2017).

During the years I was involved with the project, alongside other *companheiras*, we sought to organise a feminist educational course that could enable women to critically assess and potentially transform their realities. Because we align ourselves with *feminismo popular*[7], which draws on the discussions of Marxist feminists and relies on Latin American feminist experiences, our perspective is fundamentally anticapitalist and antiracist. Also, it is of utmost importance for us to address counterhegemonic thought and the experiences of marginalised subjects in Brazil – for example, black and indigenous groups, peasants, workers, the LGBTQI+ community, the disabled and elderly (Melo et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, engaging in critical feminist thinking through popular education, in a classroom filled with fifty women from different backgrounds, and trying to approach sensitive subjects, was at times not at all the liberatory practice we envisioned. As coordinators of the course, we constantly faced limitations and conflicts that we discussed for hours in our weekly meetings. Many times, it was a devastating and exhausting process, as we dealt with political disagreements and the contradictions raised by our own positionality, since most of us were young white students who did not share the reality of the women who participated in the course.

---

[4] I was a coordinator of the PLPs section in Curitiba from 2015 to 2018. The project started in 1992 in São Paulo and Porto Alegre, inspired by similar experiences that were happening in other Latin American countries, and is currently organised in more than twenty Brazilian cities.

[5] The themes are decided by the coordinators before the course starts, and range in a variety of topics, such as: sexual division of labour and capitalism, race and black women's struggles, sexual diversity, State and religion, women's rights, gender violence, women's health and sexualities.

[6] There is a facilitator in every session, usually a feminist activist who has some knowledge and/or experience related to the session's theme.

[7] I use the term in Portuguese because I refer to the practices of *feminismo popular* as it is specifically constituted in Latin America.

Those limitations and contradictions were particularly evident in an episode that happened in 2017, in our session about "the history of feminist movements in Latin America". While the facilitator was a fellow activist and scholar, she proceeded to recount the history of feminism through the concept of "waves", traditionally used in the United States and Western Europe. She was immediately questioned by the group for reinforcing a hegemonic and colonial discourse that marginalises the history of women's struggle in Latin America. That led to many discussions (and tears) throughout the session, since black women felt particularly (and rightfully) affected by the approach that disregarded their positionality within feminist history. It was a hurtful episode because it ended extremely badly, as one of the coordinators tried to appease the situation but made an awful racist comment. Needless to say, the repercussions were endless, as we struggled for months to regain the trust of the black participants, who were violated in an environment that was supposed to be safe.

I am critical of how we, as coordinators, handled the situation back then. Although we eventually came to properly address the episode and had many meetings to face the issues within the coordination, we did not consider the repercussions of our chosen approach when we prepared the outline for the session. At the occasion, we asked the facilitator to question the limitations of the Eurocentric and U.S.-centred feminist canon, but we still kept the discussion about Western European "feminist waves" in the course program.[8] At the time, we did not realise we were reproducing a hegemonic vision of feminism that divides, separates and excludes other narratives. Furthermore, the most damaging aspect of the episode was that our approach silenced, censored, and devalued the feminist voices of black women (hooks, 1994, p. 65).

In 2018, the same session was completely different. On that occasion, we built our knowledge of feminism centred on the claims and mobilisations of black, indigenous and peasant women in Latin America, and grounded on the political and historical context of the region, which is rooted in colonization and State authoritarianism. For that, we had to immerse ourselves in hours of study sessions and group debates to completely shift our framing of feminist history and to theoretically prepare ourselves to facilitate the debates raised by the participants. I thus recount this event as an example of how we managed to access the "healing, liberatory function" of feminist theory that can inform practice, as suggested by bell hooks (1994, p. 69).

Here praxis provides a frame to address the limitations and conflicts of feminist communities, as too often academics reproduce a "romanticized" notion of these spaces as inherently liberatory or capable of overcoming oppression by themselves, neglecting their complexities and contradictions, as Pulido observes (2008, p. 342). By adopting the notion of praxis, I come to the understanding that the "lived experience of theorizing" should be "fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation" so that the gaps between theory and practice can be tackled (hooks, 1994, p. 61).

Still, since my involvement with feminist groups allowed me to participate in collective knowledge-building, as a Law student,[9] I struggle with the issue of translating the

---

[8] This information I consulted in the records of documents and meeting minutes I kept.
[9] I here refer mostly to my experience as a Law student in Brazil, not addressing my current positionality in Gender Studies in Europe.

38

collectiveness of these ideas into academia. Not only does academic production demand individual work, but I am also conscious that my researcher position is largely tied to race and class privileges. I thus find it hard to address my positionality of being a white college-educated feminist in Brazil, who is building on ideas drawn from collective discussions I had in different contexts (hooks, 1994). That way, even when engaging with feminist theories, I am not completely comfortable with how I insert the contributions of those collective experiences into my work, as I often feel I cannot properly convey how they were informing my arguments while still keeping my research grounded within the set of formal academic rules.[10]

In that sense, I am aware that my academic production will not, by itself, "contribute to a shift in power relations" or provide "an important service simply by telling the story of a subordinated or otherwise marginalized group" (Pulido, 2008, p. 351–352). Because of that, I understand the need of tackling the conflicts and contradictions of feminist positionality in academia. As emphasised by Pulido (2008, p. 362), living as an activist and a researcher means "having to make difficult professional, ethical, and political choices and having to live with the consequences". The way I see it, the most challenging part of this process is having to constantly deal with my own doubts regarding how I position myself and address the aspects of my research that are fundamentally based on collective experiences.

I therefore posit that a truly liberatory feminist theory must be both informed by (and inform) the lived experiences of women and joined by a practice that is committed to transformative politics. Due to my involvement with the PLPs, I acquired "feminist lenses" that imply a consciousness of capitalism, racism, colonialism and multiple understandings of gender and sexuality – all of which are aspects I bring into my academic production through the topics I decide to write about and my criticism of hegemonic academic discourses in the legal field. The standpoint of *feminismo popular* has also led me to often adopt Marxist epistemologies, highlight the intersectional aspects of oppression and exclusion, and seek decolonial approaches in my studies. At the same time, I know that my constant reflexivity with regard to my positionalities and my engagement with distinct aspects of feminist theory are not enough: I must equally seek political action in order to reach for a truly feminist, liberatory, transformative praxis.

References

Fernandes, S. (2016). Pedagogia crítica como práxis marxista: Perspectivas sobre solidariedade, opressão e revolução. *Educação & Sociedade, 37*(135), 481–496. https://doi.org/10.1590/ES0101-73302016140795

Fernandes, S. (2019). *Sintomas mórbidos: A encruzilhada da esquerda brasileira.* Autonomia Literária.

Freire, P. (2011). *Pedagogia da autonomia* (57º ed). Paz e Terra.

Freire, P. (2019). *Pedagogia do oprimido* (68º ed). Paz e Terra.

hooks, bell. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* Routledge.

---

[10] That is particularly true for my undergraduate thesis, where I adopted feminist legal methods in my analysis of "parental alienation" in the Brazilian context. Besides basing my research on feminist legal scholars, I also brought the arguments of feminist groups, conveyed in their statements against the regulation of parental alienation (by the law n. 12.318/2010) (Hümmelgen, 2018).

39

hooks, bell. (2014). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Routledge.
https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743172

Hümmelgen, I. (2018). *Uma leitura feminista da alienação parental: Percepções sobre o contexto de violência doméstica e intrafamiliar* [Undergraduate Thesis, Universidade Federal do Paraná]. https://acervodigital.ufpr.br/handle/1884/62727

Lebon, N. (2013). Taming or Unleashing the Monster of Coalition Work: Professionalization and the Consolidation of Popular Feminism in Brazil. *Feminist Studies*, *39*(3), 759–789. JSTOR. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23719436

Melo, F. da R., Hümmelgen, I., Gosch, F. C., & Machado, D. (2017). Promotoras Legais Populares de Curitiba e Região Metropolitana: Disctutindo direitos por meio do feminismo popular. *In SURgência: revista de direitos e movimentos sociais*, *3*(1), 405–440. https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/insurgencia/article/view/19413

Pulido, L. (2008). Frequently (Un)Asked Questions about Being a Scholar Activist. In C. R. Hale, *Engaging contradictions [electronic resource]: Theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship*. University of California Press.

40

Chinese Single Women:

Negotiating a "Free" Self within Natal Families

Yue Liu

Abstract

Although the practices of marriage resistance and non-marital intimacies have been increasingly common since the 1980s, monogamous heterosexual marriage is still a near-universal practice in contemporary mainland China. Well-educated, professional women in their late 20s and over who have not married are labelled as "leftover women" in China. They are subjected to enormous marriage pressure from natal families, workplaces and wider society. This study aims to explore how single Chinese women negotiate individual autonomy with parents through a variety of strategies, with a focus on their pressure to marry from natal families. Based on my data, I argue that single women who manage to bargain for individual autonomy through deploying various strategies with their natal families are more likely to practise marriage resistance and their preferred intimacies.

The 1950 Marriage Law, issued soon after the founding of the People's Republic of China, established heterosexual monogamous marriage as the only legitimate form of intimacy (Kam, 2012, p.60). Since the 1980s, the development of a market economy, population mobility and reduced governmental surveillance of private lives have led to a "sexual revolution" in China; it has separated love, sex and marriage (Pan, 2006, p.21) and "redefined the character of intimate relationships inside and outside of marriage" (Davis, 2014, p.556). Hence the public, particularly the younger generation who were born in the post-reform era, are increasingly involved in a diversity of intimacies such as premarital sex and cohabitation, extramarital relationships and same-sex relationships. Even though the marriage rate is gradually declining, China is still witnessing a high marriage rate in contrast to its East Asian counterparts. In 2012, 34 % of women remained single in the 30 to 34-year-old range in Japan; this proportion was 39% in Hong Kong. In Shanghai, by contrast, the proportion of unmarried women between 30 and 34 years old was 4.5% in 2010 (Nakano, 2014).

Since September 2020, I conducted interviews with 28 single Chinese women between 23 to 38 years old in mainland China. Born under the One-Child Policy, all of them live, work,

or study in urban cities, though some come from rural China. 26 of them have obtained at least a Bachelor's degree and the majority have promising career prospects. Since the implementation of the One-Child Policy in the 1980s, only daughters have received full parental attention and financial investment and become the 'only hope' in the family because they no longer have to compete with their brothers for such resources (Fong, 2004; Ho, et al., 2018). They are expected to be well-educated and professional, and to fulfil marriage and childbearing obligations, in order to live up to the expectations set for loyal, filial daughters (Tu and Xie, 2020). Based on my data, I discovered that most single women have experienced the pressure to marry from their natal families to varying degrees; some have even faced stigmatisation and discrimination due to their singlehood. However, those who manage to deploy strategies to negotiate with parents are more likely to gain individual autonomy over their preferred non-normative intimacies and lifestyles.

> My father said (to my sister): "I don't have any other requirements. I just want you to spend a normal life as a normal person!" I hope I could marry… The main reason is that (I hope) my parents can tell their friends that they have at least one daughter married, married 'normally' (Forced Smile). (Fei, aged 28)

To make their daughters marry as soon as possible, Fei's parents "crazily" arranged matchmaking meetings for Fei and her elder sister. Since heterosexual monogamous marriage is the only legitimate and normative intimacy in China, those who do not fit into this marriage institution are deemed as "deviants" or "abnormal women" (Kam, 2012, p.65). Well-educated, professional women above 27 years old who have not married are labelled as 'leftover women' and stigmatised as 'abnormal'. "Parents will also be affected by the social stigma if they have an unmarried but 'over-age' daughter" (Kam, 2010, p.92), so many parents are anxious to push their single daughters into marriage. One reason for this is to avoid such stigmas and to enable their daughters to live a 'normal' life as a 'normal' person; another reason is to protect the reputation of the family or avoid 'losing face'. Marriage, "understood as an individual's duty to satisfy her/his family's expectation", is about the *mianzi*/face of a Chinese family (Kam, 2012, p.63). Hence many single daughters like Fei and her sister are pressured to marry early and well in order to avoid their parents being the object of others' ridicule, which will contribute to their emotional well-being and to the protection of the family reputation.

Most participants like Fei have complained that the natal family is the biggest source of pressure to marry. Even so, single Chinese women have not given up active resistance against gender norms in domestic spaces, hence many have made full use of individual resources and abilities to bargain for the autonomy over their preferred intimacies and lifestyles. Women's struggle for empowerment and autonomy has been a long process of bargaining with patriarchy, which includes diverse forms of compromise, exchange of interests and resistance. As Kandiyoti (1988, p.274) states, "different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct 'rules of the game' and call for different strategies to maximise security and optimise life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression". In my fieldwork, I discovered that single Chinese women deploy multiple strategies to negotiate autonomy with their families, and those who are financially independent are more likely to practise their preferred intimacies.

42

> Money is the best weapon, which is to shut them up. At every festival, you buy something for your parents, and then your parents will brag like 'my daughter gave me a red envelope containing 2000 CNY during the festival!' Other people will also be envious. (Tao, aged 33)

> Her (my mother's) first trip abroad was to the Philippines because I worked there… She was like 'Wow, (people) could live like this!' (Lulu, aged 29)

A *hongbao*/red envelope containing cash, an important form of gift in the Chinese context, is generally exchanged on birthdays, at weddings and on important Chinese festivals such as New Year, symbolising good luck and well-wishing (Jackson and Ho, 2020). Through giving cash and gifts regularly, Tao, who firmly resists marriage and childbearing, has managed to make her parents support her decision to remain single. Sometimes, her open-minded parents even help her share the external pressure to marry, such as changing the topic of conversation when her marriage status is questioned by relatives. Lulu, who prefers long-term cohabitation with her British boyfriend to marriage, often took her mother on overseas holidays while she worked and studied abroad. A daughter taking her mother on trips is one of the ways of showing closeness and companionship (Jackson and Ho, 2020). Lulu's mother used to hope that Lulu would marry early and to a successful man, but due to these inspiring trips, her mother's opinions on life and marriage unexpectedly changed, hence she tended to support Lulu's preferred lifestyles and intimacy.

Jackson and Ho (2020) present a few ways that Hong Kong daughters handle intimate practices to maintain good relationships with mothers, including companionship, reciprocal practical support and gift-giving. Based on a similar cultural context, Chinese women also employed such methods of being a 'filial' daughter. The practices of cash-giving and companionship by Tao and Lulu are displays of filial piety and closeness, which is showing affection and care and giving face to elders, thus contributing to their emotional well-being (Jackson and Liu, 2017; Jackson and Ho, 2020). When parents obtain substantial financial, emotional and spiritual benefits from daughters, they tend to refrain from intervening in their children's personal lives and choices. For Chinese single women, therefore, practising filial obligation is an effective strategy to 'purchase' individual autonomy from their parents.

> One of the significant reasons I wanted to stay in Beijing was I wanted to get away from the complicated relationships at home, where my family interfered in anything I was doing. (Fang, aged 30)

Fang, who graduated from a prestigious university and now lives in Beijing, comes from a disadvantaged family in Northeast China. Due to the imbalanced development between urban and rural areas, many rural parents make every effort to "support their children in leaving the village and migrating to the cities, hoping that this will secure better life chances for their children and even the whole family" (Zheng and Ho, 2016, p.457). When Fang's parents expected their only daughter to secure a better livelihood through 'marrying up' to a rich urban man, Fang was in a relationship with a man from a poor,

divorced family, which caused dissatisfaction and criticism in her family. However, the distance of over a thousand kilometres between Beijing and her hometown had freed Fang from practical parental sanction, so her parents had stopped expressing their disapproval about her relationship when I interviewed Fang. Although the freedom for unmarried women "to move out of their parents' home before marriage or to relocate to another city is relatively restricted" in China (Kam, 2012, p.61), it is more possible for rural women to achieve geographical mobility, which provides a space for them to practise intimacies without unwelcome intervention of natal families.

Wenyin, a Beijing native, failed to move out of her natal family home because she did not gain parental consent. In contrast to women from rural areas, urban women face more restrictions on mobility because "they have fewer reasons to convince their families to let them relocate to other parts of the country" (Kam, 2012, p.62) or within the same city. Although Wenyin's every move is under parental surveillance, she discovered that concealing individual affairs or hiding the details of her relationships from parents is a useful strategy to gain autonomy. When asked about her parents' attitudes towards her relationship with a married man, she said:

> I've (only) told my mother…I didn't tell her the details…She only knows I would still want this man even if he is divorced and has a child…but she doesn't know I think it's quite good if we aren't married.

In most cases, young single women conceal their sexual intimacy or dating relationships from their natal families, which helps them avoid unnecessary inter-generational disputes. Therefore, 'many parents just assume that their daughters are behaving "respectably", occasionally turning a blind eye to what daughters actually do' (Zavoretti, 2017, p.134).

When discussing strategies for dealing with inter-generational divergence or conflicts, most participants mentioned the word '*goutong*/communication'. Evans researched the experience of mother-daughter relationships among urban women born between the 1950s and 1980s, and argues that "desire for recognition of the independent emotional self through communicative practice is replacing 'traditional' expectation of the younger generation's obedience to parental authority", which "has its part to play in explaining daughters' attempts to renegotiate their sense of filial responsibility to their parents alongside rather than in contradiction to their own desires for self-fulfilment" (Evans, 2010, p.986). Some participants have actively communicated their views on dating relationships, marriage and individual issues with their parents, although the degrees and forms of communication varied greatly.

Muqing, Lily and Ting have always attempted to persuade their parents with arguments when they have disagreements; Tao often gives her parents examples of other elders getting sick due to looking after grandchildren, in order to make her parents accept the idea of celibacy; Chun prefers to communicate a comfortable private space for herself with her parents:

44

> I draw a very clear line with them, which is don't ask too much and don't try to pry into my dating relationships... I show a determined attitude every time, but the premise is I will let them know I'm dating someone.

Small chats, interesting gossips, serious discussions or even fierce quarrels offer a good opportunity for unmarried daughters and their parents to exchange opinions, increase mutual understanding and negotiate differences. As Evans (2008, p.96) demonstrates, "*goutong* provided an avenue for exploring feelings and articulations of sameness and differences, identification and recognition, as well as connectedness, separateness, and autonomy".

It is noteworthy that all the participants who actively negotiate autonomy with parents are only daughters who have received abundant parental investment in their education and careers, so they have considerable financial resources or have promising career prospects. All of them have at least a Bachelor's degree; they are currently or used to be: PhD students in top universities, psychological counsellors, teachers, corporate partners, legal specialists and white-collar staff in listed companies. Their economic situation and career prospects give them sufficient confidence and solid material foundations through which they can bargain with natal families. As Muqing said "No matter what, my parents can't sanction me financially. It's very important to be financially independent, otherwise, you can't deal with anyone!"

Conclusion

The single daughters' struggle for autonomy mirrors how inter-generational intimacy has transformed from unconditional obedience and submission to "*xiaoer bushun*/caring and supportive but not obedient" (Wang, 2019, p.29), which redefines filial piety in contemporary China. By investing emotional care, financial support and communication time in natal families, financially independent single women gain the freedom to practise their preferred intimacies such as cohabitation, premarital sex, celibacy, cross-border relationships or same-sex relationships. However, not every single woman has the equal opportunity to live as they want, particularly those who lack sufficient financial resources. In other words, pursuing a single life is only possible for those who earn enough to sustain a single personal household (Nakano, 2014), but their resistance to marital norms implies that marriage as the only normative form of intimacy is being undermined in mainland China.

References

Davis, D.S, 2014. Privatization of marriage in post-socialist China. *Modern China*, 40 (6), pp. 551-577.

Evans, H., 2008. *The subject of gender: Daughters and mothers in urban China*. United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Evans, H., 2010. The gender of communication: changing expectations of mothers and daughters in urban China. *The China Quarterly*, 204 (204), pp. 980-1000.

Fong, V.L., 2004. *Only hope: Coming of age under China's One-Child Policy*. California: Stanford University Press.

Ho, P.S.Y., Jackson, S., Cao, S. and Kwok, C., 2018. Sex with Chinese characteristics: Sexuality research in/on 21st-century China. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 55(4-5), pp.486-521.

Jackson, S. and Ho, P.S.Y., 2020. *Women doing intimacy: Gender, family and modernity in Britain and Hong Kong*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Jackson, S. and Liu, J., 2017. The social context of ageing and intergenerational relationships in Chinese families. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 4 (2), pp.1-5.

Kam, L. Y. L., 2010. Opening up marriage: married lalas in Shanghai. In: C. Yau, ed. *As normal as possible: Negotiating sexuality and gender in mainland China and Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. pp. 87-102.

Kam, L. Y. L., 2012. *Shanghai lalas: Female Tongzhi communities and politics in urban China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Kandiyoti, D.,1988. Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), pp. 274-290.

Nakano, L. Y., 2014. Single women and cosmopolitan re-imaginings of gendered citizenship in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Tokyo. In: Y. N. Soysal, ed. 2014. *Transnational trajectories in East Asia: Nation, citizenship and region*. London: Routledge. pp.167-178.

Pan, S., 2006. Transformations in the primary life cycle: the origins and the nature of China's sexual revolution. In: E. Jeffreys, ed. 2006. *Sex and sexuality in China*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 21-42.

Tu, M. and Xie, K., 2020. Privileged daughters? Gendered mobility among highly educated Chinese female migrants in the UK. *Social Inclusion*, 8(2), pp.68-76.

Wang, S. Y.,2019. When tongzhi marry: experiments of cooperative marriage between lalas and gay men in urban China. *Feminist Studies*, 45 (1), pp. 13-35.

Zavoretti, R., 2017. Being the right woman for "Mr. Right": Marriage and Household Politics in Present-Day Nanjing. In: G.S and S.H, ed. 2017. *Transforming patriarchy: Chinese families in the twenty-first century*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. pp.129-145.

Zheng, J. and Ho, P.S.Y., 2016. Contextualising transformed intergenerational relationships in China: using adult daughters' mate selection as an example. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 6 (3), pp.447-462.

46

Accounting

Ninutsa Nadirashvili

I read with fingers covering my eyes

You can see why writing is a problem

This time it was about my own women

How their men "fall in love" and abduct them

That must be the definition of love that

Made me scream last week when I was counting

Articles on queers as decimal humans

Wish I was the one who's charged with rounding

3/4 of a month back I remembered

The time when I first met young Emmett Till

Mom is reading a book about honor

And burning is a special way to kill

She says the book is sad

The whole country is sad I feel

Yet nobody is held accountable

And my essays want me to steer the wheel

Nowhere to go unless I type them up but

This next set is on childhood trauma

And it has almost become too haunting

To wonder why I did not choose something

I could just study with both eyes open

Like maybe accounting?

Voice recording: https://rb.gy/giz03d

"Women Are Women":

Right-Wing Women's (Essentialist) Conceptualisation of Sex/Gender in Germany and Austria

Nicole Roy

Abstract

In this article, I explore how women in the political parties Alternative *für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD) and *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party of Austria, FPÖ) make sense of the social categories: women and men. I draw on preliminary research findings from my interviews with 24 women members. The main aim of my doctoral project is to analyse how women account for their active support of the right wing and how they negotiate their positions in the parties. The rationale for my research is that right-wing parties have gained more influence and power in most European countries in recent times, and women's rights are often either disregarded or misused for a racist agenda. Nonetheless, a diverse range of women are supporting those parties. In this article, I argue that there are conflicting as well as matching conceptualisations of sex/gender between my participants, which are dominated by narratives of biological differences; however, those are entangled with social structural narratives. It is crucial to analyse how women in the parties conceptualise sex/gender, because for some participants those categories are an important part of their worldview and part of their reasons for joining the parties.

Introduction

From my feminist perspective, women's support for the right-wing parties *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD) and *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party of Austria, FPÖ) seems paradoxical. The paradox does not arise from the essentialist misconception that women are more peaceful (Lang, 2017, p. 72), but from the parties' antifeminist stances and patriarchal discourses on gender and their effects on women and people who are not fulfilling the essentialist characteristics of sex/gender. These characteristics are supported by far-right parties and their antifeminist stances include, for example, their usage of the male form as default in language which supports an

androcentric and patriarchal society (Falter and Stern, 2019). Therefore, I explore the crucial question of how women in the parties themselves use an essentialist view of sex/gender to explain the social categories: women and men. For them, those binary categories follow a 'fixed biological sex' excluding the social negotiability of sex/gender. This article is informed by my wider doctoral research, in which I analyse how women narrate their active support of the far right and negotiate their positions and spaces within the parties.

Continuously, right-wing parties use their influence in most European countries to disregard or misuse women's rights for a racist agenda; however, the number of women actively supporting those parties is increasing (Elies and Gutsche, 2018, pp. 6-9). There is a transnational rise of conservative and right-wing movements, who aim to 'restore' a 'natural' gender order and attack what they call 'gender ideology', which threatens this order (Kovàts, 2018; Klammer and Goetz, 2017). This phenomenon is widely discussed in research on the far right. The AfD and FPÖ are identified as channels for attacks on 'gender ideology'. Scholars draw attention and critically analyse right-wing parties' narratives on 'gender ideology' and their antifeminist stances (Mayer et al., 2020; Lang, 2017; Schmincke, 2020). Furthermore, they identify the significance of the category gender for analysing the far right and its political parties (Klammer and Goetz, 2017; Blee, 2020; Akkerman, 2015). Xydias (2020) explores women's explanations and gendered justifications for their AfD affiliation, she mainly focuses on publicly available information and only includes two interviews with AfD politicians. I contribute to understanding the right-wing discourses on gender by analysing the narratives of women members at a local and national level, enabling an understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon beyond the parties' lines. I argue that the interviewed women held opinions on sex/gender that were in line with the parties' gender essentialist positions; however, their views were more complicated. Their narratives are not cohesive and partly contradict their parties' discourses.

Narratives of women members and the parties' discourses

In 2020, I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with 18 video/phone calls as well as one face-to-face and five written interviews. Of the 24 women, 20 women actively support the AfD and four the FPÖ, this includes career politicians as well as members who are active at a local level. The first results explored here, on the participants' discussion of sex/gender, arose from my initial analysis of the data. Using socially oriented narrative research, I investigate how my participants construct and express their understandings of their realities around their party membership. This also allows me to position narratives in wider social discourses based on participants' interpersonal, social and cultural contexts (Esin et al., 2013, pp. 204-205). My participants situate their narratives in the discourses of their parties, however, they then continue adding their own experiences/ideas, which partly differ from the parties' discourses. Their everyday discourses can thereby be influenced by or influence the larger discourses (Cohen, 2010, p. 70).

My participants use gender essentialism and deterministic social accounts of gender to conceptualise sex/gender. Gender is used as a social category to essentialise women as fundamentally different to men. Characteristics are applied to men and women, assigning

them to different stable qualities (Lee et al., 2020, p. 685). I argue that essentialising women as fundamentally different to men contributes to gender inequality as it favours the status quo. I follow Judith Butler's (1988) argument against gender essentialism: "[g]ender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature" (p. 531). In opposition to this, essentialist arguments tend to state that the 'natural' is desirable (Lee et al., 2020, p. 699). Most right-wing actors use biology to explain the existence of a dual gender system, where men and women are part of a binary construction (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2017; Klammer and Goetz, 2017). The AfD and FPÖ are closely connected with antifeminist actors, who want to 'restore' the 'natural gender order' and argue against the social negotiability of gender and sexuality. The feared abolition of those differences is defined as 'gender madness', a term used by right-wing politicians since the early 2000s (Klammer and Goetz, 2017, pp. 82-85). In their eyes, this 'madness' destroys an intact social order, which leads to chaos (Lang, 2017, p. 68). The binary categories are an important part of their worldview. In this context, I want to avoid providing an uncritical platform for these narratives and falling into the trap of essentialism myself. My aim is to build a critical understanding of my participants' binary conceptualisations without reproducing them. I follow the approaches of other researchers who research groups whose worldviews they oppose, and who fear to provide a platform for those views (Blee, 1998, p. 388; Back, 2002, pp. 34-35).

Fear of change: Narratives on sex/gender

While my interviews do not demonstrate an exclusively essentialist biological conceptualisation of sex/gender, almost all participants used some biological explanations. For some those are just side notes and mixed with social explanations and for others they are central. Most participants argued that women are 'naturally' different from men but equal in their rights. There are, however, contradictions both between the participants' accounts and within participants' individual interviews; the views expressed are more complicated than the parties' official lines suggest. Bitzan (2017) argues that women's reasons to join right-wing parties can depend on gender specific and/or gender unspecific aspects. Traditional gendered roles propagated by the far right are not necessarily a relevant motivation to join (p. 69). For some of my participants they were part of their reasons, for others they were not.

One way women members conceptualise sex/gender is through biological assumptions. The main narrative of some participants is that the sexes are 'biologically fixed' as men and women. To illustrate this, I will provide the account of Susanne, who is in her mid-50s and supports the AfD on a local level. After my question on the party's definition of traditional gender roles, she stated:

> So, for me, there are biological sexes, which are male and female.
> For me only women can get children and men make children.
> Everything else regarding sexuality or how a person feels in his
> body, is his private affair.

Her main point is that sex/gender is 'biologically fixed.' This is, for her, linked to the 'roles' women and men have in procreation whereby the role of the woman is passive as receiver of the child and the man's role is active as creator of the child. Additionally, she

recognises that a person can feel outside those categories, but she believes they should keep this private, mentioning that she has friends, who "feel like a woman in their male body." She stated that "Germany offers all possibilities to everyone to do everything with his life regardless of gender, sexuality… or how he feels in his body." In other words, she argued that there is no need to discuss sex/gender, because individuals are responsible for their own lives, no one hinders them. In doing this she emphasised her own training in a male-dominated manual profession, which she took to show that anyone can do anything. Susanne thus reiterates the narrative of 'biologically fixed binaries.' However, for her those do not hinder women and men to take the roles they want to, this is everyone's individual responsibility and not a role for the state. She ignores gender and other social barriers and does not see the need to discuss the implications of gender for life chances.

Additionally, I want to point out that Susanne used male pronouns and nouns as default throughout the interview, which is in line with the party's rejection of gender-reflective language (Lang, 2017, p. 69). My other participants also adopted the male default and in one of my interviews gender-reflective language was called a "mutilation of language", which again mirrors the AfD's and FPÖ's discourses on this topic. I also received an email rejection for an interview request, in which I was addressed as a man and it was stated: "gender does not play a role for us". Addressing me as a man while I am a woman indicates that the respondent ridiculed the usage of gender-reflective language and intentionally disrespected me. In Germany and Austria, the linguistic construction of gender biases has been debated since the 1970s and 1980s (Günthner, 2019; Krondorfer, 2018). The debate against gender-reflective language has been led by several actors including the right wing but also popular media, who, for instance, argue that changing language is oppression of free speech and opinions (Günthner, 2019; Mayer and Goetz, 2019). The debates show their fear of change. The actors ignore studies, which show that the usage of male pronouns and nouns leads to a perceived overrepresentation of men in texts with women and non-binary people remaining invisible. This leads to the reinforcement of existing unequal power relations (Günthner, 2019, pp. 573-574; Krondorfer, 2018, p. 238).

I also identified a reinforcement of existing unequal power relations in most interviewees' narratives on the attribution of specific characteristics to women and men, which is linked to the idea that women are different from men. The explanations for those characteristics fluctuate across the interviews but contradictions exist also within individual interviews. For the most part men and women's specific characteristics were seen by my participants to be the result of biological differences; however, this was not consistently pursued throughout interviews. One example for fluctuating explanations can be found in AfD politician Petra's interview. On the one hand, she argued that women are normally politically less conservative, preferring harmony, avoiding conflict and being compassionate. On the other hand, she indicated that women are less likely to pursue a political career because of structural problems within the socialisation of young girls. Therefore, she argued for fostering girls' self-esteem early on. This shows a structural explanation of gendered characteristics. However, in the same interview she stated that she is for equality but not for sameness, invoking the notion of biological differences between the sexes. Common phrases in the interviews included: "women are too sensitive", "women are not so good in boring party work", "women are not as political" and

"men are braver". Many interviewees mentioned that politics is a tough business and that many women are 'too sensitive' as they 'normally avoid conflict,' which if I follow their argument means that women in politics are stronger than the 'normal' woman. In other words, my participants' characteristics are not necessarily the characteristics they specified for women, which implies they see themselves as exceptional women. This is of relevance to discussions on how women in right-wing and conservative parties negotiate the contradictions between their political role and their framing of gender and femininity (Pettersson, 2017; Klatch, 1987).

The participants' conceptualisation of sex/gender is dominated by their fear of change and the common narrative that changes have gone 'too far', which leads to their perception that women are not allowed to be women anymore. Mulinari and Neergaard (2015) explore the same narrative in their research with women in the right-wing Swedish Democrats. The phrase "things have gone too far" recurred several times in their research (p. 515). I will illustrate this narrative with Jessika's account. Jessika is in her mid-30s and supports the FPÖ locally. She stated that women should have the same rights as men, however she added "women are women." During the interview, she emphasised that equality between women and men is one of her main topics, however she said:

> There are certain topics, where I say, this is too much for me, just too much, I am of course, I am a woman myself, I want that women have the same rights as men and that we are equal but not the same, there should still be differences.

She connected those differences with characteristics attributed to women. For her 'feminists' try to be more masculine than men. This perception on feminism is entangled with her conceptualisation of womanhood and sex/gender and can also be found in most of the interviews. Several participants argued that "many who call themselves feminists are exaggerating and go too far", which, for them, means that the 'natural' divisions of the sexes are abolished and they fear to not be allowed to be women anymore. This is connected to the parties' discourses on the threat of 'gender ideology'. However, some participants support a certain level of feminism, Jessika said that she hopes that all women are feminists, but not 'those feminists', who want to erase 'natural' differences. In some interviews active support for women is approved, but the participants' relationships with feminism is ambivalent.

Conclusion

Most participants argued that women are different from men but equal in their rights. All participants have – at least partly – a biologically essentialist way of seeing womanhood and sex/gender. However, in some narratives, this is entangled with social structural explanations, which shows that their views are often more complicated than the parties' lines. Participants' roles in the parties somewhat contradict their conceptualisations of sex/gender, most describe themselves as exceptionally strong women. They are women members of parties, who attack 'gender ideology' and feminism, but some still emphasise the importance of a 'moderate' level of feminism if the 'differences' between men and women are secured. Their narratives on sex/gender matter because of the significance of

64

gender and antifeminism to the AfD and FPÖ. Women members help to portray the parties as women friendly and therefore help to spread ideas opposed to 'gender ideology'. Therefore, there is a need for understanding these women's narratives.

References

Akkerman, Tjitske. (2015). Gender and the radical right in Western Europe: A comparative analysis of policy agendas. *Patterns of Prejudice,* 49(1–2), 37-60.

Autor*innenkollektiv FE.IN. (2019). *Frauen*Rechte und Frauen*Hass. Antifeminismus und die Ethnisierung von Gewalt.*Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag.

Back, Les. (2002). Guess who's coming to dinner? The political morality of investigating whiteness in the grey zone. In Vron Ware and Les Back, (Eds.). *Out of Whiteness.* London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 33-59.

Bitzan, Renate. (2002). *Selbstbilder rechter Frauen. Zwischen Antisexismus und völkischem Denken.* Tübingen: edition diskord.

Bitzan, Renate. (2017). Research on gender and the far right in Germany since 1990: Developments, findings, and future prospects. In Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan and Andrea Petö, (Eds.). *Gender and far right politics in Europe.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 65-78.

Blee, Kathleen M. (1998). White-knuckle research: Emotional dynamics in fieldwork with racist activists. *Qualitative Sociology,* 21(4), 381-399.

Blee, Kathleen M. (2020). Where do we go from here? Positioning gender in studies of the far right. *Politics, Religion & Ideology,* 21(4), 416-431.

Butler, Judith. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal,* 40(4), 519-531.

Cohen, Leor. (2010). A tripartite self-construction model of identity. In Deborah Schiffrin, Anna De Fina and Anastasia Nylund, (Eds.). *Telling stories: Language, narrative, and social life.* Washington: Georgetown University Press, pp. 69-82.

Elies, Stefanie and Gutsche, Elisa. (2018). Vorwort. In Elisa Gutsche, (Ed.). *Triumph der Frauen? The female face of the far right in Europe.* Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, pp. 6-9. [Online]. Available at: https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/14630.pdf [Accessed: 7 December 2018].

Esin, Cigdem, Fathi, Mashoureh and Squire, Corinne. (2013). Narrative analysis: The constructionist approach. In Uwe Flick, (Ed.). *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis.* London: Sage Publications, pp. 1-20. [Online]. Available at: https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243 [Accessed: 15 March 2020].

Falter, Matthias and Stern, Verena. (2019). Zum „Schutz des Volkes" gegen Gender. Eine geschlechterpolitische Verortung der FPÖ. In Judith Goetz et al., (Eds.). *Rechtsextremismus. Band 3: Geschlechterreflektierte Perspektiven.* Wien, Berlin: Mandelbaum Kritik & Utopie, pp. 185-204.

Günthner, Susanne. (2019). Sprachwissenschaft und Geschlechterforschung: Übermittelt unsere Sprache ein androzentrisches Weltbild? In Kortendiek, Beate, Riegraf, Birgit and Sabisch, Katja, (Eds.). *Handbuch Interdisziplinärer Geschlechterforschung.* Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 571-579.

Klammer, Carina and Goetz, Judith. (2017). Between German nationalism and anti-Muslim racism: Representations of gender in the Freedom Party of Austria. In Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan and Andrea Petö, (Eds.). *Gender and far right politics in Europe.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 79-94.

Klatch, Rebecca E. (1987). *Women of the new right.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Kováts, Eszter. (2018). Questioning consensuses: Right-wing populism, anti-populism, and the threat of 'Gender Ideology'. *Sociology Research Online,* 23(3), 528-538.

Krondorfer, Birge. (2018). 'Schreibweisen dieser Art sind daher zu unterlassen'. Wem gehört die Sprache? Eine paradigmatische Geschichte aus Österreich. In Juliane Lang and

Ulrich Peters, (Eds.). *Antifeminismus in Bewegung. Aktuelle Debatten um Geschlecht und sexuelle Vielfalt.* Hamburg: Marta Press, pp. 233-252.

Lang, Juliane. (2017). Feindbild Feminismus. Familien/ und Geschlechterpolitik in der AfD. In Stephan Grigat, (Ed.).*AfD & FPÖ – Antisemitismus, völkischer Nationalismus und Geschlechterbilder.* Baden-Baden: Nomos, pp. 61-78.

Lee, Karisa Y., Reisl, Harry T., and Rogge, Ronald D. (2020). Seeing the world in pink and blue: Developing and exploring a new measure of essentialistic thinking about gender. *Sex Roles*, 83, 685-705.

Mayer, Stefanie, Ajanovic, Edma and Sauer, Birgit. (2020). Man, woman, family. Gender and the limited modernization of right-wing extremism in Austria. In Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, (Eds.). *Right-wing populism and gender. European perspectives and beyond.* Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 101-116.

Mayer, Stefanie and Goetz, Judith. (2019). Mit Gott und Natur gegen geschlechterpolitischen Wandel. Ideologie und Rhetoriken des rechten Antifeminismus. In Judith Goetz et al., (Eds.). *Rechtsextremismus. Band 3: Geschlechterreflektierte Perspektiven.* Wien, Berlin: Mandelbaum Kritik & Utopie, pp. 205-247.

Mulinari, Diana and Neergaard, Anders. (2015). Racist dreams and municipal budgets: women representing a culturally racist party in local politics. *Social Identities*, 21(5), 506-523.

Mulinari, Diana and Neergaard, Anders. (2017). Doing racism, performing femininity: Women in the Sweden Democrats. In Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan and Andrea Petö, (Eds.). *Gender and far right politics in Europe.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 13-28.

Pettersson, Katarina. (2017). Ideological Dilemmas of female populist radical right politicians. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 24(1), 7-22.

Schmincke, Imke. (2020). Sexual politics from the right. Attacks on gender, sexual diversity, and sex education. In Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, (Eds.). *Right-wing populism and gender. European perspectives and beyond.* Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 59-74.

Xydias, Christina. (2020). This was the one for me. AfD women's origin story. *German Politics and Society*, 38(1), 105-125.

66

A Continuous Revision of Practice:

An Exploration of how 'Religion' and 'Feminist Politics' were Negotiated by the Jewish Feminist Collective 'B'not Esh' in its Founding Year

Sophia Day

Abstract

The essay explores how B'not Esh negotiated the tensions between religion and feminist politics throughout its founding year of 1981, to identify and value the existence of an attempted religious feminist practice that ultimately has the potential to have a lasting impact on Judaism and feminism. In doing so, B'not Esh revised male-dictated Jewish liturgy regarding the Kabbalat Shabbat worship to incorporate the experiences, opinions and control held as women towards their Jewish religious practice. I propose that such revisioning was justifiable within Judaism through a reconstructionist lens as the Reconstructionist movement placed importance on the aspiration towards social idealism and liturgical interpretation to align with modern lives. Whilst Jewish women were often met with criticism within the second wave of feminism in America due to their commitment to Judaism, deemed patriarchal in nature, such a continual prioritisation of the restructuring of male-dominated religious practices resulted in the destabilisation of the gendered hierarchy within Judaism, and likely challenged anti-Semitism in the second wave of feminism. Therefore, the essay demonstrates the importance of the work of B'not Esh towards the continual endeavour of equality within Judaism and the second wave of feminism.

The following essay explores whether B'not Esh, a self-proclaimed American Jewish Feminist Spirituality Collective, were able to negotiate the tensions between religion and feminist politics throughout its founding year of 1981. Therefore, suggestions as to how such tensions may have been negotiated are proposed. Consequently, the essay provides an exploration towards whether the Reconstructionist movement, which "seeks to integrate modern ideals, foremost among them a commitment to democracy, into Jewish life" (Alpert, 2021), influenced the continual development of feminism within Judaism. This will be investigated through the consideration and analysis of B'not Esh's feminist

approaches to the Jewish Kabbalat Shabbat worship. Religion has been viewed as oppressive when there is a conservation of a gendered hierarchy, which does not align well with the shared understanding of feminism that aspires to work towards equality within society (Zwissler, 2012). Ackelsberg (1998) argues that when feminism chooses to dismiss religion, this results in the lack of acknowledgement of the experiences of religious women. Such an argument demonstrates the necessity of a deeper academic analysis of B'not Esh, in order to identify and value the existence of an attempted feminist practice that ultimately has the potential to have a lasting impact on Judaism and feminism.

Religion along with its corresponding beliefs is defined by Gross (1996) from a feminist perspective as an answer to one's important questions in life that are of great personal concern. From this, religion can be understood as a means of providing meaning and worth to an individual through belief systems. The basis of feminist politics has been defined as the endeavour to create social change, which can improve the lives of women, through the promotion of equality in society (Avishai, 2016) resulting in a questioning of the gender divide within a patriarchal society. Faver (2000) writes that some secular feminists have chosen to abandon religion due to its traditional patriarchal dimensions. Through such an understanding that feminism often questions the internal running of societies, as a means of promoting equality and benefiting women's positionality, it is evident that feminist politics do not align well with the traditional internal power structures of religion presented by Faver. However, religion can provide women with satisfying experiences in which a woman can be empowered through support from a religious community, which influences internal positive relationship building (Ozorak, 1996). Such empowerment gained by women through engagement with religion provides an opportunity to surpass possible religious traditional patriarchal dimensions, in which women are valued as equal to men. This proves that religion can play a part in the evolution of feminism.

When likening such a discussion between feminism and religion to Jewish women's involvement in feminist politics, religious Jewish American women were active members of the women's liberation movement within the United States in the 1970s (Umansky, 1988). Standing for equal rights for women within society throughout the women's liberation movement resulted in Jewish women reflecting on their positionality within Judaism, which further led to the questioning of how they can achieve equality within private and public aspects of their life (Antler, 2020; Lerner, 1977). This resulted in the founding of feminist groups such as the B'not Esh collective in 1981, consisting of Jewish feminists, who have subsequently been meeting annually (Lilith: Independent, Jewish and Frankly Feminist, 2018). The main aim of B'not Esh is the reconsideration and consequently the alteration of Judaism and Jewish life (B'not Esh, 2020), including the revisioning of previous theology towards Judaism that is inclusive of women's history and experiences (Ackelsberg et al, 1981).

At the first B'not Esh meeting in 1981, the members conducted a traditional Kabbalat Shabbat, which involved a communal prayer that welcomed the Sabbath Queen by the use of spiritual dancing and singing (Ackelsberg, 1986). Freundel (2011) writes that when conducting a traditional Kabbalat Shabbat within a communal prayer setting, it usually consists of a key religious text that is traditionally recited by a minyan. When

acknowledging that a minyan conventionally contains ten Jewish men (Greene and Brodbar, 2010) and that B'not Esh only welcomed those who identified as women at this point (Ackelsberg et al, 1981), B'not Esh took an alternative feminist approach to Kabbalat Shabbat -actively choosing to challenge the previously gendered elements - by having the key texts read by women. Despite B'not Esh not explicitly stating what branch of Judaism the Jewish feminist collective is categorised as, the radical transformation of the Kabbalat Shabbat practice by B'not Esh is justifiable through the lens of the Reconstructionist movement. This is demonstrated by the argument proposed by the founder of the Reconstructionist movement, who wrote that Jewish individuals are able to evidence their interpretation of social idealism within Jewish public worship (Kaplan, 2010). In turn, the Jewish feminist members' social idealism towards their religious practice was prioritised so that the opinions and beliefs of women were respected and integrated into Jewish worship. Furthermore, the American secular and religious Jewish women who were at the forefront of the second wave of feminism insisted that there be equality between the sexes including equal rights for women (Umansky, 1988). By having the sacred texts read by women, B'not Esh shared this sense of equality within the second wave of feminism in the United States throughout the 1970s.

Meanwhile B'not Esh were also adhering to the spiritual recommendation outlined within the Reconstructionist movement. The Reconstructionist movement ordained women as rabbis in the 1970s to aspire towards gender equality, but conservative Judaism did not ordain female rabbis until 1985, due to the concern they would not aspire to traditional conservative expectations held of women, such as being exclusively a mother and wife (Bear, 2019). By accepting women in leadership roles, the Reconstructionist movement gave exposure to the voices of the frequently previously silenced voices of women in Judaism (Englander, 2004). Thus, as other strands of Judaism remained unequal towards Jewish women in 1981, the women of B'not Esh were one of the forerunners of equality between genders within Judaism through the adoption of leadership roles within Jewish religious practice.

Although some members enjoyed the Kabbalat Shabbat by the means previously detailed, a few members reflected on the happening negatively, feeling frustrated that all of the members had conducted the worship traditionally, by the use of the customary liturgy that is male dictated (Ackelsberg, 1986). Avishai (2008) argues that when one closely follows a religion, they are often doing it by semiconscious means that suit social and religious norms. In this regard, whilst some members of B'not Esh considered their practice as wholly feminist (B'not Esh, 2018; Ackelsberg et al, 1981), they may have been oblivious to all of the non-feminist aspects of their worship, due to the possible familiarisation of previous former non-feminist religious culture; which is understood as being heavily male-dominated (Sered, 1996). One may argue from such a happening that the attempted Jewish worship was not wholly feminist and thus was not effectively challenging the domination of Jewish women in every instance throughout such a practice. As a result of Judaism being deemed as the original cause of patriarchy (Umansky, 1988), some non-Jewish feminists within the second wave women's movement were critical of Jewish feminists' involvement, which in turn led to internal anti- Semitism (Ackelsberg, 1998). Plaskow (1991) writes of such exclusion within the women's movement in which white and often Christian feminists constructed dominant accounts of women's

26

experiences which excluded other religious and cultural perspectives, advocating that the progression of feminism would only be sustained if one identified themselves with such a dominant experience and to thus rid oneself of their opposing self-identification. Yet, Plaskow writes that when one would silence their Jewish heritage and/or religion to be welcomed within the women's movement that left such anti-Semitism unquestioned, likely resulting in the extended oppression experienced by Jewish women. Yet, according to Ackelsberg (1986), B'not Esh aspired to the feminist stance that the 'personal is political' by acknowledging that their actions within their lives must adhere to their feminist and spiritual standpoint, to create a world where they are respected, which aligns with the Jewish principle of tikkun olam ('repair of the world'). The feminists within Judaism were faced with some retaining male-dominated elements in religious practices, pointed out by the protesting members, therefore, it was crucial that the Kabbalat Shabbat practice be re-examined and restructured further in order to achieve their aspired feminist intentions of demanding respect and equality as Jewish women within both Judaism as well as the wider women's movement.

Sered (1996) reconfirms the notion outlined by the protesting members of B'not Esh by highlighting that the Jewish liturgy is male-oriented and thus it often prioritises the spiritual needs of men, which Montagu (1899) argues is the need for the determination and struggle to reach God, seeking the gracious experience in God's presence. Such a notion presents a gendered inequality within Judaism that B'not Esh were yet to challenge. Giventhat the aspirations of B'not Esh are that their "spiritual concerns be taken seriously within the Jewish community" (Ackelsberg, 1986, p.109) whilst also having a strong bond with the divine (B'not Esh, 2020), it could be argued that B'not Esh were suitably interpreting religious texts to suit their feminist ethics while aspiring to reach the presence of God by reconsidering and reconstructing Kabbalat Shabbat. Likewise, Millgram (1971) states that followers can modify prayers to align with their modern lives, as the prayers within the Reconstructionist prayer book have interpretive versions. Moreover, the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation (1945) emphasises that "As for the congregation, its men and women should strive to create a common emotional mood by participating in the service to the maximum degree" (p.XXIX). Thus, I would argue that the protesting members of B'not Esh were referring to the modern Jewish movement when interpreting that women's full control over Kabbalat Shabbat – the traditional Jewish practice - as a modern obligation to Judaism rather than a threat posed via the radical transformation of the traditional liturgy. Antler (2018) writes that in the early 1980s some Jewish women who had originally rejected Judaism due to its patriarchal nature later once again categorised themselves as Jewish because simply being a woman was not their sole identity, in an attempt to combat discrimination towards themselves, seeing other feminists' prejudice as more of a threat than patriarchy. Such identity politics enabled women to acknowledge their previous historical marginalisation as a means of questioning and understanding their exclusion within the women's movement, which highlighted the large variety of women that made up the movement itself (Hausman, 1991). Through a continual transformation of the Kabbalat Shabbat practice, B'not Esh were challenging the rejection of Jewish women into the wider women's movement by acknowledging and valuing the narratives of Jewish women who did not categorise themselves as white and Christian and whose experiences differed from the dominant

understanding of oppressed women's lives, resulting in a more inclusive women's movement.

After the acknowledgement of the protesting members' concerns, B'not Esh chose to completely transform the Kabbalat Shabbat by permitting the inclusion of any non-sacred text that each member deemed necessary, to attempt to make the worship more inclusive (Ackelsberg, 1986). In turn, B'not Esh were adhering to the occurrence outlined by Sered (1996) in which women find ways that Judaism can sacralise their experiences as feminist Jewish women, whilst surpassing old-fashioned outlined expectations of women, such as the stereotype that all women have children and thus should be excused from davening (Lebovits, 2016). As traditional liturgy remained within the Kabbalat Shabbat practice conducted by B'not Esh up to this point, I would argue that a further revision of the Kabbalat Shabbat worship through the sole inclusion of alternative texts proposed by any member would have ensured that B'not Esh had questioned the necessity of the inclusion of traditionally male-dictated liturgy. In doing so, I would argue that B'not Esh would lead a practice in which each element is included out of choice for the longevity of a religious feminist collective, rather than to condone and prolong the traditions of male-dominated Judaism. Given that feminist activism can be achieved by challenging the existing patriarchy of unequal power structures (West and Blumberg, 1990), it is evident that B'not Esh were furthering the feminist political activism within Judaism by actively attempting to advance the revisioning of the traditional male-dictated liturgy. Thus, a Jewish feminism was realised as B'not Esh proved the significance of feminism within religion, in which restructuring traditional practices rather than simply rejecting them because of its patriarchal implication granted women the ability to actively participate in religious practices without adding to the oppression of women.

In conclusion, I argue that B'not Esh were able to negotiate the tensions between religion and feminist politics through a repeated reconsideration of traditional liturgy and the transformation of the Kabbalat Shabbat worship in its founding year of 1981. In doing so, male-dictated Jewish liturgy was revised to incorporate the experiences, opinions and control held as women towards their Jewish religious practice. I propose that such revisioning was justifiable within Judaism through a reconstructionist lens, because the Reconstructionist movement placed importance on the aspiration towards social idealism and liturgical interpretation to align with modern lives. Jewish women were often met with criticism within the second wave of feminism in America due to their commitment to Judaism, deemed patriarchal in nature. I argue that the continual prioritisation of the restructuring of male-dominated religious practices in Judaism not only destabilised its patriarchal structure, but also challenged anti-Semitism in second-wave feminism. Such revisioning likely contributed to the feminist knowledge within Judaism, that other Jewish feminists can adopt as a means of conducting a feminist practice. Therefore, the essay demonstrates the importance of the work of B'not Esh towards the continual endeavour of equality within Judaism and the second wave of feminism.

28

References

Ackelsberg, M. A. (1986). Spirituality, Community, and Politics: B'not Esh and the Feminist Reconstruction of Judaism. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 2 (2), pp.109–120.

Ackelsberg, M. A. (1998). Spirituality as a Resource for Activism: A Response to Michelle Lelwica. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 14 (2), pp.132–138.

Ackelsberg, M., Elwell, S., Plaskow, J., Rosenhaus, M. and Setel, T D. (1981). *B'not Esh Jewish Feminist Spirituality Collective Founding Letter, March 30, 1981*. [Online]. Available at: https://jwa.org/media/bnot-esh-founding-letter [Accessed 26 October 2020].

Alpert, R. T. (2021). *Reconstructionist Judaism in the United States*. [Online]. Available at: https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/reconstructionist-judaism-in-united-states [Accessed 4 July 2021].

Antler, J. (2018). Women's Liberation and Jewish Feminism after 1968: Multiple Pathways to Gender Equality. *American Jewish history*, 102. [Online]. Available at: https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&u=uniyork&id=GALE-A528468281&v=2.1&it=r.

Antler, J. (2020). *Jewish Radical Feminism: Voices from the Women's Liberation Movement*. New York: NYU Press.

Avishai, O. (2008). 'Doing Religion' In a Secular World: Women in Conservative Religions and the Question of Agency. *Gender & society: official publication of Sociologists for Women in Society*, 22 (4), pp.409–433.

Avishai, O. (2016). Theorizing Gender from Religion Cases: Agency, Feminist Activism, and Masculinity. *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*, 77 (3), pp.261–279. [Accessed 6 January 2021].

B 'not Esh. (2018). *Membership*. [Online]. Available at: https://bnotesh.org/member-bios/ [Accessed 1 January 2021].

B'not Esh (2020). *B'not Esh*. [Online]. Available at: https://bnotesh.org/ [Accessed 22 October 2020].

Bear, R. (2019). Women's leadership in Judaism: Amy Eilberg's ordination. *Women Leading Change: Case Studies on Women, Gender, and Feminism*, 4 (2), pp.95–107.

Englander, K. (2004). Bringing practice to theory: A case study of language use in Jewish feminist worship. *Women in Literature and Life Assembly*, 13.

Faver, C. A. (2000). To Run and Not Be Weary: Spirituality and Women's Activism. *Review of religious research*, 42 (1), pp.61–78.

Freundel, B. (2011). 'Kabbalat Shabbat': Recited by the Community; But Is It Communal? *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, 44 (2), pp.35–51.

Greene, B. and Brodbar, D. (2010). A Minyan of Women: Family Dynamics, Jewish Identity and Psychotherapy Practice. *Women & therapy*, 33 (3-4), pp.155–157.

Gross, R. M. (1996). *Feminism and religion: An Introduction*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hausman, B. (1991). Anti-semitism in feminism: Rethinking identity politics. *Iowa journal of literary studies*, 11 (1), pp.83–96.

Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation. (1945). *Sabbath Prayer Book*. Kaplan, M. M. et al. (Eds). New York: Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation.

Kaplan, M. M. (2010). *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.

Lebovits, R. M. D. (2016). Women and Davening. *Halachically Speaking*, 12 (15).

Lerner, A. L. (1977). 'Who Hast Not Made Me a Man': The Movement for Equal Rights for Women in American Jewry. *The American Jewish year book*, 77, pp.3–38.

Lilith: Independent, Jewish and Frankly Feminist. (2018). *B'not Esh*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.lilith.org/articles/bnot-esh/ [Accessed 31 October 2020].

Millgram, A. E. (1971). *Jewish worship*. United States of America: Jewish Publ. Soc. of America.

Montagu, L. H. (1899). Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism To-Day. *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 11 (2), pp.216–231.

Ozorak, E. W. (1996). The Power, but Not the Glory: How Women Empower Themselves Through Religion. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, 35 (1), pp.17–29.

Plaskow, J. (1991). Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 7 (2), pp.99–108.

Sered, S. S. (1996). *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem.* Oxford University Press.

Umansky, E. M. (1988). Females, Feminists, and Feminism: A Review of Recent Literature on Jewish Feminism and the Creation of a Feminist Judaism. *Feminist Studies*, 14 (2), pp.349–365.

West, G. and Blumberg, R. L. (1990). Reconstructing social protest from a feminist perspective. In: West, G. and Blumberg, R. L. (Eds). *Women and Social Protest.* New York: Oxford University Press. pp.3–35.

Zwissler, L. (2012). Feminism and religion: Intersections between western activism, theology and theory: Feminism and religion. *Religion compass*, 6 (7), pp.354–368.

30

Disrupting Male Gaze in Famous Vietnamese Paintings

Lan Vo

Critical comment

Inspired by the works of two photographers: Renée Cox's *Yo Mama's Last Supper* and Katarzyna Kozyra's *Olimpia*, this experimental project seeks to use photography to explore and disrupt the "male gaze" in iconic Vietnamese paintings of women during the French colonial rule in 1930s and 1940s. I wanted to see how our collective of marginalized groups (women and femme-aligned non-binary folks) see and create visions of ourselves: What would we do differently? How does the gaze of the marginalized differ from what we define as the "male gaze"? For example, with Khue's and Quyen's photos, we reduced the size of the flower vases in order to put emphasis on the women rather than the props as in the original paintings. Kim "Cua" offered two different versions of the same painting which shows her embracing both her femininity and masculinity with her dresses, Prada bag, and Muay Thai hard-trained body. Multiple photos (Khue's, An's, Ren's, Sam Lien's, Quyen's and mine) have the subjects stare directly at the camera as a way to challenge the photographer as the one being photographed. With said eye contacts, we hope to question the power dynamic between the subject and the artist: Who holds the power?

Special gratitude to:

Ngọc Nguyễn, my student and trustee assistant,
Khuê Ngô and Nhật Anh, two of my sisters from Denison
Quyên Vũ, my cousin and "twin"
Châu Lê, my aunt from my chosen family
Ren and Kim "Cua," whom the universe keeps nudging my way for the last 10 years
Sam Lien and Thiên An, like-minded friends and fellow scholars.

Figure 1. Tô Ngọc Vân's Young woman by the lily[1] (left) and Khuê Ngô (right)

Figure 2. Trần Văn Cẩn's Little Thuý[2] (left) and Khuê Ngô (right)

[1] The painting's original name in Vietnamese: *Thiếu nữ bên hoa huệ.*
[2] The painting's original name in Vietnamese: *Em Thuý.*

Figure 3. Dương Bích Liên's Ms. Mai[3] (left) and Sam Lien (right)

Figure 4. Dương Bích Liên's Young woman in white ao dai[4] (left) and Sam Lien (right)

---

[3] The painting's original name in Vietnamese: *Cô Mai.*

[4] The painting's original name in Vietnamese: *Thiếu nữ mặc áo dài trắng. Áo dài* is the Vietnamese traditional dress for women. The plain white *áo dài* is often worn by students to convey femininity, purity, and virtuousness.

Figure 5. Lê Phổ's Nostalgie[5] (left) and Châu Lê (right)

Figure 6. Nguyễn Tường Lân's Pair of Friends[6] (left) and Ren and Thiên An (right)

---

[5] The painting's original name in Vietnamese: *Hoài cố hương.*
[6] The painting's original name in Vietnamese: *Đôi bạn.*

Figure 7. Nguyễn Gia Trí's Composition[7]

Figure 8. Kim Trần's embodiment of Nguyễn Gia Trí's Composition painting #1

---

[7] The painting's original name in Vietnamese: *Hoà Tấu.*

Figure 9. Kim Trần's embodiment of Nguyễn Gia Trí's Composition painting #2

Figure 10. Lương Xuân Nhị's Young woman by the lotus[8] (left) and Quyên Vũ (right)

---

[8] The painting's original name in Vietnamese: *Thiếu nữ bên hoa sen.*

72

Figure 11. Mai Trung Thứ's La Cage (top) and Nhật Anh (bottom)

Figure 12. Lê Phổ's Nude

Figure 13. Self embodiment of Lê Phổ's Nude

Moving Beyond the "Trans Debates":

An Ally's Strategy for Transfeminist Engagements with Trans-Exclusionary Feminist Violence

Hayley Yocum

Abstract

Trans-exclusionary, sometimes termed "gender critical," feminism has and continues to perpetuate and incite transphobic violence. Trans rights activists and scholars have long critically engaged with the logical fallacies, essentialisms, and controlling images asserted and constructed by trans-exclusionary feminists. Meanwhile, many cisgender feminists have remained trans-silent, complicit in the dehumanization of our trans siblings in these so-called "trans debates." To disrupt such trans-silence, I discuss strategies of a trans-allied response to a case example describing Sandy Stone's—a trans rights scholar and artist whose work is recognized as trailblazing the contemporary field of transgender studies—experience with trans-exclusionary feminist violence. By focusing on the concrete strategies of no-platforming and adoption of trans-inclusive community guidelines, I seek to outline a pathway of mobilization for cisgender feminists to cast off their trans-silence to adopt transfeminist practices firmly in coalition with the goals of trans rights activists and scholars.

Keywords

transgender, transphobia, transphobic violence, transfeminism, trans-rights, trans-exclusionary feminism, gender critical, epistemological violence, coalition, allyship, no-platforming, community guidelines

Introduction

This decade has been characterized by a Western political backlash to the advancement of transgender rights (Barnett et al., 2018; Pearce et al., 2020). Amid this backlash, trans-exclusionary feminist authors—such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2017), Meghan Murphy (Feminist Current, 2020), Germaine Greer (The Update, 2015), and J.K. Rowling (2020)—and organizations—such as LGB Alliance (2020) and Contra El Borrado De Los Mujeres (2020)—have continued to utilize their platforms—as well as feminist theory and community resources—to perpetuate transphobia. This transphobia takes the form of perpetuating cis-hegemonic narratives and controlling images (Collins, 1990, p. 5) of

trans identity, which construct feminisms concerned only with the oppressions experienced by (some) cisgender women and—at its most dangerous—incite physical violence against trans people (Autostraddle, 2020; Camminga, 2020; Disclosure, 2020; Gaycation, 2016; Serano, 2013; Sullivan, 2006; Williams, 2014; Willis, 2017). Trans-rights activists—including trans feminists[1] —have long borne the brunt of problematizing trans-exclusionary rhetoric (Serano, 2013). Meanwhile, many cisgender feminists have remained silently complicit in the dehumanization of our trans siblings (Unladylike, 2021).

Trans-silent feminists do not interrupt—with direct communication or scholarship—the trans-exclusionary feminist rhetoric which invalidates the lived experiences of trans people (Serano, 2018). This silence may be a result of trans-silent feminists seeking to avoid polarization within feminism, feeling unqualified to speak on trans rights, or—among other reasons—having internalized the notion that while trans identity is valid, trans rights are trans issues and cisgender women's rights are feminist issues (Camminga, 2020; Collins, 1990, p. 6; Serano, 2017; Kendall, 2020, p. xv; Willis, 2017).

Regardless of the underlying reasons, trans-silent feminists' failure to take a stance against feminist-perpetuated transphobia has lent unspoken legitimization to the questioning—and thus the invalidation—of trans realities in these so-called "trans debates" (Ahmed, 2003). When the existence of trans people and their welcomeness within feminist spaces are topics left open for debate, doubt is cast on the existence of transphobia (Koyama, 2020). This then plays into the arguments of transphobic pundits—"gender critical" or not—who assert that the heightened experiences of rape, homelessness, poverty, healthcare discrimination, and suicidality among trans people (Disclosure, 2020; Grant et al., 2011) is not a result of societally entrenched transphobia, but—according to Janice Raymond (1994)—a result of transgender community deviance or—according to Germaine Greer (BBC, 2015)—that 'it is simply not true that intersexual [sic][2] people suffer in a way that other people don't suffer.'

To disrupt such trans-silence, I discuss strategies of trans-allied response—informed by the expert knowledges of trans rights activists—to a real-life case example of trans-exclusionary feminist violence. Rather than critically engaging with the specific logical fallacies posited and harms caused by trans-exclusionary arguments—an area of scholarship rigorously taken up by trans rights scholars and activists (Feinberg, 1996; Jacques, 2017; Koyama, 2020; Lavery, 2019; Mermaids, 2020; Pearce et al., 2020; Serano, 2013; Stone, 2006; Stryker, 2007)—this essay focuses on concrete strategies for cisgender feminists to support trans people, validate trans realities, and embolden transfeminist scholarship and activism within feminist spaces. Furthermore, drawing from Julia Serano's (2017, par. 18) and Sandy Stone's (Williams, 2014, par. 28-31) narratives of attempting to directly engage with trans-exclusionary feminists, I speak to trans-silent feminists—the moveable middle—rather than attempting to outline a strategy of

---

[1] The phrase "trans feminists" is used to refer to feminists who are transgender (Serano, 2012), while the term "transfeminist" is used in the title of this essay to refer to areas of feminist scholarship and activism that are informed on an epistemological level by the forms of intersectional and culturally situated oppressions historically experienced by transgender people (Stryker, 2007).

[2] In context, 'intersexual' is taken to refer to transgender people.

transformative engagement with individuals whose opposition to trans rights is rooted in essentialism or fear (Koyama, 2020). I seek to outline a pathway of mobilization for cisgender feminists to cast off their trans-silence in order to be trans-allied feminists whose activist practices are firmly in coalition with the goals of trans rights activists and scholars (Feinberg, 1992; Kendall, 2020, pp. 249-258).

Case Example: Sandy Stone's Experience with Trans-Exclusionary Feminist Violence

> In an interview with The Transadvocate, Sandy Stone, a trans woman, explained that she joined Olivia Records—a feminist lesbian separatist music collective—after being recruited as a sound engineer (Williams, 2014). Stone described that Janice Raymond mailed Olivia excerpts of what would become the chapter 'Sapho by Surgery' in her 1979 *The Transexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (1994, pp. 99-119). Raymond's chapter moved beyond her assertion that transgender women are 'deviant males' (pp. 183) who are extending their objectification of 'women in rape, pornography, and 'drag'' to 'the usurped female biology' (pp. 29), by describing lesbian trans women—who she refers to as 'transsexually constructed lesbian-feminists'—as dangerous interlopers in women's spaces (1994, p. 99). While the version of Raymond's excerpt received by Olivia did not name Stone specifically—as it would in its final publication (1994, pp. 101-103 and 201) —Stone explained that it was clearly intended to out her. After receiving Raymond's excerpt, Stone described Olivia receiving an avalanche of transphobic hate mail that ranged from criticizing the sound engineering of certain albums as masculine to directly threatening Stone's life. Other letters—referenced by Raymond (1994)—protested that 'Olivia did not inform women that Stone was a postoperative transsexual' (p. 201) and expressed: 'I feel raped when Olivia passes off Sandy, a transsexual, as a real woman' (p. 103). Stone described that the situation continued to escalate, with Olivia being informed that trans-exclusionary feminist groups planned to kill Stone, a threat that was materialized when such groups attended Olivia touring events and had their guns confiscated. Stone explained that after years of weathering such threats of violence—while continuing to serve as a sound engineer at Olivia—she decided to leave after the collective received an organized boycott threat.

The forms of trans-exclusionary feminist violence at issue in this case example consist of a trans-exclusionary feminist using her skills as a researcher to attempt to out a trans person, spread controlling images of trans women on a national scale, and to rally a feminist community response against a group that she feels is invading feminist spaces. Beyond the immediate effect of Raymond's trans-exclusionary organizing, are the echoes of transphobic violence—adopted by contemporary trans-exclusionary feminists like Rowling (2020); and Germaine Greer in The Update (2015)—incited by her book. According to trans rights scholars Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle: 'Raymond's *The Transexual*

Empire did not invent anti-transsexual prejudice, but it did more to justify and perpetuate it than perhaps any other book ever written' (2006, p. 131). Thus, I focus on trans-allied response to individuals utilizing feminist community resources to disseminate trans-exclusionary rhetoric, and on undermining of transphobia within feminist communities largely.

No-Platforming

Recognizing Raymond's work as a transphobic manifesto around which other trans-exclusionary feminists have rallied, no-platforming her and those who sympathize with her stances on trans lives recognizes that such views are dangerous enough for us to refuse to amplify (Serano, 2017). This constitutes no-platforming on a public scale, where feminist organizations refuse to hire or publish feminists who utilize their talents to spread misinformation or controlling images about trans people. No-platforming does not indicate a refusal to acknowledge the continued expression of trans-exclusionary feminist ideology. According to Stryker and Whittle, to do so would render invisible an area of feminist rhetoric which actively harms trans communities, and would shut down any attempts to bring awareness to or halt the violence that this discourse has incited (Raymond, 2006, p. 131). Instead, no-platforming firmly indicates that the core arguments asserted by trans-exclusionary feminists are not valid (Serano, 2017); and should be invoked only when they are critically engaged with, when their impacts are discussed, or to draw a parallel between the historic oppression of trans communities and other marginalized groups for the purpose of coalition building (Collins, 1990; Kafer, 2013).

This practice is not a policy of punishing or censuring individuals who express ideas that transfeminist scholars and activists simply disagree with. It is a practice of what Serano terms 'refusing to tolerate intolerance,' where we as cisgender feminists take responsibility for the ideas that we use our resources to circulate, and in solidarity with our trans siblings do not disseminate scholarship which perpetuates transphobia (2017). Trans-exclusionary feminist rhetoric is not an example of a benign "diversity of ideas," and thus should not merit circulation.

Trans-Inclusive Community Guidelines

Aligning with the practical and symbolic de-legitimization of trans-exclusionary feminist ideologies is the adoption of trans-inclusive community guidelines within feminist spaces. While the form that trans-inclusive community guidelines take is specific to a given social-political context, such guidelines should establish that:

1. Transgender people are reliable sources concerning their gender identity (Minus 18, 2014).
2. Transphobia exists and continues to harm trans communities in intersectional ways (Mermaids, 2020).
3. The presence or existence of trans people as a group does not constitute a threat to cisgender people's safety (Disclosure, 2020; Feinberg, 1996).
4. Trans rights and transfeminist activism does not undermine movements to address cisgender women's rights (Serano, 2013 & 2018).

In practice, such guidelines construct—and in most cases, reconstruct—feminist spaces as communities capable of affirming trans people.

78

Practices such as sharing one's pronouns upon introduction and in an email signature—and utilizing a person's expressed pronouns—signals that a person recognizes that people are the gender that they understand themselves to be (Minus 18, 2014; TSER, 2015). Relatedly, describing feminist issues with trans-inclusive language—regardless of whether or not a trans person is present—allows activist responses to be open to serving trans people and benefiting from the works of trans feminist activists and scholars. For example, in the context of addressing oppression related to periods or menopause, using terms such as "menstruators," "people who have uteruses," and "those experiencing menopause"—rather than the sweeping term "women"— constructs such activism as capable of supporting all of those—including trans masculine people—who suffer at the hands of a cis-normative androcentric medical system (Feinberg, 2001; Serano, 2016).

The use of trans-inclusive language within feminist movements challenges trans-exclusionary mythology—like that asserted by Greer (Channel 4 News, 2018)—asserting that trans identity takes away resources from addressing the reproductive injustice experienced by cis women. When the existence of people who experience oppression related—but not identical—to that experienced by cisgender, white, and middle-class women is treated as a threat or distraction from the socio-political movement to address such oppression, those movements will only be invested in addressing the harms experienced by those who feel threatened (Kendall, 2020; Willis, 2017). Referring to oppression related to birth, when the existence of trans men is treated as a threat to movements which call for universal access to patient-centered and rigorously researched reproductive healthcare—or as a threat to motherhood largely—pregnant men are not able to benefit from the community resources offered within those activist spaces (Autostraddle, 2021). Similarly, when the existence of transgender women who experience misogyny similar—but not identical—to cisgender women, is treated as an inconvenience or distraction, those movements make flimsy claims of solidarity (Camminga, 2020; Kafer, 2013, pp. 152; Lorde, 1981; Serano, 2018).

Furthermore, the adoption of trans-inclusive community guidelines which recognize requests for feminist "safe spaces" free of trans people as a group to be rooted in transphobia helps to undermine the trans-exclusionary feminist myths such requests rest upon (Koyama, 2020; Serano, 2013). Such practices often aim to proscribe the presence of trans women specifically—and come in the form of creating "womyn born womyn" spaces banning all trans women (Hamilton, 2016, p. 122; Tea, 2018) or mandating "no penis policies" which only tolerate the presence of trans women who have had bottom-surgery (Koyama, 2020). Such requests may come from sincere places of fear held by cis women who have been raped by people with penises (Serano, 2013, p. 31). However, to conform to such policies pays credence to the logical fallacy that those assigned male at birth (AMAB) rape as an essential biological urge—doing no service for a survivor's healing—as well as legitimizes the transphobic myth that trans women who do not disclose that they are trans are guilty of 'deception' as wolves in sheep's clothing attempting to prey on cis women (Armchair Expert, 2021; Disclosure, 2020; Tea, 2018, p. 92). In the words of trans rights activist Leslie Feinberg (1996, p. 116):

> As a rape survivor, I understand the need for safe space together—free from sexist harassment and potential violence. But

> fear of gender variance also can't be allowed to deceptively cloak
> itself as a women's safety issue.

Drawing on this logic, the need for safe spaces may be satisfied by carving out trans-inclusive spaces for people who have faced common forms of oppression—such as rape survivor support groups. Simultaneously, such community guidelines must acknowledge the validity of different trans community's needs for spaces safe from transphobia—including trans-community only spaces (Serano, 2013, p. 33-34). While trans people as a group do not pose a threat to cisgender people, the same is not true for cis people, considering our historical and ongoing perpetration and complicity in transphobic violence (Feinberg, 1996, p. 117).

Conclusion

By adopting practices of no-platforming and guidelines of trans-inclusion, feminist organizing can be formulated from the outset in a manner that is in meaningful coalition with trans rights activism and scholarship—in other words, that is transfeminist (Stryker, 2007). Embodying transfeminist practices, cisgender feminists must move beyond a shallow disagreement with trans-exclusionary rhetoric. We must not fall into the trap of cisgender feminists disagreeing with trans-exclusionary assertions because —in certain spaces—it is not socially acceptable to be outrightly transphobic. This scenario, where people passively disagree with transphobic ideas, while also not understanding how such views harm trans communities, will not address the overarching issue of feminist perpetrated transphobia. With this lack of understanding, cisgender feminists take a self-congratulatory solace in not being deemed transphobic, while also not holding feminist practices which in any meaningful way problematize transphobia. So, we must ask ourselves, are we meaningfully challenging transphobia with our feminist practices? Or are we passively accepting or tolerating trans people, while also using none of our individual talents to undermine transphobia?

Whether this takes the form of learning from and citing transfeminist works that are relevant to our areas of feminist activism so that the voices of trans feminist activists and scholars are able to eclipse the controlling narratives asserted by trans-exclusionary feminists, or simply using the phrase "cis women" instead of "women" when referring to cis women, we as cisgender feminists must actively dismantle transphobia. We must break the norm of cis-dominated feminist spaces—and women's studies classrooms—only mentioning trans people as a token talking point during a theoretical discussion of the social construction of sex and gender, while not meaningfully engaging with transfeminist scholarship or welcoming trans feminist activists (Collins, 1990; Serano, 2013). We must halt our complicity in the loss of trans lives by deeply internalizing the *reality* that trans rights are feminist issues, and that there is no feminist issue that does not concern trans people.

80

References

Trans Rights Activists and Scholars

Armchair Expert. (2021). *Susan Stryker.* [podcast]. Armchair Expert with Dax Shephard. Available at: https://armchairexpertpod.com/pods/susan-stryker [Accessed 28 May 2021].

Autostraddle. (2020). *Episode 505: Lookin' At You Kid with Zeke Smith.* [podcast]. To L And Back: An L Word Podcast. Available at: https://www.autostraddle.com/to-l-and-back-l-word-podcast-episode-505-lookin-at-you-kid-with-zeke-smith/ [Accessed 30 January 2021].

Autostraddle, (2021). Episode 604: Leaving Los Angeles With Thomas Beatie! [podcast]. To L And Back: An L Word Podcast. Available at: https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/6-04-leaving-los-angeles/id1454808721?i=1000513035337 [Accessed 30 June 2021].

Camminga, B. (2020). Disregard and danger: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the voices of trans (and cis) African feminists. *The Sociological review*, [online] 68(4), pp. 817-833. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934695 [Accessed 8 November 2020].

Disclosure. (2020). [film] Hollywood: Sam Feder and Amy Scholder.

Feinberg, L. (1992). *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come.* 1st ed. [ebook] New York: World View Forum, pp. 5-22. Available at: https://www.workers.org/books2016/Feinberg_Transgender_Liberation.pdf [Accessed 28 May 2021].

Feinberg, L. (1996). Chapter 14. Sisterhood: Make it Real! In: *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman.* Boston: Beacon Press. Pp. 109-120.

Feinberg, L. (2001). Trans Health Crisis: For Us Its Life or Death. *American Journal of Public Health,* [online] 91(6), pp. 897-900. Available at: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=4528311&site=ehost-live [Accessed 28 May 2021].

Gaycation. (2016). Season 1 Episode 3, Jamaica. [Web Series] Kingston, Jamaica: Vice News.

Jacques, J. (2017). Forms of Resistance: Uses of Memoir, Theory, and Fiction in Trans Life Writing. *Life Writing,* [online] 14(3), pp. 357-370. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2017.1328301[Accessed 28 May 2021].

Koyama, E. (2020). Whose feminism is it anyway? The unspoken racism of the trans inclusion debate. *The Sociological Review Monographs,* [online] 68(4), pp. 735-744. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934685 [Accessed 28 May 2021].

Lavery, G. (2019). The King's Two Anuses: Trans Feminism and Free Speech. *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies.* [online] 30(5), pp. 118-151. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-7974030 [Accessed 28 May 2021].

Mermaids, (2020). *An Open Letter to J.K. Rowling.* [online]. Mermaidsuk.org Available at: https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/news/dear-jk-rowling/ [Accessed 28 January 2021].

Minus 18. (2014). *What Are Pronouns?* [video] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xpvricekxU [Accessed 13 March 2021].

Pearce, R., Erikainen, S., and Vincent, B. (2020). "TERF Wars: An Introduction." *The Sociological Review,* [online] 68(4), pp. 677-698. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934713 [Accessed 17 October 2020].

Serano, J. (2012). Trans Feminism: There's No Conundrum About It. *Ms.* [online] Available at: https://msmagazine.com/2012/04/18/trans-feminism-theres-no-conundrum-about-it/ [Accessed 21 June 2021].

Serano, J. (2013). *Excluded: Making Feminism And Queer Movements More Inclusive.* Berkeley: Seal Press, pp. 1-327.

Serano, J. (2016). *Detransition, Desistance, and Disinformation: A Guide for Understanding Transgender Children Debates.* [Blog] Medium. Available at: https://juliaserano.medium.com/detransition-desistance-and-disinformation-a-guide-for-understanding-transgender-children-993b7342946e [Accessed 21 June 2021].

Serano, J. (2017). *Refusing to Tolerate Intolerance.* [Blog] Medium. Available at: https://juliaserano.medium.com/refusing-to-tolerate-intolerance-f24c1bff513f [Accessed 8 May 2021].

Serano, J. (2018). *Thoughts about transphobia, TERFs, and TUMFs.* [Blog] Medium. Available at: https://juliaserano.medium.com/thoughts-about-transphobia-terfs-and-tumfs-b77a18c1a225 [Accessed 8 May 2021].

Stone, S. (2006). The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto. In: S. Stryker & S. Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader,* 1st ed. New York: Routledge, pp. 221-235.

Stryker, S. (2007). Chapter 5: Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question. In: S. Gillis, et. al. eds. *Third Wave Feminism : A Critical Exploration.* 1st ed. [ebook]. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 59-70. Available at: http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3564824 [Accessed 28 May 2021].

Sullivan, L. (2006). A Transvestite Answers a Feminist. In: S. Stryker & S. Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader,* 1st ed. New York: Routledge, pp. 159-164.

Tea, M. (2018). Transmissions From Camp Trans. In: *Against Memoir: Complaints, Confessions & Criticisms.* 1st ed. [ebook]. The Feminist Press, pp. 87-122. Available at: https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/2233578/pdf [Accessed 29 May 2021].

Trans Student Educational Resources. (2015). The Gender Unicorn. [online] Available at: www.transstudent.org/gender [Accessed 31 January 2021].

Unladylike. (2021). *Episode 114: Beyond Trans Visibility with Raquel Willis.* [podcast]. Unladylike. Available at: https://unladylike.co/episodes/114/raquel-willis [Accessed 4 May 2021].

Williams, C. (2014). TERF Hate And Sandy Stone. *The Trans Advocate,* [online]. Available at: https://www.transadvocate.com/terf-violence-and-sandy-stone_n_14360.htm [Accessed 5 December 2020].

Willis, R. (2017). A Trans Woman's Response to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. [online] medium.com Available at: https://medium.com/@raquel_willis/a-trans-womans-response-to-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-bb7955004244 [Accessed 31 January 2021].

Literature Addressing Transphobia

Barnett, B.S., Nesbit, A.E., and Sorrentino, R.M. (2018). The Transgender Bathroom Debate at the Intersection of Politics, Law, Ethics, and Science. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law,* [online] 46(2), pp. 232-241. Available at: https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.003761-18 [Accessed 21 June 2021].

Grant, J., Mottet, L., Tanis, J., Harrison, J., Herman, J., and Keisling, M. (2011). *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey.* [online] Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, pp. 1-220. Available at: https://www.thetaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ntds_full.pdf [Accessed 11 March 2021].

Literature Addressing Feminist Intersectionality and Inclusivity

Ahmed, S. (2003). *Making Feminist Points.* [Blog] feministkilljoys. Available at: https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/ [Accessed 25 March 2021].

Collins, P.H. (1990). The Politics of Black Feminist Thought. In: *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* 2nd ed. [ebook] New York: Routledge, pp. 1-19. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203900055 [Accessed 19 March 2021].

Hamilton, C. (2016). Sex, Work, Meat: The Feminist Politics of Veganism. *Feminist Review,* [online], *114*(1), pp. 112–129. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41305-016-0011-1 [Accessed 24 February 2021].

Kafer, A. (2013). Accessible Futures, Future Coalitions. In: *Feminist, Queer, Crip.* 1st ed. [ebook] Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, pp. 149-169. Available at: https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1189107 [Accessed 15 November 2020].

Kendall, M. (2020). *Hood Feminism: Notes From the Women White Feminists Forgot.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing, pp. xi-267.

Lorde, A. (1981). The Uses of Anger. *Women's Studies Quarterly,* [online], 9(3), pp. 7-10. Available at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1654&context=wsq [Accessed 10 November 2020].

Trans-Exclusionary Feminist Authors and Organizations

Adichie, C.N. (2017). *CLARIFYING.* Facebook.com Available at: https://www.facebook.com/chimamandaadichie/posts/clarifyingbecause-i-have-been-the-subject-of-much-hostility-for-standing-up-for-/10154893542340944/ [Accessed 31 January 2021].

BBC News. (2015). *Germaine Greer: Transgender women are 'not women.'* [video] Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-34625512 [Accessed 5 December 2020].

Channel 4 News. (2018). *Germaine Greer on women's liberation, the trans community and her rape.* [video] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aU_csXGfdVM [Accessed 5 December 2020].

Contra El Borrado De Las Mujeres, (2020). *Against the Erasure of Women: Feminist Alliance for the Rights of Women Based on Sex.* [online] Available at: https://contraelborradodelasmujeres.org/?fbclid=IwAR1S2PERIfEcT0-JYK-U0incggdfJDrgFb7k9sHAG51H9isXtzDacZtHvfE [Accessed 11 March 2021].

Feminist Current (2020). *Tag: The latest on the gender identity ideology discussion from Canada's leading feminist website.* [online] Available at: https://www.feministcurrent.com/tag/transgender/ [Accessed 12 March 2021].

LGB Alliance (2021). *Myths and Truths.* [online] Available at: https://lgballiance.org.uk/myths/ [Accessed 19 June 2021].

Raymond, J. (1994) *The Transexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male.* 2nd edn. New York: Teachers College Press.

Raymond, J. (2006). Sapho By Surgery: The Transsexually Constructed Lesbian-Feminist. In: S. Stryker & S. Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader,* 1st ed. New York: Routledge, pp. 131.

Rowling, J.K. (2020). J.K. Rowling Writes about Her Reasons for Speaking out on Sex and Gender Issues. [online] jkrowling.com. Available at: https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/ [Accessed 14 January 2020].

The Update. (2015). *Germain Greer on anti-feminists, transgender and how equality feminism is not enough.* [video] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1WFOoOGKaU [Accessed 5 December 2020].