

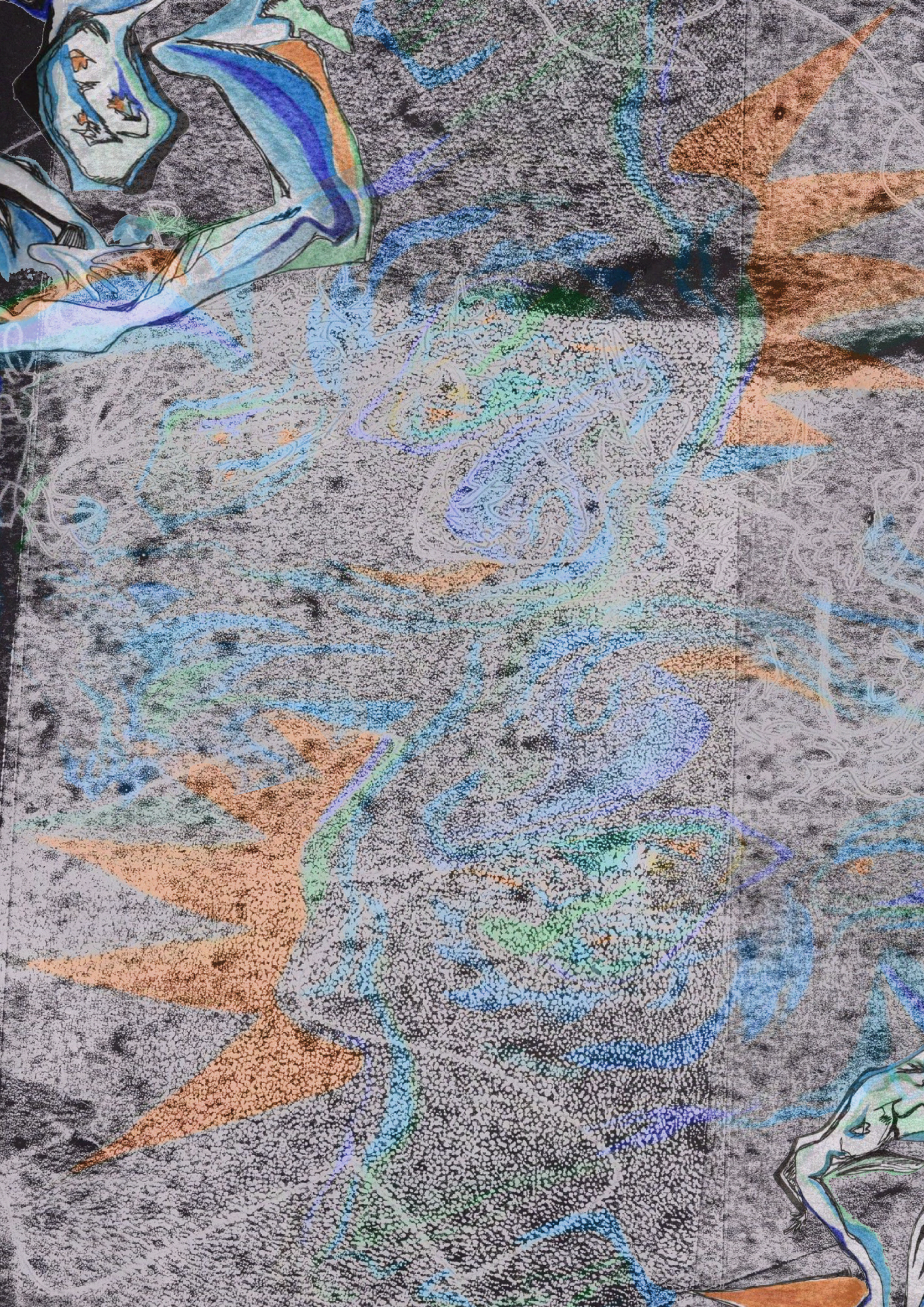
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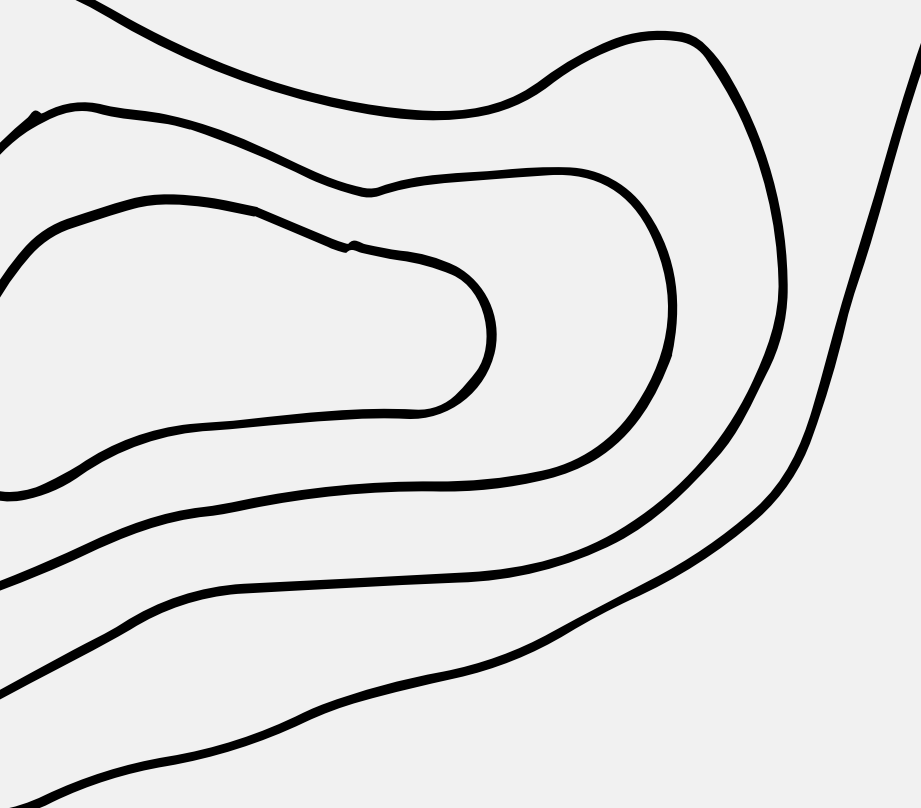
Waves
of
Perception



PLUR
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Volume One
Issue One





Plurality
**WAVES OF
PERCEPTION**

ISSUE ONE | 2024

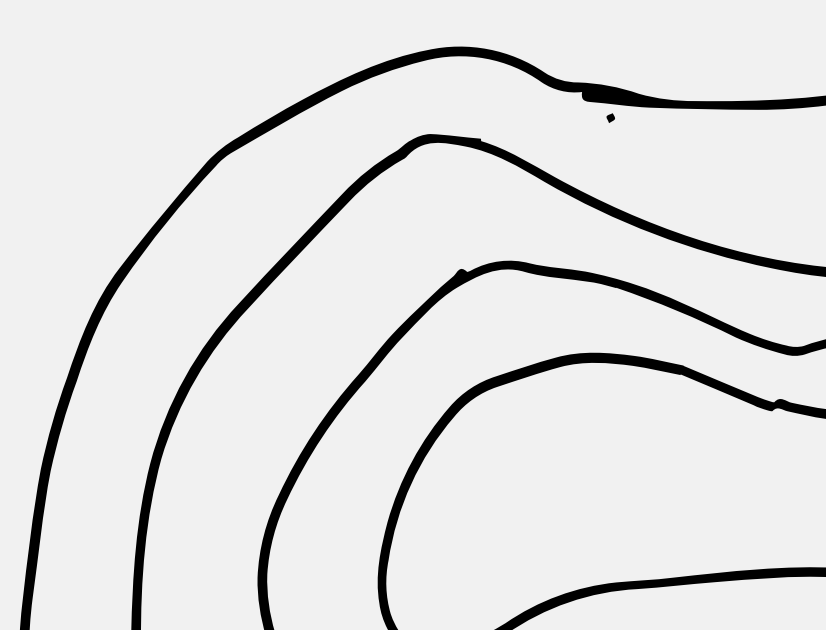


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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When I first started to think of a journal which centred the nuances needed from the critical analyses used when discussing positionality and the ways in which positionalities interact, I was excited at the potential for the publication to grow into something which fostered a community which demands more of the single-axis analysis currently used in academia. Since, like the name suggests, it really is all about the plurality of the human experience and calling out the irrationality of why some are privileged over others. I see *Plurality*, as a way to challenge the notion of what is deemed as philosophical or theoretically fruitful by our institutions, many based on colonial and patriarchal grounds. Along with providing a space and platform for the lesser analysed topics which are under-discussed or not seen as 'academic' enough.

Our theme 'Waves of Perception: The temporal nature of gender conception' focuses on the nature of progress in society and how progress is felt at different levels throughout time, with the more marginalised of a movement often being unjustly sidelined or forgotten. It is about moments of progress and how our perceptions of gender have changed over time. Along with how progress, like waves, often recedes and crashes. There's no linear path to liberation. However, ultimately the importance is to keep pushing and to build momentum for change. In the age of the repeal of *Roe v Wade*, increasing rhetoric painting negative images of others, and the rampant transphobia we see, it is important to built spaces such as *Plurality* to continue critiquing and bringing to the centre topics and people who's stories have been othered or purposefully forgotten.

Our authors bring to light important discussions and issues, analysing them in connection with intersectionality. Beginning with Lucy Barrie's analysis of the importance of modest dress being incorporated into the feminist project. Lily Roberts who explores whether feminist interpretations of the biblical story of Genesis are possible. Rounding out our 'Philosophy and Divinity' section, we have Elizabeth Hamilton theorises how we can resist with words and the importance of anti-oppression speech. For our 'Art and Literature' section, Julia Guzikowska explores how women writer's have subverted patriarchal storytelling norms through the use of metafiction. Focusing on the representation of the female body in 90s pop culture and literature, Julia Owczarek looks at how female protagonists who do not reject their bodies are still unable to liberate themselves. Moving to the 'Social Sciences', Lea Kern looks at how Māori women's experiences have been shaped by colonialism and patriarchy, and how indigenous feminisms such as *Mana Wāhine* have been important in capturing this positionality.

Ellie Robertson gives a linguistic analysis on the possibility of removing gender from language. Using feminist and decolonial theoretical frameworks, Liza Yeroshkina analyses Russia's decision to invade Ukraine. Focusing on how queerness affects temporal experiences, Izzie Atkinson argues how this could redefine how we think of historical progress. For our 'History and Classics' section, Eliza Sinclair Kidd looks at critical inclusion of early feminists in the feminist historiography of geography focusing on Ellen Churchill Semple. Adeline Cheung considers the importance of an intersectional approach for historians of empire. Then we have Eve Coffey who discusses the legal implications of virginity testing within the UK legislative environment in our 'Law' section. Finally we have our 'Miscellaneous Musings' beginning with Abigail Nicoll brings important considerations of the importance of intersectionality within psychological research. Focusing on the muse in art, Martha Gane uses a gendered lens to analyse the role of musehood and artist. Ruby Scott analyses how TikTok and social media have changed what femininity means via choice feminism.

I am infinitely grateful for Plurality's editors, for helping the author's develop their voice and writing. Along with generally helping this issue, and *Plurality*, to become a reality. Thank you to Maria for helping guide the editors and the development of the sections. This publication would not have been possible without Abby's and our wonderful copy editors' attention to detail. We received an incredible number of submissions for our first issue thanks to our talented marketing team made up of: Rhiannon, Holly and Emilia. Thank you to Daisy, Marnie and Bessie, our wonderful artists for helping the issue develop into a gorgeous work to flip through with your eye-catching art pieces and cover design. It has been absolutely amazing to see the materization of this project with the publication of this first issue and I am thrilled to have been a part of it. We already have our second issue 'Witness' in the works and I am excited to see how this publication develops in the future . This process has definitely taught me a lot and I hope that others too learned from their experience either by writing, editing, reviewing or supporting the team.

Sincerely,



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PHILOSOPHY **AND DIVINITY**

Section 1

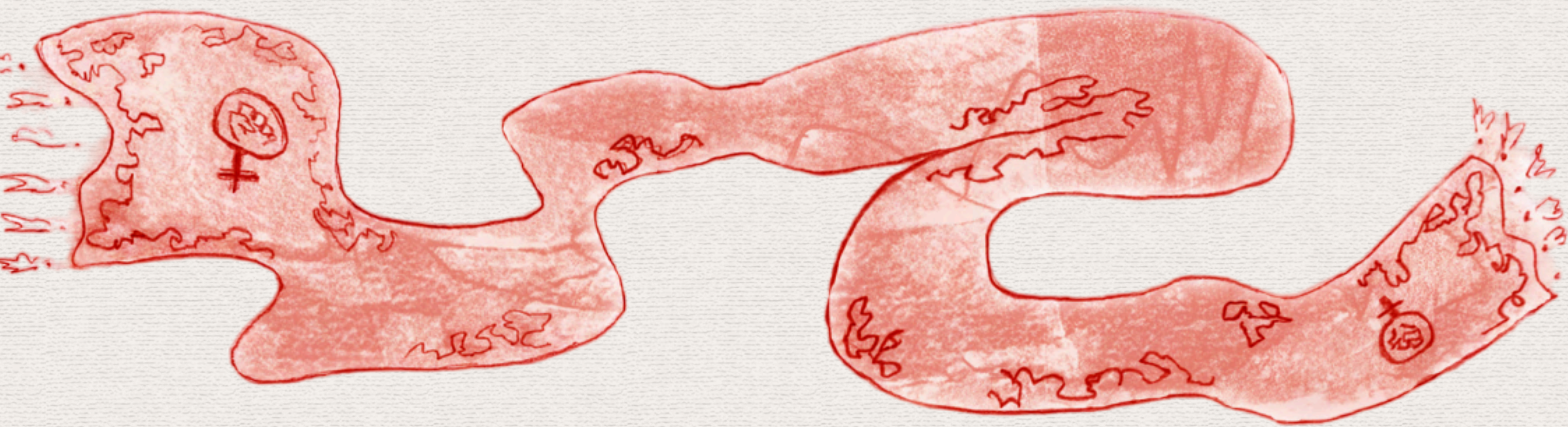
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BY LUCY BARRIE



CAN RELIGIOUS
MODEST DRESS



Be Included in the Feminist Project?

ARTWORK BY DAISY MARSH

EDITED BY KATIE O'CONNOR, COPY EDITED BY RUTH WATERSON
REVIEWED BY JULIA MAYO AND LUIS QUINONES ROMAN

In 2009, Nicolas Sarkozy, the former French president, claimed that the burqa was not a symbol of faith but rather a sign of enslavement, and was therefore unwelcome in French society (La Fornara, 2018). Feminism aims to free women from any such 'enslavement' that would act as a barrier to gender equality. Nevertheless, the intersectional injustices that impact religious women make this debate more complicated than what Sarkozy suggested. This essay will therefore explore the ethical significance of religious modest dress, and advocate for its compatibility with the feminist project. This will be achieved through focusing on Jewish and Muslim women, living as minoritised groups in Western countries. While religious patriarchal structures seem to contradict the strive for gender equality through dictating how women present themselves, this should not permit the Western world to act as 'saviours' and reduce these women to victims. Instead, they should be included in the feminist cause and an effort should be made to truly understand their perspectives in order to strive for a modern world that treats men and women from all backgrounds more equally than it does currently.

Before unpacking this further, it is necessary to understand what the feminist project is. While there are undoubtedly numerous ways to define feminism, the International Women's Development Agency understands it as working towards the aim of 'all genders having equal rights and opportunities' (IWDA, 2018). This should be achieved by striving for an end to sexism, gendered exploitation, and oppression. Taking this interpretation to be broadly encompassing of many others, but recognising that it is not the sole approach, it will be used as a springboard for the following discussion. In the fight for this objective, there are discriminatory systems which make it more difficult to achieve, and through understanding the intersection between race, class, and in this case religion, with gender, it becomes

clear that to fulfil the goal of gender equality, other forms of oppression must also be tackled (Arinder, 2020). It is important to keep this notion of intersectionality in mind as we examine the way in which the perception of religious modest dress can be understood as a practice that treats women with inequality, therefore contradicting the feminist objective.

In our modern society, the sexual exploitation of women is prominent, and can be seen in many ways. From the portrayal of women in the media to children's toys, women are consistently valued for their physical appearance, and consequently sexual desirability, rather than for their abilities, intelligence, and morals. An example of this are Disney princesses, whose small waists and other idealised bodily features are exaggerated, emphasising to young girls that the princesses 'win their man solely on the basis that they are the most beautiful girls in the land' (Rutherford and Baker, 2021). The fairy-tale ending that they strive for is only possible if they accept their own objectification.

On the other hand, in both Judaism and Islam, the focus is on women existing 'outside the unduly libidinal economy of the social,' (Hahner and Varder, 2012, p.28) and sexual relations are meant to be reserved for marriage. Thus, as these religions are experienced in a society in which women are oversexualised, a conflict arises, and it falls on the woman to solve it; she must cover up in order to prevent the societal objectification of her until she finds the man who is worthy of objectifying her (Hahner and Varda, 2012). This reflects an entrenched misogyny, which blames the woman for being a sexualised being by virtue of her simply existing. Modest dress supposedly acts as a barrier to this objectification, rather than calling on men to not see women only as sexual objects. In Islam, the Arabic word *awra* refers to what parts of the body

must be covered to align with modesty requirements. Women are required to cover their entire bodies, including their hair, apart from their face and hands. (Boulanouar, 2006, p135). Similarly, a Jewish woman must cover her elbows and knees, and her hair with a wig or headscarf if she is married (Loewenthal and Solaim, 2016). The implication is that if women do not dress in such a way, they will solely be seen for their physical attributes, rather than for the plethora of other characteristics that men are valued upon. This contradicts the essence of modesty as it is a projection of unabashed masculinity. Socially speaking, there seems to be no problem with the way that men perceive women, and the burden falls on the latter to consistently present themselves to the world in a way that makes life easier for men to follow the laws of their religion. Therefore, one can argue that women dressing modestly with the goal of preventing their own objectification stands in direct opposition to feminism's aims of emancipating women from oppression and treating them as equals to their male counterparts. There is no equality to speak of in a world in which women must persistently make decisions regarding things as basic as the clothes they wear each day for the sole purpose of benefitting men and preventing them from being sexualised by them.

However, modern society tends to dichotomise nuanced discourses into black or white. It is reductive and exclusionary of feminism to assume that religion in general, and consequently religious modest dress, is an antithesis to gender equality. A hugely celebrated aspect of feminism's progress is that it has afforded women choices they have never had before. With this logic, it might seem appropriate to adopt 'Choice Feminism', as it understands 'freedom as the capacity to make individual choices, and oppression as the inability to choose' (Ferguson, 2010, p.248). Choosing to dress modestly for religious purposes exercises this liberty just as much as the decision to dress in a way that

we might traditionally categorise as going against gender stereotypes. If feminists think that it is right to dictate how other women should dress in order to resist the patriarchy, then surely, they are contributing to the oppression that they hope to dispel, creating another hurdle to autonomy and liberation (Hahner and Scott).

Particularly in regard to religious women living as minorities in Western countries, the immediate assumption that religious dress is oppressive implies that women who abide by these dress codes are docile and incapable of making decisions for themselves and require the secular world to 'rescue' them. This saviour complex is damaging, not only feeding into larger notions of Western superiority, but also allowing space for religious prejudice to become a part of wider cultural beliefs. To return to the example of Sarkozy's burqa ban, which is not only patronising and paternalistic, as it depicts Muslim women as having no autonomy or understanding, but also fosters an atmosphere in which Islamophobia is allowed to be disguised as wanting to 'save' these women from their own religion (La Fornara, 2018). Essentially, this justifies the actions of those who are uncomfortable with the wearing of burqas to claim that their Islamophobia comes from a desire to help women be free from men. In this way, gender and religious prejudice intersect, and Choice Feminism seems to be a way to combat this, by giving women back their ability to choose as they so desire.

Furthermore, the assumption that religious women need saving from oppression ignores the possibility that the choice to dress modestly might be rooted in other aspects of their identity, not necessarily linked to gender. Due to their intersectional identities as both women and religious minorities living in western countries, Muslim and Jewish women are placed at a disadvantage, particularly as their voices are not listened to as much as other women who only face gender-based oppression.

Religious experience in this setting is considerably more complex, and others oversimplifying this without making the effort to properly understand it, acts as an impediment to inclusivity. When analysing religion from an outside perspective, it is often overlooked just how much religious principles permeate the daily lives of those who are observant (Michelman, 2003). For example, Jewish standards of modesty are called *Tzeniut*, and come from *Halakha*, Jewish law. They do not solely correspond to women, and importantly do not just relate to the way that Jewish people present themselves outwardly, but also refer to modesty in terms of being humble through actions, thoughts and behaviours, unrelated to sexual desires; dress is a way to express this humility (Sadatmoosavi et al, 2016). It therefore has other functions and acts as a part in a wider whole that characterises religion. To reduce it in a way that aligns with the secular narrative belittles its true meaning, and perhaps overlooks the possibility that there are other ways to value women that go beyond their sexual desirability.

Another reason for modest religious dress that should be taken into consideration before the women wearing it are dismissed as oppressed, exists particularly in the context of a majority non-religious society. This can be illustrated with regard to Muslim women who choose to wear hijabs, as many argue that it is a symbol of their religious faith, both for themselves but also to others, and is a way to stay connected to the culture that they or their family may originate from (La Fornara, 2018). Political connotations can impact this. For instance, following 9/11, many Muslim women living in the West were more likely to wear hijabs. As Islamophobia became more rampant, this seemed like a means to demonstrate a positive counter-image to the prejudices that were being created because of the unjust associations people made between Muslims and Islamic extremist terrorist groups (La Fornara, 2018). Hamdan explains that

she dresses like this as ‘a form of political and cultural resistance to the way the hijab is perceived in the West’ (Hamdan, 2007).

Furthermore, returning to France’s Burqa ban, the intersection between politics and religion is evident, as the government attempted to impose their views on the personal choices of their people. Thus, the same is true in terms of resistance against this. In 2011, Kenza Drider, alongside other Muslim women, stood outside the Notre Dame, wearing a niqab (Sunderland, 2013). She protested the right that was taken away from her to dress as she so wished. In this way, unfairly, her personal decision became inherently political, an active choice which opposed Sarkozy’s narrative that she was ‘enslaved.’ These examples demonstrate that the experience of religious women, particularly those living as minorities, is multifaceted, and therefore requires more understanding from the secular world before attempts are made to protect or save them from their faith.

This is especially important considering the ‘saving’ of these women perpetuates connotations of infantilising or belittling them which only adds to preconceived notions of gender and women’s inability to make their own decisions. Such infantilization, like the previously discussed over-sexualisation of women, is something which permeates the everyday life of modern society. This relates to the way that women present themselves, in addition to clothing, with for example, the expectation that women should remove their body hair. This ensures that they resemble their pre-pubescent appearance as much as possible, and demonstrates the way that society idealises the ‘girl’ over the ‘woman’ with the aim of re-emphasising the dominance of men in society. Men are not pressured in the same way to appear childlike, but rather must be as assertive as possible, highlighting that the patriarchy promotes the submission of women to men, such as that of a child

to an adult. This demonstrates the added significance of patronising religious women, it emphasises the notion that women are not capable of making their own decisions in the same way that men are. The tumultuous fight across the world to achieve women's suffrage is just one example of the way in which women's decision-making has been suppressed by patriarchal sentiment. When this sexist notion is combined with the Islamophobic prejudices that rely upon a Western superiority complex, the two parts of these women's identities intersect, and it becomes all the more evident that the narrative of 'protection' is simply a disguise for continued oppression. From this, one may convincingly argue that Choice Feminism is a view that we should support when talking about modest dress, as each woman, no matter their beliefs, should be free to wear whatever clothes they wish, modest or otherwise, in order to resist both sexism and anti-religious rhetoric.

Nevertheless, while Choice Feminism might succeed in its inclusion of modestly dressed women in the feminist cause, it is a flawed outlook in other ways. Ultimately, as Hirschman claims, "the invitation to leave one another alone is really an invitation to leave the current unjust arrangement in place." (Ferguson, 2010, p.250) While it is true that gender inequality is not the only factor for religious women dressing modestly, it undeniably plays a part, and as earlier explained, is a symptom of centuries of patriarchal traditions. Therefore, Choice Feminism's claim that women should be free to act as they wish, while certainly a goal of the general feminist project, mistakenly ignores the prevalence of internalised sexism/ As Ferguson argues, complete liberty, but as a choice resting on preconceptions of choices are shaped by the way that we are socially conditioned. She gives the example of stay-at-home mothers making the decision to leave their jobs and care for their children, not from a place of complete liberty, but as a choice resting on preconceptions of motherhood and child psychology.

There are many barriers in place for mothers wishing to leave home, such as the underfunded and under-regulated childcare systems in place, as well as the societal opposition against women who break free from this traditional route (Ferguson, 2010, p.250). This choice is influenced to such an extent that other possibilities become far less appealing, but also less realisable. As a consequence of these conditions, the choice to stay at home is rendered the only feasible option, bringing into question if this is truly liberty at all. This same conditioning can often occur in tight and loving religious communities. While certainly not an example which demonstrates the experience of all Jewish women who decide to dress modestly, certain ultra-orthodox Jewish communities are completely separated from the outside world. The Charedi community in Stamford Hill, London, raises its children to speak Yiddish as their first language rather than English, replaces what we might deem 'standard' education with religious learning, and barely engages with mainstream society through TV, newspapers or the Internet (Holman and Holman, 2002). In this way, young girls who are taught to cover their bodies from a very young age have never seen any different. It requires this understanding to see that the 'choice' that we might think they have, is not really there, given that they do not see any other option, nor know what life is like outside of their world. In this way, the flaws of Choice Feminism become apparent.

However, our rejection of Choice Feminism does not mean that we should endorse the Western saviour complex that, as mentioned, often results in the development of patronising and infantilising attitudes towards religious women. These beliefs only contribute to pre-existing prejudices which wrongly place the Western world as superior to others. While it is ignorant to claim that these women lack autonomy and need 'saving' as a consequence of the ingrained misogyny that

religious dress in part endorses, it is not the case that these personal choices have no social consequences (Holman and Holman, 2002). They influence the people surrounding them, as well as future generations, perpetuating a cycle of patriarchal views which are difficult to escape from. It is therefore the responsibility of feminists to make judgements on what we believe to be contributing to the feminist cause, but to do so without actively judging or excluding this group of people. We must instead make the effort to truly understand the motivation behind religious dress, and from there can make public judgements which are necessary to strive for a more equal future for all men and women, no matter their faith. In conclusion, the concept of religious women dressing modestly can and should be included in the feminist project, although with caution and consideration. This essay has examined the various motivating factors for religious dress, some of which do perpetuate patriarchal traditions that feminism should aim to combat. It has also considered and rejected an alternate feminist view Choice Feminism, which although seems convincing in its aim of inclusion, overlooks how the internalisation of misogynistic structures limits the freedoms it aspires for women to have. By focusing on more than one perspective and allowing space to consider the nuances of each, we can reach the necessary ethical resolution that is inclusive of all those involved. This mindset should be promoted when making academic, cultural, moral, and political judgements regarding the way religion manifests in our societies, and furthermore the particular experiences unique to those with intersectional identities, such as women belonging to religious minority groups. Ultimately, this inclusivity is dependent upon having respect for, and being willing to learn from and understand religious women who dress modestly. These prerequisites to the formation of judgements regarding modest religious dress ensure that all women, no matter how they choose to live their lives, are involved and listened to within the feminist project.

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BY LILY ROBERTS

CAN THE STORY
OF EVE
(GENESIS 2-3)

Be Interpreted as Feminist?

EDITED BY KATIE O'CONNOR, COPY EDITED BY RUTH WATERSON
REVIEWED BY EMILY ALLSOPP AND LUIS QUINONES ROMAN

Summary of Genesis 2-3 and The Traditional Interpretation.

Genesis 2-3 describes another account of creation, with more detail than Genesis 1. It is generally assumed that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 have different authors, and Brown observes that the former has a biological focus while the latter focuses on social roles (2017, 256). This is significant from a feminist perspective because Genesis 2-3 assigns gender roles to the archetypal humans as Adam and Eve, thereby asserting that all men and women should fulfil their respective roles.

In Genesis 2, God creates Adam from “the dust of the ground” and places him in the garden of Eden (2:7-8). God observes that it is not good for Adam to be alone, and so creates “a helper as his partner”, as described in the NRSVUE (2:18). God describes Eve’s creation in these terms, **אֵצֶל כְּנֶגְדּוֹ** - ezer knegdo. Translated in the NRSVUE as “a helper as his partner” (2:18), she is named woman for “out of Man this one was taken” (2:23). Woman is tempted by a serpent to eat from the tree that God has forbidden, and persuades Adam to eat the fruit as well, resulting in their fall from God’s grace (3:1-13). Woman’s punishment is to be ruled by her husband, and she is named ‘Eve’ because she is “the mother of all living,” (3:16, 3:20). Due to the aetiological nature of the Genesis 2-3 narrative, the traditional interpretation has been that Adam and Eve reflect the natures of all men and women after the fall. Therefore, it has traditionally been argued that Genesis 2-3 presents us with evidence that all women, following Eve, have a propensity for evil, and that God ordained for women to be ruled over by their husbands (Gomola 2014, 81).

A Feminist Account of Genesis 2-3: A Misreading.

Feminist theologians such as Phyllis Trible and Reuven Kimelman argue that Adam is intended to be ungendered before Eve’s arrival, so Man and Woman were created at the same time and are therefore equal.

Trible argues that Adam only becomes male when Eve is made, but before Eve, Adam is a groundling of the earth, therefore not man and not gendered (1978, 77). In Hebrew: God formed **אָדָם** - ha’adam (earth creature) from **אֲדָמָה** - ha-adama (the earth) (Trible, 1978, 77) (2:7). However, ha-adam is a grammatically masculine word, suggesting that Adam was gendered even before he was officially conceived as man (Trible 1978, 80). Kimelman agrees on Adam’s non-gendered being, arguing for a translation of 1:27 Adam’s creation. That God created it not him, ‘it’ in the masculine here can be explained through Hebrew’s requirement that ‘it’ have a grammatical gender even when describing an ungendered object (Kimelman, 1996, 12).

Even if one is to adopt the view that Adam is non-gendered before Eve, he becomes gendered in Genesis 3 and comes to represent the archetypal man. Adam is associated with male and thus, understanding Adam as gender-neutral only furthers the othering of Woman. Trible and Kimelman’s interpretation of a genderless Adam is not empowering to women because only Adam is afforded the luxury of neutrality. Eve is only ever incidental to Adam, called “Woman” because she was taken “out of man” (2:23) Eve or Woman is explicitly told that she is to be subjugated by Adam once he is a man (3:16), an understanding of Adam as non-gendered does not excuse the hierarchical attitudes present in Genesis 2-3. Adam names ‘each living creature’ who is formed by God for him, which implies that Adam is superior to the animals (2:18-20). Eve is created after the animals, entering into an existing hierarchical structure.

Man’s superior power over women is established as Eve is one of multiple attempts by God to find Adam a helper. This implies that Eve is not the same rank as Adam but is inferior to him as the animals are. While Man gets to name the animals, Woman, who serves the same role as the animals – helping Adam – is compared to them. Although Eve may maintain some superiority to the animal in that she



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succeeds in fulfilling a role, it can be maintained that she is inferior to Adam as the animals are. Eve and the creatures could not be created or identified without Adam, and therefore their mere existence is dependent upon their utility to him. Understanding Adam, the first person, as non-gendered only categorises women as different, as the Other while men are the default, and this is not equality. Adam is the first human, Eve the second, though they are not made in the same way, signifying their inequality to one another. From Tribble's account, we could conclude that Adam is dependent on Eve for his distinction as male, therefore he is not her superior. However, this would be a misreading because it assumes ha-adam as entirely gender neutral, even though throughout the Old Testament ha-adam is used in the context of a man (Kawashima, 2006, 48). Tribble's interpretation is a minority opinion among Bible scholars and does not take into account the rest of the Hebrew Bible (Kawashima, 2006, 47). Furthermore, Kimelman's assumption requires an assumption that the author of Genesis 2-3 already regarded Adam and Eve as equals, which does not align with the narrative order of their creation - Adam first and Eve second - or the patriarchal context of the rest of the Old Testament. Therefore, understanding Adam as non-gendered is problematic within a feminist interpretation of Eve, as the claim that Adam is ungendered lacks adequate support. Furthermore, even if Adam were ungendered, his supposed neutrality would still position Eve as the Other.

Another argument from the feminist perspective tsela - ,צִדָּה that the traditional translation of 'rib' (2:21) which can also be understood as 'side', implying an equality between Adam and Eve, and therefore Man and Woman. Gomola gives a few reasons for this reading, one being that Adam very clearly owns his 'rib' whereas the ownership of his therefore placing more onus of Eve's creation

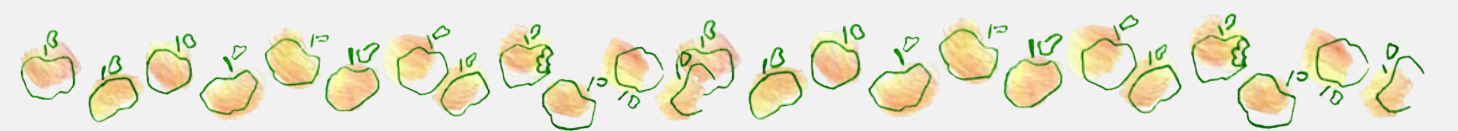
on God rather than Adam (Gomola, 2014, 83). 'Side' also implies an equality between Adam and Eve as they are created *beside* each other, making them duplicates rather than creator and created. The BDB translates צִדָּה as either rib or side, although it should be noted that other uses of צִדָּה to mean side, such as Ex.25:12 (side of an arc) and Ex.37:3 (side of a tabern), most often refers to objects *not* bodies. Tribble comments on this, stating that the significance of Adam's rib is overemphasised, as what really creates Eve is divine power, not Adam (Gomola, 2014, 83). These two inferences miss the central theme of hierarchy present in Genesis 2-3. Adam is made from 'the dust of the ground' (2:7), the ground which God makes just prior to Adam's creation (2:4). If we acknowledge that Genesis 2 already assumes hierarchy before Eve's creation, then we can conclude that the substances Adam and Eve are made of imply an inequality between the two. Some may object to the notion that distinction in itself implies inequality between the two. However, as seen in this narrative, the differences between Adam (Man) and Eve (Woman) perpetuate patriarchal ideas that value women only by virtue of their utility to men. This assumption enables the view that the omnipotent God rules absolutely, while Adam's creation from the earth renders him subservient to God, and Eve's creation from Adam's biology renders her subservient to both Adam and God.

God could have just as easily made Eve from the earth, but he did not. Therefore, the specific wording of rib or side matters not, as in both cases the material she is made out of is fundamentally different to and reliant on Adam's prior existence. This order of creation, Eve's reliance on Adam to exist, implies a hierarchy of creation. Gomola makes the point that the substance of a rib is more complex than earth, and in this way, Eve is implied as a superior being (2014, 83). However, when we consider that Adam had to exist first and that he was created with a level of complexity that entails the

possession of a rib, the argument that Adam was created as less complex than Eve begins to lack appeal. Furthermore, it seems that Adam and Eve's creations are analogous to birth, in which case the party acting as mother has an inescapable 'created-from' relationship with its offspring. That is, Adam (Man) has a created-from relationship to the ground because that is what he came from, and spends most of his time on, especially in an agricultural society in which a man would feel connected to the earth. He uses the land for natural resources that will help him survive, and is therefore dependent on that from which he was created. Eve (Woman), on the other hand, is taken from Adam's rib. She is therefore connected to Adam in a way that he is connected to the land, but not to her. He need not rely on Eve for his creation, but Eve must rely on him for hers. This is not a depiction of a relationship between two equals, as Adam is framed as above Eve in the hierarchy. This reading remains the same whether or not Eve is made from Adam's "rib" or "side," and therefore is not feminist.

Lastly, a feminist interpretation of Genesis 2-3 might include a discussion of the term 'helper', עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ- ezer kenegdo, and whether Eve is made for Adam. That is because ezer gives connotations of strength, ezer is 'one that can be relied upon' and kenegdo translates roughly to 'corresponding to' (Myers, 2013, 85; Gomola, 2014, 84). William L. Holladay translates עֵזֶר as "helper" and עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ as "his counterpart", a possessive version of the word root as עָזַר which translates to "opposite" or "corresponding to" (1972, 569, 481). The presence of his here is significant, as it emphasises how Eve's being is made to rely on Adam's existence. Genesis 2:23 clarifies this point, naming her 'woman': אִשָּׁה isha, taken from אִישׁ ish, 'man' (Holliday, 1972, 87, 89). The woman is named just as she is created, in reference to man, "for out of Man this one was taken" (2:23). Myers idea that Eve is being described here as a suitable helper equal to Adam, but it does not seem that a suitable helper described in terms of

Adam's existence is a description of an equal. Gomola concludes that this is the influence of misogynist translations of the Bible (2014, 84). However, this analysis is only concerned with defining Eve before she goes against God's word. Eden is paradise, and in Genesis 3-4 Adam and Eve fall into the mortal world (3:23), Eve's punishment is to be subjugated by Adam (3:16). Eve's role is outlined as part of her punishment, to be ruled over by her husband and for childbirth to be painful (3:16). Eve is mentioned at the beginning of Genesis 4 referred only as Adam's wife whose only action is becoming pregnant twice more, after which her importance in the Hebrew Bible diminishes (4:1) (Myers 2013, 74). So, although the Eve of Eden might have experienced some kind of equality with Adam, she is not afforded that luxury when in the mortal world and she is reduced to the role of child bearer. Although this is the end of both Adam and Eve's narratives, we rarely see female characters after Eve who at any point in their narratives have access to the kind of agency Eve has when she eats the fruit, marking with significance that her narrative ends only as Adam's wife. Therefore, as mortal women outside of Eden are still doomed to be subjugated by men, the depiction of Eve in Genesis 2-3 is not feminist.



Eve as Beauvoir's 'Other' and Adam as the 'Subject'.

The feminist re-interpretations of Eve I have examined above are attempts to interpret Eve as equal to Adam. However, all of these arguments that Adam is ungendered, that Eve is made from Adam's side rather than his rib, or that she is a strong helper equal to Adam- all define Eve through her relation to Adam. A useful mode of examining the role of Eve is presented by Simone De Beauvoir in her examination of the role of woman (Beauvoir, 1948, p.26). Beauvoir argues that women are oppressed because they are regarded as the Other while man is the Subject (Beauvoir, 1948, 26). A woman is defined in reference to man, whereas a man can simply exist

independent of his relations to another (Beauvoir, 1948, p.26). Man is the default, the whole self and the essential but woman is different, the divided self, and the inessential (Beauvoir, 1948, 78). In many ways, Eve epitomises the role of the Other, as she is different from the first man, Adam, and created from his bodily excess. Eve, to be truly feminist, should be able to be interpreted without reference to Adam. Defining Eve only with reference to Adam, whether she is considered equal to or less than him, still Others Eve. To consider that Adam begins genderless, as Tribble argues, solidifies Eve's Otherness.

Beauvoir argues that men are able to access an innate sense of relational impartiality, and that the position of 'neutral' is implicitly only available to men, as they are arranged to be the subject (Beauvoir, 1948, 25). This sentiment of neutrality is evidenced in the reason for Adam's creation without the imposition of gender, that is, the will of an ungendered. When compared to Eve, who is created to fulfil the will of a man, she is not afforded the same neutrality, and therefore, embodies the female Other. Some have argued, like Brown, that Eve's fall from grace is her becoming the Other, and that her transition into being subjugated only begins after she sins (Brown, 2017, 289). However, Eve's Otherness is baked into her very existence as she is made from Adam, and therefore always defined in reference to him. The othering of Eve, the archetypal role model for women, only solidifies the oppression of women. Therefore, Eve in Genesis 2-3 cannot be read as feminist.

Genesis 2-3 is intrinsically patriarchal; therefore, it cannot be read as Feminist.

I have argued that in Genesis 2-3 Eve is the Other in both the traditional and feminist interpretations because she is always defined in relation to Adam. She does not and cannot exist of her own accord. Daly argues 'if God is Male, then Male is God' (Daly, 1973, 54). However, this extends to Adam too.

If God is Male, and creates the primary human Adam as a male, then Male is God, Man is primary, and Woman is secondary (Daly, 1973, 9). Daly also notes that Eve's first sin, the corruption of Adam pits femininity against holiness (Daly, 1973, 48).

Eve as the archetypal woman implies that women have a greater propensity to sin – which is not a representation of womanhood that empowers female readers. Eve, as far as the interpretations this essay has examined, remains not only subservient to Adam but also only defined in relation to him. After the fall, Eve gives Adam two sons and then fades into obscurity, modelling androcentric, or male-centred, gendered norms which reduces women to their role as wife and mother. This is a theme consistently found throughout the Hebrew Bible, in the narratives of women such as Bethsheba, Dena or Tamar; all female characters presented through a male lens. Therefore, it seems that this patriarchal Othering of Eve originates in the biblical narrative itself and is so bonded to her character that this influence is found even in modern feminist explanations of her character.

Conclusion.

To conclude, through no lens can the character of Eve in Genesis 2-3 be interpreted or re-interpreted to be feminist as the original text is rooted in patriarchal ideals. It is impossible to interpret Eve in Genesis 2-3 without reference to Adam, so in this way, Eve remains as the Other and Adam as the Subject. By presenting Adam and Eve as the archetypes of humanity, Genesis 2-3 promotes patriarchal ideas that women are meant to be 'rule(d) over' by men (3:16). To achieve justice for women within the religious realm, there needs to be religious representation in which women are not tainted by their status as the Other and are the Subjects in their own narrative. This is a status which Eve in Genesis is unable to achieve, even after feminist exegesis.

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BY ELIZABETH HAMILTON



How To Resist with Words

ARTWORK BY DAISY MARSH

EDITED BY KATIE O'CONNOR, COPY EDITED BY RUTH WATERSON
REVIEWED BY EUGENE PHILALITHIS

Resistance against oppression can be diversely defined. Johansson and Vinthagen (2019) have posited that it is composed of the acts of subordinated people that might undermine power. Henry (2019) describes these acts as contra the forces that homogenise and confine people, aiming at liberation. These definitions broadly describe the amorphous concept of resistance as ‘acts against’. However, what are these acts? Can something as little (or as big) as speaking out be a resistant act? I argue that anti-oppressive speech can enact resistance in accordance with J.L. Austin’s theory of speech acts. While J.L. Austin’s titular task is identifying ‘How to Do Things with Words’, I will describe how to resist with words.



To do this, I will:

- I.** Introduce resistance, explore Audre Lorde’s conception of the resistive power of speech and explain speech acts.
- II.** Describe how anti-oppressive speech may be a resistive performative.
- III.** Discuss the dimensions of content that impact resistant speech acts.
- IV.** Consider the power of oppression as a potential undermining force for anti-oppressive speech acts.
- V.** Offer a solution to this problem and discuss how speaking out can ultimately be used as a means for resistance, and be successful in this.

I. Oppression, Resistance, and Speech Acts

Resistance, as introduced, can be understood as a response to oppression, actions against. Oppression must thus be defined. Iris Young (1990, 39) posited that oppression is an iteration of injustice and a ‘disabling constraint’. To describe how oppression exists in our society, Young (1990, 41) posits that it is ‘structural’, meaning it is present in generally unexamined norms, rules, and habits that underpin institutional governing and the subordinating consequences of it. By understanding oppression this way, it can be seen that undermining rules and

norms is necessary to liberate subordinated people from discriminatory confinement. To expand on the nature of this, Patricia Hill Collins, alongside other feminist thinkers, elucidated how subordinated people occupy unique social positions created by the interlocking of oppressive structures (Collins, 2008, p.82). This theory, labelled intersectionality, has progressed our understanding of oppression, showing how complex it really is. Acknowledging intersectionality can be exemplified by the concept of misogynoir, developed by Moya Bailey, which describes the way that racism and misogyny jointly shape black women’s oppression (Bailey, 2021, p.1). This is visible in media depictions of derogatory archetypes of black women such as the ‘mammy’ or ‘welfare queen’ (Bailey, 2021, p.2). This discriminatory representation is a result of not only misogyny or racism, but the specific combination of the two (Bailey, 2021, p.2). Specific identities constitute social positions that affect the experiences of many subordinated people, and so, intersectional resistance is vital. Therefore, resistance is a direct response to oppression, no matter its complexity, and requires the undermining of the rules and norms that shape it.

Audre Lorde describes speech as resistive, specifically when one verbalises their own experience (Lorde, 1984, p.42). She highlights that this acts against the invisibility that is indispensable to oppression. The act of verbalising experiences stands in direct opposition to the silence which keeps oppression invisible and obscured (Lorde, 1984, p.42). Speaking out from a position of subordination rejects the idea that certain voices are less valuable and so should not be heard. Furthermore, vocalising experiences of subordination can call attention to how the things we see and do every day are capable of being oppressive, in turn challenging us to critique the thoughts and behaviours we consider normal (Lorde, 1984, p.44). Through speech, we are able to discuss oppression and give name and delineate

ideas such as misogynoir, and use this language to criticise norms like the archetypes introduced above. In this way, vocalising such ideas enables them to directly challenge the norms they analyse, providing the tools to change perceptions. Thus, by identifying these benefits of vocalising, Lorde has laid the groundwork for how important speaking out can be as an act of resistance, and we are left with the question, how does this work?

Pausing on the discussion of resistance, I will now elucidate J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts (performatives), before moving onto Mary Kate McGowan's application of this in the context of oppression. This will provide the framework for speech to be understood as a resistant act in itself. J.L Austin posits that performatives, that is utterances that make *something* so, should be considered acts (Austin, et al., 1979). For example, at a wedding, the proclamation 'I do' is considered an act in itself, as it officially marries the couple when it is uttered by both parties. J.L. Austin also explains how there are conditions that performatives must fulfil to be successful. The first is that the circumstances are appropriate, for example, the proclamation 'I do' can only make a marriage happen at an actual wedding (Austin, et al., 1979, p. 237). The second is that there are conventions which recognise these words as acts, for example, the proclamation 'I do' would not succeed if this phrase was not commonly known to officiate one's commitment to marriage (Austin, et al., 1979). Finally, the speech must be sincere and intentional, otherwise it can be classified as an abuse, (Austin, et al., 1979) for example saying 'I do' jokingly undermines the relevant integrity of the statement. Thus, speech can do things and therefore can be an act.

Mary Kate McGowen (2009) takes this framework and argues that performatives can be oppressive, and so speech can enact oppression.

This accounts for the mechanisms of oppression within speech, which will be used to delve into resistant speech. J.L. Austin defines a particular performative, an exercitive, as one that exercises power, rights, or influence (McGowen, 2009, p.393). McGowen argues that oppressive speech can be exercitives that create oppressive rules which then govern a particular environment (McGowen, 2009, p.397). Oppression is the activity that results from the following of created rules and norms which constrain subordinated people, and so speech governed by these rules can be considered as enacting oppression (McGowen, 2009, p.397). This can be seen in the following example of two colleagues talking at work about a woman called Denise who has accused someone of sexual assault:



Ex.1:

Allan: Boys will be boys.

Michael: Exactly, she's complaining about nothing.

McGowen asserts that speech like Allan's can enact oppression as it creates oppressive social rules, the prevalence of which is exemplified in Michael's response. Allan's speech establishes the norm, in this environment, that men's wrongdoings should be considered more forgivable, especially when they are committed against women. Therefore, as speech can influence what is permissible in a given environment, such as oppressive misogynistic rhetoric, speech can be an oppressive performative.

II. Resistant Speech Acts

To delineate resistant performatives, I will illustrate an interaction between the oppressive rules proposed by McGowan and an example of resistant speech. Analysis of this interaction will motivate the concept of resistant speech acts.

What if, before Michael could respond, Denise spoke up? What if she told Allan that what he said was wrong to some degree? Denise could say:

Ex.2:

No! Men should be held accountable for their actions. What he did was wrong and it's good that I came forward

In Ex.2, Denise's response contravenes the rules that, according to McGowan, Allan's utterance sets up, and in this capacity her speech can be classified as an act. Denise knows that Allan's utterance is unfair and misogynistic, and vocalises this. Allan's oppressive act (his permissibility of misogyny) is undermined as the oppressive rules his speech creates are transgressed. Denise's speech functionally makes misogyny no longer as permissible in this environment. Her response further enforces the idea that her experiences and voice are important, and should not be reduced by misogynistic rhetoric. She is not only generally undermining the norms of misogyny in this environment that Alan creates by contradicting him, but as Lorde suggests, the norm of staying silent in the face of it is subverted. Lorde would posit that a considerable aspect of Denise's resistance is the recentring her own experience. In speaking out, she challenges the underlying implication of Allan's utterance that her voice, experience, and opinions do not matter. Denise's speaking out is the antithesis to the silence which is vital to the continuation of oppressive norms. Ultimately, it can be understood that Denise's utterance in Ex.2 challenges the social rule of permitting misogyny and her own subordination, thus is resistant in this capacity.

In order for Denise's response to be a resistant performative, the content of her speech must be distinctly anti-oppressive. For this to be the case, Denise must understand the oppression at hand, and her response shows that she does. She first says, "men should be held accountable for their actions", challenging the oppressive norm Allan's utterance perpetuates; that men should not be held accountable for their sexual violence against

oppressive women, more simply the endorsement of a 'boys will be boys' attitude. She has enough knowledge and familiarity with this concept to understand that this is what Allan was harmfully advocating in his speech. Moreover, she says that "it's good that I came forward", which illustrates her understanding that sexual assault is something worth protesting, even in the face of Allan's misogynistic speech act. In this way, the content that makes up Denise's resistant performative, is dependent upon Denise's awareness of existing oppressive norms. Overall, she enacts resistance, so her speech is a performative.

III. The Dimensions of Resistant Speech Acts

As shown, the resistant speech act derives from Denise's understanding of her experience, which calls for an exploration of the epistemic layer of resistant speech acts. Without knowing what Allan meant, especially the harm of his statement, Denise would be unable to enact resistance through words. She understands that the experience is wrong and thus resists. However, imagine if Denise accepted the 'boys will be boys' attitude that Alan perpetuates. In this case she would likely not realise the degree of injustice in her experience, and therefore not speak up in the way she does. The injustice of this attitude needs to be something Denise recognises. A problem thus arises when ideas of certain forms of oppression have not yet been developed or when people are not aware of them. It would be easy for Denise to internalise these attitudes, but access to understanding of injustice can undermine this ease. For example, currently, it seems intuitive that sexual harassment is oppressive and therefore wrong, but this was not always the case. In fact, the concept of sexual harassment was only developed in the 1970s in the U.S (Jackson, 2021). Before then, it was likely more difficult for a woman to understand her own experience as oppression, as she would have lacked the epistemological resources needed to assert the

injustice of her harassment, despite its obvious wrong. Fricker's (2007) idea of hermeneutical injustice discusses this concept. Fricker argues that our perceptions of social experiences are shaped by prejudicial interpretive resources. These implicit biases undermine our ability to understand and thus vocalise the social experience of subordinated people. Thus, epistemic resources form part of the epistemic roots of resistance speech acts.

This is not to say that she is unable to understand how the experience is wrong without external definitions of injustices. However, to counter social norms in the way she does by speaking out, an understanding of the injustice and oppression of this experience is necessary. This necessity is motivated by the ease of understanding and explicating that is provided by ideas of injustice, as identified by Fricker. This ease allows Denise to speak out and for her meaning to be understood and not dismissed. Implicitly understanding her oppression is one thing, but effective resistant acts derive from the explicit naming and shaming of such oppression. This renders the power of vocal resistance temporarily situated, we can only verbalise to the extent to which we can conceptualise forms of oppression, making it part of the bigger task of interrogating our social perceptions to understand oppression and injustice.

Finally, speech, being personal, is a particularly useful tool to enact resistance on an intersectional level, but must be mindful of intersectional oppression. When an oppressed person speaks out against their suffering, they acknowledge the unique social situation that constitutes their experience of subordination. This empowers in a specifically intersectional way as it allows resistance to be personal. The personalisation of resistance is important as, drawing from the ideas of black feminists including Lorde (1984, p.67), articulating challenges to oppression on behalf of others can be harmful as it leaves space to ignore intersectional

forces which may shape the oppression. Thus, as intersectionality recognises the differences in experiences of oppression, personal resistant speech, an act constituted by the perspective of one agent, emphasises the importance of an individual's experience. This demonstrates that resistance speech is particularly useful where it is personal and may become problematic when it is on behalf of others. Speaking out is thus not only an act of resistance, but one of representation. This further illustrates how perceptions of subordination are fundamental to the formation of an anti-resistant speech act. In these ways, the content of resistant performatives is important to allow them to enact resistance. This content can draw inspiration from knowledge derived from personal lived experience of oppression and/or conceptualisations of oppression where they are available. The content must avoid obscuring intersectionality and may be limited by hermeneutical injustice.

IV. The Trouble for Resistant Speech

Oppression is powerful and prolific. Speech may transgress the rules of oppression in content, but does this change anything enough to constitute an act? I consider here the qualification of speech acts which require a certain level of meaningful difference we must expect to label resistant speech an act. This is the primary problem for resistant speech and resistance alike; how can small, individual actions like speech act to counter something as widespread and dominant as oppression?

McGowen theorises that oppressive speech operates by its influence and that norms and rules constitute oppression, but resistance does not have such a foundation. There are no established 'moves' that one can make, in speech or otherwise, that automatically constitute resistance as it is not a structural phenomenon, but is one of norms and rules, like oppression.

By uttering something anti-oppressive, we cannot draw upon the rules that already exist in society to make something permissible, or not permissible as the case may be. In brief and as stated, it is not an exercitive, as oppressive speech is. Lacking the power to exert authority, anti-oppressive speech may be insufficient in enacting resistance to oppression, which is authoritative. Initially it seems that Denise's response changes the environment by challenging that misogyny should be permissible, but the problem is resistance lacks the same power that oppression holds. What if Allan laughed Denise's response off or reiterated his point? What if Michael still said what he said after she spoke? If any of these things happened, it indicates that it is still permissible in this environment to be misogynistic, to dismiss Denise's experience and excuse men for terrible behaviour. Thus, the rules that Allan's exercitive enacts are not directly altered by Denise's utterance and so oppression still pertains no matter what Denise says. If oppression prevails, has the anti-oppressive speech changed enough to deserve the status of a speech act? Denise's speech may be resistant in content, but if it does not actually alter oppression, it may fall short of meeting the parameters of a speech act.

V. The Solution for Speaking Out

I defend the notion that resistant speech can be speech acts by arguing that breaking oppressive norms and rules meaningfully compromises oppression's ability to subordinate. As I have shown, through expressing an opposing attitude which oppressive systems seek to forbid, anti-oppressive speech can break oppressive rules, therefore changing the norms of an environment simply by denying them. Moreover, as oppression works through norms and rules, if these are contravened then oppression is not working. We know that oppression can persist, as illustrated by the considerations of Part IV, as resistant speech cannot authoritatively disallow it. However, the persistence

of oppression is undermined by every instance in which speaking out denies its influence. This is due to the fact that resistance is a reaction to oppression and has no structural underpinning of its own. Therefore, it does not set rules and norms of behaviour, does not directly make things permissible or prevalent, but does challenge what is permissible and prevalent at the hand of oppression.

In the case of Alan and Denise, it may seem like this undermining is trivial, and that when Denise is brushed off, she has not undermined any oppression. However, dismantling structural oppression requires steady progress, the breaking of oppressive rules over and over again until norms begin to change. Resistant speech can therefore be used with other forms of protest to combat oppression, all of which are acts of resistance. This can be seen in the name and logo change of the breakfast food brand of Aunt Jemima. The Aunt Jemima caricature drew upon the racist and sexist 'mammy' stereotype originating from minstrelsy, a specific example of misogynoir as conceptualised by Moya Bailey. Riché Richardson identified this issue in 2015, not in speech but in an article, yet still 'speaking out' against this iteration of the mammy archetype (Crump, 2021), however it was not until 2020, with increasing pressure from the Black Lives Matter protests that the logo finally changed. As we can see, Richardson's initial act of resistance did not immediately change the logo of the brand, but was a challenge to a norm, which when repeated over and over, eventually dismantled a form of structural oppression. There are cases when it seems like resistant performatives do not immediately have any effect on undermining oppression. However, every time speech challenges oppression, it is one step closer to shifting norms away from the subordination of people which are often accepted without question. This serve to further define resistance and such defend my understanding of anti-oppressive speech being acts of resistance.

I have defended that anti-oppressive speech can be an act of resistance by their breaking of rules that constitute oppression. By elucidating Austin and McGowan's work on (oppressive) speech acts, it can be seen that anti-oppressive speech constitutes resistance through its subversion of oppressive norms that performatives create. I have then posited how resistant speech can be an act. To follow, I illustrated the epistemic and intersectional dimensions of resistant speech. I raised the possible objection of how speech that is resistant in concept, may not constitute a speech act as it may be insufficient in enacting change. However, I have illustrated that conceptualising and understanding oppressive rules, and then breaking them is key to dismantling oppressive systems through examples of both a hypothetical situation (that of Alan and Denise) and real life one (the case of Aunt Jemima), so this is what constitutes resistant acts and makes anti-oppressive speech qualify as this. I conclude that speech and speaking is not only an act of resistance, but an effective and powerful one that can progress our society away from oppressive norms.



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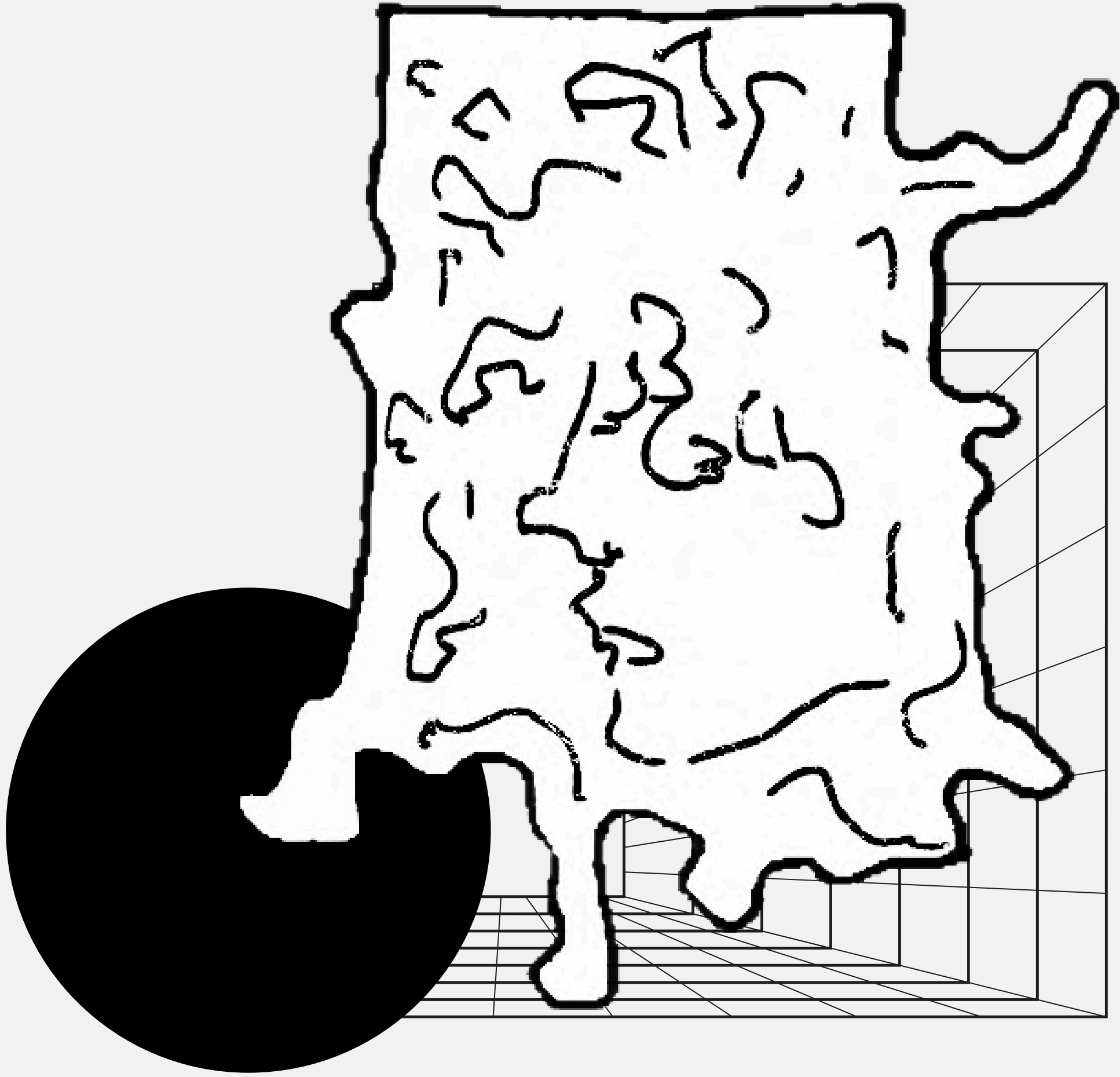
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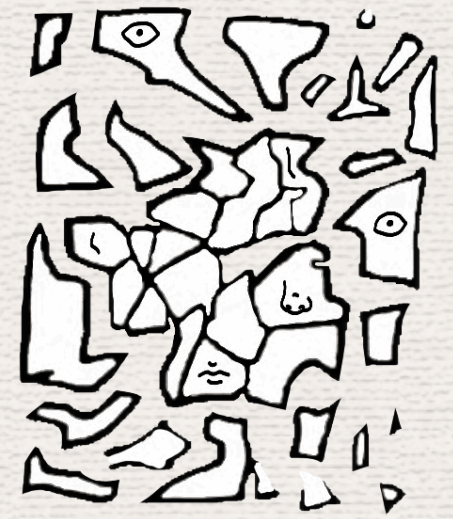
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SECTION 2

Art and
Literature

Artwork by Marni Robertson

BY JULIA GUZIKOWSKA



CHALLENGING
PATRIARCHAL
REPRESENTATIONS



In Women's Metafictional Writing

ARTWORK BY MARNIE ROBERTSON

EDITED BY ZEYNEP KILIC, COPY EDITED BY EVEREST HEAD
REVIEWED BY ALISHA PALMER

Introduction

Friedman and Fuchs claim that '[i]n exploding dominant forms, women experimental writers not only assail the social structure but also produce an alternate fictional space, a space in which the feminine, marginalized in traditional fiction and patriarchal culture, can be expressed. Thus, the rupturing of traditional forms becomes a political act, and the feminine narrative resulting from such a rupture is allied with the feminist project' (4).

This statement makes a valid point in regard to the postmodernist feminist fiction by experimental women writers. When radically political fictional spaces are considered, the concept of metafiction proves to be particularly important. Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School* (copyrighted 1978) and Sapphire's *PUSH* (1996) are two examples of narratives that, through their experimental form, especially the metafictional techniques, trouble the normative modes of representation and manage to establish radically feminist spaces of expression.

Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as: 'fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality' (2).

However, this method does not only question the fictionality but, 'through its self-exploration' (3), 'rejects the forms that correspond to the ordered reality' (7), namely 'the language of the traditional novel: the conventions of realism' (11) and thus draws attention to the 'impermanent structures' rather than a dictated 'common sense' (7). Imperatively, Friedman and Fuchs see the traditional realist narratives as a mode of writing embodying the patriarchal system, with its essential feature being 'the stance of mastery' (38) (elements like the omniscient narrator, linear plot etc.). However, as Mark Currie highlights, metafiction is committed to 'the idea of constructed meanings rather than representable essences' (15),

consequently becoming a method of subverting the conventional and "universal" realism of patriarchal storytelling. Acker and Sapphire's narratives exemplify this mode of writing, mainly through fragmentation, intertextuality and self-reflection and create "the fictional" as an opposition to ordered realism and question the essentiality of social structures, id est the patriarchal system.

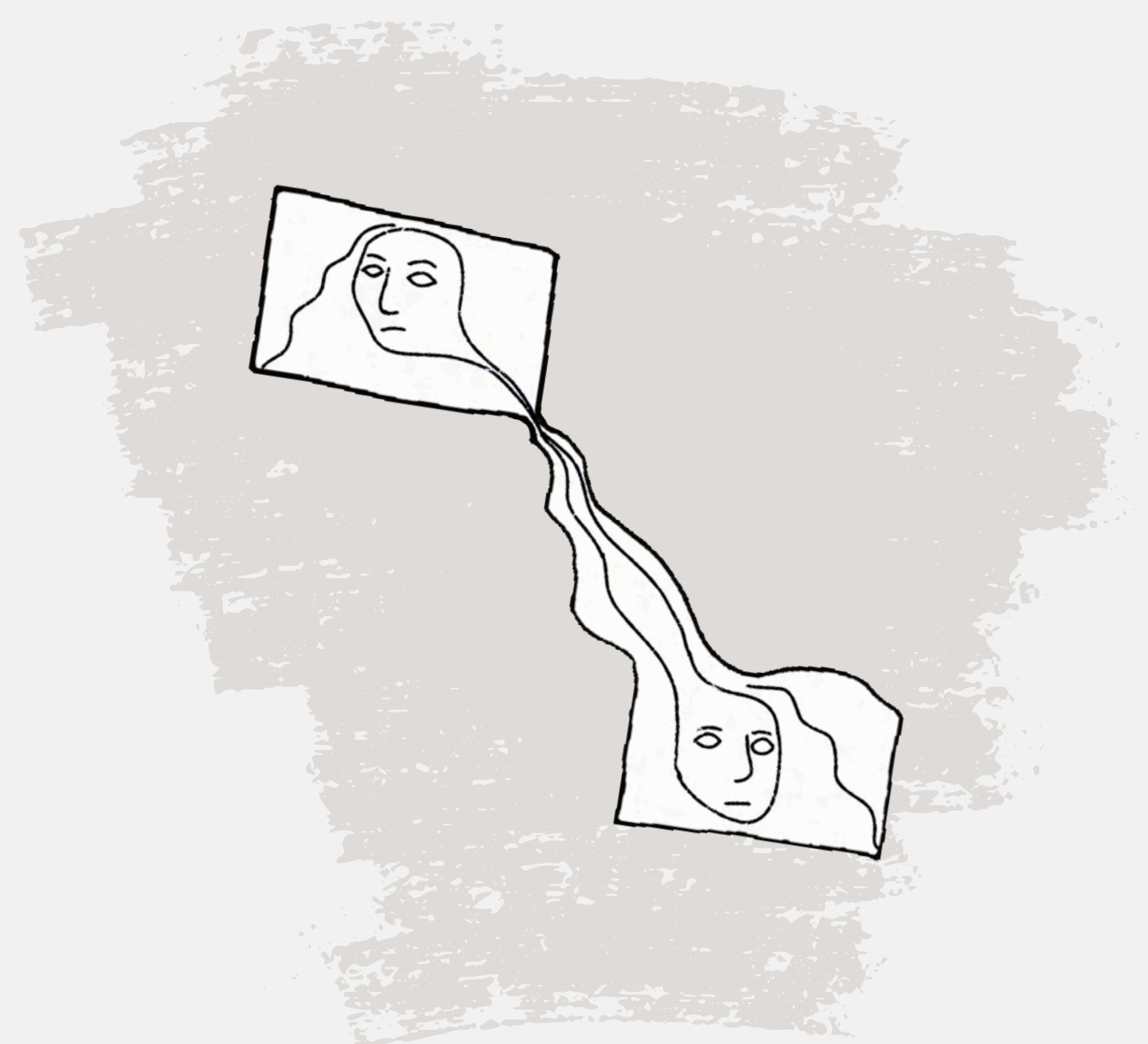
In line with Friedman and Fuchs's understanding of women's experimental writing, I argue that through the means of metafiction, which subverts the established notions of realism and stresses the constructedness of reality, authors like Acker and Sapphire create room and possibility for women's radical opposition against established norms of literary patriarchal structures as well as voice a call for their liberation. These works are rooted in the ideas of agency; through the experimental and metafictional form, they assert the writer's freedom and thus give power to the marginalised feminine.

1. The writer's freedom in expression

Blood and Guts in High School (henceforth *Blood and Guts*) by Kathy Acker is an experimental novel that tells the story of Janey Smith, who, throughout her coming-of-age, endures incestuous sexual relations with her father, rape, abuse, kidnapping and being sold into prostitution. Called by some critics a novel of cruelty which '[rereads] the patriarchal literary tradition' (Henderson 208), this narrative, in questioning the dominant and objective representations of truth and reality, establishes itself as a critique of literary conventions. Acker confronts the realist mode of writing, mainly through elements of metafiction, like fragmentation and intertextuality, as a result establishing fiction as a place of women's artistic expression free from realist modes of writing.

The primary technique of creating metafiction within *Blood and Guts* is fragmentation. Acker intertwines various forms: prose, script, poetry, and illustrations to put together a novel that radically defies the traditional, that is, realist forms of a narrative. Larry McCaffery emphasises the experimental punk aesthetics at the core of this novel, which aim to challenge traditional artistic forms by prioritising representations of power, obscenity and excess (220). Notable, though, is the use of illustrations within the story. Critics like Katie Muth see these drawings as ‘disruptions’, which aim to ‘aestheticise poststructuralist arguments’ embedded within the novel (91-92). However, I would argue that these images fundamentally but productively fragment the story, thus deconstructing it, but they remain reiterations of the main narrative. The text of the narrative is visualised in the drawings, for example in connection to Merida (the place where the first chapter of the novel takes place) – see p. 6, Figure 1 (Acker 14). The surrealist visual representation of the novel’s setting not only echoes the atmosphere of the place where Janey grows up: the “genitality” of the illustrations draws attention to her childhood being filled with sexual relations but also exposes an illusion of the narrative world as fictional or constructed. Besides the visual repetition of the setting and its mood, the narrative includes a series of drawings called “Maps” (Acker 46-51). In these illustrations, Acker retells the story through various (visual) allegories and metaphors, thus again using repetition as a mode of fragmentation and creating self-consciousness in the narrative, proving it metafictional. For instance, in the third map, “The Fairytale Begins” – see p.7, Figure 2 (Acker 50-51), Acker creates an allegorical story at the top of the illustration (e.g. ‘Baba takes me to the edge of the metal factory and sticks his cock in me. I’m his ‘wife’ (Acker 51)), which foreshadows the further parts of the narrative, in which Janey is kidnapped and sold to a Persian slave trader (‘Janey lived in the locked room. Twice a day

the Persian slave trader came in and taught her to be a whore.’ (Acker 65)). Moreover, in the centre of the map, Acker draws attention to the narrative’s ‘I’ being a writer: ‘I make myself a writer’ (50), identifying the fictional writer of the novel as the protagonist. This is emphasised further in the story: ‘One day she found a pencil stub and scrap of paper in a forgotten corner of the room. She began to write down her life ...’ (65). A motif of the protagonist as a writer introduces a crucial element of metafiction: the self-consciousness of the novel as an artefact (using Waugh’s term (2)) and further their ability to create a personal, subjective reality. As Friedman and Fuchs suggest, such stories problematise the idea of universal truths, freeing women’s writing from the conventions of realist fiction, which reinforces the patriarchal system (38). Therefore, *Blood and Guts* becomes a metaphorical commentary on the agency of a female writer, who, going against traditional realist storytelling, can create a space for the free expression of a woman’s life – experimental and not subdued by oppressive conventions.



The self-reflection of the narrative on its fictional status is combined in *Blood and Guts* with the critique of dominant stories within patriarchy. Acker achieves this ‘borderline discourse between fiction and reality’ (Currie 2) through another metafictional technique: intertextuality. This novel, being a pastiche, draws on various texts and myths existing in reality to undermine the predominant representations within patriarchy, particularly the feminine representations. Hutcheon identifies this (as some critiques, for example McCaffery 223; Pitchford 59; Freidman and Fuchs 39, name it) “plagiarism” as inherently postmodern in its way of questioning the ‘(historical) power of representations’, a technique ‘often used by feminist artists [...] to deconstruct them [cultural representations]’ (98). It is visible in Acker’s novel, for instance, through the play on the Oedipus complex, for instance, ‘Janey depended on her father for everything and regarded her father as boyfriend, brother, sister, money, amusement, and father’ (7). Acker deconstructs this popular psychoanalytic theory by inverting it, in which Muth sees a commentary on the concept of the Oedipal family (90) and thus challenges its universality. Particularly significant, however, proves to be the intertextual reference to *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, which appears in the narrative Janey starts writing her story:

‘She began to write down her life...

A book report

We all live in prison. Most of us don’t know we live in prison.’ (Acker 65, emphasis in original)

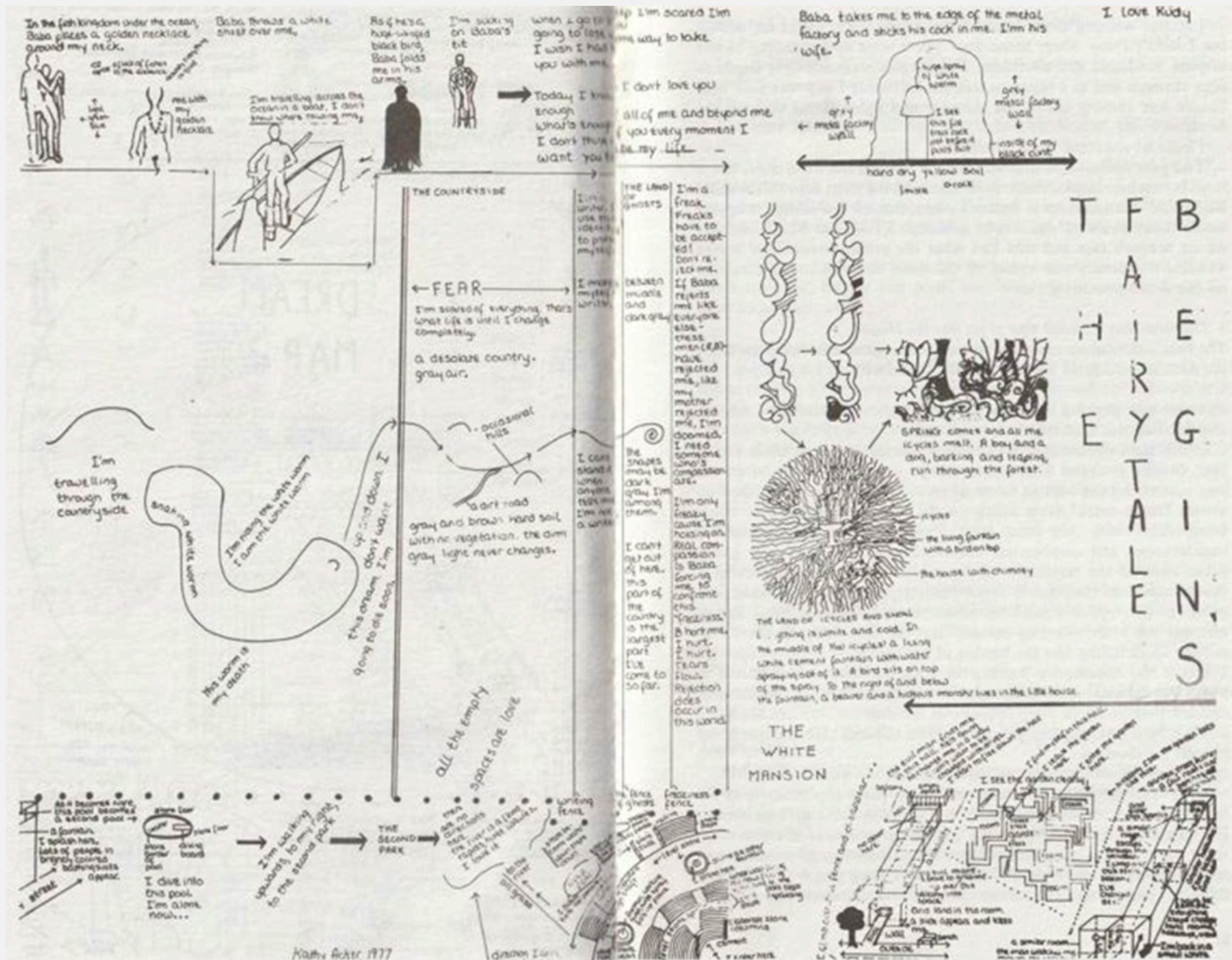
By placing this intertextual reference after the narrative self-consciously acknowledges its constructedness, Acker voices a radical criticism of the fictionality of representation. The metaphor of the prison (alluding directly to Hawthorne’s popular historical fiction novel) poses a question of whether the narratives of patriarchal culture “imprison”

women in their representations, whether the realist novel as a form perpetuates the prison-like conditions for the female characters and /or writers. Janey’s life becomes, thus, metaphorically written by the presentation of *The Scarlet Letter*’s protagonist, Hester Prynne. Pitchford sees in this a postmodernist technique, used by feminist writers, of challenging the “master narratives” (24-25). On the other hand, Henderson calls it ‘Acker’s “pedagogical mission” [...] to get the reader to reread [...] the patriarchal literary tradition’ (208). Thus, by using the experimental, metafictional mode of writing, Kathy Acker ‘takes the bourgeois realist novel and explodes its form’ (Henderson 202), ultimately challenging the patriarchal conventional representations. The fictional space of *Blood and Guts* becomes thus a feminist project of asserting the artist’s freedom and power to (self-) represent.

Figure 1: Acker, Kathy. “Merida”. *Blood and Guts in High School*. Penguin Books, 2017. p.14 (scanned)



Figure 2: Acker, Kathy. "Map 3: The Fairytale Begins". *Blood and Guts in High School*. Penguin Books, 2017. p.50-51 (scanned)



2. The woman's agency

The fictional women's spaces and the establishment of spaces for the feminine and female writers can take different shapes while still being centred around the means of metafiction. Sapphire's *PUSH* is a coming-of-age story of Precious Jones, who, after being repeatedly raped by her father, becomes a second-time mother at the age of sixteen. Learning to read and write in an alternative school *Each One Teach One*, the protagonist tries to challenge the forces of social determinism in her attempts to become a good mother and construct her life outside of the dysfunctional family. Similar to Acker's *Blood and Guts*, this narrative is also experimental in its form, through the use of African-American Vernacular English, the fragmentation through different modes of writing (prose intertwines with poetry, etc.). Nevertheless, it is particularly through the elements of metafiction that Sapphire establishes this novel as a radical feminist project

that exemplifies the importance of self-determination and the importance of each person's experience. Compared to *Blood and Guts*, the intertextuality in *PUSH* is not a challenge or an assault on patriarchal myths of representation but a means of self-discovery. This metafictional technique is constructed here by references to other works of culture. They are not criticised but seen as ways to empower oneself. Especially important proves to be a reference to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*: 'We reading *The Color Purple* in school. [...] that book give me so much strength' (Sapphire 81-83). The intertextual references in *PUSH* function thus as ways to emancipation. This notion is strictly connected to the quest for literacy within the story. David draws on the theory by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 'text created author' and claims that: 'being and becoming for black people involved reading and writing in order to disprove white supremacist claims of black inferiority and cultural absence' (182- 183).

The intertextual references function here as cultural representations and guidelines for Precious to discover stories through the newly learned language as well as to question the notion of Black women's invisibility within society. Many critics highlight the importance of the narrative's position within the broader literary tradition of African-American writing, id est the issue of literacy (e.g. Dagbovie-Mullins 446, Michlin 175, Venkatasan 117). As David states, this motif of learning to read and write is crucial as it 'holds a promise of a self-determined visibility in the wider world, a visibility that would counteract the [...] abjections, absence ...' (182). This idea is visible in the optimistic ending of Precious's story:

'He pulling on my earring, want me to stop daydreaming and read him a story before nap time. I do.' (Sapphire 140).

The first-person narrator asserts in this conclusion her own agency. The short sentence "I do." emphasises the power and freedom to read and through that fulfils her ideals of motherhood. The intertextuality in *PUSH*, thus, is a means of establishing the radical agency of its protagonist. Furthermore, Sapphire's novel, similarly to *Blood and Guts in High School*, utilises self-consciousness of its fictional status to create a feminist narrative. The first-person narration and self-reflexive elements of the novel (like poems or extracts from the class journal) emphasise the narrative's character as a creation by Precious. Michlin proposes to read the entire narrative as the protagonist's submission to the 'Life Stories' collection written by the class members in the Each One Teach One class:

'We have a class project – LIFE STORY. It's where we write our life stories and put it all in one big book. [...] One day when I have time I read you what the other girls wrote.' (Sapphire 94)

Thus, the novel *PUSH* becomes an optimistic testimony to the power and liberation through telling one's own story. It becomes a metaphor for self-representation and self-constructedness within stories. Sika Dagbovie-Mullins argues that 'Precious is victimized until she writes herself into being' (436). In such a way, the experimental elements of the story, especially its metafictional self-consciousness, become a way of asserting a woman's means to represent herself and assume a position among cultural representations. Therefore, Sapphire creates a fictional expression space for a marginalised protagonist – Precious is given a voice and freedom to self-represent.

Conclusion

Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts* and Sapphire's *PUSH* are examples of experimental writing that becomes political through the radical uses of the narrative form. Substantiating Friedman and Fuchs's claim (see p. 3), metafictional elements of the novels draw attention to the constructedness of the texts and break with realist expectations. Through techniques like fragmentation, intertextuality and self-reflexion of the fiction, authors establish fictional spaces of resistance against conventions. Therefore, these works provide a space for feminist postmodernist opposition against the patriarchal modes of representation.



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Fig. 1: Acker, Kathy. "Merida". *Blood and Guts in High School*. Penguin Books, 2017. p.14

Fig. 2: Acker, Kathy. "Map 3: The Fairytale Begins". *Blood and Guts in High School*. Penguin Books, 2017, p.50-51

BY JULIA OWCZAREK

‘THESE CHICKS
ARE DAMAGED
GOODS’:

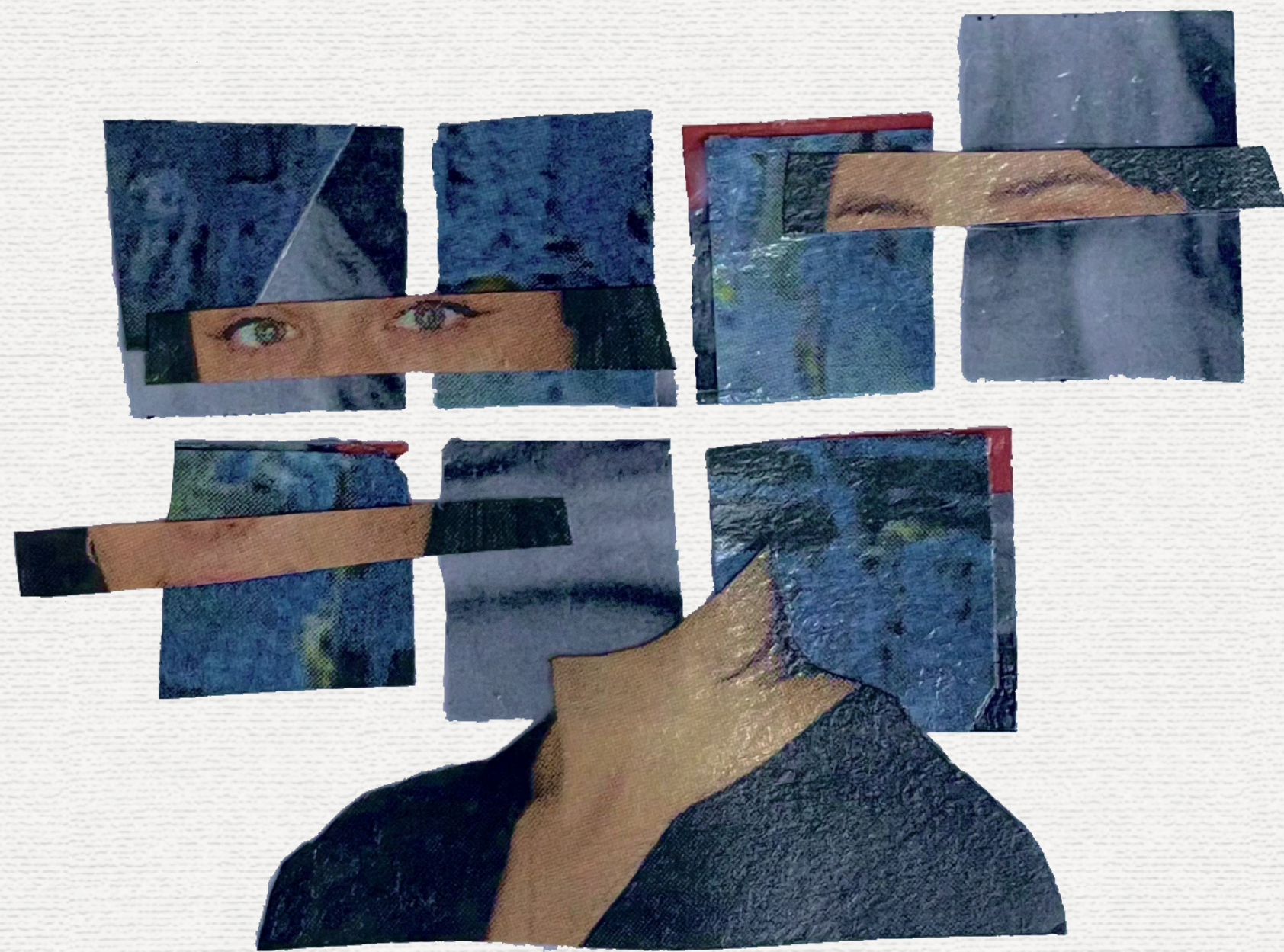
*The Abject Female Body in Fielding’s
Bridget Jones’s Diary and Warner’s
The Sopranos*

ARTWORK BY MARNIE ROBERTSON

EDITED BY ZEYNEP KILIC, COPY EDITED BY EVEREST HEAD
REVIEWED BY ELLA PORTER

Abject Female Body

Art and Literature



ARTWORK BY MARNI ROBERTSON

The female body as a disruptive force was a dominant topic in the popular culture and literature of the 1990s, as well as in debates of the postfeminist theorists of the decade¹. As culture began to constantly scrutinise women's bodies and obsessively fixate on unhealthy thinness and perpetual youth, an idealistic model of the female body was conceptualised: self-contained, perfectly smooth, with no biological functions or needs (vide McRobbie 57-8). Due to the impossibility of meeting these voyeuristic standards, the uncomfortable biological reality of womanhood has been perceived as deserving of societal degradation and unyielding control. This essay will examine² the nature of Kristevan's abjection of female bodies in Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1997) and Alan Warner's *The Sopranos* (1999). I shall follow the thesis of Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price, which delineates the relationship between the physicality of the female body and the negative perception of women, outlined as such: 'the body has a propensity to leak, to overflow the proper distinctions between self and other, to contaminate and engulf. Thus, women themselves are, in the conventional masculinist imagination, not simply inferior beings whose civil and social subordination is both inevitable and justified, but objects of fear and repulsion' (3). I will argue that the female protagonists of these novels are unwilling to reject their corporeality despite its negative connotations; however, due to the all-encompassing nature of their patriarchal environments, they are unable to liberate themselves from the oppressive demarcations of female abjection.

The culture of the 1990s undeniably exerted a considerable amount of pressure on women. Due to the efforts of second-wave feminism, women (predominantly white and middle-class, the demographic at the forefront of the movement's concerns) no longer had to be financially reliant on their fathers and husbands.

Thus, they were encouraged to excel in the professional sphere; as Angela McRobbie notes, '[w]e might now imagine the young woman as a highly efficient assemblage for productivity. (This also marks a shift, women now figure in governmental discourse as much for their productive as reproductive capacities.)' (55). This observation draws attention to the simultaneous requirements of excellence in professional and personal spheres – as far as modern women as a group have become considered the locum of new opportunities for capitalistic growth, the expectations of raising children and maintaining a household have neither diminished nor been passed on to the men. Women were urged to perform the roles of supermodel, career woman, and caring mother all at the same time – as Stéphanie Genz explains, the postfeminist woman 'lacks a harmonious inner wholeness or balance and she is troubled by her fate as a "Superwoman" who strives to incorporate her careerism and her need for hearth/husband, her heterosexual femininity and her potentially desexualizing feminist agenda' (98). These demands are strongly dependent on the temporality of the physical body as women have also been judged as having 'female sell-by dates', as Bridget Jones herself angrily notices (Fielding 213)



and as her family friends point out on any occasion: 'You career girls! [...] Can't put it off for ever you know. Tick-tock-tick-tock.' (Fielding 11). Thus, the biological clock of fertility is another unavoidable pressure as it is tied not only to motherhood itself but also to the attractiveness of the body as perceived by men. Furthermore, as Regina Schober explains, '[b]odily perfection often correlates directly with economic success [...] being attractive ensures a higher market value, both in a competitive job and marriage market' (124). Therefore, both economic and romantic achievements are impossible to separate from physical appearance.

These demands of bodily perfection are intrinsically linked to Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. She defines abject matter as something that crosses boundaries and defies social order, a part that must be cast off from the self in order to maintain its integrity – it can be exemplified through bodily waste, which is identified as the abject by the visceral revulsion it causes: 'Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me' (Kristeva 2). Kristeva demonstrates that the abject draws attention to boundaries, both physical and cultural, as she poignantly questions: '[w]hy does *corporeal waste*, menstrual blood and excrement, or everything that is assimilated to them, from nail-parings to decay, represent [...] the objective frailty of symbolic order?' (Kristeva 70). Kristeva emphasises that the existence of abject matter (and the irrationally strong revulsion it triggers) signals a threat to an idealistic order of rationality, one that must be repressed in order to maintain the status quo – and that this repression manifests not only on an individual but also institutional and ideological level. Due to the significance of menstruation and pregnancy, women are undeniably more connected to abject matter and are frequently identified with it, which is also discussed by Shildrick and Price: 'The very fact that women are able in general to menstruate, to develop

another body unseen within their own, to give birth, and to lactate is enough to suggest a potentially dangerous volatility that marks the female body as out of control, beyond, and set against, the force of reason' (3). These theories suggest that the very corporeality of women is threatening to the Symbolic patriarchal order.

Kristeva classifies two types of 'polluting objects' (the excremental and the menstrual), and asserts that 'those two defilements stem from the maternal and/or the feminine' as '[m]aternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self's clean and proper body' (71-2). She determines that the child will most likely learn the 'polluting' nature of bodily waste from its mother. The connection between maternal authority concerning bodily boundaries (especially those between waste and cleanliness) and the mother's body itself as a representation of the 'polluting' matter determines that the association of women with the abject is often formed in early infancy. This suggests that women as individuals, not only as archetypal mothers, and cast-off parts of society and are exposed to shame and repulsion through that early connection with corporeality. This theory also finds its expression in the idea of Bakhtin's 'grotesque body' as defined by Russo: 'the open, protruding, extended, secreting body [...] The grotesque body is opposed to the Classical body which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism' (63). This essay argues that the female characters depicted by Fielding and Warner are examples of abject, grotesque bodies – as the natural functioning of bodies in these texts is determined as repulsive in order to further the notion of achieving self-contained perfection, purged of any bodily fluids or biological needs, as a marker of societal merit.

Both Bridget Jones's *Diary* and *The Sopranos* are filled with images of female abjection. The former focuses on the protagonist's obsession with weight loss and attractiveness, which has been cultivated by her mother, her male romantic interests, and the popular culture surrounding her: 'I am a child of Cosmopolitan culture, have been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices' (Fielding 59). Bridget is fixated on the conjectural repulsiveness of her body, which is shown by her repeatedly using the same images to describe it: 'I feel ashamed and repulsive. I can actually feel the fat splurging out from my body' (Fielding 18), 'unexpectedly repulsive notion: never before faced reality of lard splurging from bottom and thighs under skin' (Fielding 57). As she pictures the isolated fat cells transgressing the boundary of her skin, she blames her weight for all her misfortunes: 'Oh God, what's wrong with me? Why does nothing ever work out? It is because I am too fat' (Fielding 181). However, even when she achieves her weight goal, she is only perceived as 'tired' and 'drawn', and she can only conclude that '[e]ighteen years of struggle, sacrifice and endeavour – for what? [...] I feel like a scientist who discovers that his life's work has been a total mistake' (Fielding 106-7). Throughout the novel, Bridget's behaviour constantly fluctuates between self-denial and indulgence: she either starves herself or binge-eats, either swears to forsake smoking or smokes a pack in an hour, is frequently either intoxicated or hungover. This increases her association with the abject through bodily discomfort and fluids: '[t]his morning I definitely felt the beginnings of morning sickness, but that could be because I was so hungover [...] that I ate the following things to try to make myself feel better' (Fielding 115). Bridget defines her identity through the state of her body, and the representation of her self-doubt and emotional fluctuations through excessive ingestion contributes to her portrayal as grotesque; therefore,

her physicality is central to her self-perception as unacceptable in broader society.

In *The Sopranos*, Alan Warner portrays a group of teenage girls in a Catholic school choir, navigating the complex societal expectations of growing up in 1990s Scotland, in 'The Port – a thinly disguised replica of Oban, Warner's hometown' (Schoene 258). They perform their defiance through over-indulgence in alcohol, as well as provocative fashion and sexual promiscuity. The novel is full of explicit images of sperm, vomit, blood, urine and defecation, which are drastically discordant with the nuns' ideas regarding the girls' conduct. This contrast is demonstrated in an extended scene at the start of the novel – as the girls observe a couple in the middle of exhibitionist intercourse, the unaware Sister Condron proclaims: 'You will carry yourself with grace through this city today. [...] You are going to be on the television set so make-up will be respectfully applied' (Warner 94-5). The *Sopranos* embrace their status of the abject, as they 'appear hell-bent on squandering their talents' (Schoene 257) by proclaiming 'we stick together on this and there's no ways we'll win, won't even get in the second round! We'll be [...] back here in plenty time for the Mantrap slow dances' (Warner 1-2), prioritising opportunities for sexual conquest over the performance of their choir. This attitude is further explored later in the novel when the girls express disillusionment with their prospects: 'what good it is in being talented in this dump? Who's interested in talent here?', 'That's half of why we're getting the boot, a mean admit it, it's all sex and clothes that freaks those frigid old cows out at this fucking tip' (Warner 256-7). The *Sopranos* are dimly aware that the futures available to them in the Port are extremely limited, and conforming to the status quo can bring no reward; therefore, they find it more satisfying to prioritise risky behaviours which enable short-term emotional release such as extreme alcohol use and potentially dangerous

Abject Female Body

Art and Literature



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sexual encounters. Their refusal to repress their corporeality demonstrates the threat they pose to the hypocrisy of the nuns' moral order – as Manda proudly states that twenty-seven of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour's girls were pregnant that year (Warner 46), it becomes clear that religious repression does not protect the girls from unwanted relegation to the abject status of teenage mothers.

The men in the novels clearly express that the only viable role for the female body is that of the sexual object. Daniel Cleaver, Bridget Jones's boss and love interest, suggests to her that 'the vain pursuit of an intellectual life is getting in the way of your true purpose' [...] to cook all my meals for me, of course, darling. [...] And walk around my flat with no pants on' (Fielding 166-7), and the old men in Edinburgh pubs ogle the teenage Sopranos: '[a]re yous trying to give us all heart attacks with these skirts, an old boy in a tweedy jacket yelled [...] Jeezo, none of us'll sleep the night, eh boys?' (Warner 143). The men only perceive the aspects of the female body that can be exploited for their gratification and deprive the women of their subjectivity. On the other hand, women are also judged for their explicit sexuality – as Orla embraces the sexual role she both desires and believes is required of her and tells Stephen: '[y]ou can do anything you want with me an that's what men wish for,' he is repulsed and thinks that '[t]hese chicks are damaged goods' (Warner 309). In the world of the Sopranos, there are no positive solutions; the only relative freedom that can be wrenched from the ubiquity of sexual objectification and moral contempt is a total embodiment of the abject, with all the social ostracism, pleasures, and dangers that come with it.

For Bridget Jones, however, the solution presented in the novel is more ambiguous. In one of the last sentences of the novel, she proclaims: '[h]ave finally realized the secret of happiness with men [...] do as your mother tells you' (Fielding 307), as she settles

down with Mark Darcy, the man her mother initially attempted to set her up with. The figure of Bridget's mother, similarly to Warner's nuns, represents the enforcement of the Symbolic order as the Kristevan maternal authority through impossible body image standards as she constantly criticises Bridget: 'What on earth do you think you're wearing, darling? You look like a common prostitute' (Fielding 170), 'Nobody wants a girlfriend who wanders round looking like someone from Auschwitz, darling' (Fielding 130-1). The mother construes Bridget's body as unacceptable by comparing her to the abject through figures strongly connected with taboo and rejection from society. Throughout the novel, Bridget attempts to reject her mother's lifestyle, expose her hypocrisy, and argue for the validity of remaining single (as shown in her conversations with Magda and the dinners with other married couples). However, although she is aware that the conventions of heteronormative marriage have often been the cause of her unhappiness, in the end, she remains constrained by them and accepts the narrative of gaining a male romantic partner as a symbol of ultimate success. Unlike the Sopranos, Bridget is willing to conform to the status quo and relinquish her individuality in exchange for the confirmation of being perceived as performing femininity in an attractive and acceptable manner.

In conclusion, the specific conditions of postfeminist culture create unrealistic expectations of female bodies, which in turn causes an increased association of women with the abject and the grotesque. The female characters in Fielding's and Warner's texts refuse to suppress their corporeality and explore their position in regards to the behavioural and aesthetic standards of the patriarchal order, assessing the alternatives of conformation, indifference, or active opposition – all of which expose them to scrutiny, objectification, and judgement. Both the men in

their environment and the older women enforcing the status quo denote them as repulsive because of their embodied nature and, thus, declare them as worthy of social degradation. Bridget Jones and the Sopranos are undeniable symbols of attempts to escape patriarchal oppression by embracing the abjection of the female body; however, they still remain subjugated within the societal demarcation of female bodies as transgressive and grotesque.



Footnotes

1. This essay will interpret the concept of ‘postfeminism’ as outlined by Rosalind Gill: an ‘entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes’ including ‘the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline’ (149). While the complexities of the multiple and contradictory definitions of the term lie beyond the scope of this essay, my focus shall remain on its exploration of expectations placed on female bodies.

2. While acknowledging that the cisnormative delineation of femininity as determined by biological sex is limiting and detrimental, this essay shall discuss bodily functions such as menstruation (which cannot be strictly equated with femininity as there are women who do not menstruate and people who menstruate but do not identify as women) in conjunction with societal perceptions of bodies gendered as female.



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SOCIAL SCIENCES



SOC. SCI.

SECTION 3

BY LEA KERN

MANA WĀHINE

*Decolonising Feminism and
Patriarchy in Aotearoa*

EDITED BY MEGAN HOWES, COPY EDITED BY TAMSIN DUNLOP
REVIEWED BY LOTTI JONES

1. Introduction

Aotearoa/New Zealand¹ was the first country in the world to give women the right to vote in 1893, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was widely celebrated for her response to Covid-19 (Roy, 2020), and the country, despite having experienced a swing towards the right in the 2023 general election (Corlett 2023), is generally seen as one of the most progressive (McDonald, 2020). But does the situation of Māori women paint a different picture? It is important to look at numerous additional difficulties Māori women face compared to Pākehā² women. Statistics show that Māori women are significantly overrepresented in prisons (Adair, 2023) and are much more likely to be unemployed than all other demographics (Reilly, 2019). According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a leading Māori scholar on Mana Wāhine theory (1992), Māori women face a double jeopardy of oppression for being both a woman and Māori. To understand their situation, it is essential to examine what role colonialism plays in this oppression. In this essay, I explore how colonialism has shaped the struggles Māori women face, and how they respond to it through Māori feminisms, – more specifically, through the concept of Mana Wāhine³. I start by describing how colonialism is a gendered process that brought patriarchy to Aotearoa, and how this colonial encounter shaped interactions between white and Māori feminists, an encounter that is marked by misconstructions of distinct realities that are assumed to be the same. I move on to Indigenous feminism in Aotearoa by categorising Mana Wāhine as a decolonising Māori form of feminist theory and tying it into transnational efforts before finishing with a conclusion. I find that the colonial encounter lastingly shaped the situation of Māori women in Aotearoa by introducing Western binaries, gender norms and patriarchy. Furthermore, the lens of colonisation distorted Māori culture to present it as sexist. The only way out of this double bind for Māori women is therefore an approach that takes their oppression as both women and Māori into account.

2. Effects of colonialism on Māori women

British settlers landed in Aotearoa on the 9th of October 1769 (Moewaka Barnes and McCreanor, 2019), and the relationship between settlers and Indigenous populations was regulated through the Treaty of Waitangi, or Te Tiriti o Waitangi, in 1840 (Mutu, 2019). The Treaty recognized Māori authority whilst giving the British Crown governance over settlers (Mutu, 2019). English and Māori versions of the text contained differences, which contributed to different expectations of future relations (Mutu, 2019). Since 1840, the British Crown has committed several treaty breaches resulting in injustices against the Māori population and, as Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry shows, specifically against women (Waitangi Tribunal, 2023). As part of this inquiry, the Waitangi Tribunal is hearing claims alleging that the Crown's systematical prejudice and denial of Mana Wāhine has serious impacts on wellbeing of Māori women

2.1. Patriarchy as an imported Western concept

To see how colonialism changed understandings of gender and brought patriarchal violence, it is helpful to first look at what gender relations were like before colonialism. The traditional view on gender stands in line with a broader Māori concept, the notion of balance amongst all things (Mikaere, 1999). It acknowledges that both men and women have intrinsic value and bring essential qualities to the community (Mikaere, 1999). In Māori narratives and cultural traditions, the feminine is celebrated for its nurturing essence, drawing inspiration from Papatuanuku, or Mother Earth, and her female

¹ From now on referred to as Aotearoa, the Māori name for New Zealand

² Pākehā is a Māori word referring to any New Zealander not from Māori descent

³ The spelling “Mana Wahine” is also possible, I use “Mana Wāhine” in line with Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry

descendants who are recognized as indispensable contributors to the creation and sustenance of all life forms, including children (Yates-Smith, 2006). Furthermore, the idea prevailed that women's sexualities are what make them powerful, which led to women living more sexually liberated lives compared to Pākehā women in those same times, who were generally seen as property of fathers and husbands (Mikaere, 1999). In Māori culture, differences between genders exist, however, there is no hierarchy amongst genders (Simmonds, 2011). It is essential to understand that despite women being seen as having a more nurturing role, they still held important spiritual, leadership, and caretaking positions within the whānau⁴, and their nurturing qualities did not devalue them (Gabel, 2013). Society was not organised through the traditional nuclear family structure of mother, father, and children but a more extended community, so there was no strict distinction between private and public (Mikaere, 1999). This, as Western feminism found out many decades later, is essential for women to live liberated lives (Zinn, 2000). With the colonial encounter, an oppressive gender binary was introduced that had not existed in Māori culture and language before, an insight that goes against the widespread misconception that Māori names are gendered (Pihama, 2020). In fact, gender is a concept within Māori culture that goes beyond traditionally Western binaries of male – female (Pihama, 2020). This is shown, for example, in Māori language that does not differentiate between male or female pronouns, with 'ia' meaning both he and she (Smith, 1994 in Simmonds, 2011).

What changed when settlers colonised Aotearoa? The early colonial discourse had major impacts on how the world sees Māori people and how they see themselves. In early colonial accounts, Māori culture was viewed through a Western, patriarchal, Christian, and racist lens, which has had terrible consequences for Māori people in general (Johnston and Pihama, 1994).

These accounts led to a shift in how Māori women are viewed: from active and powerful beings to merely passive receivers of the male sperm (Pihama, 2020). A striking example of misinterpretation that resulted from the superimposition of Western frames onto a Māori context is the false claim by a French ship crew about a group of Māori women showing their private parts (Johnston and Pihama, 1994). The crew interpreted this interaction as proof of the promiscuity of Māori women, whilst it was actually a gesture of contempt and disdain towards the Europeans (Johnston and Pihama, 1994). This distortion of feminine sexuality exemplifies a wider process of downplaying the importance of Māori women, it entails a robbing of their importance in spirituality and Māori cosmology through a lens of male-centred Christianity (Simmonds, 2011). Furthermore, it changed the position of Māori men, who through colonial and patriarchal discourses were placed higher above in the hierarchy than Māori women (Tuhiwai Smith, 1992). Māori men were the ones that the settlers fought against in wars, and they were integrated into the capitalist economy as workers, compared to Māori women who were confined to the home (Tuhiwai Smith, 1992). This led to very gender specific experiences of colonial oppression that hurt Māori men and Māori women in different ways (Tuhiwai Smith, 1992).

2.2. Misunderstanding of Māori culture and ignorance of different contexts

When Western colonists arrived in Aotearoa, they misread what they saw (Tuhiwai Smith, 1992). One example of this are Māori greeting rituals, which lead them to portray Māori women as overly sexualized (Johnston and Pihama, 1994), but also as the "Other"; beings that are savage and immoral (Tuhiwai Smith, 1992).

⁴ Whānau is Māori and translates roughly to community or extended family



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This shaped the interactions between Pākehā women and Māori women. There have been instances of cooperation between these two groups, for example when Mira Petricevich, a Māori woman, was part of the New Zealand delegation to conferences of the Pan-Pacific Women's Association in the 1950s (Paisley, 2006), or through alliances between Pākehā lesbian feminists and Māori women (Dominy, 1990). However, when Māori women tried to integrate into Pākehā feminist movements, like the suffragette movement, they were forced to give up parts of their Māori identity such as the moko kauaue, a traditional face tattoo, as this was seen as “barbaric” (Pihama, 2018). Furthermore, Māori culture has often wrongly (see section 2.1) been called patriarchal by Pākehā feminists, who use the example of speaking time on the marae ātea⁵ as supposed evidence of sexism while ignoring the complexities of the issue at hand (Irwin, 1992). The gatherings at marae ātea are highly ritualised procedures of welcome with up to eight different ceremonies, some of which are traditionally practised by men, some by women and others by men or women (Irwin, 1992). Because women were not doing exactly what men were at marae ātea, Pākehā feminists claim that this is a blatant denial of women's rights that clearly shows sexism within Māori communities (Irwin, 1992).

So, this relationship between Māori and Pākehā women is primarily marked by tension. Even though white feminism can explain “Othering” of the female part of their identity, Māori women fear that these theories can further perpetuate oppression and “Othering” of the second part of their identity, their Indigeneity (Tuhiwai Smith, 1992). Tuhiwai Smith (1992:50) states that for Māori women: “to lose control of that struggle [to white feminists] is to lose control of our lives”. This comes into play when Western liberal feminists claim that women who take over unpaid care roles are worth less than those who break into the traditionally male sphere of paid

work. There is a danger of assuming that every single woman sees freedom in the same way: applying Western hierarchies to Māori women and their whānau, who come from a cultural context where this hierarchy of work did not exist, pushes Western colonial narratives upon them. Māori ideas and stories might lead Māori women to conceptualise freedom differently than their Pākehā counterparts, and it should not be assumed that they aspire for what a white liberal feminist aspires for (Mahmood, 2005:12ff).

3. Mana Wāhine: a decolonising Māori form of feminist theory

Instead of explaining the situation of Māori women through a Pākehā framework based on Western ideas, traditional Māori culture must be considered. According to Pihama (Pihama, 2020:355), “the articulation of Mana Wāhine theory [...] is essential in countering the impact of over 170 years of colonial gendered practices.” As with most Māori terms, it is hard to find a direct English translation of the concept (Simmonds, 2011). Acknowledging that this definition cannot encompass the complexity of the concept, “mana” is about authority and about power, it is central to interactions between people, but it goes beyond the human, referring to spiritual and cosmological elements and the connection to land (Waitere and Johnston, 2009). The meaning of “wāhine” goes beyond the simple translation of woman, as it refers to only one of the times and spaces that Māori women move through in the course of their lives (Pihama, 2001 in Simmonds, 2011). Mana Wāhine is more than simply “feminism”, it is a “decolonizing Indigenous/Māori form of feminist theory” as Tuari Stewart (2022:457) puts it. Above all, this Māori feminist framework provides a space for Māori women to explore and redefine what it means to be a Māori woman today,

⁵ Meeting points within communities in Aotearoa

whilst drawing on what it meant to be a Māori woman in the past (Simmonds, 2011). It is situated within a wider movement for decolonisation, Māori sovereignty and reclaiming the pre-colonial past, but extends that concept to the intersection of what it means to be both Māori and a woman (Pihama, 2020; Simmonds, 2011). This is essential since decolonisation can only work when the mana of women is taken into account, especially considering how many of Māori women's ancestors have continually been silenced (Pihama, 2020). This is not exclusive to the context of Māori women (Spivak, 2010). Irwin argues that since Māori men and women experience oppression differently, we must highlight and focus on the specific needs of Māori women, who are for example paid less and are more likely to face health problems (Irwin, 1992). It is crucial to recognize that Māori women are not a homogenous group, since lived experiences of Māori women differ depending on class, tribal affiliation, sexuality, age, and other factors (Irwin, 1992; Tuhiwai Smith, 1992).

Mana Wāhine theory can be situated within a wider context of Indigenous feminisms. Pihama (2020) draws a link between Mana Wāhine and Hawaiian Indigenous feminism, stating that the need for theories that centre Indigenous women's perspectives is shared in both contexts. Pākehā or white feminism is not enough to capture the multiple oppressions that Indigenous women experience and fight against. Their voices have too long been silenced both by the dominant culture but also by Indigenous men, and having theories that centre their experiences is essential to bringing their submerged perspectives to the surface in an effort to decolonise (Gómez-Barris, 2017). Gómez-Barris formulates a decolonial femme method (2017) that relies on situated knowledge to explain effects of colonialism, moving beyond extractive epistemologies which tend to reinforce colonial power relations. To do this she draws on Tuhiwai

Smith's ideas. This is one example that shows the interconnected and transnational struggle of Indigenous women across the world, fighting for liberation from oppression on the basis of their Indigeneity as well as from patriarchy. As Simmonds (2011:112f) puts it: "It is important, therefore, to locate our struggles [those of Māori women] within an international context".

4. Conclusion

As I have shown in this essay, the colonial encounter in Aotearoa has lastingly shaped the situation of Māori populations, specifically those of women. Māori culture has continually been misrepresented because it was distorted through a Western, Christian, and white lens. Patriarchy is a hierarchical concept that did not exist in Aotearoa before settlers colonised the islands. With that came a depreciation of women's power in respect to both their sexuality but also of their spiritual importance and in their role as nourishers. Since the situation of Māori women is shaped by colonialism, a Pākehā feminist approach will not liberate them from their oppression by both patriarchy and colonial systems. To combat this, there has been a focus on Mana Wāhine as a theory to centre the experiences of Māori women and to create a space for them to redefine what being Māori and a woman means today and has meant in the past.

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BY ELLIE ROBERTSON



REMOVING THE
BINARY:



*An Exploration On the Impact
Language Has On Our Gender
Perception*

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EDITED BY MEGAN HOWES, COPY EDITED BY TAMSIN DUNLOP
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Language, as a reflection of societal values and beliefs, wields the power to shape perceptions of gender, often perpetuating a binary understanding through grammatical gender systems. The influence of the generic masculine and masculine norm within languages with dense grammatical gender reinforces this binary, marginalizing communities and centralizing power within the masculine form. Despite these challenges, endeavours towards gender neutrality within grammatical gender languages offer hope, particularly in their potential to benefit marginalized groups like the LGBTQ+ community. However, while recent advancements demonstrate potential for gender neutrality within language, the possibility of achieving a genuine 'gender-free' language remains a question, especially within grammatical gender languages and beyond. In order to begin answering this question, one needs to understand the concept of 'gendered language' and how it has impacted our perception of gender throughout history. It is also necessary to analyse how recent linguistic adjustments impact the LGBTQ+ community and the changes in attitudes towards non-binary spaces. By comparing attitudes towards gender in grammatical gender and genderless languages, we gain insight into the intricate relationship between language and societal norms. To do that one needs to look at the contemporary languages such as English, Spanish and Swedish, which are undergoing gender-neutral adaptations within the core lexicon and grammar. In addition to indigenous languages that have historically included a form of gender neutral language. In essence, this examination of language and gender dynamics offers the conclusion that it is possible to remove gender from language, yet cannot change the impact that gendered language has already had on society's perception of gender.

Gender Inclusive Language: The Erasure of The Woman

In linguistic terms, grammatical gender is defined by languages that use a nominal morphological system

(Papadopoulos, 2019). However, just like gender, languages can also be viewed as a spectrum categorised by linguists into three categories: grammatical gender languages, natural gender languages, and genderless languages (Chatzidavidou, 2023). Most of the languages that use extreme forms of grammatical gender categorise all nouns into two categories, masculine and feminine, whilst also ensuring syntactical agreement between adjectives and pronouns (Hord, 2016). Speaking a language that consistently labels inanimate objects as feminine or masculine causes speakers to be stuck within a binary perception of gender (Jakiela and Ozier, 2018, p. 9). Ultimately, using a grammatical gender language that employs a binary causes many speakers to think of gender as a dichotomy. For example, it is commonly accepted that the concepts of 'sun' and 'moon' are opposites. In Spanish, a grammatical gender language, this opposition is marked through gender ('*el sol*' and '*la luna*', with '*el*' being masculine and '*la*' being feminine) (Vergara, 2020). Therefore, it can be assumed that speakers of a grammatical gender language separates and differentiates gender as two different concepts, masculinity and femininity (Papadopoulos, 2019).

This can also be said for grammatical gender languages without the binary, - in many natural gender languages such as German, there exists three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. However, it still causes a gender dichotomy as it poses masculine and feminine as opposites (Mazzuca et al., 2020). Whilst the idea of the neutral or *neuter* does break from the binary system of gendered language, it does not propose the concept of other as it cannot be used in place of the binary in reference to biological gender (Pieciul-Karmińska, 2018). As such, natural gender languages that have the existence of a neuter continue to be stuck within the binary, as *neuter* does not offer itself as a placeholder when the

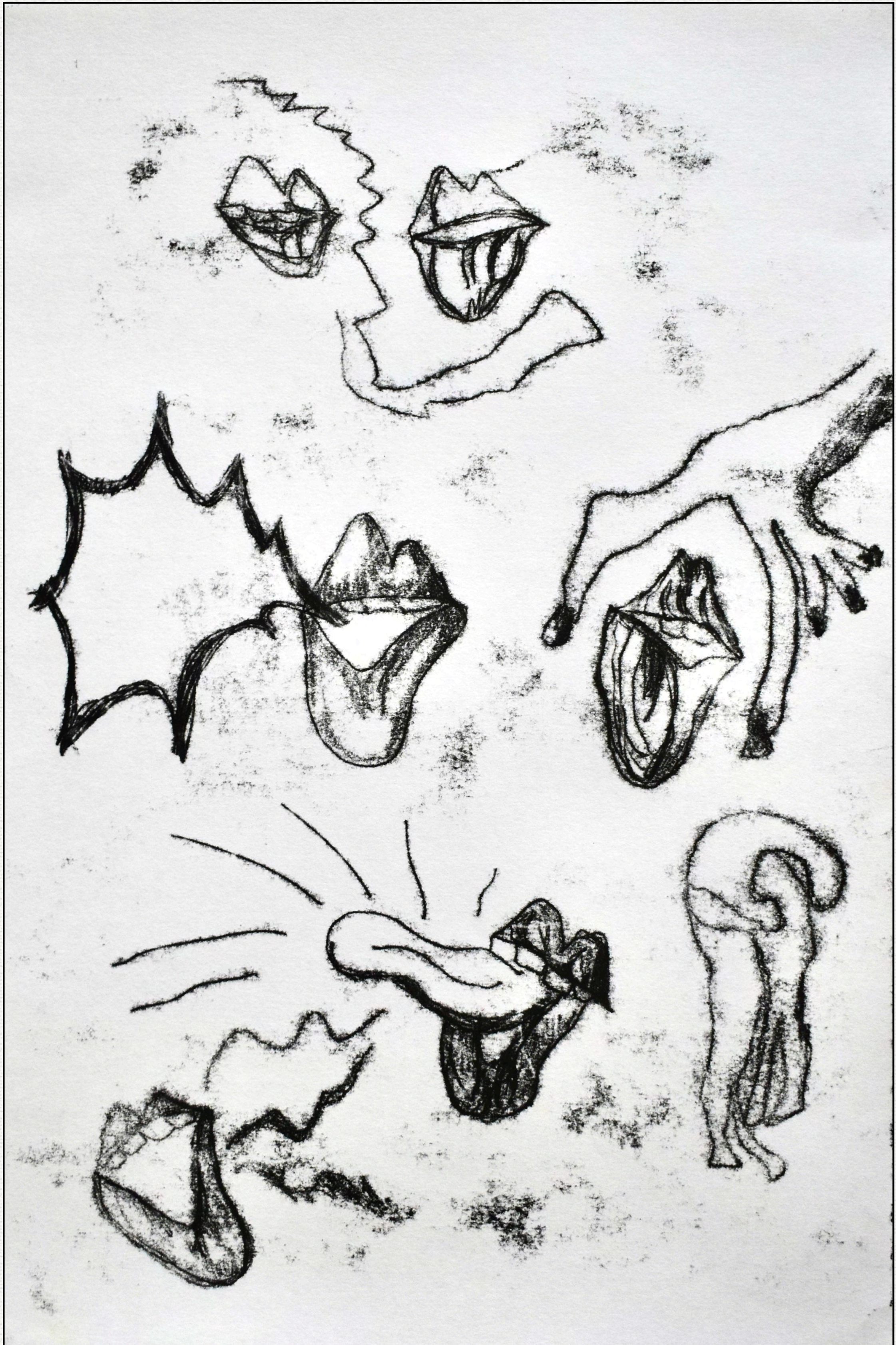
gender is unknown (Pieciul-Karmińska, 2018). Pieciul-Karmińska expands on this relationship by highlighting the idea that the nouns in the neuter form in gender are looked at as universal figures, impersonal almost (2018, p 121). The use of neuter gender is a purposeful choice especially within translation, even though it has equal validity it is not used in place of biological gender, but instead it is used to convey impersonal characters something that everyone can relate to. The use of neuter in Polish offers a different outlook, Pieciul-Karmińska highlights that the neuter in Polish is considered substandard, a noun to be used only if necessary (2018, p. 119). This has a major impact on the cultural outlook of gender neutrality, with most speakers viewing the neuter as inferior to gendered markings (2018, p. 119). It is evident that in languages where the neuter exists, such as German and Polish, they continue to express a dichotomy with each having a significant impact on the cultures view of neutrality. The idea that grammatical gender language supports a dichotomy highlights the fact that gender and language are intrinsically linked, impacting our perception of gender. This raises the question of whether gender-neutral language can even exist within languages that have grammatical gender, especially when even those which do not adhere to the binary continue to reinforce a dichotomy (Mazzuca et al., 2020).

In order to even start promoting the existence of gender neutral language within grammatical gendered languages, one needs to begin with the decentralization of men. The sociolinguistic concept of decentralizing men and ceasing the use of the generic masculine within grammatical gender has been a continuous focus within feminist politics for decades (Saul and Diaz-Leon, 2017). American philosopher Marilyn Frye (1983) argues that the gender marking within language, (such as *she/he* in English and even noun markings such as *el/la* in Spanish), promoted male dominance through the

dichotomisation of men and women. Frye highlights the fact that gender marking encourages the idea that men and women are so different that language has to indicate so (Frye, 1983). Therefore, in order to create an equal society, one would have to remove these markings from language (Frye, 1983). However, many sociolinguists have argued that removing all gender indicators would ultimately alter the structure of language and cause it to collapse (Teso, 2010, p. 138). A more pragmatic adaptation of this argument would be the inclusion of gender neutral indicators. Alternatively, some linguists argue that simply adding gender-neutral indicators is not sufficient and could eventually impede the evolution of language. They suggest that there is a limit to the number of minor changes a language can undergo before a complete structural overhaul becomes necessary (Spinelli, Jean-Pierre Chevrot and Léo Varnet, 2023) However, before considering a complete restructuring, a small yet crucial change would be to stop using the generic masculine form in order to ensure genuine neutrality. The simplest example of the generic masculine or the masculine norm would be the use of the masculine when the gender is unknown or when making a generic statement, most commonly found in textbooks discussing 'man' or 'mankind' (Nazlıpınar Subaşı, 2020). Whilst it may be a simple way to refer to humans, it promotes the idea that women are 'other' and not the standard to humans (Nazlıpınar Subaşı, 2020). The use of the masculine norm is not only prevalent in English but also languages using a more extreme grammatical gender such as Spanish. Most commonly used examples include the use of *chicos* (the masculine plural of 'boy') when referring to a mixed gender group. This term used to be considered gender neutral, however, many argued that it contributed to the omission of women from the conversation and also aids male dominance with the masculine version of the noun becoming the standard for all (Saul and Diaz-Leon, 2017).

Removing the Binary

Social Sciences



ARTWORK BY BESSIE SCHOFIELD

Whilst this conversation has mainly focused on pushing the visibility of women, it does not consider the impact that the generic masculine has had on the queer community by ultimately omitting them from the conversation. The use of the male generic and masculine norm also disregards those who do not align themselves within the gender binary and halts the progression of genuine gender neutral language (Gustafsson Sendén, Renström and Lindqvist, 2021).

Gender Inclusive Language: The Inclusion of Queer Identities

To say that there has not been attempts of removing the binary within grammatical gender languages, would be false. Perhaps the most recognisable example of this would be the use of 'they/them' as a singular person pronoun within the English language. The use of these pronouns becoming more normalised outside of queer spaces has led to criticisms that it defies the structure of the language. However, the use of 'they/them' as singular person pronouns is not an unknown linguistic structure within the language, having actually been used for years in replacement of the generic masculine when the gender is unknown (Arnold, Mayo and Dong, 2021). Regardless, even if it was a new pronoun, English would not be the first nor only language to introduce new pronouns to try and escape the gender binary. In the last decade or so, there has been a new pronoun within Swedish (a natural gender language) referred to as *hen*. First used within queer spaces in the late 2000s to early 2010s, this pronoun is used as a way to battle the binary and to promote the inclusion of non-binary identities (Vergoossen et al., 2020). The 2012 introduction of this pronoun into mainstream society via a controversial inclusion within a children's book has been relatively successful, with it mainly being used orthographically (Wallner and Eriksson Barajas, 2022). Whilst not yet commonly used in speech, many continue to advocate for this pronoun as language change happens gradually over

time (Wallner and Eriksson Barajas, 2022). In Sweden, the use of this pronoun has been successful in reference to people when their gender is unknown or out of the binary. However, it is clear that even despite the reluctant acceptance of this pronoun within Swedish society, it was mainly queer feminist communities that were fighting for the inclusion of this additional pronoun (Milles, 2011). Therefore, it can be assumed that the gender neutrality progression within language would not be as advanced or prominent without queer voices (Bouteillec and Garnier, 2020).

Pronouns have not been the only way that gender neutral language has evolved, as more recently there has been development of gendered terms (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell and Laakso, 2011). As previously mentioned, the term to refer to a mixed gender group in Spanish has normally been *chicos* but more recently there have been attempts to neutralise this term with an 'x', '@' or even by altering the spelling completely. However, many advocates have disapproved of the use of the '@' as it still fits within the gender binary (Bonnin and Coronel, 2021). Similarly to the discourse surrounding the addition of pronouns, many people argue that the change of these terms has tainted the simplicity of their language (Vázquez, 2020). However, as language is a part of our society it should reflect the reality of society currently, which would result in the inclusion of gender neutral terms (Vázquez, 2020). Additionally, these developments of grammatical gender have immensely benefited LGBTQ+ youth, as they become more included within their learning environment. It has not only impacted their engagement within their learning community but also their mental health, as the less they are omitted from the conversation the more they feel a part of society (Silva and Soares, 2024). Therefore, the evolution of gender-neutral language, whether through the adoption of pronouns like '*they/them*' in

English or the introduction of terms like 'hen' in Swedish, reflects a progressive shift towards inclusivity and recognition of diverse identities, ultimately fostering a more supportive and equitable society for LGBTQ+ individuals, (particularly youth).

Whilst some might perceive the solution to achieving gender neutrality as making all languages devoid of gender distinctions, the advocacy for gender neutrality extends beyond languages that operate within the binary framework and even transcends linguistic categorizations of gender altogether. Whilst there might not be grammatical gender within genderless languages, gender can be portrayed linguistically in other ways, such as phonologically (Rose, 2015). In many indigenous languages, it is common for gender to be indicated through phonetics and lexicon rather than grammar, resulting in something called 'male/female speech' (Rose, 2015). This dichotomy of speech is a natural occurrence in many indigenous languages such as Garifuna and Thai, as a result of societal and cultural conditioning (Rose, 2015). Similarly, it is also evident in western languages for example Irish sign language as a result of differing educational systems (LeMaster, 2006). This form of gender indication can cause more societal pressure on women to be perceived as ladylike and to not speak masculinely (Igbe and Damkor, 2021) and also resorts back to the masculine generic, with that being viewed as the standard speech pattern (LeMaster, 2006). Therefore, it is evident that language perpetuates gender stereotypes even without the existence of gender markers. However, in many indigenous communities such as Zuni and Anishinaabemowin (Kristianto, 2016), it is commonly accepted that 'a man that speaks like a woman' (and vice versa) is a person who wields two souls, which many sociolinguists translate as someone who is non-binary (Robinson, 2019). This gender system existing within indigenous communities promotes the acceptance of gender neutrality within their

language, despite clear phonological gender markings, as 'two spirited' people were often considered healers of their community, wielding power that others do not (Kristianto, 2016). It is also found that speakers of genderless languages are often more accepting of other genders, as they are not stuck within the concept of the gender binary (Robinson, 2019). This is aided by gender roles in indigenous communities not being homogenous, they are not stuck within a universal dichotomy, instead they understand that each community has different needs that are expected to be fulfilled by different genders (Robinson, 2019). This understanding leads to a more open mind, a mutual acceptance that is not gender or sex that matter but instead what is needed for the individual and community. In essence, this embracing of gender neutrality within indigenous communities illustrates how language can serve as a conduit for cultural acceptance and understanding, ultimately transcending the limitations of the gender binary (Robinson, 2019).

At the beginning, the possibility of a true genderless language was posed, and by exploring this topic one can conclude a disappointing yet hopeful result. Despite endeavours to decentralize men and eliminate the generic masculine, achieving true gender neutrality necessitates broader societal shifts. While progress has been made, such as adopting singular they/them pronouns in English and introducing gender-neutral terms like hen in Swedish, indigenous languages demonstrate alternative approaches to gender expression, often with greater acceptance of non-binary identities. However, these progressions towards gender neutrality do not erase the impact that gendered languages have had on our perception of gender. This highlights the idea that removing gender binaries from language requires not only linguistic changes, but also societal shifts. It is up to society as a whole to shift our perception of gender and alter

our language in order to achieve gender neutrality. This can be done so by providing a more comprehensive education on gender identity from a young age, which like it has been said will not only create a more inclusive in environment for LGBTQ youth but also help others truly understand the importance of neutrality. This necessary shift in perception will ultimately help reduce judgments of introducing inclusive language, and help to aid the understanding that language change is needed to keep up with the modern world. In short, the world is changing, like it always has done, and therefore language needs to change too. Until we do so, female and queer communities will be continuously under-represented within our language. In essence, genderless language is not something that can be achieved imminently, but by shifting broader societal perceptions of gender and actively reforming our language, we can strive towards a more inclusive and equitable linguistic landscape.

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BY LIZA YEROSHKINA

WHO IS TO
BLAME FOR THE
RUSSIA-UKRAINE
WAR?:

*Feminist and postcolonial
perspectives on 'real politics'*

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The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has widely been narrated as having epochal significance with far-reaching implications. For leading historians of Eastern Europe, such as Timothy Snyder (2022) and Serhii Plokhy (2015), what we are seeing is an existential threat to democratic norms.

While discussing phenomena of the political world, drawing on a variety of lenses is advantageous; in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war it is a necessity. This article engages with a combination of lenses provided by feminist and postcolonial theories to critically reflect on the logic, as articulated by Russia's political elites, behind the invasion of Ukraine. It focuses on the role of gender and racialisation in normalising one's place in the social hierarchy and its 'appropriate' behaviour, excusing occupational, violent and genocidal policies under the abstract term of 'real politics'.

This article attempts to trace the way social structures empower gendered and racialised politics, allowing invasions to be justified. Russia-led wars in Ukraine will be discussed as an example of the consequences of such a structure and ideology. This article will firstly underline a feminist and postcolonial approach that addresses the necessity of social hierarchy analysis to reveal the causes of war. Further sections will focus on unpacking Russia's claims of the legitimacy of its colonial/great-power state project to incorporate Ukraine. I will conclude with a reflection on how the notion of the nation-state, rooted in the ideologies of social hierarchy and colonial domination, can be seen as having fuelled the ongoing war.

Intersection of feminist and postcolonial theories

The intersection of critical approaches to international relations has revealed the gendered and racialised language embedded into the western perspective on the nation-state which glorifies aggressive and violent policies (Enloe, 2014, p.124).

Both feminist and postcolonial lenses provide powerful analytical tools that reveal the overlaps between the realist and imperialist tones explicit in the speeches of Russian leaders (Kuzio, 2022). By identifying the rhetoric that excuses war, critical lenses identify the way in which 'real politics' normalises invasion as one of the justifiable options available to the state. Let's first look at the feminist approach.

Feminist theorists consider gender as a form of social hierarchy, which creates unequal and excluded power redistribution between human sexes and shapes the worldview of global politics (Tickner, 1992; Enloe, 2014). The gendered structure of knowledge production is argued to be rooted in stereotypes and assumptions about males' and females' 'standardised' behaviour, based on their sex categories (Enloe, 2014).

Western phallogocentrism, first theorised by Jacques Derrida (Dely, 2008), values more masculine 'features'. Outlined in Greek philosophical thought, this was based on a socially constructed 'ideal' type of men that who ought to reflect masculine traits (reason) and define themselves in relation to the 'other' – the 'emotional' and 'passionate' female body, which was thought to be less capable of performing characteristics that the male body was privileged to have (Peterson, 2000). Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that theories about the political organisation of society, a state-based order, were drawn from the concept of the 'state of nature' introduced by the 'fathers' of realism, Hobbes and Rousseau. She argues that the Hobbsian perspective of males as aggressive, and Rousseau's view of man as 'capable of reasoning' support the idea of 'human nature' which underpins contemporary international relations.

This is why the archetype of a (masculine or reasonable) man became central for constructing characteristics that facilitated the normative state (Weber, [1949] 2017). Due to gender binaries, it is argued that a state manifests the masculine 'image' of the strong protector, which needs to demonstrate its power through physical and material domination (Hart, 1976; Waltz, 2001). It does this both domestically and externally to deter other actors who, predominantly, will challenge its strength to boost its own military capacities in the "state of war" underpinned by anarchy (Parkin, 2015). Scholars of feminist theory (Tickner, 1997) point to the gendered language and categories that are used by traditional IR scholars to contrast the state's domestic system (order, peace, safety) with the external environment (anarchy, lawlessness, chaos, ego, deceit). Thereby constructing the political agenda of a state, with the focus on a self-defensive politics as its major concern (Walt, 1991). Yuval-Davis (1997, p.97) argued that realism's 'convention fiction' of a "pre-condition natural state" has enabled military forces to constitute the basis of coercive power from which the state claims the right to rule.

The notion of sovereignty is a key theme of international relations (Philpott, 1995). Smith (2011) has elaborated on the western narrative of national sovereignty that is used to excuse colonisation while subordinating colonised people from the decision-making through the ideas of legitimate authority. While Philpott (1995, p.356) defines sovereignty as a supreme legitimate rule over given territory, this concept is manipulated by the imperial state to doubt colonised people's right to independent decision-making (Yuval-Davis, 1997). As Yuval-Davis (1997) notices, the imperial state is trying to pursue the idea of their legitimacy to rule over colonised territory with the help of the hierarchical heteropatriarchal model (Smith, 2011, p.65). The model 'accepts' a state sovereignty only if it

demonstrates its coercive capacities through the military forces (Smith, 2011). From that perspective, the state is responsible for its own 'survival', and if it 'fails' to do so, it is legitimate for other actors to impose its power over it. According to Smith (2011, p.65) gender violence facilitates colonialism: "This is patriarchy that naturalises social hierarchy constructed through domination, violence and control".

One of the other tools imperial states use to claim their authority as legitimate is through historical manipulation, which is one of the most common features traced in the Russian propaganda (Kuzio, 2022). Doubting the legitimacy of Ukrainian people to define its own political agenda rooted into the 'common origin myth' seen in the concept of 'Russian people' (Shevtsova, 2022). 'One nation' narrative reproduces the idea of ethno-cultural inseparability between the Russian and Ukrainians as a way to impose a Russian-beneficial agenda in Ukraine while denying Ukrainian national independence.

Russian innocence & NATO-blame

Both gender and ethno-centric analysis have been used to critique and delegitimise the notion of Russia's innocence when it comes to the occupation of the Ukrainian territories since 2014. Justification of Russian aggression is explicitly present in the work of the scholar of offensive realism John Mearsheimer (2014), as well as 'Putinwersteher' (Putin supporters) Cohen (2019) and Petro (2015). Similarly, such rhetoric is found in the speeches of Russian ultra-nationalist philosopher Alexander Dugin (Newman, 2014) and the Kremlin adviser Sergey Karaganov (Maçães, 2024). The common realism and oriental concepts are explicit in the works of these scholars and political figures, who try to present Russian aggression through the lens of a state's duty to fulfil its political agenda, while normalising



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Ukrainian subordination and passive role as an actor in the international arena (Kuzio, 2022, p.6).

Mearsheimer (2014) justified Russian terror in Ukraine through the prism of 'normative' behaviour of the states: "It's not imperialism; this is great-power politics" (Mearsheimer quoted in Chotiner, 2022). He considers Western invasion into the Russian 'zone of influence', referring to Ukrainian ambition to become a part of NATO, to trigger a Russian response. For Mearsheimer, "the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility" for the Russian occupation of Crimea (quoted in Chotiner, 2022). From that perspective, annexation of Ukrainian regions by Russia aimed to deter other great-powers from expanding, referring to the US in the form of NATO collective defence pact (Kuzio, 2022). A similar point is made by Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to whom "NATO remains a military alliance, and we are against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory" (Kremlin.ru, 2014). Equally, Putin's adviser Karaganov (quoted in Mações, 2024) claimed that the reason behind the Russia-led war in Ukraine was "to end Nato's expansion".

The Russian Federation's decision to launch so-called military operations in Ukraine could be explained by the constructed binaries between Russia and Ukraine as active/passive, strong/weak, important/unworthy, based on a femininity-masculinity dichotomy (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2023). The Maidan Revolution of 2014 was seen as a 'feature' of a weak, 'failed' state that promoted 'anarchical order' in the region (Sysak & Malloy, 2023). This could be seen as a relevant 'symptom' for realists to discard Ukraine as a normative state, due to the state apparatus' inability to perpetuate the hierarchical order and provide 'security' and 'stability' within the state (Smith & Dawson, 2022). During the revolution in 2014, which resulted in the

pro-Russian regime being overthrown, Russian leaders' rhetoric was centred around the 'need' to intervene abroad to ensure peace and security inside and outside Russian borders (Sysak & Malloy, 2023). Feminist criticism of the notion of Ukraine as a failed state would focus on the gender binaries embedded into the realist account of the state that defines sovereignty in relation to violence and dominance, fuelling and normalising warfare (Enloe, 2014).

Feminist scholars such as Tickner (1997) point out the gendered concepts responsible for manifestation of the 'normative' state behaviour (Weber, [1949] 2017). The critique would refer to the naturalised aggressive interactions of a state, based on the idealised masculine image of men as a representative of humankind. Thus, the principles of politics are centred around the idea of 'human nature', which requires a state to demonstrate its military power domestically and externally through domination (Hart, 1976; Waltz, 2001) to deter other actors (inherently aggressive and self-interested) from challenging its military capacities (Parkin, 2015). The logic behind it only makes sense if Russia as a 'normal' state naturally responds to the threat, while Ukraine's freedom to take its own political decision is suppressed because of its subordinate place within the hierarchy (Ryabchuk, 2013). Such a reasoning of 'weak' state subordination is justified by Mearsheimer: "When you're a country like Ukraine and you live next door to a great power like Russia, you have to pay careful attention to what the Russians think, because if you take a stick and you poke them in the eye, they're going to retaliate" (quoted in Chotiner, 2022).

Sabotage of 'pan-Russian unity'

While for Mearsheimer (2014) the Russian war was instigated to counter the threat of possible western expansion in form of military pack, for oriental scholars Russia's actions seemed to be legitimate as

a protector of ‘pan-Russian unity’ and ‘Russia’s moral authority’ (Newman, 2014) against western intervention (Kuzio, 2022, p.7). While Russia claims hegemony over Ukrainian national identity and denies Ukrainian sovereignty, it considers differences from Russia-promoted political arrangements to be a consequence of outside (so-called “collective West”) influence (German and Karagiannis, 2017). It was this, Putin said, “that prepared the Kiev regime, which they controlled, and Ukraine which they had enslaved for a large-scale war [...] they were the ones who started this war, while we used force and are using it to stop the war [...] This is nothing other than preparation for hostilities against our country, Russia” (Kremlin.ru, 2023). The realist’s language that legitimate expansion through the notion of the superpowers’ battle over the ‘possessions’ choices is undeniable in such a claim, as well as the imperial narrative that rejects the political and cultural subjectivity of its colonial ‘property’ (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

The discussion of diminished Ukrainian subjectivity is continued in the account of Russia-Ukrainian relationships when it comes to the discourses on Ukrainian nationalism (Kuzio, 2022). Cohen (2019) argues that Russia was forced to ‘intervene’ in anti-Russian nationalistic movements sponsored by the West in Ukraine. As the leader of the Russian Federation put it, “all the subterfuges associated with the anti-Russia project are clear to us. And we will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia” (Kremlin.ru, 2021a). From the so-called western orientalist perspective, and according to the President of Russia Federation (Kremlin.ru, 2014), Ukrainian nationalism is essentially fake, because Ukraine is not a real nation-state, which must be seen only in the context of “pan-Russian nations” (Petro, 2015). As Putin put it, “We (Ukraine and Russia) are not simply close neighbours but, as I have said many times already, we are one people [...]

we cannot live without each other” (Kremlin.ru, 2014).

The social hierarchies as a basis of relationship between settlers and colonies is justified by the idea of what is considered to be a sovereign nation (Riabczuk, 2013). By rejecting Ukrainian national independence under the notion of ‘inseparability’, Russia has portrayed Ukrainian intellectual decolonization as something hostile; as an “act of provocation, disobedience and separation” (Shevtsova, 2022, p.137). Post-colonial lenses underline the imposition and reproduction of the Russian narrative about “one nation” which aims to naturalise and legitimate Russian agenda-setting in Ukraine. For Shevtsova (2022, p.114), the historical manipulations and selectivity of the Russian account of its relations with Ukraine that stresses the closeness of both nations, intended to naturalise Russia’s “ownership” of Ukrainian territories and people. Riabczuk argues (2013) that the notion of settlers’ superiority over the colonised people’s culture and language is used to legitimise imperial domination. Such a claim matches the history of Russian-Ukrainian relations where Ukrainian national identity and legacy has been “seen as peripheral, inferior or non-existent” (Shevtsova, 2022, p.136).

Neo-traditional ideology and militarised-patriotism were considered to be a milestone of Russian national identity (Kratochvíl and Shakhanova, 2021). That is why protecting ‘traditional’ values played an important role in military mass mobilisation in Russia. According to Romanets (2017), “re-masculinisation” contributed to breeding. Russian identity as an opposition to “Gayropa” values (Edenborg, 2017, p.159). Russia-Europe values contraction is rooted into Orthodox Christian fundamentalism as a part of Russian unistate-sanctioned homophobia (Romanets, 2017). That is why Ukrainian ideological Europeanisation

was perceived as a threat to Russian “spiritual” sovereignty and “traditional family values” which constructs Russian gendered identity around masculinity/femininity dichotomies (Edenborg, 2021). According to Kratochvíl and O'Sullivan (2023, p.360), “it is this hypermasculine construction that enabled the invasion”. As the leader of the Russian republic of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov put it, “Same-sex marriages are a normal thing for them (Europeans). [. . .] [I want] that our peoples restore their culture, customs, traditions. This is the basis for a strong Russia” (quoted in Morozov, 2015, p.120).

Russia's claim to the right to impose its agenda over Ukraine is linked to the denial of Ukrainian ethno-cultural subjectivity, vital for recognition of sovereignty (Yurchuk, 2017). Since Russia perceives Ukrainian territories and people as subordinated, Ukrainian decolonization and democratisation were portrayed as a deviation and external attack on “pan-Russian” unity and values.

Nazis & Russian saviours

The Russian mechanism of achieving legitimacy to invade Ukraine was also based on the constructed identity of Russia as a ‘liberator’, as a ‘watchdog’ of ‘Ruskey mir’ (“Russian World”) and its cultural and linguistic pre-eminence (Svetsova, 2023). As a continuum of the notion of the artificiality of Ukrainian sovereignty, Ukrainianization (Ukrainian as an official state language) has, since the start of the ‘Euromaidan’ protests in November 2013, generally been presented in Russian public discourse as an mechanism of repression against “those who did not see themselves as Ukrainians”, and whose interests should be ensured by Russia (Kuzio, 2022). Once nationalism in Ukraine was perceived as an inherently anti-Russian project, the ‘responsibility to protect’ principle was used to justify invasion (Shevtsova, 2022, p.115). The 2014 Russia occupation of the Crimean Peninsula was rationalised as the

aggressor-state’s ‘duty’ to protect ‘the people’: “Those who opposed the coup [the Maidan Revolution] were immediately threatened with repression. Naturally, the first in line here was Crimea, the Russian-speaking Crimea. In view of this, the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol turned to Russia for help in defending their rights and lives” (Kremlin.ru, 2014).

What is more, the narrative of the Soviet people’s heroic ‘liberation’ of Europe from Nazism played an important role in justifying the fight against ‘Ukrainian Nazis’. Bringing back the political memory of the Great Patriotic War was a clear reference to the Second World War with a glorification of the Russian victory (Shevtsova, 2022). To elucidate, the Putin’s speech at the Victory Day 2021 (Kremlin.ru, 2021b) continued this narrative, while glorifying the liberation from fascism that afterwards resulted in Soviet occupation of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania (Svetsova, 2023). Similarly, the annexation of South Ossetia in 2008 was presented as Russian support for the region’s ‘independence’ (Kuzio, 2022). Equally, the separatist military conflict in the Donetsk region was justified by Russian-speakers’ and Russians’ ‘concerns’ about a ‘radical revolution’: “Since 2014, Donbass has been fighting for the right to live in their land and to speak their native tongue” (Kremlin.ru, 2023). In line with this, the February 2022 Russian “special military operation” was explained by the logic of Russia’s “duty” to “deNazify” Ukraine from radical nationalists that oppressed the Russian-speaking minority (Shevtsova, 2022). Opposingly, Russia used to engage with the politics of ‘self-determination’. For instance, the Russian President recognised Eastern Ukrainian territories as a ‘sovereign’ while denying Kosovo independence and supporting Serbia’s national sovereignty (McGlynn, 2022). That demonstrates a hypocritical account of the Russian understanding of “responsibility to protect” and the notion of state sovereignty.

Denetdale (2016) believes that the notion of “tradition” is weaponized by the settler-state to legitimise imposing its agenda on colonised societies. That is evident in the Russian attempts to contrast the ‘natural’ presence of Russian language in Ukraine to ‘artificial’ Ukrainian (Shevtsova, 2022, p.144). While the circumstances of the wide-spread use of the Russian language in Ukraine are left unattended, if not fabricated, by Russian authorities, the reasons were rooted in “ethnic cleansing, resettling of people and language policies” in some parts of Ukraine (Shevtsova, 2022, p.114). According to Spivak ([1988] 2010), the colonised people are denied self-representation in political and cultural domains, while considered to be ‘subaltern’ (of lower status) to the settler nation. That is why Russia presents itself as a saviour of “Russian people” against Nazis, whilst defining Ukrainian culture and language as inferior and less ‘real’ (Kuzio, 2022).

Conclusion

In this article, I have looked at how the combination of feminist and postcolonial lenses can be profitably used as a tool for examining the reasoning behind Russian Federation’s justifications of its aggression towards Ukraine. The essay aimed to contextualise the way Russia claims its legitimacy to influence Ukrainian decision-making while justifying the invasion. Postcolonial lenses underlined how historical manipulations normalised the rejection of Ukrainian sovereignty. Similarly, gender-focused critics tried to demonstrate how the denial of Ukrainian subjectivity and its ‘rights’ to set the separate from Russia agenda fueled the imperial logic of the legitimization of the power over its colonial ‘possessions’. An amalgamation of critical lenses to international relations enables us to highlight the loaded language of the realists and orientalist in Russian public discourses. Tracing the gendered and racialized logic on what counts as a sovereign state and who has a ‘right’ to introduce a

political agenda on behalf of a nation, helps to underline the efforts made by Russia to make the war more acceptable to the international community. The case of Russia’s political stance toward its neighbouring states shows how social hierarchy is reproduced and normalised through the narratives of ‘the great powers game’ and ‘rational state behaviour’. While Russia-led wars demonstrate how imperial ideas are camouflaged and tolerated, the same logic might inevitably lead to the forging of a new political order that goes against the principles of democracy and just social interactions.

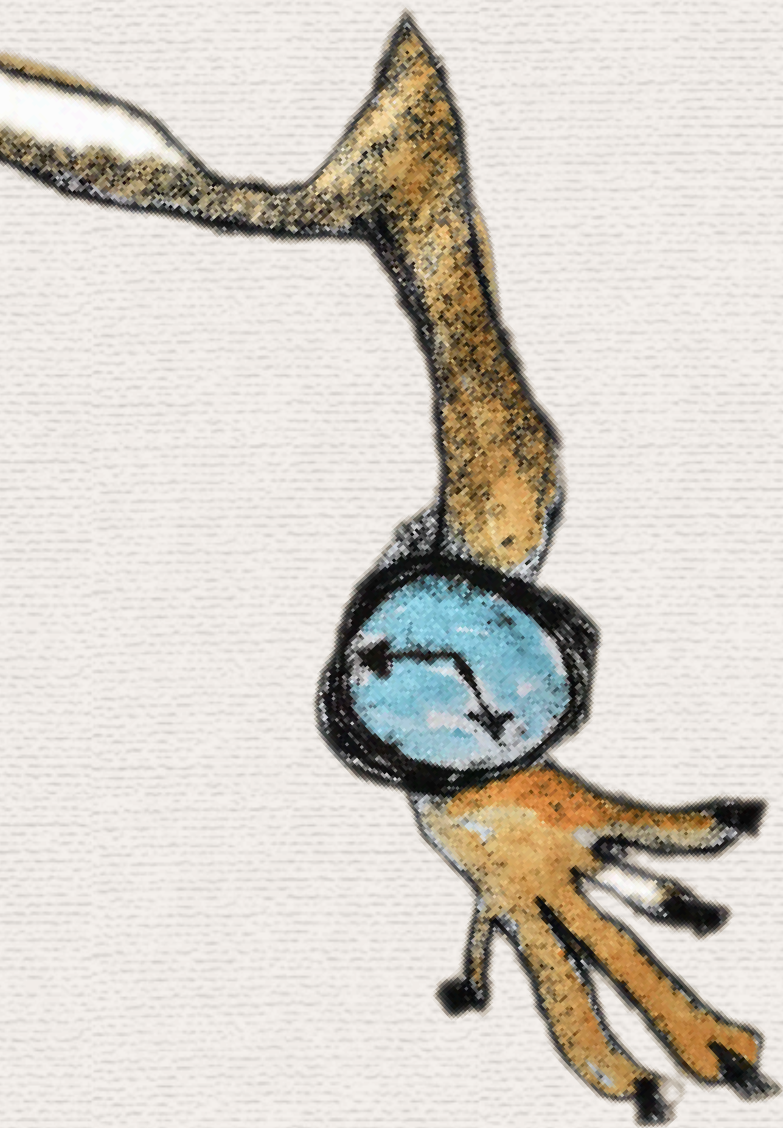
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BY IZZIE ATKINSON



AGAINST
CHRONONORMATIVITY:
HOW MAY A CONCEPT
OF QUEER TIME

*Challenge Traditional Ideas of
Historical Progress?*

ARTWORK BY BESSIE SCHOFIELD

EDITED BY MEGAN HOWES, COPY EDITED BY TAMSIN DUNLOP
REVIEWED BY ISABELLE ATKINSON

'someone will remember us I say even in another time'
 - *If not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (Carson, 2002)



Poignant words such as these written by Sappho remind us of the conspicuous queer attachment to memory, history, and time. Whether a sobering, bittersweet, or comforting attachment, queer histories, experiences, and theories are tied to the concept of time and progress. If we, in modernity, define time as the standard by which we measure and organise the expected life course, as 'linear, ordered, progressive, and teleological' (Luciano, 2007:2), then queer discourse and experience can be seen to exist as oppositional to it. Historical progress is marked by heteronormative assumptions of the life course - regarding factors such as bodies, achievements, goals, and productivity - assumptions that queer communities may not always assimilate to. This essay aims to discuss how a concept of 'queer time', borne from this alienation and difference, can be seen to challenge traditional, heteronormative, and 'western' ideas of historical progress. To do so, it is important to consider further concepts, such as chrononormativity, grief, and activism, through contesting queer theories on futurity. Additionally, all arguments should contemplate intersectional applications, as what we define as 'the queer experience' continues to adapt and diversify.

Chrononormativity (Freeman, 2010) is the theory that time normalises life, plotting expected benchmarks of progress throughout culturally defined sequences of age categories, otherwise known as the life course. In the process of normalisation, chrononormativity becomes weaponized as it not only outlines but enforces predetermined norms onto mass populations. An example of this can be seen throughout puberty, a culturally defined category through which society measures a young person's physical and mental development because they have reached a certain age. In the Global North – specifically Euro-American epistemologies – it is usual and even encouraged to observe the growth and development of children's bodies, with specific attention paid to assumed binary gender differences, such as the presence or absence of breasts or facial hair. When the passing of time does not align with such benchmarks, an individual becomes 'abnormal'. By not conforming to so-called time-sensitive expectations, intervention often occurs – medical or otherwise - reinforcing normative time, sex, and gender expression expectations. This process becomes normalized within schools, families, and political arenas. The reality that not all conform to these benchmarks - for example, intersex, transgender, disabled or queer bodies – often leads to some being perceived as the deviant 'other', or else ignored entirely because of the diversity they display. As such, recent legislation in England restricts hormonal healthcare for trans youth, banning the prescription of hormone blockers for those under 16. Policies limiting or disallowing this sort of care are an example of both the enactment and danger of chrononormative ideas of progress. Examples such as this political intervention contributes to 'chrono-biopolitics' (Luciano, 2007), the idea that time helps elevate certain bodies, while others are left to 'wear out'. This is especially pertinent in recent years, and given such restrictive

legislation, as these 'others' are not only being left to wear out but are doing so with little to no help or care.

If chrono and heteronormative time is defined through processes such as 'expected' stages of puberty, finding a monogamous, opposite-sex partner, having children, and so on, then queer time is surely anything that counteracts such strict organisation. As Eve Sedgwick writes, queer 'designates [an] open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning' (Sedgwick, 1993:8). Foucault, too, approaches queerness less as a category of sexual identification, rather as a way of defining and developing a way of life outwith heteronormative institutions (Foucault, 1996 cited in Halberstam, 2005:1). Queer time can then be defined as the open mesh of possibilities along the life course, as queer people and communities often do not fit the chrononormative mould, thus challenging traditional ideas of progress. A more tangible example of this can be seen in queer relationships, where benchmarks such as marriage, reproduction, or even monogamy are not automatically norms by which relationships are negotiated.

This concept may be less arbitrary in reality, as the rise of homonormative practices in queer communities creates a somewhat grey area.

Homonormativity is the prioritisation of heteronormative ideals and norms within LGBTQ+ communities and within social policy (Duggan, 2002). One central example is marriage equality for same-sex couples. Whilst a landmark moment around the world, marriage equality assumes that queer couples should want the same structure to their relationships as heterosexual couples; that after a certain amount of time marriage is the natural relational progression. This is not to say some queer people do not want this, rather it highlights how time is used to normalise life even

within queer communities. Many queer people do get married, have children, work until retirement and so on, suggesting that the distinction made between chrononormative and queer time is exaggerated. As Judith Halberstam importantly highlights, not all LGBTQ+ people live radically different lives from their heterosexual counterparts, and this is evident in recent decades as queerness becomes more accepted and usual in day-to-day contexts. What is compelling about queerness, though, is its ability to open new 'life narratives' and 'alternative relations' to time and thus to progress (Halberstam, 2005:2). The complex and individualised experience of queerness makes chrono normativity and queer time core concepts with complicated definitions. While we may agree with Sedgwick, or Foucault or Halberstam, each is elaborating on the central idea that queerness is essentially 'other', regardless of nuance that may align queer lifestyles with the majority, or its entanglement with neo-liberal capitalism or state sponsored scripts for progress. Muñoz (2009) highlights how awareness of this duality within queer lives is integral to building a queer future, speaking to variation within queer communities.

Having summarised some of the key ideas associated with queer time, its definitions and its complexities, I now move to discuss its relationship to historical progress and its potential to redefine our understandings of it. Historical progress can be defined as the desire or supposed need to move on, making clear distinctions between the past and the present so as to measure development. This drive to keep moving forward can be explained in consumer cultures by the power of neo-liberal capitalism and the global state of competition and advancement. Importantly, chrononormative concepts of progress insist that negative aspects of the past – death, trauma, regret – should be subject to closure. While they may be learnt from, these elements should be forgotten in order to make way for what comes next,

to continue production, profit and success. In opposition to this, queer time is punctuated by these supposedly negative aspects; remembrance, shared grief, and activism remain central to queer communities and are historically notorious for their longevity. One striking example is the HIV and AIDS crisis of the end of the 20th Century, a period that underpins queer discourse and activism worldwide, where other communities – namely mainstream voices of the global North - have moved beyond it. As discussed in *Arranging Grief* (2007), Dana Luciano explains how the process of grieving is seen as a luxury in the modernity of linear & organisational time. In Euro-American cultures directed by labour, grieving is an act often relegated to a specific time scale, within a funeral, a limited number of personal days afforded by a workplace, or merely something to ‘get over’ in time. Queer time challenged this following the AIDS crisis, as the expression of grief was infamously loud and painful, disrupting time’s supposed desire to move on, to admit closure and, ultimately, to forget (Luciano, 2007). Furthermore, the collective nature of mourning that fuelled queer communities redefined what it was to grieve. As well as expressions of sadness and heartache, grief became a space for enthusiasm, anger, and a powerful longing for change. This shift in politicised grief is what Douglas Crimp refers to as militancy (Crimp, 1989), the way in which the refusal to grieve in a chrononormative period is in itself an activist undertaking. In other words, as summarised by Luciano, queer rejection of imposed timelines resists the ‘tendency to consider grief as always exceptional but instead positing its very ordinariness as a ground of political action’ (Luciano, 2007:24). The trauma of the 1980s and 90s is not the only example of queer melancholia, - for example, events such as the 2016 Orlando shooting, or the murder of Brainna Ghey are characterised by similarly collective mourning. Both bore witness to mass vigils, fundraisers for LGBTQ+ charities, and reinvigorated conversations on social media and in the news.

These acts of remembrance embedded throughout queer histories prove how queer time challenges traditional ideas of historical progress because the clear distinction between that which has been and what is becomes difficult to make. Both the politicisation of grief, and the large communal expressions of it interrupt chrononormative time, and they demand to be acknowledged. If ‘the fading of intense grief...constructs the difference between the immediate past and the more distant past of memory’ (Luciano, 2007:13) then one could argue that queer time is more fluid, transcending across this chrononormative structure of past, present, and future to honour those neglected, mistreated, and otherwise forgotten.

As well as exploring the concept of a queer present incorporated with the implications of the past, theorists consider how the possibility of queer futures challenges traditional ideas of historical progress. Within a chrononormative society, queer has been historically positioned as the enemy of the future - as a ‘death drive’ (Edelman, 2004) – because queer does not contribute to hetero, chrono and capitalist norms of production and progression. Such conversations introduce the idea of queer futures, how they would look, who they would involve and the way in which a queer future would operate. Theorists such as Lee Edelman take a radical stance on queer futurity. They argue queer communities should embrace the radical negativity of queerness, adopting a mindset of anti-futurity (Edelman, 2004) by way of further challenging traditional historical progress. This mindset centres on the stance that queer people should accept the label of the future’s ‘death drive’ and use it to further distance themselves from hetero and homonormativity. Edelman argues that if queerness is to be the undoing of society, it should do so radically, not by disappearing within normative practices such as marriage (Edelman, 2004).

Furthermore, this is because such practices are seen by some as devaluing essentially queer life courses; by assimilating within normative cultures, queerness and an understanding of queer time becomes extinct. Thus, Edelman's stance, while somewhat extreme, is understandable. As a queer person confronted with negativity, violence and feelings of worthlessness when questioned about 'what's next' from a heterosexual majority, the idea of complete rejection may seem appealing, especially if as a form of radical activism.

Critical thinker José Muñoz's (2009) writings find fault with Edelman's in two particular areas. First, despite the influence of Edelman's contribution to future-based politics, it is unrealistic to assume it is applicable to all queer groups. Lives rendered unstable due to factors such as class, race, or disability, may not have the freedom to adopt such radical behaviours (Muñoz, 2009). Muñoz describes these marginalised groups as nearer to 'social death', the combination of prejudice and alienation that leaves many without the ability to reject futurity and still survive. Just as during the AIDS crisis, when activism was called out for a lack of inclusion and intersectionality, modern theories must recognise the array of identities and expressions that exist within the term 'queer'. This highlights faults with EuroAmerican queer studies and neoliberal capitalism broadly, more than Edelman specifically; however, it is important to consider such criticism in order to facilitate intersectional discussion.

Secondly, Muñoz disagrees that LGBTQ+ people should accept their proposed status as oppositional to the future, suggesting instead that queer potential is, in fact, situated within it. Muñoz summarises his argument for futurity as 'queer as horizon' (Muñoz, 2009), as something that has not yet occurred. Muñoz states that 'seeing queerness as horizon rescues and emboldens concepts such as freedom that have been withered by the touch of neoliberal thought and gay assimilationist politics' (Muñoz, 2009, p.32).

Essentially, the present is not the end of queerness, just as the past was not. Queer as Horizon argues that while there is a potential for queerness, the present is ephemeral under the threat of normative time. In other words, 'we are not quite queer yet' (Muñoz, 2009, p.22) and so must recognise the potential of a queer future, and the way in which queer time can continue to challenge traditional historical progress rather than succumb to it. Just as in Sappho's writing, where the poet could be understood as referring to a collective 'us', Muñoz refers to 'we' as an entity that exists across time. Queer time challenges traditional ideas of historical progress because it is a concept that cannot be confined within years or months or days, and a collective that is 'not yet conscious' (Muñoz, 2009:20) and not yet complete.

In addition to analogues of sobering queer history, and sharing Muñoz's desire for a queer future, Elizabeth Freeman (2010) argues queer time can be explored through experiences of pleasure, measuring it within the good as well as the bad. This theory of Eroto-historiography (Freeman, 2010) suggests that the body can act as an historical method beyond the pain and suffering of queer communities, and instead (or additionally) have a consciousness of queer pleasure and enjoyment. By historicising only through pain, it is argued that acts such as homonormativity, imitating norms of gender and sexuality, are really a mirroring of the past. This is a concept Freeman refers to as 'temporal drag', the process of pulling the past along with us, whether consciously or otherwise, and thus limiting the possibility of freedom and fulfilment. Rather beautifully, Luciano concludes that this constant entanglement with our past is the only way of perpetuating love which we do not want to relinquish (Luciano, 2007, p.16). Summarizing the queer and rebellious act of refusing to forget, as well as speaking to the defiant act of finding pleasure in queer histories. Freeman's critique of the often-sole focus on melancholy is important to consider as we

move to develop queer time as something also celebratory and positive. This is not to say queer remembrance and trauma should be neglected, but perhaps these varying historiographies should work in consort, as both challenge traditional concepts of historical progress. Through a rewriting of queer pasts, theories such as Freeman's allow us to consider queer futures, perhaps constructing a clearer image of the future Muñoz describes. The intermingling of love and pain, pleasure and tragedy are components central to concepts of queer future; the idea that peoples and communities can live by standards they themselves have set – whether in relation to biological progress or personal life courses.

A core aspect of queerness, particularly as I understand it in my own life, is the remarkable ability it has to deconstruct binaries. We see this largely in discussions of gender, sex, relationships and sexualities, but these examples of grief, pleasure, pasts, and futures reflect the very same thing. Queerness disrupts frameworks of chrononormativity by destabilising the distinction between melancholic narratives of the past and pleasurable, hopeful ideas of the future, seeing both as interconnected and interdependent. Not only does this hold personal potential to experience life, relationships, pain, and love in a more fluid way, queer time holds the political potential to unsettle underlying structures of society as it undermines the artifice of the binary upon which chrononormativity rests.

To conclude, I refer to the opening of this essay quoting Sappho: 'someone will remember us...even in another time' (Sappho translated in Carson, 2002). This simple line of poetry encapsulates the queer desire or even need to remember, to recognise the way in which queer time transcends the normative rigidity of traditional historical progress. In a modern age of neoliberal capitalism, time is

defined by its chrononormative organisation and structure, from controlling individual bodies to determining the production and development of entire countries. Queerness is, by definition, whatever is at odds with the norm or the dominant (Halperin, 1995) and so it makes sense that queer time counteracts hegemonic understandings of time and progress across it. Through exploring the relatedness of concepts such as chrono and homonormativity, collective queer experiences of grief, and the debate over queer futurity, this essay has explored how queer time challenges traditional ideas of historical progress, and the potential it has to continue to do so. Queerness scrambles and interrupts the structured analogues of historical progress because it is not confinable to such rigidity; by its nature queerness is fluid, and queer time is no exception to this phenomenon.



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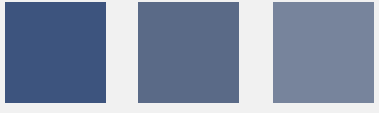
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SECTION 4

HISTORY

HISTORIA



CLASSICS

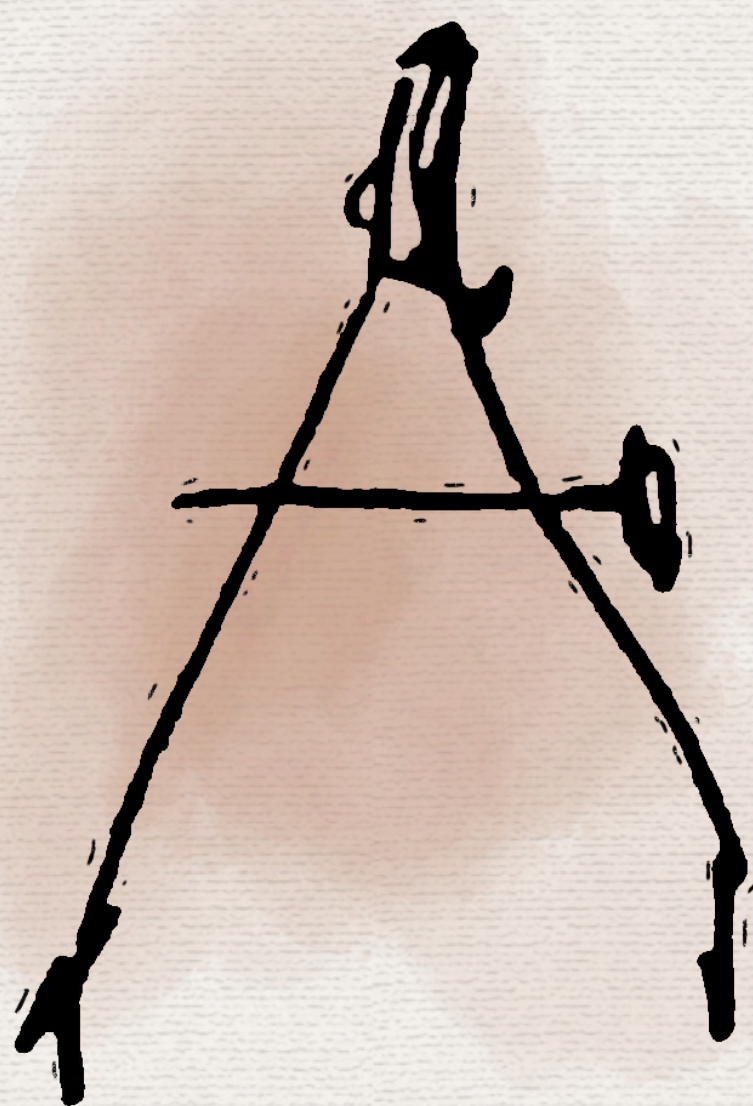
CLASSICA

BY ELIZA SINCLAIR KIDD

ELLEN
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SEMPLÉ

Navigating a Patriarchal Discipline

EDITED BY ROSE BATES, COPY EDITED BY RUTH WATERSON
REVIEWED BY MALIKA MCKENNEY



ARTWORK BY MARNI ROBERTSON

I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone.

- **Margaret Atwood, Surfacing**

Ellen Churchill Semple is a notorious figure in the geographical realm whose complicated legacy renders her place within a historiography of geography uncertain. While Semple is hailed as the first female geographer, it is also widely acknowledged that her work is tainted with racism.¹ Contemporary scholars wish to erase her contributions, declaring that they would “prefer to forget” her infamous text *Influences of Geographic Environment* in which she claimed that physical geography determined human behaviour.² Mona Domosh complicates this desire to erase Semple from memory by advocating for a feminist historiography of geography. Through foregrounding the contributions that women have made to the development of geographic knowledge, Domosh challenges the exclusion of women from accounts of the discipline’s past.³ This paper therefore addresses the question: Should Semple be included in a feminist historiography of geography? Furthermore, was Semple a feminist? To interrogate this, I reimagine Pearson’s take on violent women.⁴ Just as Atwood describes a woman’s disbelief at her ability to cause harm in the opening quote,⁵ Pearson centres the misperception that women are simply compassionate caregivers and victims of their circumstances – the ‘myth of female innocence’.⁶ This is useful for exploring Semple’s role in epistemological violence where her data interpretations brought negative consequences for certain groups.⁷ An intersectional lens is crucial for examining the connections between race, class, and gender which shaped the experiences of Semple and those she deemed ‘inferior’.⁸ The structure-agency debate emerges, asking whether individuals are entirely socialised by structures or can act autonomously.⁹ I take a relational approach to acknowledge the interrelatedness of social processes

and argue that Semple both actively challenged and perpetuated patriarchy. Firstly, this paper outlines Semple’s theoretical contributions and other key insights provided by contemporary female geographers which are useful for assessing Semple’s impact today. Secondly, Semple’s infiltration of male-dominated space is examined to demonstrate her resistance to traditional gender expectations. Thirdly, her imperial entanglements are traced to illustrate her perpetuation of the patriarchal state. Finally, a contemporary manifestation of the Semple dilemma is considered. I conclude that by today’s standards of intersectional feminism Semple is not a feminist role model, however she can be considered an early feminist for her active reconfiguration of an all-male discipline. Ultimately, I advocate for the critical inclusion of Semple’s work in a feminist historiography of geography. This project of decoding knowledge to understand the influence of cultural forces offers a step towards decolonising the academy.

Conceptualising Semple

Semple is primarily known for a theory now referred to as ‘environmental determinism’. Reflecting Charles Darwin’s natural selection and Friedrich Ratzel’s anthropogeography, Semple argued that climate and terrain strongly influenced a population’s social organisation and physical characteristics.¹⁰ Specifically, Semple claimed that populations in the tropics suffered ‘arrested development’, remaining in a child-like state due to extreme heat and subsequent ‘laziness’.¹¹ Semple therefore Othered many groups outside of the West, arbitrarily constructing them as inferior simply because of perceived difference. Othering is a broad term that describes the efforts of a politically dominant group to marginalise and subordinate another group.¹² Beyond extremely problematic stereotyping and Othering, Semple conflated a nation’s success with the acquisition of territory and resources.¹³ She explicitly endorsed U.S.

imperialism, believing that America could make the best use of the frontier and contribute to the “spread of civilisation”.¹⁴ Through justifying the invasions and exploitative processes of late 19th and early 20th century New Imperialism, Semple’s work had undeniably nefarious consequences. Her ideas were adopted by the Nazi Party to justify German territorial expansion and Hitler cited her work in *Mein Kampf* to evidence the ‘inferiority’ of Jewish people.¹⁵ Semple’s theory has been largely rejected as it is now deemed essentialist, imperialist, and pseudoscientific. Considering the harmful practices connected to her narrow and oversimplified interpretations, I argue that Semple participated in epistemological violence and the reproduction of patriarchal imperialism.

Although colonial exploration supported the establishment of the geographic discipline, subsequent transformation has enabled a departure from this.¹⁶ In the late 1980s, geography experienced a reflexive turn where positionality, power relations, language, and representation became of interest. Feminist geography produced significant contributions during this period. Within the sub-discipline, patriarchy is conceptualised as a fundamental socio-cultural structure that renders men and women gendered subjects and ensures male dominance within society.¹⁷ Patriarchy is neither universal nor uniform and can be perpetuated by women. Haraway, a key geographical thinker, distinguishes feminist objectivity from masculine objectivity where the former involves recognising one’s subjective perspective and the latter involves making detached claims about ‘observable truth’.¹⁸ Through introducing ‘situated knowledges’, Haraway argues that truth is multiple and varies based on a person’s socio-political context.¹⁹ This is vital for understanding Semple’s situated perception of ‘truth’. Harding’s ‘standpoint theory’ similarly argues that embodied knowledge gained through

lived experience offers a strengthened version of truth, resulting in ‘strong objectivity’.²⁰ With this in mind, I acknowledge that my position as white and privileged limits my ability to understand the struggles of those Othered by Semple and reflexivity alone does not grant me the right to speak for such groups. Given my shared experience of womanhood with Semple, I centre gender in this paper. Yet I also acknowledge that the oppression I experience today is less restrictive than that of Semple’s time, as patriarchy is ever-changing. Feminist scholars have emphasised that academics have a ‘social responsibility’ to construct and give meaning to the world in a harmless and anti-racist manner.²¹ For Ramphela, feminist scholars should produce integrated analyses that consider intersectionality and incorporate insights from Marxist, liberal, black, anarchist, and radical feminism.²² To be truly ‘relevant’, feminist geographers must carefully consider women’s competing realities with the ultimate aim of empowerment.²³ Semple’s work does not align with the current aims of feminist geography. However, for reasons outlined below, I argue that her work is relevant if it is heavily critiqued and decoded.

Disrupting the Geographical Discipline

Semple defied various patriarchal norms within geography, overcoming concrete barriers to challenge the patriarchy at large. In the late 19th century, it was widely believed that women had no use for higher education considering they could not enter the ministry, practice law or medicine, and were instead restricted to domestic duties.²⁴ Those that were admitted to university received a weaker curriculum, fewer resources, and a strictly segregated education.²⁵ Ultimately, Semple was born in an era when women who wanted to educate themselves faced “hyperbolic condemnation”.²⁶ Yet, as the only woman in a class of 500 men at the University of Leipzig, Semple was a force of resistance.²⁷ Although she was prohibited from

matriculating and denied a PhD, Semple became a founding member of the Association of American Geographers and its first president.²⁸ Newspapers described the “remarkable spectacle of a woman lecturer holding an audience of some of the greatest living scientists spellbound for more than an hour”.²⁹ This review demonstrates that her presence was truly incongruous, and her intelligence considered surprising. Where feminists have expanded the definition of activism to incorporate micro-actions that change power relations,³⁰ I argue that Semple’s infiltration of male-only academic space was a form of feminist activism that provided positive social change for women. For Bushong, Semple’s visibility in the discipline “undoubtedly” contributed to the higher proportion of women earning geography doctorates during her lifetime.³¹ In this regard, Semple was a pioneer.

Beyond mere visibility, Semple’s commitment to expanding female representation in geography was significant and remains celebrated on ‘Annual Ellen Semple Day’ at Vassar College where she first graduated.³² Semple delivered lectures to young women, encouraging them to study geography and once stating that “modern education, which seems to be a big mill especially designed for crushing the imagination, finds a more resistant element in the mind of woman, probably due to her strong emotional nature”.³³ Here, Semple not only celebrated women’s intelligence but also outwardly and unconventionally embraced emotion. This is intriguing as women were, and continue to be, forced into the devalued categories of ‘nature’ and ‘emotion’ as opposed to male ‘culture’ and ‘reason’.³⁴ Though Semple clearly associated women with emotion, she valorised this quality in a way that defied societal norms. Semple further challenged gendered assumptions by participating in physically demanding fieldwork and pursuing a singular observable scientific truth in her work.³⁵

For Haraway, the latter is a masculine endeavour, seeking to provide a view from nowhere.³⁶ Contrastingly, ‘feminist objectivity’ involves multiple views from somewhere, a ‘positioned rationality’.³⁷ This brings forth a debate, where Dœuff argues that femininity does not have to be radically separate from ‘masculine’ rationality as this only reinforces the construction of reason as a masculine trait.³⁸ I align with Dœuff here, arguing that Semple’s positivist approach does not render her less of a feminist. Rather, Semple’s simultaneous identification with male and female dualisms represents a powerful refusal to conform to patriarchal norms. Additionally, in *The Anglo-Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains*, Semple made a considerable effort to centre women’s livelihoods, presenting an early geographical analysis on gendered experiences.³⁹ I therefore argue that although there are no records of Semple’s personal relationship with feminism, her actions aligned with the feminist aim of empowering women through education and research.

However, Semple exclusively supported wealthy, white women in accessing education which does not align with the inclusive nature of today’s intersectional feminism. While Semple had to overcome many gender-related barriers, she was very economically privileged. Semple belonged to a wealthy family and could afford to travel and study, an uncommon luxury for many in 19th century America including men.⁴⁰ She travelled to India, Indonesia, Japan, and across Europe.⁴¹ However, despite her abundant experience and impressive status as a geographer, she received unequal pay throughout her career.⁴² These layers of gender discrimination present within the geographic discipline meant that while Semple was able to overcome certain patriarchal obstacles, she was hindered by many others. Nevertheless, her ability to break down barriers was impressive - where feminist geographers in the 1970s were supported by

the passing of sex-discrimination legislation which compelled departments to employ more women, Semple was not.⁴³ I therefore argue that although her economic privilege enabled her in many ways, Semple exercised profound amounts of agency to challenge the male-domination of geography. Simultaneously, Semple suffered from patriarchal norms as illustrated below.

Perpetuating Patriarchal Imperialism

Challenging and perpetuating patriarchy are not mutually exclusive acts and Semple reproduced the patriarchal status quo in many ways. With Haraway's 'situated knowledges' in mind,⁴⁴ it should be noted that Semple's work was based on a cohort of male thinkers and their theories due to the male domination of knowledge production. This is exemplified in the androcentric opening lines of *Influences*: "Man is a product of the earth's surface... he is a child of the earth".⁴⁵ Like many historical female scholars, Semple was socialised into using language-based restrictions that centred relations between man and the environment.⁴⁶ Blunt and Rose add that during Semple's time women's writing had to emulate men's writing due to pressures relating to the reception of their knowledge.⁴⁷ Specifically, female scholars were judged more heavily as individuals and their writing therefore had to strictly imitate the imperialist 'masculine voice' to be taken seriously. ⁴⁸ This gender-specific pressure is evidenced by the *Daily Express* in their fixation over Semple's appearance above her academic contributions, drawing attention to her "light-blue evening gown with a string of fine pearls".⁴⁹ This factor was never central to the reviews of male scholars demonstrating that Semple had to work particularly hard to gain respect as an academic and be perceived as more than an object. As Hermann claims, "a woman who wants to be educated is forced to let a little man grow inside her".⁵⁰ This is applicable to Semple as she faced various patriarchal constraints that influenced the

content and style of her writing. In achieving scholarly recognition, she perpetuated the patriarchy.

For many feminist theorists, patriarchy and imperialism are intertwined. Spencer-Wood argues that patriarchy was intrinsic to colonialism and empire, with the imposition of laws and policies in seized lands that reflected Western ideologies surrounding women's subordinate nature.⁵¹ Considering this entanglement, I argue that where Semple justified American expansion she also perpetuated patriarchy. The Western imperial context created opportunities for women of a certain race and class to write and legitimise the actions of the state, meaning such women perpetuated essentialist constructions of racial inferiority in their work.⁵² Semple exemplifies this, achieving liberation at the expense of countless others as her ethnocentric discourse symbolically and physically harmed subsequently 'subaltern' groups. In an era of New Imperialism where her gender rendered her inferior, Semple found power and authority through racial 'superiority'. As Hanson notes in relation to feminist geographical scholarship, "what some women view as positive change, others may see as harmful to their interests".⁵³ Rather than building broad alliances as intersectional feminists seek to do, Semple alienated many women by inflicting the 'double jeopardy' of racist and gendered marginalisation on them.⁵⁴ She contributed to 'horizontal hostilities', placing white women above the women she Othered.⁵⁵ It is impossible to say whether Semple was socialised into this thinking or made a calculated decision to inflict epistemological violence in pursuit of academic success. However, it can be said with certainty that Semple was not innocent, supporting Pearson's claim that universal female innocence is a myth.⁵⁶ Certain women condemned the concept of empire long before Semple's time, suggesting that the imperialist

patriarchy was not entirely imposing. Mary Wollstonecraft, a founding feminist philosopher, claimed in her 1792 publication *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that the rulers of empire were morally corrupt.⁵⁷ Jane Addams, an activist, sociologist and philosopher born just 3 years before Semple produced anti-imperial critiques throughout her lifetime.⁵⁸ This supports the argument that Semple should be heavily critiqued when read today and not simply excused as a product of her time, a time when patriarchy and imperialism powerfully reinforced each other.

It is also useful to compare Semple to contemporary geographer Linda McDowell to illustrate the extent to which Semple falls short as an intersectional feminist. Both Semple and McDowell have received major awards and titles for their efforts in transforming the geographic discipline.⁵⁹ McDowell's work is intersectional, centres inequality, challenges patriarchy and lifts up the oppressed. For example, McDowell considered how the labour market status of migrants in the UK reflects 'intersectionality at work'.⁶⁰ In a markedly different manner, Semple's work perpetuates harmful normative assumptions surrounding race and empire. I therefore argue that to align with today's standards of intersectional feminist geography, any feminist reconstruction of geography's past should note but not inflate Semple's positive contributions and must discuss her shortcomings. I align here with Domosh's view that a discipline's history cannot be selectively remembered.⁶¹ This critically inclusive approach deepens our understanding of empire and its connection to gender relations. Imperialism created opportunities for Semple, and yet widespread male socio-political dominance also limited her.

A Wider Trend of Problematic Women

The progress and expansion of feminist movements has been significant across the globe.

However, patriarchy remains a pervasive structure that is perpetuated by certain influential women. This paper has argued that while Semple can be admired for occupying male space and actively encouraging women to participate in knowledge production, her work inside this space should be heavily critiqued. In this section, this argument is taken beyond academia and into contemporary politics to demonstrate patriarchy's broad influence across society. Georgia Meloni is an example of a leading female figure who simultaneously challenges and perpetuates patriarchy. Meloni broke through a heavy glass ceiling in 2022 when she was elected as Italy's first female prime minister, defying the male-domination of a specific realm as Semple did. Yet, Meloni also mirrors Semple's androcentrism by leading the Brothers of Italy party and taking the political title of *il presidente del Consiglio*, where *il* is the masculine article used instead of *la*.⁶² Furthermore, through condemning abortion Meloni has increased the obstacles that women face every day.⁶³ Durose et al.'s concept of 'acceptable difference' is relevant here, describing political candidates who conform to aspects of the archetypal male politician to render their difference acceptable and reduce potential Othering.⁶⁴ As Meloni's rise to power demonstrates, "patriarchy readily accommodates some women into positions of power, provided that the women are male-identified, male-centred, and act according to patriarchal values".⁶⁵ This also applies to Semple as although she was deviant enough to break the barrier surrounding academia, she aligned with the aims of the imperialist patriarchy. It is important to note that patriarchy evolves, and that patriarchy is particular – it creates different obstacles within different institutions, whether academic or political. Yet ultimately, Meloni's case further supports the argument that the structure of patriarchy and female agency can co-exist, and agency can be well-directed, harmful, or both. Rather than being passive 'robots'

controlled by patriarchal forces of domination, women are autonomous beings capable of choosing violence.⁶⁶ Simultaneously, patriarchy is deeply entrenched and continues to support various forms of inequality therefore feminist geographers must continue to study the past and present to fully understand it. For this reason, Semple should be included within a feminist historiography of geography, aiding the interrogation of patriarchy.

To conclude, Semple challenged the patriarchal nature of geography by establishing the very presence of women within the discipline and inspiring others to follow. Therefore, although Semple did not contribute to feminist theoretical development within geography, she can be retrospectively regarded as an early feminist geographer. However, Semple's feminism is far from intersectional, and it has been argued here that her flawed theorising amounted to acts of epistemological violence which perpetuated patriarchy. Semple's story is one of both profound autonomy and patriarchal constraint. Ultimately, feminist historiographers have a responsibility to critically include Semple in order to understand the ways in which female geographers have challenged, been hindered by, and reproduced the status quo. As modern-day feminist geographers such as Domosh and Seager have been critiqued for their lack of engagement with race and ethnicity, it remains important that geographers are continuously pushed to be self-reflexive and produce intersectional analyses.⁶⁷ While patriarchy continues to permeate much of contemporary life to the detriment of all, scholars must question the biases that are currently being reflected in their work and consider how academia can improve as a whole. The decoding of historical knowledge offers a blueprint for revealing the power dynamics shaping today's writing. I therefore encourage further research into the development of a truly holistic, intersectional, and feminist historiography of geography.

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BY ADELINE CHEUNG

GENDERING
EMPIRE

A Historiographical Exploration

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'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman'.

'Decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men'.

Simone de Beauvoir's articulation of gender emphasises its social construction, describing how the identity of being 'a woman' is not a biological reality but one that individuals have to transform, contort into, and inhabit. In her landmark work in feminist theory *The Second Sex*, she argues how gender is a totalising, transformative social experience. In this essay, I will argue that this total construction of power and identity finds resonance in the colonial project. As alluded to in Franz Fanon's vision of decolonisation, colonialism wholly moulds and creates individuals. The link is established in using gender as a category of historical analysis for empires, where the principal analytical prism is a Foucauldian dispersion of power, in which power emanates through knowledge-fields, discourse and social relations rather than through simple, unmasked, top-down imposition. Two strands emerge: the genealogy of power and the reproduction of power. The former traces how gender has contributed to moulding, naturalising and essentialising colonial hierarchies, while the latter addresses how historical writing itself illuminates or occludes narratives, agencies and subjectivities, in turn creating new meanings. However, gender as a category of historical analysis is useful for historians of empire, contingent upon the adoption of an intersectional approach that does not posit gender as primary to other axes of oppression. Furthermore, the consciousness of its inessentiality – particularly that of the binary – is necessary to avoid perpetuating Eurocentrism and its specific demarcation of the concepts of gender and race.

Gender history was seminally substantiated in Joan Wallach Scott's 1986 work — *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*. Therefore, I will first offer a reconstruction of her work. 3 Expanding from

Scott's typology, I will explore how the gendered lens enabled an understanding of the genealogy of the notion of empire, which concerns the symbolic function of gender. Then, an examination of the role of white women in empires highlights the necessity for an intersectional approach. The necessity for intersectionality is also manifest in studies of the end of empire and national struggles, where gender proves an equally useful but charged category. Some historians trace how women's bodies have often been taken to symbolise national causes such as modernisation and modernity, yet other historians address the inherently complex relationship with racial and political identities. Lastly, I reflect on the role of historical writing itself and its potential for essentialising its objects of criticism: patriarchy, gender binary and European hegemony, therefore positioning historical writing as an act of reproducing power.

Scott proposes that gender is a useful category of historical analysis: she notes a paradigm shift from the mere expansion of subject matter to a 'critical re-examination' of existing historiography. 4 While early gender historians of the 1950s-60s drew their attention to understudied spaces of domestic and labour history, this perpetuated the separation of the spheres of 'sex or politics, family or nation, women or men', reinforcing the 'political' as masculine and 'domestic' as secondary and feminine. 5 Writing has since diverged, as historians theorised of gender in relation to other historical categories through 1960s-1980s, while historians of the 1980s introspectively reevaluated their concept of gender. 6 Scott attempts to synthesise these efforts — for her, 'gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power'. 7 The 'perceived differences' are constituted of 'culturally available symbols', such as the Biblical figures of Eve and Mary; 'normative concepts', such

as educational or religious doctrines; ‘politics... and social institutions and organization’ that stretch beyond kinship systems into the labour force and civil governance; and ‘subjective identity’, the role of socialisation and gender identity. 8 Because of the multifaceted reach of gender, Scott argues that it can serve to illuminate various social relationships and how their dynamics are established. 9 For this essay’s particular focus, the historiography of empire, gender can decode the language of legitimacy in war, conquest and dominance. Finally, Scott asserts the normative aim of this exercise: through this gendered deconstruction of past power structures, ‘open possibilities’ are uncovered for a ‘[utopian] future’ of equality across ‘not only sex but class and race’. 10

In analysing the construction of empire — the genealogy of colonial power — Scott’s symbolic function of gender proves elucidative of the logic which justifies colonial dominance. Philippa Levine recognises that gender analysis does not equate to a universal positioning of gender, but that examining the ‘meaning and effect of sexual difference’ pushes the questions of empire from the descriptive to causal: ones that do not merely narrate but interrogate historical processes. 11 The images of the coloniser and the ‘ideal white male’ converge, imbued with qualities of being ‘physical, responsible, productive, and hard-working’. 12 In the same collection, Kathleen Wilson adopts a Foucauldian lens to uncover the expressions of power beyond the apparent: examining the relationship between gender and the formation and dissemination of other markers of difference and hierarchy under the British empire. In particular, she highlights how ‘stages of civilisation’ — an important scientific and philosophical underpinning of imperial endeavours — were highly dependent on gender in several dimensions. 13 Firstly, the construction of an effeminate native character as antithetical to British masculinity encompassed

sexual promiscuity, irrationality, or timidity, creating a natural distinction between the coloniser and the colonised in conjunction with the racial demarcation. 14 This reflects the intersectionality demanded to make sense of the creation of colonial identities. Mrinalini Sihna explores how these figures of the ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ provided an impetus for colonial projects to assert dominance and self-appoint paternalistic tutelage over economic, political and administrative spheres. 15 Furthermore, Wilson asserts that the position of women was taken as an indicator of civility by ‘Scottish intellectuals, natural historians, and social scientists’ as Scottish historian William Robertson had claimed, ‘To despise and to degrade the female sex, is the characteristic of the savage state in every part of the globe’. 16 Scholars observed the treatment of and the social position of women to draw conclusions on the ‘stage of development’: which as practice of categorisation captured the imagination of imperial scholarship. These acts are laden with irony as they operate with a myopic view of the status of women in their own contexts, reinforcing the understanding of colonial power as embedded in the creation of knowledge. Such criticism thus functions to ahistoricise the notion of civilisation, which has in turn justified empire — acting in a capacity of paternalistic tutelage as non-European societies are considered insufficiently developed along a path that was dictated by European experiences and standards.

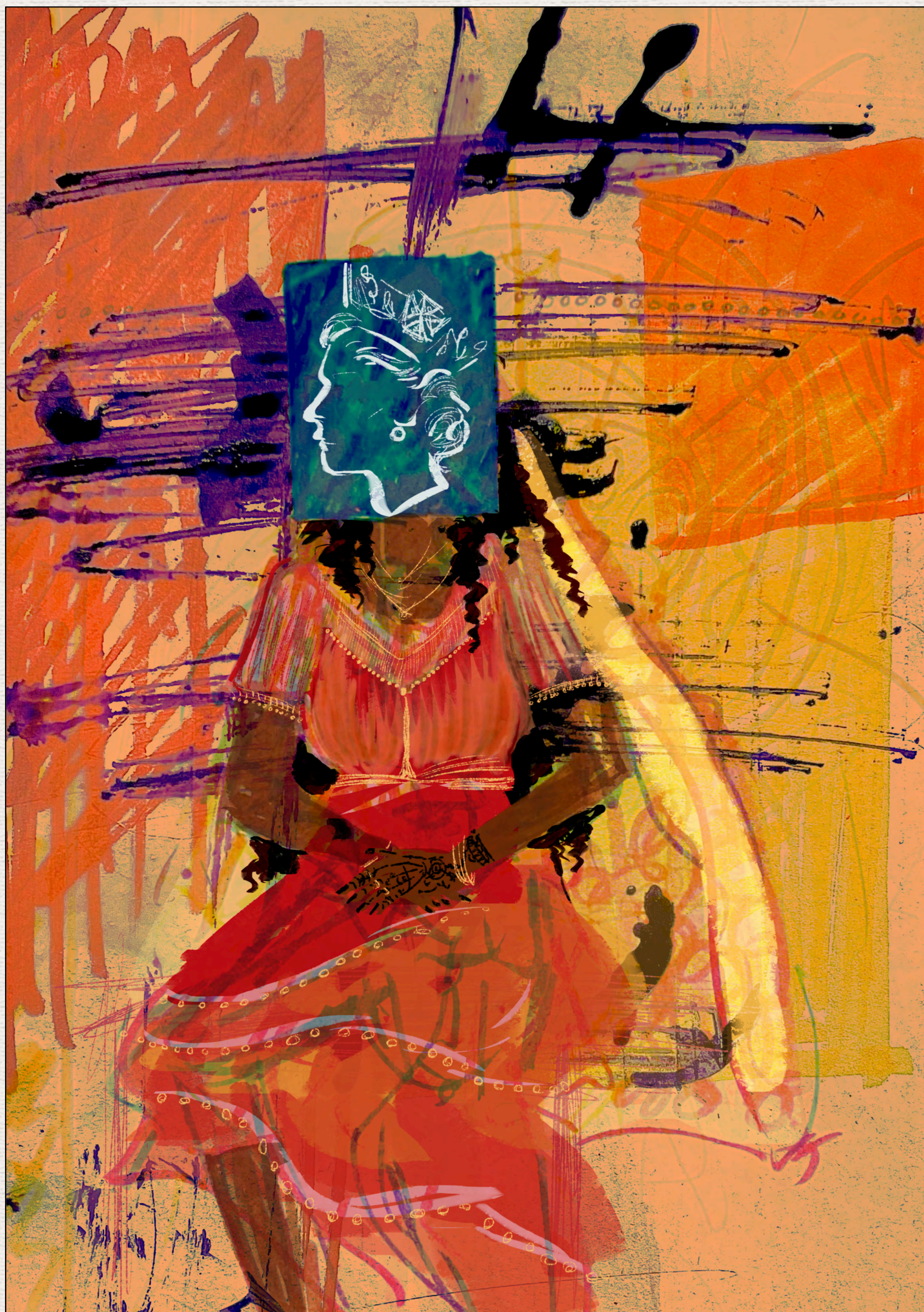
In understanding the motor of empire, however, it is evident that gender alone is insufficient for decoding power dynamics. Some historians attempted to vindicate the historical image of the white woman, challenging the ‘myth of the ignorant, jealous memsahib’ by arguing that this too is a product of patriarchal historical writing — ‘memsahib’ — being how white women of high status were addressed in colonial India. 17

The desire to recognise female agency in reproducing knowledge is understandable, yet Jane Haggis critiques that this ‘risks colonising gender for white women rather than gendering colonialism as a historical process’ when certain lines of inquiry attempt to isolate the experiences of white women.¹⁸ She demonstrates this through her study of missionary women in South India where, although the professionalisation of missionary work appeared as empowerment for Victorian women, as an escape from domesticity, it adhered to patriarchal expectations constructed for both the metropole and the colonies. Haggis offers a measured analysis, avoiding Manichaean labels — that of fundamental and dialectical dualisms — in conversation with her ‘three distinct interests: my subjects - the missionaries; their Indian subjects; and my own purpose: a feminist post-colonial history’.¹⁹ By adopting Edward Said’s conception of the European writer’s situatedness in colonial hierarchies and the creation of the Other, she reveals firstly how missionary women’s self-fashioning as independent and professional hinges on the image of their oppressed Indian ‘sister’.²⁰ Secondly, the missionary woman continues to embody and perpetuate Victorian ideals. Wilson’s discussion of civility can be applied: she was expected to transport with her the domesticity, manners, and Christianity of the English ‘lady’ to the ‘barbarism’ of the colonies.²¹ Oppressive gendered constructs were sustained within the cultures of both the metropole and colony. Thus, historians assessing the operation of empire cannot limit their scope to gender. Haggis has demonstrated the intersectionality demanded, positioning ‘difference [as] a central axis of [her] history’.²²

The process of the dismantling of empire, the national struggle, and its historiography further reveal both the usefulness of gender, as well as the necessity to recognise its social, rather than essential, nature. While the gender binary exists in

many non-Western societies, the fluidity of its implications and identities supports its ultimately social function. Gail Hershatter and Wang Zheng examine the evolution of gender and gendered historical writing in China.²³ The ‘woman question’ was a principal concern of Chinese nationalists and communists: Hilary Chung, in analysing the May Fourth Chinese literature, asserted that ‘defiance against the oppression by the modern woman is a beguiling metaphor for revolutionary vocation’.²⁴ These were a part of the New Culture Movement in the early 20th century, often perceived as a watershed in Chinese politics and culture and characterised by its iconoclasm and search for modernity. The subject of female liberalisation has been brought under national projects, signifying the continued objectification of female subjectivity. Rather being an end in itself, Chinese nationalists advocated for female liberation for the teleological ends of ‘modernisation’, as He-Yin Zhen describes the way in which men would proudly present their wives or daughters as Westernised and modernised to reflect their own enlightened status.²⁵ Hershatter and Wang further point out the delayed paradigm shift from writing women into history, to viewing gender as a signifier of power. They attribute this to the dominance of Marxist class analysis, and later, a translational issue — both gender and sex are translated into the same word, *xingbie*. Post-Mao scholars, in the effort to depart from class analysis, essentialised sex in order to ‘precede and transcend’ the former.²⁶ For this reason, analyses of gender as a construct in Chinese cultural and historiographical contexts have been staggered and under-explored. The interactions with political and intellectual climates have significantly altered the efficacy of gender as a category of historical analysis in modern China.

Other histories of the end of empire also wrestle with the weight of nationalism and post-colonialism — consequently, a gendered lens



ARTWORK BY MARNI ROBERTSON

cannot be applied in silos without a consciousness of (inter)national power dynamics. Sinha explores how Indian women were only used as a representation of a culture, an embodiment of national sentiment in national struggles. 27 Simultaneously, Lewis and Mills trace the relationships between Western feminists and indigenous women, particularly how Western women campaigned against issues such as 'sati' in India and the veil in Middle Eastern societies. 28 Due to the western nature of this campaigning, these practices were revitalised as 'symbols of resistance to colonial rule, rather than symbols of the oppression of women'. 29 However, this intersectionality renders the conversation complicated, with multiple tensions to be maintained simultaneously. Ania Loomba, Lata Mani and Rajeswari Rajan articulate the difficulty of giving meaning to the 'burning widow of the sati without portraying her as an archetypal victim as Western feminists have, nor as a free agent as is often done in nationalist writings'. 30 As nationalists attempt to reverse the terms and legacies of colonisation, they may also uncritically sustain and glorify practices that are fundamentally harmful and sexist; at the same time, the West's engagement with these topics serve to cultivate its own moral superiority. Neither of these approaches authentically foreground female agency. The deeply contested nature of this topic suggests that gender is not merely posited as constructor of meaning: rather, other categories also mould and decode gendered acts, furthermore, discussions are grounded by their localised contexts. The genealogy of meaning and power appears multidirectional.

Finally, given these ambiguities, historians and feminist theorists have increasingly questioned the role of historical writing as reproduction of power — does this re-examination of past knowledge redistribute or perpetuate power? Two key concerns emerge when using gender as a lens of analysis: its intersection with race as well as the gender binary.

Feminist postcolonial writing, such as that of Audre Lorde and Gayatri Spivak, questions the primacy of gender. Lorde emphasises the power of difference, asserting that feminist writing must question its own racist roots to productively dismantle the interlocked axes of oppression. In her essay *The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, she argues that embracing difference is a powerful reserve for change, in contrast to an unreflective, linear development of feminism. 31 Gender, as evidenced in its pervasiveness in the history of empire, is equally given meaning by its adjacent racist practices. Spivak adopted an innovative rereading of *Jane Eyre* as a colonial novel, exploring how the constructions of literary figures are reliant on the backgrounding of Black characters, drawing conclusions on the formation of white female subjectivity. 32 Barbara Smith articulated that confronting gender alone would never make sense for the oppression of Black women. 33 Gender as a category of historical analysis implies a primacy of gender in constructing meaning, yet this overlooks the construction of gender identities themselves along racial divides. The act of gendered historical analysis itself indicates privilege in adjacent fields of power such as race and class.

Beyond the issue of occluding adjacent axes of oppression, a critique of Scott's approach is that it projects the gender binary onto its subjects of analysis. Despite how her analysis is based on the premise that gender is a social construction, Jeanna Boydston and Afsaneh Najamabadi point out that Scott's social scientific categorisation of gender maintains the binary through the analytical lens of the masculine/feminine dichotomy. 34 Boydston argues that Scott merely deflected 'analysis from the naturalised body to the perceived body, but this was a deflection, not a displacement, for perception now became the real subject'. 35 Colonial projects essentialised hierarchies through the gender binary, however, gendered historical writing essentialises

and reproduces this binary. Therefore, some, particularly non-European, historians have turned their attention away from the binary to make sense of power: by historicising gender as a subject, rather than a category of analysis. For example, Najmabadi examines ‘modes of “male-ness” that were distinct from manhood, but not in reference to womanhood’.³⁶ She explores modes of sexuality in Qatar Iran and reveals how sexual desire between younger and older men was characterised beyond ‘effeminacy’, thus removing the categories of masculinity and femininity altogether.³⁷ On the other hand, Oyèrónké Oyewùmí explores how power was primarily articulated through age and not gender in pre-colonial Yoruba societies, thus deconstructing the assumed relationship between gender and power, or even gender as a salient social identity.³⁸ These examples reveal the risk of applying a gendered lens when confronting colonised societies — it is applying categories that did not exist, and in doing so further colonise the epistemes of pre-colonial histories. However, despite these efforts to uncover native modes of gender, Rey Chow argues that in only accepting the limitations of this quest, will the ‘epistemic violence’ of colonialism be fully confronted through its transformation of native’s consciousness and social constructs.³⁹ An acceptance is not acquiescence; however, it provides an imperative for dismantling of the ontological treatment of the gender binary in historical categorisation, as it links the binary with the colonial knowledge field. The epistemological shift is a productive engagement with the impacts of empire, and therefore how historical writing (re)produce knowledge.

Historical writings of empire demand self-consciousness due to the nature of the construction and maintenance of empire: it is not simply juridical — emanating from the centre to the lower strata, instead it is disciplinary — fluid, productive, and shaped by discourse.⁴⁰

Historians are not mere observers but contributors to this discourse. While gender as a category of historical analysis proves critical in understanding the construction of empires, it could occlude gender production by colonisation and racial demarcation. It is therefore necessary to adopt an intersectional lens of historical analysis, rather than conceptualising of binaries that reproduce power through the act of historical writing. Embracing the complexities allows for an authentic exploration of the reach of colonial power and its historical construction, and, returning to Scott’s closing remarks, an imagination of a future of social and political equality.

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LAW SECTION

SECTION 5



BY EVE COFFEY



LEGISLATING
VIRGINITY:



*The Laws and Ethics of Hymenoplasty
and Virginity Testing*

ARTWORK BY BESSIE SCHOFIELD

EDITED BY HELENA OSIE BISHOP, COPY EDITED BY CHARLOTTE MARTIN
REVIEWED BY LUCY ROSS

Introduction

According to Merriam Webster, the definition of a 'virgin' is someone who has never participated in sexual intercourse.¹ This definition revolves around heterosexual relationships and the assumption that the intercourse will involve a person with a penis and another with a vagina. However, what one considers sexual intercourse can vary from person to person (for example, whether oral sex is included) and the definition incurs greater difficulty when linked to anatomy, specifically the hymen.² The hymen is a thin membrane of skin near the opening of the vagina, which consists of leftover fragments of tissue formed during foetal development, found only in female mammals.³ The presence of the hymen still holds significant importance in most religions as it is believed to determine a woman's 'purity' and ability to marry, an essential factor for their position within their community, due to the commodification of female virginity. Consequently, women often face violence when they are accused of not being a virgin, or are found to have a hymen which is not intact. Due to the gender binary being imposed by the concept of virginity, this essay assumes that most people with hymens identify as women, whilst still acknowledging that trans*, non-binary and intersex people can also share this anatomical feature.

This essay will discuss the cultural practices that encourage virginity testing and hymenoplasty, followed by an analysis of potential harm-reduction solutions with reference to the historical and religious background which places virginity as a gendered concept. Whether the measures put in place by the Health and Care Act 2022 are sufficient in preventing the violence against women which stems from practices surrounding virginity will be discussed in the context of the practical realities of virginity testing. This idea will be explored within the framework of the UK's legal system with reference to other European jurisdictions for context.⁴

Section I: Misconceptions of Virginity in Religion

The physical presence of a hymen is seen as the determining factor in establishing a woman's virginity, following the idea that the hymen will break and bleed during first sexual intercourse. This is normally put within the context of the traditional cisheteronormative standard of vaginal penetration by a penis.⁵ Not only does this definition ignore queer sex, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has found that the appearance or non-appearance of a hymen cannot determine virginity. The hymen can be destroyed or torn during physical activity, and some women are born without one at all.⁶ Despite this evidence, the hymen is still regarded as proof of virginity in women. Virginity is a prerequisite for marriage in all major religions: Christianity (1 Corinthians 6:13, 3:16); Islam (al-Isra' 17:22); Judaism (Mishnag Ketubbot 1:2); Hinduism (chapter 17-Shloka 14); and Sikhism.⁷ Today, virginity testing is no longer commonly practised but in certain highly-religious communities a couple's wedding bed sheets are examined by the groom's family for blood to ensure the bride's premarital virginity.⁸ Women are subjected to greater expectations and further oppression by the continuation of these traditions which are rooted in false medical practices, unlike men who have no inherent physical evidence of their having sexual intercourse. Virginity is therefore a gendered concept, relying on an outdated assumption of female anatomy. Historically, gender has been a prominent characteristic of practices surrounding virginity which is visible in the custom of giving higher dowries to families whose daughter appeared to be a virgin.⁹ Freud posits in "The Taboo of Virginity" that:

The demand that a girl shall not bring to her marriage with a particular man any memory of sexual relations with another is, indeed, nothing other than the logical continuation of the right to exclusive possession of a woman which forms the essence of monogamy, the extension of this monopoly over the past.¹⁰

The belief that a virgin woman is inherently more valuable can result in a sense of entitlement of men in the control of women, mandating obedience and encouraging punishment, including murder, to preserve ownership.¹¹ Although more moderate religious communities no longer see a woman's virginity as imperative, in highly religious communities the ability to marry, and therefore virginity, continues to be intrinsically linked to one's social status. Being a loyal member of the community and having children are seen as being guaranteed through maintaining virginity until marriage.¹²

Being found not to be a virgin brings deep shame to the party's family. ¹³ A woman found to have had premarital sex will be seen as 'spent' and 'dirty', leading to her alienation, which, in the religious communities that carry out these practices, is often her entire social group including family members.¹⁴ To avoid this, a woman must be found to be a virgin, which is achieved through physical examination of her anatomy.

Section II: Virginity Testing

Virginity testing, also known as hymen testing, is a physical examination performed upon a woman which involves the insertion of fingers into a woman's vagina to assess whether she has a hymen, purportedly to determine virginity. ¹⁵ Virginity testing has been recorded globally, recently including countries with no previous history of the practice such as Belgium, Canada, and the Netherlands.¹⁶ This could be partly due to modern migration patterns but it should be noted that hymen testing is not only a practice carried out in Muslim countries and communities (which is a common misconception)¹⁷; virginity testing is also rife among the Christian community in the Bible belt of North America.^{18 19}

Additionally, it has been discovered that the British government inflicted virginity tests upon immigrants throughout the 1970s, predominantly

on Indian women to supposedly assess whether they were truly engaged to a British citizen for their visa claim, based on the stereotype that Indian women abstain from sex until marriage.²⁰

Generally, women detainees are at a higher risk of abuse, including forced virginity tests with the aim of disempowering and humiliating them, despite this being clearly prohibited by the United Nations Rules on the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders²¹ (otherwise known as the Bangkok Rules).²² In addition, until very recently the Indonesian government subjected its female military candidates to virginity tests as part of its recruitment process, demonstrating the systemic use of the tests, despite their scientific dispute.²³ It is clear from their varied use that virginity tests are not a solely religious practice.

Virginity testing, and its lack of attention in the public eye, proves that myths about female anatomy prevail and continue to be used in the oppression of women and girls. As the aforementioned practices seen in Britain were carried out on Indian women and female inmates, who are largely minorities, women of colour are disproportionately affected.²⁴ Virginity testing remains largely underreported, especially when it is practised within societies who generally oppose it.²⁵ WHO has described the practice as "a violation of the victim's human rights and is associated with both immediate and long-term consequences that are detrimental to [her] physical, psychological and social well-being."²⁶ This definition from WHO can be seen as a step towards a more nuanced view of virginity testing, where the victim's psychological well-being is also seen as a priority. Women and girls who have to undergo virginity tests will have increased anxiety around being discovered as 'impure', making the practice a form of psychological torment, in addition to being physically degrading and painful. Infection and bleeding are shown to be common side effects, in

addition to sexually transmitted infections and Human Immunodeficiency Viruses (HIV) in situations where the examination is performed in an unhygienic manner.²⁷ This type of practice overlooks the myths about the hymen, sexual autonomy, and the possibility that women may lose their physical signs of virginity during sexual assault. Especially when an estimated one third of women in the United States will be raped in their lifetime.²⁸ In this vein, virginity testing is also employed to investigate whether a woman has been raped, mimicing the original sexual trauma.²⁹ ³⁰ Additionally, the test perpetuates the idea that the hymen will always break during penetration, which is not strictly true due to its elasticity.³¹ Inversely, ‘certified virgins’ can also experience adverse effects from their test as some communities believe that having sexual intercourse with a virgin can cure AIDs and HIV, encouraging those infected to have sex with a virgin and ‘cure’ themselves.³² Virginity testing is perceived to have social and cultural benefits, such as reducing the spread of STIs and HIV, preventing unwanted pregnancies, and communal tradition, but the supposed benefits against the spread of STIs and unwanted pregnancies have not been proven empirically.³³

From the psychological side effects to physical harm, it is evident that virginity testing is an oppressive tool used against women which reinforces the patriarchy. It is one which only has consequences for women, disproportionately affecting those who belong to religious communities.³⁴ It upholds socio-cultural norms that reinforce women’s inequality and serve as a form of control over the actions of women and girls. It violates basic human rights, including the liberty and security of the person (specifically physical integrity), discrimination based on sex, and occasionally the right to life, in the case of honour killings.³⁵ To avoid such violence, women can turn to extreme measures, including surgery, to appear to have a hymen.

Section III - Hymenoplasty

“Hymenoplasty is driven by a cultural expectation. It is a wider indication of a very patriarchal and culturally dominant society over women.”³⁶

Hymenoplasty is defined in section 148(2) of the UK’s Health and Care Act 2022 as “a surgical intervention that involves reconstructing the hymen.”³⁷ This can be done in a number of ways, but it usually involves sewing the remnants of the hymen back together with dissolvable stitches or reconstructing it entirely with skin grafts. The technical goal of the procedure is to ensure the woman will bleed when she next has sexual intercourse, the motivation for 30% of the women seeking hymenoplasty.³⁸ In the study conducted by the British government, it is cited as being readily available in the private medical sector, with procedures costing two thousand pounds and being performed by twenty-two identified private clinics.³⁹ Many of the reasons for wanting the surgery seen in the British study can be attributed to oppressive patriarchal stereotypes, such as the goal of ‘feeling tight’ which 12% of the study’s participants cited (with 35% seeking both tightness and blood loss) and 13% expecting the operation to boost their self-esteem (which can be linked with the value that patriarchal standards place upon virginity).. Outside of this, 9% of women participating in the study were seeking hymenoplasty as part of their goal to overcome a traumatic sexual experience. By the end of the study, only 29% of the participants (nineteen women) decided to go through with the (surgery, with only two achieving their goals of bleeding on their wedding night: hymenoplasty does not often achieve its goal.

The British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons “does not recognise or support hymenoplasty as a cosmetic procedure” and it has no formal training, being widely disapproved of in medical ethics, yet it is still being performed.⁴⁰ This is a trend that has

spread throughout Europe, for example, 63.2% of medical clinics in Switzerland have had hymenoplasty requested in their clinic, with 64.3% of these clinics performing the surgery.⁴¹ All surgery has implied risks, but hymenoplasty has its own unique risks including sexual difficulties, narrowing of the introitus, acute bleeding during the procedure, and increased pain sensation. On top of the physical negatives, there are also the same psychological effects as associated with virginity testing; guilt, shame, and fear of the surgery being discovered to name only a few. The study found that the issue for many doctors, especially those with religious or moral views surrounding virginity, is balancing saving a woman's life and deceiving her future husband. As such, women's safety cannot be said to be the priority. Hymenoplasty itself could result in the murder of a woman, as shown by a study of Lebanese students in which some male participants said they would 'hurt' (5.3%) or 'kill' (4%) a woman who had the surgery.⁴² Not only are there risks from the surgery itself, but from its possible violent consequences.

It must nonetheless be noted that there can be certain benefits associated with hymenoplasty, namely that it can provide a form of liberation to women faced with the pressure to remain virgins before marriage. If these women can finance the surgery, then they can be free to have sexual partners before getting married. This is an elitist form of freedom since it must be bought, but a form of freedom, nonetheless. In a similar vein, hymenoplasty can be lifesaving, as it can create the appearance of virginity for a hymen test, preventing honour-based violence (HBV) even if no bleeding occurs during intercourse.⁴³ Additionally, the procedure could have a psychological benefit to the women who seek it in order to feel reparation from sexual assault and be 're-virginised', if they feel their virginity was stolen from them. However, women seeking hymenoplasty for reasons of sexual trauma

are in a very small minority (9%) according to a Dutch study.⁴⁴

Hymenoplasty is an issue in its own right due to its ineffectiveness and harmful side effects, but it is also a symptom of the perpetuation of the detrimental beliefs surrounding virginity and virginity checking. Due to its inherent links to violence and abuse, hymenoplasty can rarely be seen as having been freely consented to.⁴⁵ The Health and Care Act 2022 is Britain's legislative answer to the issue. It forbids any person from carrying out a virginity test or hymenoplasty and from aiding or abetting someone for carrying out either practise for the reason that violence can be incited by both procedures.⁴⁶ Based on the heavily gendered nature of the problem, the legislation is targeted towards the protection of women. However, by illegalising hymenoplasty without first dealing with the ideas surrounding virginity which encourage virginity testing, women are left vulnerable if they are subjected to an illegal virginity test. Without being supported by changed practices in sexual education, specifically debunking ideas surrounding the hymen, the legislation risks leaving women vulnerable to practices performed illegally by members of their community without the solution of hymenoplasty. Medical tourism is already a common way for women to access hymenoplasty, with many travelling to Tunisia where it is commonly practised.⁴⁷ Although this is prohibited by the 2022 Act, medical tourism leaves only women who cannot afford to travel for surgery subject to the interdiction.⁴⁸ As a result, the legislation furthers the financial pressures hymenoplasty can bring without dealing with the expectations surrounding virginity which make surgery desirable.

The dangers of the surgery should be made public knowledge so that people travelling to acquire it understand the possible consequences.

Legislating on practices such as virginity testing without taking active measures to prevent it from taking place risks a performative ban where the practices remain ongoing behind closed doors. Therefore, in tandem with the legislation now in place in Britain, preventative measures for the practices which lead to and encourage virginity testing and hymenoplasty should also be implemented: the root cause must be dealt with as well as its symptoms.

IV - Proposals and Conflict To raise awareness

among young people, myths concerning virginity should be ‘debunked’ within school’s sexual education classes and health classes in general. An education on the subject will aid in dispelling fear and shame surrounding virginity and the normalisation of the topic should make it easier for girls suffering abuse to seek help. For example, teachers could facilitate police reports. In addition, a public education campaign could be initiated to educate the European and global population generally, as was done with the risks of smoking, of which there are now very high levels of awareness.⁴⁹ The ban of virginity testing and education that would demystify the hymen, should eventually treat the root cause of the violence against women that stems from virginity testing but it cannot be implemented in isolation. The same steps should be taken in prohibiting hymenoplasty. The Minister for Care and Mental Health, Gillian Keegan, has stated that the 2022 Act was introduced for “safeguarding vulnerable women and girls”.⁵⁰ Though this may be a possible outcome of the 2022 Act, a move past virginity in measuring girls’ and women’s worth is needed, not only legislation. The Health and Care Act 2022 can be seen as a promising step in the right direction but it will not be possible to live in a post-virginity checking society unless public opinion on a whole is changed.

Section V - Conclusions

Luckily, opinions on virginity are indeed changing, and in very high places. In 2018, the Pope declared that ‘brides of Christ’ no longer need to undergo a virginity test before being declared as consecrated virgins.⁵¹ As society becomes more aware of the false stereotypes and violent abuse surrounding virginity, hymenoplasty and virginity testing could fade out of existence. However, this requires action from the government to raise awareness among the population. The potential for gender norms surrounding virginity to change grows as science and feminist theory work together to dismantle the idea of virginity itself. Though we may be far from a post-virginity society, legislation regulating virginity testing and hymenoplasty are a step in the right direction, despite not being the end of the journey.

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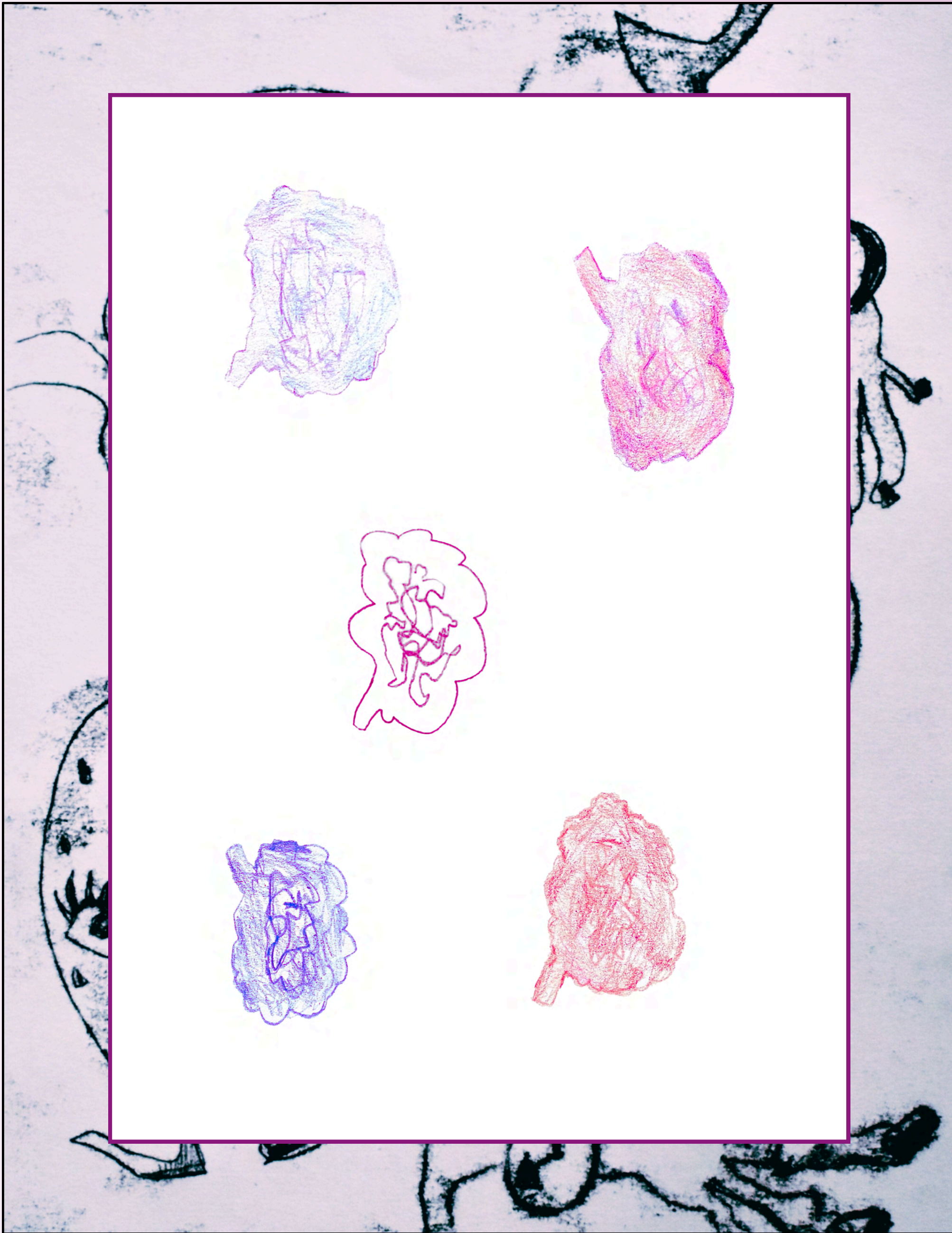
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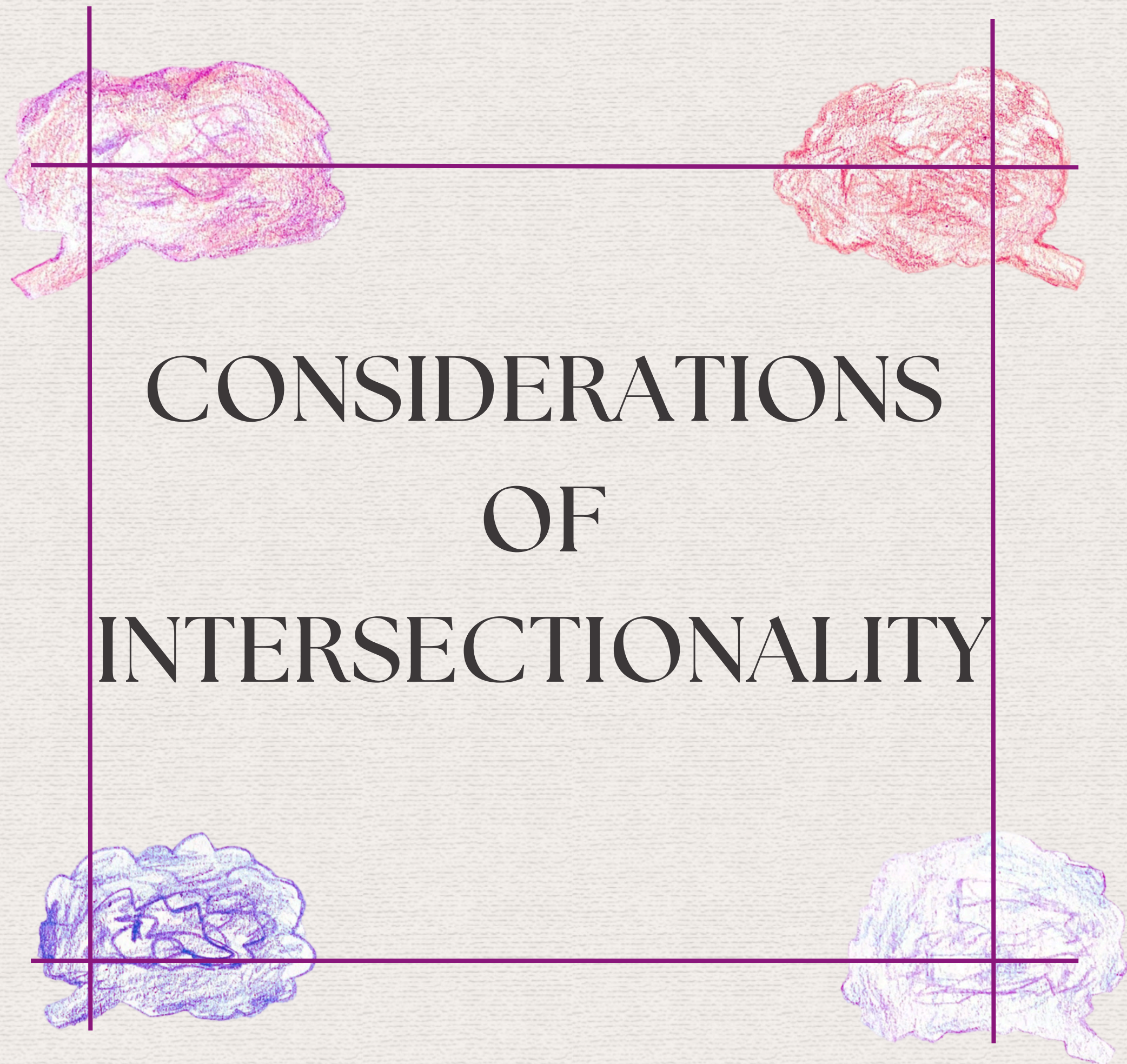
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Miscellaneous Musings



Section 6

BY ABIGAIL NICOLL



CONSIDERATIONS
OF
INTERSECTIONALITY

In Psychological Research

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Introduction to Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a critical, theoretical, and analytical framework which emerged in the literature around the 1970s. The Combahee River Collective, a group of African American feminists, published a radical statement articulating how the struggles of Black women could not be appreciated by mainstream feminist or racial equality movements (Combahee River Collective, 1977/2018). Their statement advocated for a more inclusive approach to activism and called for the complete dismantling of existing oppressive power structures in the name of social justice. Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited with coining the term 'intersectionality' in the late 1980s as part of her pioneering work on the unique discriminatory experiences faced by individuals with intersecting social identities. Crenshaw postulated that existing frameworks addressing gender and race inequalities did not adequately account for the experiences of Black women because they experience a complex combination of interlocking oppressed identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Her work rejected the traditional single-axis approach to discrimination, which analyses each dimension of identity in isolation and overlooks the compounding effects of multiple forms of oppression. Crenshaw supported the view that identities and group memberships are fluid, socially constructed, and vary across contexts, rather than being fixed or objective attributes.

Intersectional frameworks provide a more nuanced understanding of individual outcomes, for example experiences with prejudice or disparities in access to opportunities. According to intersectionality, such outcomes are a consequence of the convergence of multiple identities and the social positioning of individuals and groups within systems of power and inequality.

The intersectional approach requires an understanding of the interconnected nature of group memberships and how they are constructed and

maintained within systems of inequality (Cole, 2009; Hurtado & Sinha, 2008). The development of an individual's identity is situated within historical and cultural contexts (Fine, 2018) and involves the construction and reconstruction of narratives through social experiences (Azmitia et al., 2023; Erikson, 1968; Hammack, 2008). The intersectional perspective also involves consideration of the varying levels of power held by each identity that constructs an intersectional position (Dhamoon, 2011). In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between group membership and oppression, the power structures that perpetuate inequalities must be acknowledged (McCormick-Huhn et al., 2019). It is also important to recognise that the concept of intersectionality is not exclusively applicable to members of multiple marginalised groups; privileged identities are also part of intersectional positions (Knowles & Marshburn, 2010). Most individuals possess both marginalised and privileged identities, resulting in fluid and nuanced experiences of power that are shaped by intersecting systems of oppression and privilege (Benet-Martínez & Hong, 2014). For example, a White lesbian experiences a disadvantaged intersectional position relative to men and heterosexual women, but is advantaged relative to non-white lesbians (Shields, 2008).

Why Intersectionality is Important in Psychological Research

At the forefront of the increasingly popular intersectionality agenda in psychology is the wellbeing of individuals. The British Psychological Society states that a key principle of psychological research is to "consider societal benefits" and "contribute to the common good" (BPS, 2021). There is an abundance of evidence on the harmful outcomes of negative intergroup relations and systemic oppression on marginalised individuals. For example, marginalised groups often experience educational and economic disadvantages

(Porter, 2011) alongside both physical and mental health disparities (English et al., 2022; Mitchell et al., 2021; Stevens-Watkins et al., 2014).

Consequently, psychology as a discipline should prioritise advocating for a more equitable society.

Intersectional perspectives facilitate a comprehensive understanding of human behaviour and mental health within specific social and historical contexts, thus improving the accuracy and inclusivity of psychological research across diverse populations. For example, research suggests Black women experience higher rates of depression and anxiety than their White counterparts yet are less likely to seek psychological help due to cultural barriers, stigma, and widespread distrust in healthcare systems (Ward et al., 2013). While these challenges are likely rooted in systemic racial discrimination and gender-based oppression, an intersectional approach advocates that Black women face unique stressors inexplicable by race or gender in isolation, rather the impact of the complex interplay of multiple identities. As social categories play an integral role in individual mental health and life outcomes, adopting an intersectional approach in psychological research and services is essential to ensure the mental wellbeing of all individuals and the development of effective and inclusive interventions.

Limitations of Traditional Psychological Frameworks

Thus far, intersectionality has been largely neglected in social psychological research (Bowleg, 2017) as social identities are often assumed to be immutable and distinct from one another (Cole, 2009; Yoder & Kahn, 2003). Previous research has examined individual group memberships in isolation, through either a categorical or additive lens, and often limits analyses to a single axis (Goff & Kahn, 2013). However, social identities must be studied in conjunction with one another to achieve a

truly comprehensive understanding of an individual's experiences (Rosenthal, 2016), as group memberships are mutually reliant on one another for meaning (Shields, 2008). Previous research also demonstrates that individuals with multiple marginalised identities feel more 'invisible' than individuals who experience stigma based on just one aspect of their identity (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Remedios & Snyder, 2018). Therefore, it is important to consider the unique intersectional position held by individuals to understand how subgroups within marginalised communities experience varying levels of structural stigma.

Current social psychological research tends to focus primarily on the personal outcomes of prejudice and discrimination, often overlooking the broader societal structures that maintain inequalities (Shellae Versey et al., 2019). Influential frameworks such as social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978) and social categorisation theory (SCT; Turner, 1999) have previously been criticised for underestimating the influence of historical, social, and cultural factors (Dashtipour, 2012; Sabik & Shellae Versey, 2023). SIT posits that individuals develop a sense of identity based on social group memberships, while SCT emphasises the cognitive processes underlying the categorisation of the self and others into social groups. Both theories depict social identities as unidimensional and do not adequately consider power dynamics or the interlocking nature of identities (Bowleg, 2017; Shields, 2008). Future research must consider identities within their broader contexts to provide more accurate and nuanced findings (Cho et al., 2013; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008).

Social psychologists have also historically tended to ascribe generalised findings about identity and group membership to entire cultures, disregarding variability within communities (Hammack, 2008; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

However, every individual within one social group will also identify with at least one other social group, meaning they each possess a unique intersectional position (Sabik, 2016). This position determines an individual's socially constructed experience of privilege or oppression, which necessitates research into diversity within groups (Cole, 2009). The consequences of seemingly irrelevant categories, such as height, can depend on an individual's intersectional position and the associated structural advantages or disadvantages (Zinn & Dill, 1996). For example, being tall is associated with dominance and success among White men, but results in heightened suspicion and fear towards Black men (Blacker et al., 2013; Hester & Gray, 2018). This highlights the unique experiences of privilege or prejudice that result from intersecting group memberships and power structures (Rosenthal, 2016). Considerations of intersectionality that overlook the effects of power dynamics may be considered 'ornamental' (Bilge, 2013). For instance, the concept of 'multiculturalism' is often criticised for attending to inequality without confronting the underlying power structures (Burman, 2005; Grzanka & Miles, 2016; McCormick-Huhn et al., 2019). Incorporating intersectionality theory into psychological research practices can deepen our understanding of differences both between and within social groups (Sabik, 2016), while also considering the influence of hegemonic structures.

Psychologists have recently begun to recognise and rectify the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic) sampling bias which has long existed in psychological research. The WEIRD bias frequently limits the generalisability of findings (Henrich et al., 2010) as research which relies on homogenous sample populations cannot accurately represent the experiences of diverse populations (Cole, 2009). The overrepresentation of WEIRD samples results in the overgeneralisation of context-specific experiences

and identities to non-WEIRD samples (Henrich et al., 2010).

The absence of marginalised groups in psychological research samples can significantly disrupt the reliability and generalisability of findings and have meaningful real-world implications. For example, mental health studies and interventions are typically focused on privileged groups, thus increasing the likelihood of misdiagnosis or ineffective treatments for marginalised individuals with mental disorders (Collins, 2017). This is particularly concerning as being a member of a socio-culturally marginalised group is already associated with higher incidence of poor mental health, which may be attributable to higher levels of stress or experiences of discrimination (Benet-Martínez & Hong, 2014; Klonoff et al., 2000). Our understanding of human behaviour is historically centred around dominant groups, therefore underestimating the needs of marginalised communities. Current policies and interventions may only be effective for certain groups, perpetuating systemic patterns of disadvantage and undermining the validity of the field of psychology (Bowleg, 2017). According to decolonial intersectionality frameworks, the WEIRD bias

prioritises Western-centric perspectives and research agendas while neglecting to consider the intersecting identities which shape the diverse human experience (Kurtis & Adams, 2016). To become more inclusive, research practices must also actively centre the diverse perspectives of marginalised communities to enrich current understanding of psychological phenomena and drive positive social change.

Notably, studies which do focus on marginalised groups regularly neglect an intersectional perspective and generalise the experiences of the most socio-politically dominant category of a particular identity to the entire group (Bowleg, 2012). For example, studies investigating higher rates of mental health issues among Black people often adequately reflect the perspective of a heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class Black man, but fail to represent the unique experiences of Black queer individuals, Black women, or Black working-class individuals (Griffith et al., 2011). Therefore, diversity within marginalised communities is often overlooked, resulting in biased studies that could potentially inform mental health interventions or policies which reinforce existing inequalities. This underscores the importance of an intersectional perspective in combination with a diverse sample population.

Potential Barriers to Implementing Intersectionality in Psychological Research

The intersectional approach poses some challenges to psychological research. A common critique is the invisibility effect; individuals with multiple intersecting oppressed identities may be viewed as minority members even within their own marginalised groups (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). As researchers using an intersectional approach may still overlook less visible or less recognised forms of marginalisation, more obvious experiences of oppression receive

disproportionate attention. This effect may be attributed to androcentric, heterocentric, and ethnocentric biases in the context of discrimination (Sabik, 2016). For example, the common ethnocentric bias in Western sexism discourse often results in the invisibility of non-white female perspectives in gender-based discrimination research. Researchers must therefore make a conscious effort to attend to non-prototypical group members by reflecting on their own unconscious biases, prioritising participants' voices, and including critical analysis of existing power structures.

A paradigmatic perspective of social identity, which recognises the dynamic and multifaceted nature of individual identities within their broader social and cultural contexts, is being increasingly adopted by researchers (e.g., Azmitia et al., 2023; Lei & Rhodes, 2021). However, progress is slow, and most mainstream psychological research claiming to use an intersectional lens does not adequately address every core component of intersectionality (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2021). Studies to date tend to examine the effects of multiple individual identities, such as gender and race, but fail to take systemic social inequalities into account or challenge dominant social paradigms (Alexander-Floyd, 2012; Collins, 2017). The intersectional approach critiques this current narrative, as merely identifying the presence of intersecting identities does not adequately address the roots of deeply entrenched systems of inequality. For example, it is not sufficient to research disparities such as racial and gender inequality in leadership positions without also examining and challenging overarching issues and root causes such as institutional sexism in corporate policies or access to education. Moreover, intersectionality requires recognition of not just the most visible aspects of identity which dominate social psychological research (race and gender), but also factors such as sexuality, disability, or

socioeconomic status which contribute to individual experiences of oppression. Mennies et al (2020) claimed to have advanced the field, as they used a diverse representative dataset and considered systemic oppression when analysing disparities in mental health outcomes. However, it has been argued that their study cannot be classified as intersectional research because their definition of intersectionality was narrow and implied that only marginalised people are relevant to intersectionality theory (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2021). Mennies et al (2020) also used an overly depoliticised approach, failing to include a call to action for social justice, a key component of intersectional psychological research. If researchers fail to attend to the need for radical structural change, intersectionality's social justice roots may be left behind (Collins & Bilge, 2020; May, 2015).

Future Directions for Considerations of Intersectionality in Psychological Research

There remains a gap in the literature on how to apply a critical intersectional lens to effect social change and address discrimination (Al-Faham et al., 2019), in line with one of the integral aims of psychological research (BPS, 2021). A recent pragmatic framework called 'The 8 Inclusion Needs of All People' (Wilson, 2023) aimed to simplify the many potential combinations of intersectional identities and address the contextual implications of intersecting groups. These eight fundamental needs (access, space, opportunity, representation, allowance, language, respect, and support) collectively aim to address the complex lived realities of individuals with various intersecting identities. Each of these needs addresses an aspect of societal inclusion, providing broader scope for the analysis of context-dependent manifestations and implications of intersecting identities. Wilson's model builds upon Crenshaw's foundational work and operationalises the concept of intersectionality by translating the original theoretical framework

into methodological tools for empirical research and social change. The model proposes a practical solution for governments and organisations to incorporate the needs of diverse groups and create interventions which enhance inclusivity and mitigate discrimination. However, Wilson's framework is yet to be empirically tested and may be overly reductionist due to the simplification of complex intersectional identities and individual inclusion needs. Moreover, the model may not adequately address the structurally embedded nature of discrimination and inequality. In order to address these potential limitations, Wilson's framework should be empirically tested across a wide range of cultural, social, and institutional settings and could include metrics to assess systemic barriers and the institutional structures that perpetuate inequality.

To conclude, the integration of effective intersectional frameworks within psychological research has the potential to yield more nuanced and representative findings, ultimately reducing systemic biases in mental health care, interventions, and social policies, while advancing equality. Studies may improve public understanding of the complex interplay of identities and systemic power structures, therefore driving social change and combatting ignorance. More effective and inclusive specialised assessments and treatments could be developed to address the diverse needs and experiences of various intersecting identities. Furthermore, psychological research must actively challenge the status quo (systems deeply entrenched in systemic oppression) to facilitate progress towards a more equitable society and gradually dismantle stringent power structures which maintain inequalities. Such a radical shift demands a greater consideration of intersectionality and social justice in psychological research methodologies, implications, and practical applications, with the aim of improving general wellbeing and mental health outcomes.

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BY MARTHA GANE

MYTH OF THE
'MUSE':

*A History of the Gender Roles
Conceptualised in Art*

EDITED BY ASHLEY NG, COPY EDITED BY DAISY GILLAM
REVIEWED BY ISOBEL WILCOX-MAHON

The muse has been historically defined as a source of divine inspiration to the artist, a passive and voiceless object art is made in reflection to but not about. The dynamic is almost always gendered with the female counterpart of the muse being frequently left silent. She takes on a sexualised role, posing nude, as often the relationship between muse and artist extends to romantic one. An erotised and romanticised version of womanhood litters nude paintings of the past, highlighting how the role frequently stripped women of their identity as they were portrayed through the eyes of the male artist. However, there are artists who have challenged these assumptions. Tracing the life of artist Lee Miller and the work of Shigeyuki Kihara reveals how the binaries between the roles of artist and muse are not as rigid as previously thought but are influenced by societal constructs limiting how we perceive and use the role of the muse.

As is the case with many women throughout history Lee Miller's name has often been overshadowed by that of a man. Her relationship with famous artist Man Ray has left her traditionally categorised as a muse within art history. Even as Miller's fame has grown in recent years independent of this relationship with a greater focus on her work as a surrealist war photographer, it seems that biographers often shape her story around the men in her life (Blumberg, 2024). Women's value is often viewed by their proximity to the men in their lives, such as playing the role of wife, mother, sister etc. In Miller's case it seems we view her life as reduced to that of her relationships with men. The first thought would be to re-assert Miller's independent creative agency in the face of these reductive narratives, by highlighting her own work as an artist. However, it is possible that it is not how we have categorised Miller as a muse which limits our perspective of her but instead our understanding of the term muse itself. Instead of scrapping muse-hood altogether we need to take a closer look at what this term actually

means and analyse how we understand it today. Miller's time spent as a muse was also valuable given that her own creative agency was present due to the collaborative nature of the work the two artists produced. It could ultimately be that we need to rethink the passive image of muse as a product of a world overlooking the work of women. Women's prevalence within art has largely been through their perceived image, and there is a question of whether the muse can ever really be separated from its reductive and passive nature. Indeed, throughout art history women have played the role of a model objectified and reduced to the performance of appearance. As John Berger famously wrote on the subject; 'men act, and women appear' (Berger, 2008, p.47).

The inherent sexualisation of the woman as a muse is exemplified in the work of Paul Gauguin: his paintings from his time in Tahiti depict a fetishised view of island life and his muses who occupied it. A primary muse Gauguin frequently painted was his 'native wife' Teha'amana, whom he married when she was just thirteen after leaving behind a life in Paris (Tuuhia, 2021). The paintings feel exploitative and there is no sense of collaboration as in Miller's work with Man Ray. Instead, her role of muse is tied to her identity as a Tahitian; Gauguin sought to capture the exotic world of the French colony and Teha'amana is used as an erotised aesthetic object to signify this (Tuuhia, 2021). Colonial exploitation is embedded throughout these paintings; Tahiti was a French colony at the time and the power imbalance is notable in Teha'amana's role of muse. We have no records of her life beyond the writings of Gauguin, nor about her views on the art that Gauguin created of her. Particularly haunting is *Spirit of the Dead Watching*, painted in 1892, which depicts Teha'amana lying awake supposedly afraid of the island spirits. The exhibitionist nature of the painting feels as though we are violating the privacy of the young girl, the viewer can't help but wonder if

she is in fact afraid of her husband (Tuuhia, 2021). It seems the role of the muse for women of colour is also inherently tied to a secondary sense of objectification as they come to represent not just the other of womanhood but also the other of their culture, of which they become an eroticised symbol for. Gauguin's muses fall into the 'dusky maiden' trope, a representation of Polynesian women popularised throughout a history of colonial encounters with the region. It embodies the perspective of them as the exotic other, a romantic construction of 'the sexually receptive and alluring Polynesian maiden' (Tamaira, 2010, p.1). Many of the early European depictions of the region conjure an 'Edenic wonderland', which Gauguin sought to capture on a mission to reconnect with nature, and early depictions establish a sexualised version of Polynesian women (Tamaira, 2010, p.1).

This reductive and fetishised pattern of muse hood is something the Samoan Japanese artist Shigeyuki Kihara seeks to challenge and explore in her work 'Fa'afine: In the Manner of a Woman'. The photographs recreate 19th century images where women posed partially clothed among props and backdrops of 'exotic' scenery. These themes hark back to Gauguin's use of muses as props, depicting a fetishised version of Tahiti life in his paintings. In assuming the role of model in her work Kihara takes on this conception of muse as an eroticised object and novel spectacle of the foreign and unknown. The piece is a triptych which adheres to the 'dusky maiden' trope; however, Kihara subverts this by taking control of her own image. The first photograph sees her topless dressed in a stereotypical grass skirt surrounded by standard props such as tropical foliage and a woven mat used in the 19th century to evoke the exotic (Tamaira, 2010, p.20). In the second her skirt is removed and 'to all intents and purposes she appears to the viewer as the quintessential dusky maiden' (Tamaira, 2010, p.20).

However the final photograph flips this expectation as she now reveals an unexpected side of her identity – her penis. Kihara identifies as transgender, as a Fa'afine she challenges the rigid binaries of gender in the western world. Fa'afine translates to 'in the manner of a woman' and describes individuals who are neither male nor female - best categorised in western notions as a third gender (The Met, 2024). In using her body and reclaiming the muse trope of 'dusky maiden' she crosses the boundary of the colonial gaze re-asserting her identity outside of this stereotype. These reductive categories of muse and artist, go hand in hand with the gendered conception pushed by colonial forces. The imposition of a gender binary which doesn't account for Fa'afine people also enforces a lack of nuance in the relationship between muse and artist, imposing gender roles. Kihara's work foregrounds the indigenous identities lost in the conceptions of muse hood assumed by a colonial power. By referencing these muses of the past through the agency of her own work she is able to reclaim her identity. Furthermore, it could be argued that female artists identifying muses as sources of inspiration for themselves today can actually be used as a means of empowerment. By portraying the likes of Teha'amana in herself and not the exoticised version conceived by Gauguin, this highlights the women who have been overlooked and forgotten in the past in a new light.

Both Miller and Kihara are able to some extent to become their own muse and in doing so remove the harmful forces of patriarchal and colonial powers shaping their image. This suggests the inequalities in the role of muse aren't inherent but have been limited by the audience's expectation of what a muse should be. The original nine Greek muses can be seen as creators rather than objects of art, they inspired the creation of the arts literature and the sciences (Antoniou, 2022). The muses represent

creativity and inspiration within Greek mythology, each one aligning with a creative pursuit such as poetry or music. A case could be made that the original creative power in the figure of the muse was removed by an art history dominated by men, and in fact the role is not inherently that of a powerless object. Kihara and Miller both re-assert the power in the legacy of the Greek muses through taking creative agency. On the other hand, it seems that agency was only granted to both women when they assumed the role of artist. Indeed, Miller's work as a muse is something she is hardly credited for.

As both muse and artist, Miller transcended the border between these two roles raising questions about how we view each participant of this dynamic. The story goes that her career first began after a chance encounter on the streets of New York with the head of Vogue (Davis, 2006, p.3). She was saved after walking into busy traffic by Conde Nast who soon put her on the 1927 cover, impressed with how she seemed to encapsulate the modern fashionable woman (Davis, 2006, p.3). From the start Miller had ambitions to be behind the camera and not just in front of it, however it is telling that her way into this field was through her image. As a woman Miller was not entitled immediately to creative agency but only afforded this after proving valuable as a source of beauty. However, as a wealthy white woman the luxury to make this seemingly sudden jump into fashion and art is also evident. Indeed, biographers often gloss over the leap Miller then makes to study under Man Ray in Paris. Now an established model she decided in 1929 to begin a career in photography and picked who she claimed to be the best photographer at the time, Man Ray, as her teacher. It's during this period that the two began a romantic relationship and Miller assumed the role of muse, inspiring much of the work he produced.

This was to the extent that Ray's art was often in fact collaborative and can be read as a coming together

of two creative minds. Miller fell in with surrealist circles during this period, drawing creative inspiration and working with other artists. She was cast in the lead role in Jean Cocteau's film 'Blood of a Poet' in 1930 and worked alongside Man Ray. Indeed, Ray's famous solarization technique where black and white hues are reversed to create a halo effect is something that Miller is credited as being involved with discovering by accident turning on lights in a dark room (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). Her role as a surrealist muse was one where she had creative agency, and she claimed her established role as model but with intention. Works like *Observatory Time – The Lovers* from 1931 which feature Miller's lips are the result of a mutual creative relationship (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024).

It is telling, however, that Miller's narrative begins in a shadow cast by two men, Naste appears like a fairy godmother whisking her away into the world of fashion while Man Ray is depicted as an introduction to her artistic ambitions. This narrative overlooks the many pursuits into the art world Miller had already made. She had previously studied in Paris on past trips in 1925 as well as across Italy and attended classes in New York (Lawson, 2014, p.185). Omitting these earlier studies from her biography in the past has created a false myth that her identity as an artist was something to come out of her time spent in Man Ray's studio (Lawson, 2014, p.185). In fact, from an early age Miller had creative ambitions, and describes how she had almost given up on them by her early twenties after struggling to find the right medium (Lawson, 2014, p.186). Diary entries from her youth reveal that Miller herself struggled with the gendered binaries of creativity that she would one day transcend. She describes thinking that to her it seems to be a female artist would be a contradiction of terms, wondering whether genius was a solely masculine trait which she could never claim (Lawson, 2014, p.184).

This conception of genius Miller seemed to hold refers to an established stereotype of the solitary masochistic genius working alone to create impressive artwork (Nochlin, 1988, p.153). It's this archetype that also feeds into the relationship of muse as the passive counterpart to the active artist, creator and inspirator. It leaves no room for collaboration since all artistic genius is seen to be down to one lone figure. The only version of collaboration for a long time was a kind of co-ownership, both parties seen to be working actively together (Lawson, 2014, p.18). Rethinking this approach allows for inclusion for the forgotten collaboration within art, such as discussing a work in early phases, proof reading etc (Lawson, 2014, p.18). Inclusion of these layers can also mean an inclusion of the active role of muse as opposed to the co-existent but independent spheres of artist and muse.

However, Miller's time as muse was a role defined by patriarchal norms among the surrealists. Though the group sought to push the boundaries of social conventions and question the establishment it often retained gendered structures. Intended to be a kind of celebration of beauty in the unconventional, the movement had philosophical roots. It sought to find a crossover between the real and the imagined, seeking to look beyond the everyday and challenge social hierarchies (Breton, 1924, p.1). However, in reality it upheld lots of social norms, and was blind to its own gender politics; the movement was dominated by men and often saw women as a kind of erotic object (Orenstein, 1975, p.34). Indeed, some works feature the female body as a symbol of fantasy removing personal identity to present an image of commodified beauty. Work from this period describes women as muses, 'child women', 'dream women' and romanticises their virginity (Orenstein, 1975, p.32). In this context it seems hard to make the case that Miller was a muse with her own autonomy, however she did later go on to forge a clear path of

her own as an artist in her own right.

Miller soon left Man Ray stifled by his control of the work they were producing together and opened her own studio, first in Paris and then New York. She had established friendships with photographers during her time at Vogue and became a commercial photographer herself for them in Paris and London. One marriage later Miller found herself living in England with surrealist lover Roland Penrose as war broke out. Her fashion photographs take on the unconventional with remaining surrealist tendencies and Miller went on to become a war correspondent for Vogue, producing her most famous work as a war photographer. Photographs like 'Fire Masks' for example taken for Vogue shows two women modelling new masks designed to protect the wearer from bombs. The calm glamour of the women juxtaposed with the ruins they pose in have clear surrealist references (Davis, 2006, p.4). It's this work which has gained more appreciation in its own right cementing Miller as an artist herself. This clear establishment from muse to artist is a fascinating dual narrative within Miller's life. It could be charted as an ascension from the lesser role of passive muse to artist assuming their own creativity after breaking free of this image.

Arguably, however, Miller's creativity was being showcased all along; it was just that our narrow definition of what it meant to be a muse confined how we see her value in these respective roles. Miller's life may challenge the traditional version of muse, but it seems that she stands as the exception in an art history which has often left many women simply erased, such as Teha'amana. Miller's privilege to assert herself as an artist and create room for her own voice is notable, and something not often afforded to women of colour. Her upper-class background also meant she didn't face many of the same hurdles in order to get to each point in her journey. There are many muses whose voices

are still left unheard, Teha'amana remains defined by her objectified image in Gauguin's work.

The nature of the term 'muse' is one bound up in gender dynamics, the forces of power at play on a wider social scale are reflected through the relationship between artist and muse. We have gendered the two and in doing so created a dynamic of inequality. Kihara's work reveals the colonial imposition of these gender dynamics that are not inherent in the figure of muse when looked at plainly as a source of creative inspiration. A chicken and egg scenario emerges- is it that we place power in the hands of the artist because this is a role traditionally held by a man or does the man assume this role as it is where the power lies? It seems looking at Miller's life and time spent in both roles of artist and muse that the two are not so binary. The very assumption of this gendered structure sexualises and others women problematising what could be an innocent relationship between inspirator and creator. It is only when muse hood becomes a mythologised version of a woman's identity that the dynamic becomes a a problem. This leads to an erasure of women defined by a sexualised and stereotyped version of their race and gender. Through the reclamation works of Kihara, as well as the agency displayed in Miller's role as muse, we need to evaluate our own perception of what it means to be a muse, acknowledging the often-hidden work of women that has taken place throughout art history by highlighting it with this title. By using this as a label where we recognise the nuance in the role, we can come to consider muse hood as a place of creative agency in its own right.

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BY RUBY SCOTT

‘GIRLCORE: THE
RIGHT WAY TO BE
FEMALE?’

*Examining the Effect of Choice
Feminism on What it Means to be a
“Woman” through the Language and
Trends of TikTok.*

ARTWORK BY DAISY MARSH

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REVIEWED BY REBECCA MAHAR



ARTWORK BY DAISY MARSH

Introduction

The rise of micro-labelling and trends on social media is increasingly a factor in how young people define themselves, in a similar fashion that sub-cultures have been for a long time. However, I argue that these hyper-specific social media identities are harmful and divisive towards how people engage with their identity; but especially their femininity. This is due to overly specific ideas of what it means to be female, a woman or a girl and about the right way to engage with femininity, that I argue is written out in a kind of manifesto observed by social media trends. I will specifically be analysing the trends and language of TikTok since its meteoric rise to popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a person who came of age during the pandemic itself, I found myself to be the target demographic for many of the trends and languages that I outline in this essay. “Girly” trends aimed at ‘finding your aesthetic’ or ‘how to be the best type of girl’ were everywhere. Even as a teenager I felt something both eerie and frustrating about this content.

Concurrently, I also became disillusioned with choice feminism, which is what I was perceiving as becoming the mainstream form of feminism.

Choice feminism is a form of feminism that is a response to criticisms in the past that feminism is too radical or political (Ferguson, 2010). Choice feminism thus seeks to be a ‘softer’ form of feminism with less politics; with a prevailing message that women should have individual freedom to do as they please within their lives (Ferguson, 2010). I believe this branch seeks to focus only on the individual and their short-term betterment; rather than addressing systemic issues that oppressed groups face or seeking solidarity between those who are oppressed. I see that “choice feminism”, as it has risen in the past decade or so, has had an immense effect on the way women conceptualise themselves and their femininity.

This essay outlines the way choice feminism and social-media-driven marketisation interact with one another to shape the way feminine people conceptualise their identities; through demeaning feminine identity to be more stupid or inferior than their masculine counterparts, placing their identity as being attached to a masculine counterpart in order to be whole, and the self-optimisation and micro-labelling that occurs on social media to form feminine identities only around exclusive ideas of acceptability.



My Girl Math is when Women are Stupid

“Girl Math” swept TikTok in late 2023; the trend is a format in which women list things that are within their “Girl Math”, composing of justifications for spending extra money or making mistakes about finance, such as buying things with cash being free or returning an item to a shop being a profit. Since its rise it has received criticism with some claiming that this trend is degrading towards women (ctvnews, 2023). Despite the trend being intentioned as a light-hearted joke, I see it disappointing as that this ignorance or ditsy attitude to life is cemented in its association with the feminine identity. However, even as news sources, TikTok users and academics have criticised this trend and others with similar rhetoric, this criticism is widely seen as overly political and far-reaching to criticise. Under the comments of a news segment that discussed the trend, comments widely criticised the consensus that the girl math trend was offensive with comments such as “Leave me and my girl math alone”, “Wow, the fact they really spun this is wild to me” and “It’s lighthearted fun” (ctvnews, 2023). This wider societal understanding of trends like girl math can be seen as a symptom of the grip of choice feminism on feminine identity as

there is this reluctance to approach the political and question why people who identify with feminine identities enjoy trends like this so much, and thus why they enjoy connecting their feminine identity with intellectual inferiority.

“Girl math” can be seen as part of the wider “bimbo feminism” movement that I see as an offshoot of choice feminism, seeing its rise with TikTok in 2020. Bimbo feminism shares similar beliefs to choice feminism but hinges on the idea of reclaiming the “bimbo”. I believe this movement can be identified as emerging with TikTok creator Chrissy Chlapecka who in 2020 put out a video defining what it was to be a bimbo under the modern reclamation of the term:

“A bimbo isn’t dumb. I mean... she kinda is. But she isn’t THAT dumb. She’s actually a radical leftist! Who’s pro sex-work, pro “Black Lives Matter”, pro LGBTQ, pro-choice, and will always be there for her girls, gays and theys.” (Chlapecka, 2020).

While Chlapecka’s manifesto appears progressive and inclusive, I question if what is being so-called reclaimed out of the “bimbo” label is in any way liberating for women or anyone who interacts with femininity. Historical instances of reclamation have been liberating and useful for marginalised groups, however the self-expressed stupidity and ditsy nature of the bimbo movement as well as the trends that it has sparked are not radical comments on the reclamation of original bimbo label, nor do they express the political or gendered inclusiveness of Chlapecka’s original manifesto; but instead comfortable assimilations to the comments that men used to demean women through the term in the first place.

In fact, the modern idea of the bimbo is systematically created in order to damage the perception of women and legitimise claims that they

are lesser than men in many regards, which in fact actually damages substantive feminist endeavours such as the growth of women in politics or narrowing the gender pay gap (Komar, 2023). Under the bimbo persona it is easy to see how women may not be able to handle equal positions with men in these departments. Chlapecka’s comment that the bimbo doesn’t “do this for the misogynistic male gaze. [they] do it for [their] gaze” (Chrissy Chlapecka, 2020) sparks a wider concern that cements this ideology within the lexicon of choice feminism as she dismisses societal structures that define the way that women want to be perceived. Thus, I see this as the dawn of a specific type of choice feminism that appears to be niche to Gen Z and TikTok users and can be attributed to the formation of trends such as “girl math” amongst others.

I credit bimbo feminism as legitimising a pattern of self-identified ignorance linked to feminine identities. This can be observed in recent trends such as “girlhood” being described as an innate ineptitude at more “masculine” hobbies such as pool, as well as trending audios saying “I’m just a girl” that are widely used over women discussing things such as their poor driving skills or expensive shopping habits. What I see to be the culmination of this ideology and the most damaging expression of it is in TikTok creator nikitadumptruck explaining world issues such as Israel/Palestine or Russia/Ukraine through scenarios of girls at a party being in a fight or relationship scenarios in what she calls “girlsplaining” (Nikitadumptruck, 2022). Not only is this damaging to feminine identities but it minimises serious world struggles and legitimises itself through the aforementioned political reclamation of the bimbo. Overall, the influence that choice feminism has had on feminine identity through TikTok curated bimbo feminism is damaging without providing liberation. This is as it hinges on a femininity that is inherently countered

to a masculinity, rather than promoting more fluidity between the two binary gender expressions, which is something that can be seen widely across modern choice feminist discourse.

Wives and Girlfriends: (Fe)Male Success

Within the patriarchal system that impacts all of our lives, people engaged in femininity are often defined within a binary opposing the idea of masculinity. Choice feminist rhetoric allows women to be comfortable within this binary and embracing it. This is due to the idea that they should be allowed to embrace what makes them feel the most fulfilled at any given moment without questioning the political and historical circumstances that have built the notions of what it means to feel “right” or “safe” today.

TikTok trends are no stranger to this discourse, with a wide group of them locating feminine identity as only existing within its situation to masculine identity. Whether this be aesthetics such as the “rockstar girlfriend” or the “mob wife”, which both show this aforementioned marketability within social-media and a need to label oneself as a micro identity to feel significant but also that significance comes from being associated with a masculine counterpart rather than just being a rockstar or a mob boss. Further, a trend that encapsulates this was the “my wife is a...” trend, where generally female university students would discuss not wanting to do their academic work but being motivated by the idea that someday someone would say “my wife is a lawyer” or “my wife is a doctor”. Rather than being motivated by the impressive accomplishment of achieving a degree. It is here easier for feminine identity to see its ultimate achievement as linked to a masculine counterpart. Though the choice feminist would have no issue with as it makes these women happy, I see this movement of connecting one’s feminine identity to a masculine counterpart as a troubling rising

phenomenon which restricts feminine achievement, and is also exclusive in gender and sexual identity, as it reinforces the idea that there are only two gender identities and that they complete one another. Arguably the most fully-fledged and alarming instance of this discourse taking effect is the rising infatuation with “trad wives”.

A “trad wife”, or traditional wife, is a woman who fulfils the so-called traditional roles of being a wife in the home such as taking care of her children, doing all of the cooking and cleaning, constantly attending to her husband to make sure he is cared for and not having a job within the waged labour force. However, many trad wife influencers are in effect in the labour force due to their roles as influencers. This is often ignored as this fact demystifies the whole element of why the tradwife appeals to so many on social media; it presents the ideal submissive feminine identity, thus understanding these women as agents within the economy takes away from their mystic appeal.

There has been a significant rise of these types of women becoming influencers on TikTok and many of them have become widely popular from Ballerinafarm’s from scratch cooking with her eight children and Nara Smith’s viral heavily pregnant all-day cooking for her family to the radical marriage rules of Estee Williams. There have been online debates between the supporters and opposers of these influencers, with supporters often arguing within a choice feminist rhetoric that these women have the right to do what they want on their platforms

Critics have pointed out the inherent issues with trad wives’ presence online; not only that this lifestyle is extremely gender essentialist, but also that there is an inherent exclusivity within it as it is only achievable by the super-wealthy. Ballerinafarm’s husband’s father has a net worth of

\$400 million while Nara Smith is often cooking expensive and beautiful dishes but is never seen cleaning or performing any of the more laborious or boring domestic labours that come along with working in the domestic sphere for those who can't afford cleaners and childcare. Furthermore, the idealisation of a woman's worth pertaining to her proximity to men is rooted in the mystic ideal of the nuclear family. This ideal is only cognitively recognised through white ideals and has its history in colonial ideals used to control the population and naturalise women's role as domestic servants and white supremacy as the social norm, and thus leaves behind people of colour in this romanticisation. This exclusivity in trends and lifestyles that go viral on TikTok is not a singular occurrence but instead systemic, as vast amounts of trends that are aimed at women around femininity specifically are seen to be unattainable by the majority as they rely on ultra-feminine, white, heteronormative ideals.

How to be your Best Self: TikTok Aesthetics and their Exclusivity

“How to be that girl”; a question floating around on TikTok from around 2022 up till today, the answer of which is generally given to be a list of ways that you can look better (and by this more “feminine”) through a self-optimisation that involves several products and procedures to become your best self. This idea of self-optimisation is something which is bound with choice feminist rhetoric as it is a justification that women can use to make themselves feel fulfilled while upholding problematic standards such as colonial, European beauty standards, and a shallow sense of self fulfilment that emphasises these beauty standards over a meaningful and engaging relationship between one's body and wider society.

From “that girl” came the famous “clean girl” aesthetic, which suggests that the best way to be a woman is to look always clean and immaculate.

However, the important values of cleanliness often observed yet not explicitly admitted in the “clean girl” community are built on historical ideals of beauty and cleanliness that hinge on being white and thin. This is another way in which social media and choice feminism interact to provide standards and ideals that are unachievable for the vast majority of the population and only work for the privileged few who luckily fall into certain social categories. Aesthetics like “cottagecore”, “vanilla girl”, “old money”, “quiet luxury”, “ballet-core” and so many more can be typed into the search bar of the TikTok app to provide users with an onslaught of procured photo montages of thin white women who achieve their feminine labels in ways considered appropriate to societal standards and do so in ways that allow the user to observe who they are and what they represent based on the micro-label attributed to them.

In the internet age this marketisation and branding of the body that occurs through these microtrends is a way in which we are being conditioned to respond to human identity in conceptualising one another through categories and labels. It unfortunately appears to be more comfortable for many to comprehend than embracing a wider human experience in solidarity with all other identities. It echoes Beauvoir's work on narcissism in which she argues that those who are narcissistic refuse to engage with the world and others in a meaningful way; this can be said to be truer than ever in the sphere of TikTok discourse where there is a willing ignorance towards acknowledging that others exist as people rather than as part of simulation activated when one goes online. Category based self-marketisation gives the user instant gratification through one's identity, yet once again not just anyone can choose to be accepted into these identities. People of colour cannot achieve this validation from social media aesthetics as they are so based in European colonial

beauty standards, which further demonstrates how problematic they truly are. For instance, the term “cottagecore” romanticises old-fashioned European lifestyles and much like the tradwife trend is presented as a haven that we should all aspire too, yet similar lifestyles in non-European countries are often viewed as primitive or uncivilised. This dichotomy demonstrates how exclusive TikTok aesthetics are and how they are unachievable for women of colour and anyone that drifts from the hyper-feminine European beauty standards.

Conclusion

This essay demonstrates the usefulness of TikTok trends and related language as an example of the legacy of choice feminism and what that means for feminine identities. It is my conclusion that this branch of feminist debate does not progress the movement of feminism in working towards a more fulfilling and liberated life for all regardless of their gender and sexual identity. I put forward three considerations that should be made by people who want to work towards these goals and deter the ideology of choice feminism that I argue has done little to help.

The first would be to avoid gender essentialist, binary or hyper-feminine/masculine terminology and ideology when it comes to this question. The binary nature of gender and its construction means that the feminine identity is created in contrast to the masculine and ideologies that support the continuation of this harsh binary can be seen to be contradictory to an idea of liberation and fulfilment for women or feminine people as they inherently segregate different identities.

The second is that we should be inquisitive; question why things are the way they are and how they have come to be so. A lot of my criticism of choice feminism is the fact that in attempting to depoliticise feminism, it takes things at face value rather than questioning the political, socio-economic and historical processes that build up

much of the norms and ideas within our society today. The idea of what is normal or natural, such as the gender binary or heteronormative romantic standards, are often invented, unnecessary and oppressive to many groups; by questioning them we can build an ideology built on more substantive grounds of what is better for everyone rather than the privileged individual.

Finally, intersectionality is key. As mentioned before, privilege and exclusivity are often at the heart of choice feminism as it supports women’s actions to do whatever they want to achieve self-fulfilment, and therefore most often only benefit the rich as well as white women in Western states. Choice feminism only works when you have the privilege that afford you the choices that the ideology deems to be acceptable. Within its liberal Western origins, it doesn’t really work for communities outside of this and even shames those who do not act in a way that would be the “logical choice” for a choice feminist. Intersectionality and inclusivity are key for any meaningful moves towards a better future for people of all genders and identities, which allows us all to manoeuvre through our lives without marketing ourselves around societal ideals to like we are presenting our femininity in the “right way”.

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WITNESS

PREVIEW

NEXT ISSUE

coming soon

WITNESS

We witness events and ongoings everyday as individuals. We also witness the actions (or lack thereof) of institutions. Gender and positionality play into who is listened to, taken seriously, valid, or what events are considered worth witnessing. Witnesses also can affect how we perform our gender or craft our words.

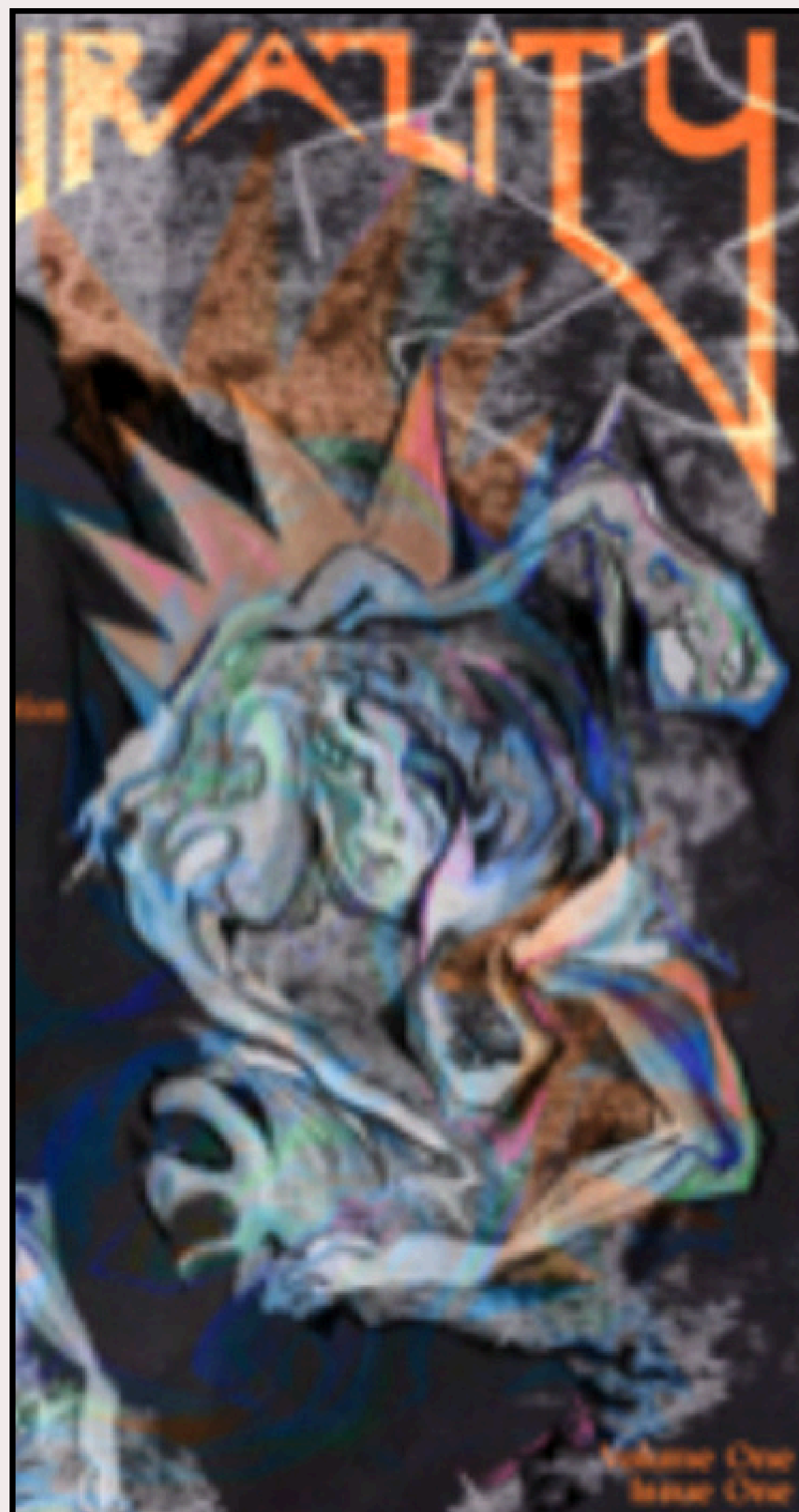
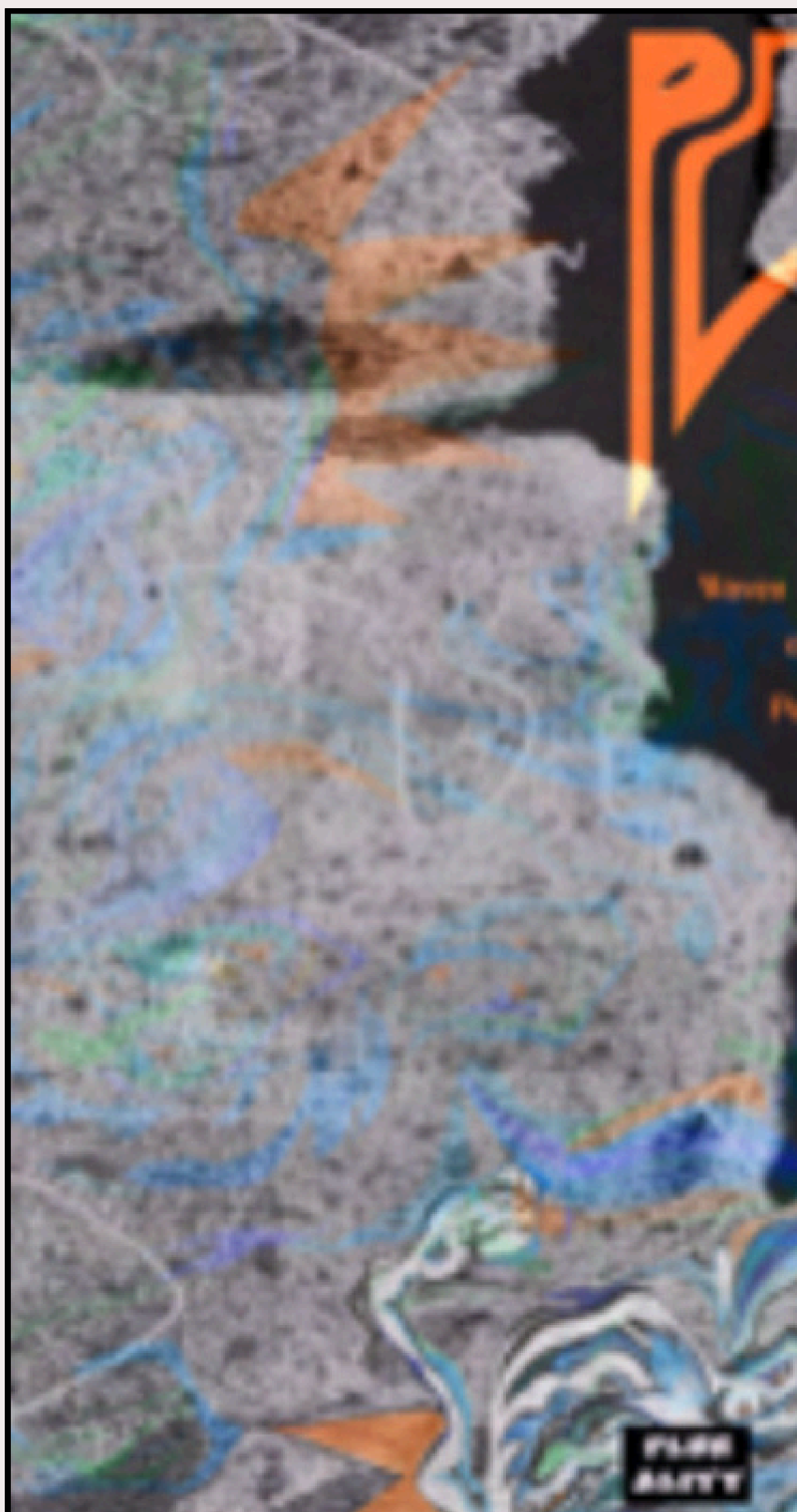
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