FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS

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CHIEF EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS: A JOURNAL OF CRITICAL STUDIES IN CULTURE AND POLITICS

Founded in 2017, Feminist Encounters is a journal committed to argument and debate, in the tradition of historical feminist movements.

In the wake of the growing rise of the Right across the world, openly neo-fascist national sentiments, and rising conservative populism, we feminists all over the world are needing to remobilise our energies to protect and advance gender rights.

Feminist Encounters provides a forum for feminist theorists, scholars, and activists to communicate with each other, to better educate ourselves on international issues and thus promote more global understanding, and to enhance our critical tools for fighting for human rights.

Feminism is an intellectual apparatus, a political agenda, and a programme for social change. Critical analysis of how gender discourses produce cultural identities and social practices within diverse lived realities is key to this change. We need to think more sharply in order to strategise well: as the discourses of conservatism renew and invigorate themselves, so we as feminist scholars need to be refining our amazonic swords in order not just to respond effectively but also to innovate our own ideas for equality and social justice.

We are, of course, committed to intersectionality, a vital lens through which to see the contours of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, age/ability, and explore how gendered scripts get lived, and filtered through these specificities of cultural organisation. Lived experience is never codified in terms of gender alone, and so our research will always be sensitive to the nexus of lived oppressions.

The journal has a large editorial board and journal team, consisting of over forty scholars in twenty countries. This is deliberately inclusive in order that we can promote diversity and engage with different concerns from across the world. Our aim is not to simply talk to ourselves, reconfirming our localised assumptions, but to generate feminist encounters across regions, even if this is sometimes uncomfortable. Globalisation has been a triumph of neoliberalism, but digital technologies have also flattened and reduced the distance between us in dramatic ways, so that now we can talk to each other with unanticipated ease.

This new access to each others' voices has also brought challenges to the way we think and do things, so that being a feminist today might be quite a different prospect to a person living in China, Iran, Norway, South Africa or the UK. Second Wave Feminism used the idea of 'sisterhood' to invoke solidarity between women. I've always rather liked Andrea Dworkin's claim, though, that: "Feminism is a political practice of fighting male supremacy in behalf of women as a class, including all the women you don't like, including all the women you don't want to be around, including all the women who used to be your best friends whom you don't want anything to do with anymore." The notion of sisterhood was challenged by Black feminists in the 1980s as being too conceptually white, thus bell hooks' trenchant critique that: "the idea of 'common oppression' was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality". In the 1990s and 2000s it has been fair to say that feminist theory and Feminist Studies since have engaged more intentionally and deliberately with intersectionality - though Jennifer Baumgardner did caution us that: "Sisterhood was never about everybody agreeing ....".

For our journal, sisterhood must expand and embrace our transgender allies and our men friends, reminding us that sibling relationships are rarely straightforward or inevitably blessed by golden moments of total affinity. Thus, **Feminist Encounters** welcomes the opportunity for new kinds of international discussions in the spirit of collaboration and critical intellectual enquiry. We hope for productive agreement and disagreement, and the shared struggle of fighting gender oppression, with our minds, hearts, and bodies, as the times demand.

Sally R Munt, University of Sussex
Founding Editor

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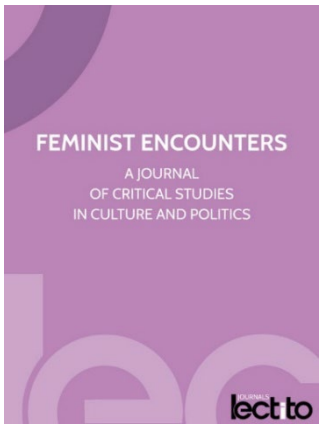

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FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS: GENERAL ISSUE

WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON POST-SECULAR FEMINISM

Guest Editors

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Stellenbosch University, SOUTH AFRICA

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Editorial

Introduction

Sarala Krishnamurthy [1]*, Sally R. Munt [2], Rose Richards [3]

Published: September 1, 2024

This General Issue has been jointly edited by Sally R Munt and Rose Richards, and is enhanced by two focussed articles on Post Secular Feminism that have been commissioned and edited separately by Professor Sarala Krishnamurthy, who recently retired from her position as Professor of English and Applied Linguistics, and former Executive Dean at the Namibia University of Science of Technology. Sarala starts this Introduction with a descriptive context to, and analysis of, the articles on post secular feminism. Then, Sally and Rose will introduce the general articles which have been submitted to this, the fifteenth issue of *Feminist Encounters*, for Autumn 2024.

Feminist Encounters has been growing in international reputation, so much so that in 2023 we had over 125,000 readers in over 100 countries. We continue to encourage this flourishing of feminist debates globally, and thank our readers for their participation and support over the past eight years, and the future success and growth of the journal.

POST SECULAR FEMINISM

On June 4, 2024, the Indian nation voted the Right-wing Hindu party BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) back into power, giving a positive endorsement of the good work that had been done for ten years, but rather reluctantly. Consequently, even though BJP won, it did not do so with an overwhelming majority, but with its allies, the NDA (National Democratic Alliance), seeking additional support from two or more external parties. The BJP fought on a Hindutva ideology and successfully rode this wave for a decade, but anti-incumbency, youth unemployment, and the tiresome repetition of outdated slogans ensured that the Hindu party returned to power with its wings clipped. BJP had first got the mandate to rule in 2014 because it pushed a Hindu majority agenda which propagated divisive and polarising politics, (that is, Hindu versus Muslims), claiming that previous governments had followed a minority Muslim appeasement model at the cost of the major Hindu polity. This ideological shift received some traction from the public at large. In this context, what might the present-day scenario and Right-wing ideology mean for women in India in general and Muslim women in particular? This is explored through a framework of what might be described as post secular feminism.

Stoeckl and Rosati (2012: 4) state that 'a post secular society is a society in which one can find high levels of reflectivity both on the side of modern society and on the side of religious traditions, both being capable of finding from within their own imaginaries good reasons to enter into a dialectical relationship of mutual tolerance and/or recognition.' With the advent of modernisation, most societies in the democratic world have moved towards the secular to accommodate disparate religious and pluralistic groups. Nevertheless, in the postmodern scenario, gradually religion has restaked its claim to public influence and relevance, while secularism is losing ground to such forces leading to a worldwide 'resurgence of religion' seen in such phenomena as the missionary expansion, a fundamentalist radicalisation, and the political weaponisation of violence inherent in some of the world's religions. For example, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali born, Dutch-American writer, activist and politician points out that Islamisation entrenches itself in modern societies when refugees move into ghettos and, over a period of time, start asserting their right to practise their religion even if it obstructs other groups. In order to ensure a well

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functioning society based on democratic principles of multiculturalism and plurality, the post-secular embraces all religious practices.

The first two articles in this issue grapple with the concept of the post secular within the ambit of modern feminism, with particular reference to the Muslim response to majoritarian and identitarian politics in India. The first takes up the symbolic issue of *hijab*, a head scarf worn by religious Muslim women which caused a political turmoil when a group of Indian students claimed their right to don the *hijab* in school over and above the standard uniform requirement stipulated by the school authorities, stating that they did not think the *hijab* was an imposition on them by their traditional leaders and that the school had no business interfering with their religious and cultural practice. In this article, Ipshita Chanda proceeds to argue from a feminist perspective, that linking women's 'dress' with progress in order to essentialise and politicise identity is challenged at every turn by Muslim women. According to them, post-secular feminism should actively enforce the assurances given to the citizen by the constitution, which promises equal rights for all citizens in a diverse, multicultural and pluralistic society. The author contends that Muslim women's struggle includes the right to practice one's faith without fear over and above the norms administered by the majoritarian government which believes that its obligation to enforce commonality amongst different religious groups is ideal and it is one desired by all Muslim women since they would want to blend in. Chanda specifically locates the use of *hijab*, a practice signifying a particular religion, Islam, in the democratic state and pluralistic society of India, wherein the Constitution gives every citizen the right to practice, preach and profess a religion.

The second article takes up the control and expectation of the traditional *Ulema* (a body of Muslim scholars who have specialised knowledge of Islamic sacred law and theology) in Kerala (a state in South India), and examines how it influences Mappila (a Muslim sect) women. Making use of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, digital ethnography with a sample of thirty respondents and secondary sources, Shabira Kolakkadan attempts to articulate the concept of piety and lofty ethics expressed among young Mappila women. Set against the geopolitical backdrop of the Indian Hindu majoritarian government and its institutions which professes that it wishes to 'save' Muslim women from the debilitating, humiliating stranglehold Islam has on the female sex, Kolakkadan states that the post-secular turn has problematised European feminism in terms of it emphasis on political subjectivity and personal agency, proclaiming that religion becomes the tool to enforce subjugation to the diktats spelt out in the religious texts. Pointing out that historically, the Gulf migration of male members of the Mappila community has led to the socio-economic transformation of Muslim women, which has resulted in education, mobility, agency and greater autonomy in decision making for the Muslim family, Kolakkadan argues that the younger generation of Mappila women choose to follow modern norms, making some compromises with their religious teachings. While they adhere to their traditional attire, Mappila women are articulate and actively participate in discussions which had to do with their religious and cultural practices as well as public discussions about appearance, and continuing to emphasise their religious identity through *hijab, purdah,* and *shariah* law. She interviewed young Mappila women who are active in social media, who wear *hijab* as part of their piety and invoke Islamic traditions in everyday life. These largely middle-class women are mothers and postgraduates from state-run institutions who contribute enthusiastically in contemporary discourses about gender, nation, and citizenship. She states that the *Ulema* imposes cultural behaviour on women, following the patriarchal norms of modern society, that are quite contrary to what is originally written in the *Quran* and *Hadiths* (Islamic religious texts). Islamic sermons distinguishing between a 'good Muslimah woman' and an educated one, claim that the first duty of the Muslim woman is to marry and look after her family. Educated and professional women cannot carry out the same responsibility as 'stay at home' wives. Women's self reliance and autonomy is therefore perceived as a threat to men's authority, their education is discouraged.

The author examines young Mappila women's notions of marriage and domesticity in social media, in detail. Clubhouse and WhatsApp group discussions reveal the complicated relationship between the *Ulema's* conception of household chores, and the young Mappila women's opinions and insights. Pious young Mappila women think that the male expository injunctions of the *Quran* and Prophet Muhammad, are underlying the *Ulema's* framework of appropriate femininity, and are in need of critical exploration. Kolakkadan asks further questions around men's and shared responsibility towards child rearing, marital relationships, domestic responsibilities, sexual relations within a marriage, polygamy, and motherhood.

These two articles open up further discussions about how feminism is perceived within Islam, and readers are encouraged to review our earlier special issue Gender Activism in India[1] where you will find more articles that explore Islamic and Muslim feminisms.

[1] https://www.lectitopublishing.nl/feminist-encounters/volume-7/issue-1

GENERAL ARTICLES

"'I am on Guard": The Making of Race, Gender and Affect in Human-Dog Relations in South Africa' by Catherine Rudolph is the first of our articles in the general section of this issue. This article analyses human-dog relations in the post-apartheid White South African suburbs to show how they operate in the production of racial and gendered difference. Her analysis draws primarily on the author's own experience as a White woman growing up in the South African suburbs, and her work as a dog walker, as well as being based in some primary empirical, qualitative research, which is drawn from interviews with the owners of two dog day-cares in Cape Town. The article tracks the affective and biopolitical effects of human-dog relationality to consider how they work in the socio-spatial structuring of the White suburbs. Using Donna Haraway's understanding of relations across difference in interspecies 'becoming', the article augments this with Harlan Weaver and Sarah Ahmed's respective theorisations of the work of affect between bodies. It outlines White discourses of fear around crime and security, and describes the spatial organisation of the suburb, which informs dogs' socialisation/enculturation with White people, and their concomitant hostility towards Black people. Suburban dogs become part of a racialised species kinship, in which they are cast as White people's companions, while protecting private property and White bodies. The article considers how dogs reproduce the historico-racial schema so that Black subjects are made to feel vulnerable in White space. Finally, it looks at gendered racialised narratives of threat and the construction of White women as objects of protection in relation to the imagined threat of Black men. By analysing these modes of relation, this article shows how interconnectedness yields an ethical responsibility towards others, across differences of race and species.

Mathias Klitgård has written the second article in the current issue, on 'Queer Renaturalisations: Guy Hocquenghem's Contradictory Nature Politics, Between Identity and Desire'. Mathias' article explains how queerphobic discourses frame nature as defined by reproductive heterosexuality, or as defined by unruly desires that civilised heterosexuality promises a progress away from. This article argues that both these politicised determinations of nature follow a logic of *renaturalisation* – a strategy that invokes nature and the natural to reinforce a normative process. He argues that the ambiguity of nature discourses stems from a conflictual construction of queerness as both social and antisocial. Because queerness oscillates between being a recognisable identity and a general critique of everything social, nature discourses used to justify heteronormative ontologies are contradictory, and therefore must change according to the context of the argument. Excavating a theory of *renaturalisation* from Guy Hocquenghem, this article will suggest that queer politics should take nature more seriously - not because nature is inherently progressive or conservative but because this very duality materialises through cultural anxieties around queerness.

In 'Managing Sex, Safeguarding the Soldier: Gender, Race and Regulationism in Nineteenth Century Colonial Punjab', Sameera Chauhan explains how managing sex was an important part of Britain's imperial project in the colonies, specifically India. Using a wide range of archival materials and examining the political debates and medical discourse from the nineteenth century, this article delves into the colonial military enterprise of regulating sexual recreation for British troops, and the processes through which the sexualised native woman was configured in colonial Punjab. Chauhan argues that paradoxical attempts to make sex available, while simultaneously emphasising imperial social mores of sexual respectability, led to the casting of the 'prostitute' as a colonial bogeyman; a vulgar but necessary evil, and a vector of disease.

In the next article we present for this issue, Longlong Ge writes about 'Repression, Permeation, and Circulation: Retracing and Reframing *Danmei* Culture Online in Mainland China'. Longlong Ge discusses the popular culture genre of *Danmei* (耽美), which is also called 'boy's love', and refers to these fantasy textual stories depicting gay male romantic relationships (McLelland and Aoyama, 2015). The rapid online proliferation of this popular culture has triggered scholars to reflect on the 'queer culture' in which it is represented. The article explores the intrinsic connection between Chinese *danmei* culture and Chinese queer culture in digital media. By adopting the research method of media archaeology and culture materialism, Ge maps the development of *danmei* culture in mainland China into three periods: the repression period (1994-2003) when the state authority compelled *danmei* and queer culture to find shelter in virtual cyberspace; the permeation period (2003-2016) when queer culture reshaped *danmei* culture, and when the former two generated multiple forms of expression on the internet; and finally the circulation period (2016-2021) when digital media industrialised *danmei* culture. Then, a cultural framework, 'queer-*danmei*-media' is proposed, in reference to the interaction of the 'affect-body-world' described by Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth, and Lisa Blackman, in order to reinforce the social and political functions of *danmei* and transfer it from a generalised pop culture towards the more *outré* politics of cultural representation and campaigning position of queerness and feminism.

In 'Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles*: Teaching Queer Caregiving Memoir on Disability, and Pedagogy as Resistance', author Jane Tolmie examines Canadian artist Sarah Leavitt's graphic novel *Tangles: A story about Alzheimer's, my mother and me* (2010, 2011 UK), in relation to queer identity, feminist wilfulness (Ahmed, 2014), and critical disability

studies. *Tangles* takes up themes of lesbianism, disability, and activism, and it does so through storytelling. Studies around life writing and disability, including the dementia disease Alzheimer's, point the reader strongly toward recognition of the key importance of storytelling in the preservation of selfhood. Tolmie asks the reader to consider whose stories are told, and whose are not, and by whom; how can or does patient selfhood emerge or survive in caregiving narratives written and/or drawn by others? This article examines this graphic memoir in the contexts of Comics Studies, Canadian Gender Studies and Critical Disability Studies.

In 'Outbursts, Discipline, and Wake-Up Calls: Gendered Emotionalities in Men's Gambling' by Klara Goedecke describes how within gambling debates and research, emotions are associated with irrationality, loss of control, and problem gambling. Simultaneously, they have a complex relationship to masculine positions, which are said to be connected to both stoicism and aggressivity. Using interviews with Swedish men gamblers and feminist and critical theorisations of emotions, this article discusses experiences, negotiations, and performances of emotions within men's gambling. The article demonstrates that emotions and control were entangled themes in the research, but discussed as separate by the individuals who were interviewed, who used emotion work in order to navigate their own experiences in relation to larger discourses about gender, health, and 'sovereignty' in relation to gambling. The article expands feminist masculinities research by providing in-depth, detailed discussions about men's emotionalities. It also contributes to gambling research by integrating problematising perspectives on emotions and to research about the production of gendered emotionalities under capitalism.

In '"Get Fierce in 5!": Depictions of the 'Healthy' Girl Body in *Seventeen* Magazine, 2016 to 2017' Shara Crookston updates another domain of popular culture, that of teen magazines. *Seventeen* Magazine, the longest running magazine for adolescent girls in the United States, reinforces problematic images of the 'healthy' adolescent girl by routinely featuring slim celebrities and models, all of whom adhere to a desirable body ideal of hegemonic beauty. Misleading and contradictory narratives of postfeminist, neoliberal empowerment include telling girl readers to love their bodies while simultaneously portraying the slim body as preferable. Additionally, most issues of *Seventeen* feature a diet-themed section, thereby encouraging food restriction and the surveillance of eating. Findings from this feminist content analysis of the magazine from 2016 to 2017 challenge *Seventeen's* stated mission of 'celebrating real girls with our social-first approach, inviting them into the conversation and engaging them in real experience as they navigate major milestones'. Thus, Shara helps us understand how postfeminism can create ambiguous messaging on femininity to young women, and explains why more classic, conformist stereotypes can undermine and reinforce female normativity.

The feminist bookstore became an institution in the global north in the wake of the second wave feminist movements of the 1970s. In 'Between Refusal and Refuge. Queer Feminist Bookstore Savannah Bay', Suzanne van der Beek and Catherine Koekoek write about how feminist bookstores have played an important role in the creation of feminist spaces since the end of the 20th century. In the Netherlands, Savannah Bay is one of the last remaining in a previous network of feminist bookstores. This article explores how the bookstore manages to uphold its function as a feminist space while operating in relative isolation. The data used for this analysis consists of a series of interviews with volunteers working at Savannah Bay. This data is analysed via Bonnie Honig's *Feminist Theory of Refusal* (2021), which connects three forms of feminist resistance within one arc of feminist refusal. Crucial to this arc is the circular movement where the women first leave the city, then organise a new way of living, and then return to the city to implement their ideas. By reading the experiences of Savannah Bay volunteers via Honig's theory of refusal, this article analyses how the bookstore manages to uphold a feminist space while being embedded in a predominantly patriarchal public sphere. It demonstrates the complex ways Savannah Bay continuously negotiates its relationship to the customers and volunteers it caters for on the one hand, and a patriarchal public sphere which it seeks to reform on the other hand. Additionally, this reading extends and nuances Honig's theoretical approach by relating it to empirical data, which raises questions about the conditions for fulfilling Honig's feminist arc of refusal, and about the relations between the various moments of the arc.

In "Precarity Factors of Street-Based Sex Work Within Criminalised Contexts: A Study in Athens, Greece", the large team of researchers and collective authors: Stavroula Triantafyllidou, Paraskevi Siamitrou, Evangelina Ntinopoulou, Anna Apostolidou, Anna Kouroupou, Sofia Kotsia, Anna Papadaki, Giorgos Papadopetrakis, Konstantina Papastefanaki, Aggeliki Sougle, Vaggelis Tsiaras, Lissy Canellopoulos, and Antonis Poulios, help us to better understand sex work in Athens. This community research study investigates the intersecting self-identified precarity factors and identities associated with street-based sex work in a criminalised context in Greece. The community research project was executed in order to understand how to improve the effectiveness of individualised care interventions to this minority and stigmatised community. Interviews of 264 cis and trans female sex workers were conducted from June 2021 to December 2022, at a community day centre for sex workers in Athens. The community-based precarity index for sex workers was used, which was developed at the community centre itself, using factors identified by sex workers themselves. Street-based sex workers more commonly reported interrelated precarious factors, such as perceived problematic substance abuse, homelessness, client violence, medical issues, and trouble with the police. Trans and refugee identities were both associated with street-based sex

work as well. The collective authors emphasise how harm reduction, gender-affirmative and multilingual and multicultural interventions are essential in street-based sex work intervention programs. Decriminalisation of sex work is recommended to reduce the harms and risks associated with sex work.

Following this excellent and diverse range of articles, this issue presents several book reviews from contemporary publications in Feminist Studies, for you to peruse.

BOOK REVIEWS

Narnia Bohler-Muller reviews *Feminist Institutionalism in South Africa: Designing for Gender Equality* (edited by Amanda Gouws, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and the National Research Foundation (NRF) funded SARChI Chair in Gender Politics in the Department of Political Science at Stellenbosch University). The book demonstrates the shutting down of gender activism within the South African state was at least partly due to the clash of ideologies of feminism, race and class, as well as a lack of political will to support feminist and women's initiatives.

Nombulelo Tholithemba Shange reviews Stephanie S. Starling's *Womanhood in Contemporary Botswana*. The book investigates the post-Covid realities for contemporary Batswana women within a global context of attacks on women's rights. The women's stories illustrate their survival tactics as well as their struggles, and the tensions between African traditions and modernity. The idea of double patriarchy permeates the book in various ways, showing how contemporary Batswana women must navigate a complex social system to survive and find an identity.

Samia Rahman reviews *Muslim Women in Britain, 1850-1950: 100 Years of Hidden History* (edited by Sariyah Cheruvallil-Contractor and Jamie Gilham). This book combines historical archival work and sociological frameworks to show how and why events played out as they did. The book traces the development of British Muslim communities and the role of women in them. It also makes a connection from the Victorian age to the current period and shows that many of the debates of the 19th century are still in play now. The narratives of women converts to Islam are also discussed, including hopes for emancipation in their new religion and their continued struggles with patriarchy.

Alice Ashcroft reviews *She's in CTRL: How Women Can Take Back Tech* by Anne-Marie Imafidon. Ashcroft describes the book as accessible to both feminist scholars and people working in Computing. The book discusses the importance of developing a growth mindset, dealing with ingrained and systemic sexism, the gendered language of tech, the effect of caregiving and the need to take back control through technology. Actionable steps toward gender equality in tech are included.

We commend this issue to you, and we hope you enjoy reading it.

Sarala Krishnamurthy, Sally R. Munt and Rose Richards

August 2024

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Islamic Piety, Corporeality and Agency: Young Mappila Women's Dissensus Over the Notion of Ideal *Muslimah* in Malabar

Shabeera Kolakkadan [1]*

Published: September 1, 2024

ABSTRACT

Occupied with the discourse of legal reformation of the Muslim community since the Shah Bano controversy in 1978, statist narratives of liberating Muslim women from Muslim patriarchy are conspicuous in India. However, Muslim leaders propose internal reforms and expect women to be good mothers. This article analyses the role of traditional *ulema* in Kerala in shaping the corporeal notions of pious Mappila women. The study also analyses the contestations and multiple discourses among pious young Mappila women toward the *ulema*'s preaching. The findings of this study are framed through the concept of piety and the embodiment of ethical self by Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition. Semi-structured interviews, participant observation, digital ethnography with a sample of thirty respondents and secondary sources are the methods used. While the conception of an ethical self and piety among the pious elder Mappila women hinges on the respectful compliance of *ulema*'s preaching of the qualities of a 'good *Muslimah*', the pious young Mappila women focus on the deliberative aspects of discourses around 'the good *Muslimah*'. This has opened up the possibilities of contestation, argumentation, and cross-checking references from the Islamic tradition to pursue a dignified and pious living.

Keywords: traditional ulema, Mappila women, good muslimah, affective marital relationship, agency

INTRODUCTION

The entangled binarised stereotype of the victimised Muslim woman under the thumb of a predacious and oversexed Muslim man in public discourse, has offered discursive vindication for the contemporary Indian state's intervention in Muslim legal reforms. Since the Shah Bano controversy in 1978[1], the Indian state's narratives of liberating Muslim women from Muslim patriarchy are conspicuous, *vis-à-vis*, for instance, the ban of triple *talaq* (2019) and the ongoing demand for a uniform civil code[2]. The supposed motive of 'saving Muslim women' is part of a wider geopolitical strategising of the Hindu right-wing (Gupta *et al.*, 2020: 1). Leaders of the Muslim community, however, advocate for reform within the community and expect Muslim women to be agents of socialisation themselves within the religious world, to be 'good wives' and 'good mothers.' This article strives to understand the role of traditional *ulema* in Kerala in shaping the corporeal notions of the pious Mappila woman, as well as the contestations and multiple discourses among pious young Mappila women towards the preaching of traditional *ulema* in the notions of marriage, sexuality, and motherhood. At the intersections of the geography of Malabar as a home to various traditions, the Mappila Muslim community there, and their pious young women subjects; this article examines pious Mappila Muslim femininity and its engagements with traditional *ulema*[3] around the notion of 'good *Muslimah'*.

Two important contributions on ethics and modernity *vis-á-vis* religion inform my attempts to conceptualise these women's engagement with the *ulema*'s notion of a 'good *Muslimah'*. Firstly, Saba Mahmood's concept of piety and the embodiment of ethical self, which cannot simply be reduced to subordination and resistance (Mahmood, 2005: 15). Secondly, how followers of Islamic tradition express and invoke it, including discursive and embodied

[1] See Agnes (2012).
[2] https://m.economictimes.com/news/how-to/what-is-uniform-civil-code-what-does-constitution-say-about-it-why-its-such-a-controversial-topics-in-india/articleshow/101348565.cms
[3] Traditional *ulema* are Muslim scholars in Islamic law and jurisdiction, and are included in every sectarian division of the Muslim community namely Mujahid, Jamat-e-Islami and Sunnis.

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traditions that are interconnected by the impermanence of everyday life (Asad, 2009). Given that both the statist as well as *ulema* narratives depict Muslim women as passive recipients of Muslim patriarchy, it is crucial to discern the nuanced ways in which these young Mappila[4] women assert their agency. The normative notion of agency warrants critical re-examination as it discredits the agency of religious women (Mahmood, 2005; Lughod, 1990). The postsecular turn in feminism has problematised the European feminism in terms of its notion of political subjectivity and agency suggesting religious piety as a means of reinforcing and conveying agency which can even involve considerable spiritual dimensions (Braidotti, 2003: 1). A central query explored in the scholarly literature since the 1970s addressing the operations of human agency amidst structures of subordination revolves around the examinations of how women perpetuate their own oppression or attempt to resist or subvert domains of subjugation (Mahmood, 2005: 6).

In her work on Bedouin women, Lughod (1990) interrogates the romanticisation of resistance in anthropological and historical studies to raise the question of how one can understand manifestations of resistance without wrongly attributing to them forms of politics or consciousness that has never formed a part of their experiential realities—for example, feminist politics or feminist consciousness. Giving the example of Bedouin women wearing sexy lingerie to challenge prevailing social mores, Lughod illustrates that this is another means of subjugating oneself to alternative forms of power grounded in capitalist consumerism. Lughod observes that attention to 'the forms of resistance in particular societies' help us to critically analyse reductionist theories of power (Lughod, 1990: 47). Complicating this, Mahmood (2005) examines if it is worth identifying a universal categorisation of acts as resistance external to the political and ethical conditions in which those acts acquire its specific meanings. Mahmood also posits the question that does such a categorisation forces a teleology of progressive politics on analysing power—a teleology that leads us not to understand the different forms of action and being which cannot be limited within the binary of reinscription and subversion of norms. Here Lughod's observations are subjected to criticism as it fails to problematise the universality of desire to free oneself from structures of subordination, which remains a core value of western progressive and liberal thought (Mahmood, 2005: 10). Butler's (1993) concept of agency also developed mainly in such contexts where norms were either questioned or subjected to resignification, therefore can similarly give only a reductionist exploration into the functioning of norms in constituting the subject. However, Mahmood (2005) views that norms are experienced, inhabited and performed in different ways and not merely subverted or consolidated (Mahmood, 2005: 22). Further complicating this debate on piety Islam and everyday Islam, Schielke (2018) argues that the cultivation of ethics as explained by Mahmood can persist only for short duration as everyday lives of these people involve aspirations and ideals characterised by ambiguities and complexities (Schielke, 2018: 7). Nonetheless, intervening here, Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando observe that the unease with Islamic revivalism stems from secular-liberal sensibilities (Fadil and Fernando, 2015: 82). These thematic inquiries sheds light on the notion of piety among pious young Mappila women beyond the descriptive narrative of 'good *Muslimah'* fashioned by the *ulema* within the context of differential theological positions in the Mappila community of Malabar

To understand this further, a quick contextualisation of the historical and structural trajectories of Mappila Muslim women is required. The Indian Muslim 'reform' movements in Malabar during the late 19th century enabled a larger discourse of transformation of Muslim communities in the modern Kerala public sphere. The revivalist efforts in every community in Kerala during the nineteenth century were aimed at providing education for all, in order to reform the language, and resist colonialism. Since the efforts of Sana'ullah Makthi Thangal[5], Islamic revivalists have insisted on education, English and Malayalam language learning, translation of religious works and the Quran, reforms of the Arabic Malayalam script, and the importance of women's rights (Lakshmi, 2012: 87). In addition, Kerala's print media culture played a vital role in Muslim reforms. In order to advance the community in the surging political realm during this period, women engaged in intricate negotiations with modernity without compromising their religiosity (Sherin, 2021: 108). In her book, Shamshad Hussain emphasises the contributions of Muslim women in promoting the community and challenging patriarchal social structures by interpreting the Quran and prophetic tradition, but they were subsequently ignored in documented history (Hussain, 2019: 25).

Indian migration to the Gulf states in the Middle East also significantly contributed to changes in the socioeconomic status of the community in the 1970s and 1980s, when oil was discovered in Arab countries. In the absence of male members, Muslim women in India gained more autonomy in decision-making and mobility. The range of socialisation patterns was widening with their direct engagements with educational institutions, banks, and international communication networks (Gulati, 1995: 197). Through the reform activities of Haleema Beevi

[4] Hailing from South West India, the Mappilas constitute a distinct and sizable community with a population of more than eight million people. The Mappila culture is a blend of Islamic tradition and Malayalam which continues to the present day (Miller, 2015).

[5] He was a Muslim renaissance leader from Malabar during British rule in India. He ardently advocated for Western education among the Mappilas.

and others, this period also witnessed the emergence of mobilisation of agency among Muslim women. F. Osella and C. Osella (2008) suggest that debates and discussions regarding Muslim women since the 1930s led to the establishment of women's organisations like Mujahid Girls' Movement (MGM) in 1982 and Girls' Islamic Organisation (GIO) in 1984 by Mujahid and Jamat factions[6] respectively (Osella and Osella, 2008). By organising religious speeches, symposiums, seminars, and many campus activities, which had been exclusively male spheres until then, they started marking their own space in the public sphere of Malabar. These movements were aimed at shaping Muslim women's lives with Islamic values, criticising practices like dowry and unlawful talaq, and encouraging the development of women's education (Saittu, 2015: 144). Mappila women were visible in Islamic attire during this period, spurring active public discussions about their appearance, emphasising religious identity through hijab, purdah, and shariah law. Additionally, this led to discussions among *ulema* to circumscribe Muslim women's appearance within religious terms by emphasising religious attire. Throughout these discussions, both in academia and the public sphere, the keyword 'pious Mappila women' has been featured as an essentialised category excluding the question of their agency, the multiple discourses and different theological positions among them.

Methodologically, this study draws upon a qualitative inquiry among thirty women between the ages of 18 and 35 from the Malappuram district of Malabar in coastal south-western India using a grounded approach. Employing snowball sampling, each ten respondents were chosen from the three important Islamic organisations in Kerala, namely Sunnis, Mujahid and Jamat-e-Islami in order to acknowledge the potential ideological differences between them. This sample was chosen because it includes pious, young Mappila women who are active in social media, wear hijab as part of their piety and invoke Islamic tradition in everyday life. These women are educated mothers and postgraduates from state-run institutions who participate actively in contemporary discourses about gender, nation, and citizenship. My data collection methods include semi-structured interviews, participant observation, digital ethnography, and secondary sources. This study aims to explore detailed and rich narratives conducive to building a conceptual framework that provides insights into the nuanced and subjective ways in which pious young Mappila women engage or contest the *ulema*'s gendered construction of corporeal notions around marriage, motherhood and sexuality in their everyday life.

The body has been the major focus of feminist analysis, where bodies are perceived as the site of subversion and resistance. The importance of examining non-European contexts and histories were highlighted by the third world feminists who also questioned the Euro-centric conceptualisations of gender. The precolonial and colonial histories were delved into by South Asian feminisms to challenge misogynistic norms and thus reconceptualised rights discourse and agency (Loomba and Lukose, 2012). Muslim feminists have explored women's bodies, socially constructed role of motherhood and sexuality within Islamic beliefs. Sparking debates over the need for egalitarian laws, Ziba Mir Hosseini analyses the link between sexuality, contemporary subordination of Muslim women and implicit inequality in classical Muslim jurist law (Hosseini, 2012) while Hadia Mubarak cautions against applying an egalitarian lens to classical Islamic texts informing the complexity of exegetical tradition (Mubarak, 2022). While Fathima Mernissi in her work 'Beyond the Veil: Male- Female Dynamics in a Muslim Society' indicate the position of early Muslim scholarship on the need to control female sexuality as a potential social threat (Mernissi, 1991), Barlas notes the concept of passive female sexuality contradicting the Islamic notion of justice to women (Barlas, 2002). Studies on female sexuality in Muslim contexts explore socio-cultural constructions of femininity and sexuality cover factors like enculturation processes (Sanjakdar, 2011), state gender ideologies (Bennett, 2005), and religious discourses (Hoel, 2013) in shaping their bodily perceptions. Existing studies on Mappila Muslim marriage practices revolve around early marriage practices (Basheer, 2004; Jafar, 2015), the social exclusion of Muslim women (Cherayi and Kumar, 2014), cross border marriages (Shani, 2021), *muta* (temporary) marriages (Osella, 2012; Koya, 1978) while some others focus on matrilineal marriages, endogamous alliances (Saidalavi, 2017) and its transformation (Sebastian, 2016; Osella, 2012). However, academic studies on the corporeal notions of Mappila women, specifically marriage, sexuality and motherhood are absent in the existing scholarship on Malabar. A shift is visible in the everyday lives of pious young Mappila women from the nexus of good mother-good wife and an ideal *Muslimah* in the *ulema* discourse which forms the core of this article.

The first section of this article explores the diverse conceptualisations of 'good *Muslimah*' by different Islamic organisations in Kerala with different theological positions. Here, I examine the different ways in which *ulema* persuaded a generation of elder Mappila women to become 'good *Muslimah*'. The second section examines how the pious young Mappila women engage with Islamic discourse in refining their everyday lives as they contest the *ulema*'s conception of corporeality and piety. The narratives of young Mappila women about their experiences with earlier generation and available second literature are analysed here. Drawing on Asad's anthropological account of Islam, instead of de-contextualising and schematising their actions, narratives about culturally specific actors should represent and translate historically grounded discourses as responsive reactions to discourses set by others (Asad,

[6] However, this doesn't mean that other women are 'backward', but the movements mentioned here are visible evidence of organised women's movements in the Kerala public sphere during the period distinct from the unorganised nature of Sunni women.

2009). Hence, accounts of these women's narratives trace a running argument that the conceptions of self and moral agency (Mahmood, 2005) that underpin their contestations are in discord with conventional notions of pious self in the Mappila community and with the liberalist assumptions of agency and individual self that claim agency is the ability to recognise individual interests against transcendental will, tradition, or custom.

THE *ULEMA*'S NARRATIVE: MAKING OF THE 'GOOD *MUSLIMAH'*

Often binding Muslim women with the responsibility to be a good wife and a good mother, the *ulema* discourse on a 'good *Muslimah'* is laden with the socio-cultural apparatuses of femininity. The respondents in this study assert that traditional *ulema* plays a significant role in shaping the notions of marriage, sexuality, motherhood, and femininity among pious Mappila women of the older generation, and this section attempts to derive an understanding of how *ulema* construct such notions. How do the *ulema* create the pedagogical realm of their teachings by using Islamic ethical materials or sources? Among those elder Mappila women, what kind of authority is being invoked in the particular pragmatics of communication employed by the *ulema*? When the ideals of a 'good *Muslimah'* are invoked among the elder Mappila women of the community, what kind of self is produced? These questions are explored through an examination of various Islamic sources and by exploring the insights gained from young Mappila women's experiences with elder Mappila women's everyday lives.

The first part of my discussion focuses on the distinctive Islamic materials through which Muslim organisations in Kerala with diverse theological positions define the concept of a 'good *Muslimah*'. The materials published by these organisations comprise literature with a broad religious orientation aimed at disciplining and educating the community regarding Islamic practices such as Islamic Fiqh [the philosophy or theory of Islamic law based on Quranic teachings and Prophetic tradition]. Among these are laws governing the obligation to perform rituals such as *salat* [five prayers in a day], *zakat* [alms giving], sawm [fasting during the Arabic month of Ramadan], and *hajj* [pilgrimage to Mecca]. The other genre of literature specifically addresses women in the community with topics such as menstruation, the obligatory bath at the end of menstrual bleeding, the ritual of *janabah* [a state of major ritual impurity in Islam caused by any contact with semen], duties of a Muslim wife, advice for a successful marital life and the importance of socialising children with Islamic norms. There are other resources that address women, including Friday sermons, recorded sermons and speeches on CD, video recordings of *ulema*'s teachings on YouTube, women's magazines, and classes for Islamic learning. A particular focus of these materials is to construct the image of a pious *Muslimah* and to discuss her necessary conduct. They represent a combined form of knowledge that employs local interpretations of Islamic juristic tradition to discipline social life.

The book titled '*Kudumbajeevitham*' [7][*Family Life*] (Abdullah, 1966) attests to the popularity of these literatures among Mappila women. The original edition of the book was published in 1966, and the twenty-fourth edition was published in 2015. According to the publisher's note, family is the elemental unit of community, and women are the guiding force. It provides Islamic guidance on how Muslim women can fulfil their duties. The chapter titled *'Sthree Barthrgrihathil'* [Women at her husband's house] discusses the desirable characteristics of a 'good *Muslimah'*. When a woman blames her in-laws and forces her husband to move into a separate house, she cannot be considered a 'good *Muslimah'*. The chapter notes that educated women have more bad habits than uneducated women (Abdullah, 1966: 31), a claim that is not supported by any Islamic texts, undermining efforts to popularise modern education among women. Such indoctrination materials are not only derived from popular genres of Islamic literature, but also from the subjective interpretations of *ulema*, depending on the situation.

Another powerful source for shaping the rhetoric of 'good *Muslimah'* and good wife is the recorded sermons of the *ulema*[8]. An Islamic sermon in Malayalam, titled *'Nalla bharyayude lakshanangal'* [The features of a good wife], emphasises the character of a good wife. Using the Prophetic verse that 'a husband should feel peaceful when he looks at his wife's face', the speaker urges the audience to rethink whether their wives are faithful and good wives. To remind the male audience of how to deal with an undutiful wife, the speaker tells a story of an Arabian couple whose wife acts as if she were ill because she is lazy when it comes to cooking. When the husband recognised that she is acting her illness after failing to recite the Quran to cure her sickness, he recited a passage on polygamy from the Quran (4:3) that made her jump up from bed and go to the kitchen. Such sermons often focus on a man's rights in polygamous marriages without acknowledging the limitations and responsibilities[9] that come with it, which are included in the verse. Amina Wadud noted in her work 'Inside the Gender Jihad - Women's Reform in

[7] All translations are done by me from Malayalam.

[8] These recorded sermons are easily available today from online platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube.

[9] 'And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of (other) women, two, three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then marry only one or those your right hands possess (i.e., slaves). That is more suitable than you may not incline to injustice.'

Islam' that polygamy is a conditional and serious responsibility in Islam, and practicing polygamy is currently impossible as specified in Quran (Wadud, 2006: 114). Thus, we find certain *ulema* preaching, directly or indirectly affirming patriarchal positions through the common trope of polygamy.

Prior to the global onset of Covid restrictions in March 2020, one could easily find large posters and flex boards with Islamic sermons by popular orators in different parts of Malappuram. Thousands of people attend these sermons, mostly older women in the community, which are often held in large playgrounds or auditoriums nearby. In contrast to booklets and recorded sermons, such religious events contributed to the development of a widely shared public discourse of 'good *Muslimah'*, not confined to the private spaces of elder women, and, as a result, strengthened the sense of community identity among participants. In their sermons, speakers incorporate *ulema*'s interpretations of stories based on current contexts along with verses from the Quran to give them a scholarly flavour. Hirschkind's findings exhibits resonance with these observations. Weaving Qur'anic verses into preacher's own rendition of the local tales forms an integral part of the contemporary sermon practice in Egypt (Hirschkind, 2006: 191). The preachers' particular pragmatics of communication in sermons tend towards a strict tone or a style of storytelling that evokes '*thaqwa*' [fear of God] and '*khushu*' [humility]. It is interesting to note that many of the sermons do not include any Q&A sessions or questions about *ulema*'s teachings, contributing to the disciplinary nature and limiting critical engagements.

By inviting popular orators to these events, the *Mahallu* committees[10], Madrasas and 'traditionalist' factions raise funds for specific purposes, such as renovating mosques or Madrasas or doing charity work. It is common for Mappila women to attend such events organised by their own organisations. Taking a closer look at the micro practices surrounding such events reveals that the purely ideological indoctrination of Mappila women towards the 'good *Muslimah'* is intertwined with certain materialistic demands on these women by *ulema*. As a participant in one of the Islamic sermons, a regular attendee of such sermons, shared with me a nuanced view of fund collection. She said,

> I really enjoyed those sermons, but in the second half, when they start collecting funds, the speaker begins glorifying Allah's rewards for almsgiving. These sermons inspired many devout women to donate their gold jewellery to charity. Now I prefer to listen to sermons online. Topics covered include death, heaven, family life, duties of wives and husbands, etc.

Several Islamic organisations run madrasas and women's colleges that cater to the educational needs of the Mappila community. This is mainly due to the North-South disparity in instituting government educational institutions and the Malabar region belongs to the Northern part of Kerala which suffers from lack of public institutions and lack of infrastructure in Malappuram (Government of Kerala, 2006). Islamic organisations expect educated women with basic religious knowledge to cultivate Islamic morals in their children and families to cultivate true Islamic culture rather than empowering women to exercise their rights as Muslims. Therefore, bringing about a change in the existent gendered division of labour is considered problematic or undesirable, and sometimes interpreted as a sign of *fitnah* [temptation].

In his speech on women, a prominent preacher of a 'reformist' faction'[11] stated,

> Most of the family disruptions were caused by women working outside the home. The family would be peaceful if the men managed finances, but the women would become arrogant and overrule their husbands when they earned money. Men who promoted women for jobs now have extra-marital relations.

He continued by reciting the thirty fourth verse of the fourth chapter in Quran and said that

> Men have to support the family financially, and Allah has dignified some over others through the verse. The role of a woman in Islam is to be a mother, wife, sister-in-law, or daughter-in-law.

In her work 'Muslim Women and the Post Patriarchal', Rifat Hassan (1991) maintains that the Quran does not specifically mention Adam or Eve However, verse 4:1, which says 'O humankind, fear your lord, who created you from one soul and separated you from its mate, and made you into men and women' is a general teaching on how humans were created. According to the verse, men and women are created from the same soul, which underlines their equality. Hassan argues that it is through the popularity and circulation of some interpretations of Hadith

[10] Here *Mahallu* means that each house in a particular location would be registered under an important mosque in that place. There can be more than one important mosque and *Mahallu* in a particular location which can be based on ideological differences *like Sunni, Jamath-e-Islami* amd *Mujahid.* Each *mahallu* has its own committee to take care of the people's religious matters included in that respective *mahallu.*

[11] https://youtu.be/qyb0M4kDK-4

contradicting the Quranic narrative on creation that remains responsible for the general notion among Muslims that women are inferior in righteousness. Consequently, women's self-sufficiency is perceived as a threat to men's authority. As a result, women are perceived as a source of temptation [*fitnah*] and of easy enticement into immorality. It highlights the moral issues of women, which require the guidance of men who are *qawwamun* [caretakers] responsible for guarding their women and ensuring they don't deviate from their morals. Although the word *qawwamun* means the provider of livelihood, it is interpreted in various presumptive ways, such as maintaining or protecting women, in charge of them, and mastering them. In addition, Muslim societies generally take this verse as a normative division of labour in an ideal family, but this does not necessarily mean women should not provide for themselves (Hassan, 1991: 55).

A generational shift is palpable in the understandings of a 'good *Muslimah'* and the corporeal lives of young Mappila women when exploring their narratives on perceptions of marriage, sexuality, and motherhood. Pious elder women's notions of the self and self-respect are linked to getting recognition from their community as a 'good *Muslimah'*, sometimes at the expense of their personal freedom. The formulation of corporeal lives by elder Mappila women is largely determined by hegemonic discourses rooted in Islamic pedagogy. For their sacrifice in their individual freedom, the *ulema* continually invoke *sabr* [patience] through worldly hardships, along with *thawab* [rewards] for souls in *akhirah* [the life after death]. Analysing the *zar* cult which is a Muslim healing practice in Northern Sudan, Boddy proposes that *zar* practice can be understood as a means of contextualising their experiences within a gendered structure or cultivating a subordinate discourse. Though this may appear as 'instruments of oppression' within the liberal parameters of freedom, Boddy argues that it acts as a counter hegemonic process by women asserting their value collectively and individually through organising related ceremonies thereby embracing gender complementarity (Boddy, 1989: 345). Incorporating this vantage point, the elder Mappila women of the Mappila community manifest their ethical being while voluntarily submitting themselves to the traditional normative order and the will of God. Young Mappila women are also instructed to adopt the hegemonic discourse of the 'good *Muslimah'* to earn respect within the community. However, the palpable dissonance in these narratives we observe can be explained by Mahmood's (2005) observations about self and generational shifts. Mahmood (2005) states that there may not necessarily be a homogenous concept of self that coexists with a given culture or time period. Mahmood (2005) presents differential manifestations of personhood within the same cultural and historical settings, each a product of a distinct discursive formation rather than a broader cultural context. She identifies distinct ideas of corporeal lives taking shape among Egyptian Muslims with radically different conceptions of bodily behaviour (Mahmood, 2005: 120) by analysing the discourse of ritual obligations. Apart from the ways in which younger generation understand the elder ones, it is quite likely that elder Mappila women simultaneously possess distinct concepts of their self, piety and corporeal lives.

Recorded sermons and live broadcasts of sermons have ended up replacing booklets. These mediated communications were popular because of the methods of persuasion they used, the pragmatics of the ways in which they spoke, as well as their physical appearance, including dressing and a beard, which made their discourses sensible to the elder Mappila women. The contents of the sermons are deeply influenced by the fact that the majority of sermon audiences are women. Charles Hirschkind notes that the increased number of women listeners inspires preachers to speak about topics relevant to women, and argues that religious media and its disciplinary function produce a public that is subordinate to authority and results in homogenous moral behaviour rather than a free exchange of ideas (Hirschkind, 2006: 111). While their sacrifice of personal freedom for the family, in exchange for rewards from God, forms a vital element of their pious self, young Mappila women remain fundamentally different when it comes to notions around piety and self. In the following section, I explore the myriad ways in which young Mappila women contest the *ulema*'s conception of marriage, female sexuality, motherhood and a good *Muslimah.*

YOUNG MAPPILA WOMEN'S MODES OF CONTESTATION

The ongoing contestations in Malabar among the young Mappila women about the concept of a *good Muslimah* is symbolic of a decisive transformation in the corporeal notions of Mappila women. Against this backdrop, I intend to explore the articulations of pious young Mappila women with respect to marriage like partner selection and their organisational affiliation and property exchange and domesticity including sharing in household production, conjugality and financial responsibility in family life. This is followed by an inquiry into the question of sexuality in Islam, specifically female sexual rights, and the final part analyses mothering notions and practices of young Mappila women.

In this section, I will examine young Mappila women's notions of marriage and domesticity in detail. Firstly, I attempt to capture whether the young Mappila women choose their partners from one's own organisational background or from different organisations. Given the pressures of the patriarchal structure that demands women to stick to the religious norms of their husband's family in Malabar, partners belonging to different sectarian

organisations often find it difficult to lead a harmonious life. Though most of the Mappilas in Malabar associate themselves with any one of the Islamic organisations in Kerala, some of the pious young Mappila women prioritise mutual respect and mutual understanding beyond the organisational affiliation in their marital life. In the words of Noushiya, [a research scholar]:

> My partner belongs to AP Sunni[12] family and I hail from a Mujahid family. I had said no to many Sunni marriage proposals as they told they would restrict my higher studies and going to mosque. But he never forces his ideology in me and I never force mine in him, it is based on a mutual understanding. This may not be possible for many to tolerate the sectarian differences.

Such narratives suggest a flexible approach of partners that mutually respect the differences without imposing one's mode of pious being over the other. While this is a common cause for conflicts in family life among many Mappila families, this level of understanding is possible here because of the conscience of two individuals regarding the importance of mutual and peaceful coexistence beyond sectarian affiliation. Living outside Kerala since marriage as part of their career mitigates the likelihood of facing contentious opinion from their family sphere. Sunnis belong to the 'traditional' group, however narratives from the field validate that caution must be exercised in impulsively assigning 'progressive' or 'conservative' label to individuals merely based on their sectarian affiliation. Thus, young Mappila women's partner preferences may not be necessarily embedded in sectarian identities in establishing affective marital ties.

Informal networks among the young Mappila women play a vital role in shaping their contestations. What I imply by informal networks here are the online collectives in social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Clubhouse where these women actively discuss the juristic positions on women's corporeality in the light of their practical contexts in negotiating with the traditional gender roles. The informal networks may be formed within or outside one's own organisational affiliations but includes women with a common interest in reading, discussing and debating Islamic discourses. Similar collectives including both men and women discuss and debate similar topics. The topics of the discussion ranges from women's rights in Islam regarding conjugality, sexual gratification, duties of household chores and parenting to Islamic perspectives on LGBTQIA issues and political issues *qua* Muslim in the Indian subcontinent. These women respondents are not graduates from Islamic colleges but are graduates from state run institutions who keeps their Islamic identity in the public realm.

Mahr, the obligatory property to be given by the groom to the bride, being one of the vital elements of marriage in Islam, leads me to identify young Mappila women's articulation of their right of mahr in marriages. Lately, there is a general awakening among the young Mappila women of Malabar that Mahr is the right of a Muslim woman. Many women demand mahr ranging from books, a copy of Quran, camera, scooter, money or a plot of land. For instance, a Clubhouse discussion on *Nikah, Mahr and Nafaqa*[13] was initiated by some of the pious young Mappila women on 6th June 2021 where they invited a few male religious scholars. During the discussion on the current trend of demanding *mahr* as things with no monetary value, the moderator who has a doctoral degree in Islamic *Fiqh* from one of the international Islamic universities abroad said:

> *Sidq* is the word Islamic scholars use for *mahr*. It's derived from the word *saduqatuhunna* from the Quran's fourth chapter. It's obligatory and the second condition is '*nihila'* [with respect]. So *mahr* should not be simple things like dates but can be as much as a pile of gold. That doesn't mean a bride can demand more than what the groom can afford.

The trending nature of young Mappila women demanding *mahr* is salient in the words of Sahila who is working as a copywriter. While sharing her experience with *mahr* in marriage, she contemplated with some level of culpability and explained:

> It was a time when 'no gold' marriages, couples in simple dressing styles and 'variety' marriages were trending. I had actually demanded a camera as my *mahr* just because it was trending to ask such *mahr*. Later I realised the importance of monetary value of *mahr*. Many friends had made better demands even before my marriage but they chose not to disclose - which is the more modest way of doing the same.

Here it is incumbent to analyse the complex juncture of individual desires and their ethical being. The impetus behind her demand was obviously her fascination for being recognised as a Mappila woman who takes a remarkable

[12] Based on ideological differences, we can find there are different Islamic organisations among Kerala Muslims. They are mainly *Sunni, Jamath-e-Islami* and *Mujahid. Sunnis* are again subdivided into *AP Sunni* and *EK Sunni* organised under A. P. Aboobacker Musliyar and E. K. Aboobacker Musliyar, respectively.

[13] Marriage contract, bride price, which is the right of a bride, financial responsibility of husband to his wife during marriage and up to a particular period after divorce, respectively.

decision in her own marriage matters. Her later realisation points to the Islamic virtue of '*muhasabah*' or '*ihtisab*' which means self-evaluation or self-assessment of one's own deeds. The trajectories of formation of subjectivity here complicates the secular liberal conception of desire for freedom from structures of subordination as innate and motivating all human beings (Mahmood, 2005: 14). The way their ethical being enables to impose limitations on their own individual desires and to attempt self-transformation help them to reevaluate their everyday practices.

The Clubhouse discussions also suggest the critical engagements of pious young Mappila women with Islamic pedagogy in rethinking their own Islamic practices without compromising their debate with patriarchal conceptions of marriage and sexuality. Schielke's work examines these intricate dynamics of everyday Muslim lives in which he observes the inherently tenuous nature of self-purification attempts (Schielke, 2010), a perspective critiqued by Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando who argue that the new scholarship on everyday Islam overlooks certain expressions of everyday Muslim lives (Fadil and Fernando, 2015: 61). Drawing on this position, I argue that the pious young Mappila women in this study exhibit a constant striving to purify and transform oneself despite occasional aberrations.

Coming to the household production, a WhatsApp group discussion can be analysed here that reveals the complicated relationship between the *ulema*'s conception of household chores and the young Mappila women's perceptions. Created in 2016, the group consists of around one hundred and fifty Malayali Muslim women studying or working in different parts of India in which I requested to join as part of my research. The group is described as a research/ study collective set up to discuss emerging trends in the study of Islam and gender. It aims to discuss various aspects of Muslim women's studies and activities as well as to record the new trends in the field of relevant research and practical interventions. In a discussion on household chores, these women attempt to redress the typical gender roles by means of argumentation, contestation, mediation and arbitration whichever fits into their own practical contexts of everyday life on the basis of evidence from Islamic tradition. Sama[14] [aged 34, working as a HR executive] reflected:

> I got married into a family with five sons. Even though I don't have a mother-in-law, I could see her lifestyle at their home. The men are trained to do every household chore, including cleaning toilets. My father-in-law taught me how to knead and roll *chapatis*. He cuts vegetables before I reach home after work.

The respondents recognise that as mothers and wives, their effective intervention can help better gender relations for the coming generation. The experience shared by Sama was not pondering the general habitual ways of living in the Mappila community, but a sign of invoking a women-friendly domestic atmosphere in an educated Mappila family setting, where the late mother-in-law had deliberately socialised her sons into the duty of household chores. Yet Sama does not accept that the family is not patriarchal but are practically more women friendly in their lifestyle. Here, I would like to draw attention to Saba Mahmood's observation about performative behaviours among Egyptian Muslims. The differential understandings of ritual performances and performative behaviours existing among present day Egyptian Muslims (concerning divergent notions of individual and collective freedoms) have essentially different consequences for the structuring of political life within personal and public domains (Mahmood, 2005: 121). Notably, the different notions of individual and collective freedom engulfed in the conceptions of marriage, sexuality and motherhood between young Mappila women and elder Mappila women have radically differing implications for the *ulema*'s attempts of organising an Islamic lifestyle specifically around the propositions of a 'good *Muslimah'*.

Many of the young Mappila women I interviewed opined that men should be trained to do household chores and care work. Sahila [aged 27, a copywriter] who has been married to her friend and lover described the term- a 'good daughter-in-law' in the Mappila community:

> A good daughter-in-law means one who wakes up early, sweeps the courtyard and cooks food, obeys her mother-in-law and attends to her husband's everyday needs. My mother-in-law was very strict. A series of conflicts led to her persuading my partner to divorce me, though there were no serious problems between us. I don't fall in the category of a good wife or daughter-in-law. When my partner cooked food and attended to our baby, he got called things like '*penkonthan*' [henpecked husband]. Now no further issues are there as we don't bother those things.

Here I would like to underline the differences in perceptions about a 'good *Muslimah'* among the different generations in Sahila's recalling of the past incidents. According to these young Mappila women, they are critical of the categorisations of good wife and good mother and in a way the idea of the 'good life'. They question the basis of the notion that a daughter-in-law should be stoic to do all the household chores and serve her husband and in-laws. Disregarding the traditional socio-cultural scripts of the community, these young women examine the

[14] Names of all the respondents are anonymised.

canonical sources of Islam to understand how Islam has addressed these issues of household chores and women's duty. However, the discourse addressing household chores under Islamic law has been subjected to multifaceted debate (Katz, 2022: 7) in different times without adhering to a monolithic standpoint which do not come under the purview of this article.

Elaborating the discord in these women's modes of fashioning their self and *ulema*'s modes of persuasion, these women evince the indifference of *ulema* in general towards preaching the concept of a good Muslim husband. *Ulema*'s persistent focus on wives' duties appears to be at odd with young women's understanding of the rights and duties of *azwaj* [life partners] in an Islamic marital relation. To instigate anguish in Nubla [aged 34, who is working as a psychiatric social worker], she heard a mother's advice to her daughter to do every household chore as a woman is the slave of man in Islam. She sallied:

> Most lectures teach that the hell will have many women who misbehaved with their husbands, but I've never heard about any punishment for bad husbands. I truly believe Allah is merciful and not one waiting to put women in the hell.

Nubla's words clearly demonstrate her conviction that God is not determined to categorise and punish a particular section of his creations as sinners. Young women dissent from the expectations of *ulema* around an educated *Muslimah*/ working *Muslimah* to be a multi-tasker. Irrespective of their organisational affiliation many Mappila families prefer an educated girl or a working girl who *also* cooks well.

Pious young Mappila women think that the male exegetical tradition of Quran and *sunnah* [practices and tradition of Prophet Muhammad] underlying the *ulema*'s conception need critical exploration. These women seek instructions from scholars who are well trained in Islamic theology and doctrinal arguments, preferably those scholars who have pursued extensive research in Islamic theology from renowned Islamic universities. Their apprehension of the scholarly interpretation of women's rights in Islam, along with their engagement in the public sphere, modern education, liberal discourses on gender and citizenship contribute to their ethical and practical dilemmas in following the elder Mappila women's corporeal notions. Rinaldo's concept of pious critical agency among reformist Muslim women activists of Indonesia is notable in this context owing to its conception of comprehending women's attempts at a critical interpretation of religious texts (Rinaldo, 2014: 829). The present study however focused on multiple forms of contestations among the young Mappila women born and brought up under both 'traditionalist' and 'reformist' organisations and the linear fashion of shaping their corporeal notions irrespective of their differences in organisational affiliation.

Concerning the responsibility of maintenance of the family in Islam, during the Clubhouse conversations on *Nikah, Mahr and Nafaqa*, the moderator stated: '*Nafaqa* means a man has to provide his wife not only financial support but also a servant.' Quoting *Fathhul Mueen*[15], he continues 'a mother is insisted to feed the baby for only nine days, after that a lady should be allotted to feed the baby'. By sharing an inspiring article titled 'Women in the family: Some observations of the *Fiqh*'[16] by one of the young religious scholars [graduated from one of the important Islamic colleges in Kerala] in the WhatsApp group, the young Mappila women discuss the duties of a husband. The author refers to Imam Kasaani belonging to Hanafi[17] school of Islamic jurisprudence in the book *'Al-Badaai'* to advance the position on household chores and says:

> If a woman finds it difficult to cook, her husband must provide her cooked meals. Women's only obligation is to fulfil her husbands' sexual needs. Islamic *Fiqh* has several such teachings. No explicit *sharia* rule mandates household chores for women.

These young women orient their notions of individual freedom and justice towards the Islamic concept of the interdependence of men and women in family life. Mutual understanding and respect are deemed crucial by the young Mappila women to ensure peaceful coexistence within the family. Naja, mother of two kids and holds a doctoral degree in social sciences, explained:

> I don't believe in the general equation that a mother is solely responsible for taking care of the baby, but if husband is the only earning member [as I am still looking for jobs] I would spend more time to take care of the children and household chores.

Naja's narrative reflects the equal responsibility of parents towards child-rearing, hers is not perceived as a stubborn position grounded in the desire for individual freedom, but a stance that imbues mutual accountability. Most of

[15] A *Fiqh* textbook belonging to Shafi school of Islamic jurisprudence written by a Malayali *alim*/ religious scholar.
[16] https://campusalive.net/fiqh-and-muslim-women/
[17] There are four major schools of Islamic thought namely *Shafi, Maliki, Hanafi* and *Hambali* each associated with the names of the scholarly leaders of the respective schools.

the young women in this study are working and their conception of family life fits in well with their male partners having the willingness to unlearn habits and share the familial responsibilities within the rigidities of a patriarchal society. The juxtaposition between a more liberal sense of gender equality and the conception of harmonious interdependence in Islamic family life are addressed in the article 'Women in the family: Some observations of the *Fiqh*' by contextualising the different social order envisaged by Islam. The author was keen to observe that:

> In a society like ours in India, where the Islamic social order doesn't exist, the separate *Fiqh* rules for men and women are misconstrued as discriminatory. As men have more familial duties than women, women have a lower share in inheritance because she is not required to provide for the family. Even if she earns, she can spend as she wishes. Therefore, the thirty-fourth verse of the fourth chapter, which says Allah has given more powers to men over women, is about men's duty to support the family. Rather than obsessing over *Fiqh* rules, men and women should act with mutual understanding.

The article pinpoints that if women are doing household chores which are not her prescribed duties, she should be given enough dignity and respect in the family. Household responsibilities should be shared if both partners are working.

With respect to the marital relations and domesticity, here I aim to understand how young Mappila women negotiate social expectations around the 'good *Muslimah*'. Nubla shared her understanding of Islam's position on the residence of partners after marriage. She said:

> I understand that Islam prefers the bride and the groom to move to a separate home. In Islamic history, we can never see a woman being divorced for failing to look after her husband's family. Both partners have a responsibility to each other and their own parents. As a result of cultural accommodation, Muslims here have accepted patriarchal norms.

Nubla's explanations indicate the speeches of western religious scholars like Mufthi Menak and Nuhman Ali Khan regarding family life. In his speech on joint family system where the bride lives with the in-laws, Mufthi Menak said[18]:

> It's permissible only on the conditions that the women's modesty and respect is ensured and *hijab* rules are not disregarded. In Islam, a man has no right to order his daughter-in-law around as if she were an unpaid maid. Respecting each other is unity in Islam rather than sharing a roof.

This statement of Nubla reflects some delving of young Mappila women in their negotiation with the rigidities of the patriarchal social order. Their inspiration for the same emerges from their pious conviction about justice in Islam, which are rooted in their optimism in the *rahmath* [mercy] of Allah.

In short, the active discussions held among these young Mappila women on marriage, *mahr,* duties and rights of the partners and domesticity admonish the need to engage with the canonical sources of Islamic tradition in shaping their discord with the patriarchal structure. *Ulema*'s perception of the ideal *Muslimah* being lenient to patriarchal insecurities remains rather repugnant to young Mappila women, who find their inspiration from an Islam which respects and ensures the dignity of women.

In the following section, I attempt to draw attention to young Mappila women's notion of marital sexuality distinct from the *ulema*'s teachings. Given the public discourse which accentuates issues over Muslim women's sexuality, polygamy remains the primary subject matter of concern. Observing one of the discussions around polygamy in the WhatsApp group of young Mappila women, we can find differing arguments around polygamy in Islam and in the Mappila community specifically. Neila's [aged 27, a teacher] remarks reflect a critical analysis of the practice of polygamy in the Mappila community. She said:

> One often hears the argument that Arab men have three or four wives. How can we compare us with Arabs who have separate houses for each wife, provide maids and support each of their children, and spend anything for their wives? Many monogamous men here don't provide maintenance. These are two extremes.

Saja added:

> Unlike our women, Arab women don't devote their entire lives for their husbands and children. And for many other reasons, they have no issues with polygamy.

And Shahma (aged 34, working as a doctor) responded:

[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5tKkkjSrvE

> In India, pogroms and sectarian violence have rendered many Muslims widows. Well-off Muslim men should marry such women by providing *mahr*... If a husband doesn't provide maintenance, his wife can divorce him and seek compensation. Our *mahal* system got weakened because of undue deference to the government set-up. We had a history of *qazis* who were women-friendly. Can we imagine these things today?

Nasha [aged 33, working as an Assistant Professor] said:

> And women who raise these issues are branded as impatient and 'liberal feminists'.

These exchanges reveal the debate and negotiation on online space, formed out of the informal networks that try to resolve the practical issues of women's everyday life in the community. The pious young Mappila women challenge the *ulema*'s conventional notions that overlook the validity and the conditions of traditional polygamy in Islam. They believe that a provision granted to ensure the protection and justice towards the disadvantaged women in the community should not be misused for fulfilling men's sexual desires. In response to a similar discussion on the importance of mahr and women's rights in Islam held in a WhatsApp group including both Malayali Muslim men and women, Siraj, a journalist commented:

> The question of whether women should demand *mahr* or not arises from the modern, colonial/Indian elite concept of monogamy. Polygamy is a very normal condition of Islamic marriages and family life. The real significance of *mahr* is that men wanting to marry more than one woman will realise its value because he has to give *mahr* again.

The term 'men wanting to marry more than one' in Siraj's words clearly reveals his preference for polygamy, which arguably ignores the serious responsibility laid down by the same. Over the last few years, polygamy continues to be a topic of heated debate in this group between young Mappila men and women where men favouring polygamy in association with male lust are strongly criticised. Some common members in two WhatsApp groups favour the women's group to hone their arguments because the WhatsApp groups have similar characteristics in terms of the topics discussed and the socio-cultural profile of the members in terms of their academic atmosphere and social life. The skills and strength developed within exclusively female spaces among Arab Muslims has been very much part of Leila Ahmed's study on Western ethnocentrism and *harems*. Ahmed attempts to unsettle the Western perception of subservient Arabian women by highlighting the homosocial space of females in *harems* where the institutional power of men is criticised and independent thoughts are cherished (Ahmed, 1982: 531). Hence, women's collective concerns about male control mean that a separate realm of discussing everyday issues within these informal networks have shaped a particular kind of feminist consciousness among these young Mappila women, enabling them to critique the patriarchal structure of the community.

As a response to my queries to participants about female sexuality in Islam, Nawal [aged 29, a housewife], quotes a popular *hadith* by the *ulema* saying that 'Angels will curse a woman who refuse to satisfy her husband's sexual desires'. This hadith is used as a common reference to enhancing the expectations around a sexually submissive wife. Nawal said:

> After marriage, I had read a book on married life written by a leader of our organisation. A section on sexual relations refers to this *hadith*. I found it very problematic. How can God curse us for that reason?

Nawal's concern revolves around the notion of the sexual obligation of a wife towards her husband, ignoring the knowledge and viewpoint of the wife regarding sex. As an individual with little prior knowledge about sexual relations, she could confide her concerns in her compassionate fiancé, Nawal found it difficult to comprehend a sense of justice in the *ulema*'s preaching of sexuality, as if her opinion over her body and mind was deemed insignificant. Examining such contestations among contemporary Muslims regarding sex and gender questions in the exegetical tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, Kecia Ali notes that though classical Islamic texts underscore the importance of women's sexual gratification, the association of 'good mother' with 'good woman' emphasises the perceived duty of wives to be available for their husbands' sexual gratification. Women's sexual rights in Islam did not enjoy adequate attention from the majority of the scholars (Ali, 2006).

Comprehending the difference between the ways in which men and women takes in sexual expression, arousal and satisfaction, the young Mappila women express that they have communicated their priorities and concerns effectively to their partners. Their male partners are compassionate enough to provide ample time and make conscious efforts for their wives to achieve sexual satisfaction. Some of my interlocutors are very enthusiastic sexual partners along with their husbands. In Nuha's words,

> We used to share very wildest sexual fantasies by attempting different positions, and I am happy in it. It helps us to become closer and able to satisfy each other.

This narrative highlights the emotionality and intensity in female desire among the young Mappila women. Despite the repressive silence bounding female sexuality among the elder Mappila women, these women are willing to speak about desire, and discuss better ways of engaging with increasing satisfaction. Their discussions through the online platforms [including women's informal and online networks] enabled them to talk frankly about sexuality where the social stigma does not act as a barrier. They carefully confine themselves to the Islamic value of *adab* [good manners] which insists any form of vulgar discussions on sexuality is deemed unacceptable unless aimed at seeking medical help or knowledge. According to a *hadith* narrated in *Muslim* 'On the day of judgement, the lowest person in the sight of God will be the man who is intimate with his wife and then broadcasts her secrets'. The mutual respect and Islamic values of *mavaddath* [affection] and *rahmath* [mercy] between the couples also binds them to the Islamic standards of *adab* in their discussions on intimacy.

It was Shahma who shared a Facebook post[19] of one of the 'reformist' leaders from Kerala, regarding the prophetic teachings on sexuality in Islam. The article starts with the warning that men should not be selfish in fulfilling sexual pleasures without satisfying his wife.

> There are many defenders of this kind of *hadith,* for whom *deen* [religion] is purely a male affair. When a woman complained to the Prophet that she had been forced by her father to marry a person, he said no father had the right to do so. She said she had cited the incident to dissuade other men.

The author cites two women who complained to the Prophet that their husbands refused to have sex with them. It was the common Arabian practice of *lihar,* which means staying away from one's wife after declaring her to be 'like one's mother'. The author says that the Quran intervened in favour of the woman. The first three verses of the chapter '*Al Mujadila*' says that God heard the complaint and that the practice is despicable. The author concludes that womenfolk during the Prophet's time were bold enough to complain and asserted their sexual rights. He then asks us how many women would dare to complain here. In a nutshell, while polygamy is widely perceived as the marker of oppression and being a recurrent theme of *ulema*'s teachings, young Mappila women trace its Islamic roots in order to understand the notions of justice and protection within the Islamic family system. Their perceptions of fulfilling sexual needs within marital tie are equally applicable to men and women and seems to be contradictory with the male sexual mastery over women in the *ulema* discourse.

Finally, focusing on young Mappila women's perceptions and experiences of motherhood, writings of young Mappila women can be analysed. Writing articles in magazines of general interest or specifically in Muslim magazines owned by the different Islamic organisations remains another prospective mode of debate by these women within the patriarchal norms of the community. An article— 'The First Experiences of Motherhood'[20], written by a psychiatric social worker—in a 'traditionalist' Muslim organisation's magazine enlightens the readers about the mental support that husbands should provide in pregnancy and motherhood. She also spotlights post-partum mood disorder and depression. The article is notable for its criticism of how elderly women have a habit of making light of new mothers' concerns. They normalise labour pain and comment on the quality and quantity of new mothers' breast milk, perhaps unaware of the psychological effects of their words. She continues by narrating the case of Prophet: 'I wonder how our society would have responded if Amina lived among us because she had Haleema to breastfeed her son, the Prophet.' She quotes the words of Maryam who is the mother of Prophet Eesa when explaining the pain of delivery that 'if she could have died before her delivery' in the chapter 'Maryam' in Quran in order to make people recognise the hardships of labour. The articles reflect that the young Mappila women's perceptions of motherhood do not fit themselves into the category of 'good mother'. As most of these young women are either working or are students, they seek suggestions from the like-minded friends in their informal networks to embrace a motherhood which values their healthy mental state along with physical condition for the proper mental development of their babies, rather than listening to their elders, perhaps.

The pious young Mappila women discern motherhood as a stage of multiple emotions, struggles, pains, sacrifices and happiness which should not be taken for granted. They understand that the idealisation of motherhood and the ideal concept of self which deny women's needs should be dismantled, considering the Prophet's life and time as a tool of analysis for the same. The performative aspect of this conception of motherhood lies in their attempts to train their partners significantly in mutually responsible parental care work. This is obvious in the words of Afsa [aged 30, working as a behaviour technician] who has twin daughters:

> I don't believe that caring for children is a purely a mother's job. Usually, I make husband do things so that I can put my health—both physical and mental—first. So, I can look after my kids with family support.

[19] https://www.facebook.com/100001660089139/posts/pfbid0W8PsexYtJ8HU55qfHsb9ELxwZrVJtqaUK5gqeQt3RFSVH5mFuhephbbDr1ugBihPl/

[20] https://pravasirisala.com/archives/688

Significant paternal parental involvement is associated with better maternal mental satisfaction in life (Mallette *et al*., 2020: 1) and with lower symptoms of maternal depression (Maselko *et al*., 2019: 789).

Often tagged with a pejorative label of being a 'feminist' or being unfit to the category of a 'good *Muslimah*' within the community, these young women find it a tiresome task to converse with the *ulema* or to convince their elders about the need to revisit conventional notions of Muslim femininity. Any instances of outspoken remarks against *ulema*'s teachings by women in the community would be perceived generally as marked arrogance. Thus, they advance their negotiating strategies conceivably by attempts of making their partners learn and unlearn new and habitual ways respectively in their everyday life. They deliberately attempt to wane the association of 'good *Muslimah'* with the notions of a good wife and a good mother within the community. They hone their contestations through intellectual engagements in light of the evidence from Islamic tradition characterised by cultivation of an Islamic ethos that significantly differs from traditional patriarchal conceptions of *ulema* around female corporeality.

CONCLUSION

Revisiting the authoritative position of *ulema* in shaping the notions of female corporeality, the conception of an ethical self and piety among the elderly Mappila women hinges on respectful compliance with *ulema*'s preaching of the behavioural qualities of a 'good *Muslimah'*. The Islamic ethical sources in the Mappila community share many of the characteristics of the popular Islamic sources used by the participants of the mosque movement in Egypt, in which their pedagogy was grounded in an idea of the practical conduct of virtuous life of Muslim women (Mahmood, 2005: 80). While the Islamic manuals circulated among the participants of mosque movements had a common nature that presented the commonly acceptable opinions of four schools of thought *namely shafi, maliki, hanfi and hambali* (Mahmood, 2005), in the Mappila community the Islamic ethical materials produced by each Islamic organisations separately reflects the respective single sectarian ideology. However, the pertinence of shared household chores and care work in the construction of Mappila femininity is obvious across the ideological differences.

Most of the pious young Mappila women in this study had grown up conforming to any one of the major Islamic organisations namely Sunnis, Mujahid and Jamat-e-Islami in Kerala. However, realising the essentially identical nature of *ulema*'s discourses on the notion of a 'good *Muslimah'*, they focus on the deliberative aspect of discourses that have opened up more possibilities of argumentation, contestation and cross-checking references from Islamic tradition in their pursuit of seeking justice for a dignified and pious living. Arendt (1958) conceives these deliberative practices as forging the conditions of their collective living through the exercise of their agency which also provides space for communal reflexivity. The role of intellectual reforms within the community in terms of defending the status of Muslim women was notable in its encounter with the Western critique of Islam. The engagements of Muslim women with modernity have been in a way where they discuss and debate with it without compromising their spirituality, redefining the community and themselves by constantly renegotiating with tradition, without negating it. Thus, these pious young Mappila women are primarily driven by the negotiations of Muslim women in Kerala for their agency and sense of belonging to a larger social system who assured their strong presence in 'reformist' dialogues (Sherin, 2021: 110).

This study observes that this shift is made possible for certain kinds of women through acquisition of a universal modern education, easy accessibility to religious literatures and the advent of new technologies. Being raised in an age of public literacy, technology, mass media and being active social media users, the digital space appropriated by them has enabled them to seek theological concepts and doctrinal arguments from Islamic traditions which was once purely a male realm. The digital space where these women effectively shape their contestations out of the solidarity gained through shared experiences of corporeality along with the deliberation of Islamic discourses indeed blurs the organisational boundaries of femininity.[21]

The study also observes that calling upon the Islamic tradition that illuminates the possibilities of affective marital relations, the right to choose their partners, the right to demand *mahr*, the right for peaceful coexistence with their partners, the right to a satisfactory sexual life and the importance of ensuring healthy mental state during motherhood are negotiated by the young Mappila women within the overall patriarchal structure of the community.

[21] Here, the contestations of the young Mappila women blur organisational boundaries. Organisational boundaries mean that expected feminine behaviour and ways of understanding women's agency among the women belonging to each Islamic organisations namely *Sunni, Jamath-e-Islami* and *Mujahid* are distinct among the community. These differences are shaped by the teachings of respective *ulema* belonging to different organisations. For e.g., Sunni women find it best to pray at home and do not attend Friday prayers in mosques; however, women belonging to *Mujahid* and *Jamath-e-Islami* consider attending Friday prayers as a virtuous deed. Women of *Jamath-e-Islami* find it protesting and attending rallies for social cause as part of their pious being, but women of Mujahid and Sunni do not consider it as good. These organisational boundaries are visible among Mappila Muslim life.

Mahmood suggests that the previously male-defined spheres are being occupied by the women asserting their presence with new forms of conditions and interpretations around the discourses that have subordinated the women historically (Mahmood, 2005: 5). The exchanges and arguments around exegetical traditions signify that founding texts serve as landmarks, but are contested, in the current conversations. Indeed, tradition can contain rupture, growth, splitting, reorientation and recuperation (Asad, 2009). Distinct from the elder Mappila women, for young Mappila women, piety is an attribute of experiencing closeness to the one God; extending the possibility of conversation between the God and their inner minds; a manner of being that necessarily invokes optimism in the God who guarantees their rights, dignity and respect entailed by Islamic tradition.

Young Mappila women and their particular way of embracing their religion also complicates the liberal discourse on gender, agency and the popular associations of social conservatism and women subjugation. Mahmood's re-evaluation of the concept of agency bolsters our potential for an informed analysis of the young Mappila women's distinct perception of the link between corporeality, femininity and Islam in challenging the conventional norms, while liberal perspectives fail to accommodate their consensual submission to Allah. This form of agency can be comprehended only within the structures and discourses of subordination that enable the conditions for its execution. Agentival capacity thus persists not only in the acts of defying norms but also in inhabiting the norms (Mahmood, 2005: 15). Alternatively, they include men in their discussions and debates on redressing or re-examining the conventional notions of corporeality through the social media that further contributes to smoothen the transformation of the community. Both younger and elder Mappila women's corporeal lives are informed by an Islamic tradition which Asad observes as a discursive tradition that associates the cultivation of moral selves in varying ways, exerting influences over populations or resisting to such influences and generating appropriate knowledges (Asad, 2009: 11). Following Asad's theoretical lens, heterogeneity in the traditional practices of Muslims in different places, times and populations, reflects varying Islamic reasoning that different historic and social conditions can or cannot sustain (Asad, 2009: 23). Hence, these young Mappila women's contestations have opened up the possibilities of representing their social concerns over their familial roles that can stimulate larger questions of belongingness and citizenship (Contractor, 2021: 639), transcending the subjectivity of victimhood of Muslim women in the current geo-political scenario.

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Accounting for *Hijab*: Interrogating the Post-Secular

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ABSTRACT

This article questions the idea of the 'post-secular' as a category for understanding Indian women's experience of religion as an existential practice in neocolonised capitalist patriarchy. The majoritarian state's manipulation of an identitarian regime of signification to use and control women's lives is located in a plural, democratic society that is currently riven by the violent politics of conflicting religious and secular constructions of *hijab*, a head covering worn by Muslim women. From an engaged ideological perspective that seeks radical transformation, feminist struggle includes the right to practice and profess one's faith, against a majoritarian norm that bulldozes difference and imposes its prescriptions as ideal. This article aims to show, from a feminist perspective, the manipulation of significatory practices in India, linking women's 'dress' with progress to essentialise and politicise identity. It questions whether redressal against violence wrought on women by religious fundamentalism can be found in a secular state policy, based on the norm of equality of difference. Feminist practice would actively use the guarantees given to the citizen by a pluralist secular constitution to challenge the violence of interlinked discriminations, necessary for the survival of a plural society in which diversities co-exist.

Keywords: hijab, Indian Constitution, plurality, South Asian feminism, secularism

INTRODUCTION

On 1 January 2022, women students of an Indian government-run PreUniversity college in Udupi, a district in the southern Indian state[1] of Karnataka, were denied entry into the classroom for wearing *hijab*, a shawl or scarf that covers the head. The head of the college asserted that this was done to ensure that everyone in the classroom wore the same uniform. On 3 January 2022, a section of students in Koppa, another district of the same state, wore saffron scarves as a mark of protest against allowing women students of a minority religious community to wear *hijab* in the classroom. Another group of students, of another government-run college in Balagadi village and Mangalore district of the same state, also publicly proclaimed that they had the right to wear saffron scarves inside the classroom if *hijab* was permitted therein.

In the ensuing months, students were shut out of regional schools and colleges for coming with their heads covered. Some were publicly made to remove their head-covering; others were refused admission to examination halls; in some places, this ban was extended to include teachers and examination invigilators. Classmates sometimes donned *hijab* in solidarity with their friends; in other cases, people studying in the same class opposed each other, one group wearing saffron shawls to 'protest' against a head covering worn by the other. On 10 February, in Mandya, a female student in *hijab* was confronted by a gang of men wearing saffron shawls. They shouted slogans that revealed their allegiance to a particular religion and attempted to prevent her from entering her college to fill out her examination form.[2] *Hijab*-wearing women congregated, asserting their right to religious freedom and self-expression in Karnataka and elsewhere. Demonstrations supporting the religious freedom, self-expression, and autonomy of the women students of the minority group were held in other parts of the country.

[1] The word 'state' in lower case is used for a political formation with powers of administration and part of a larger political formation, e.g., the state of Karnataka, part of the Indian union; State in higher case is used for the state as a theoretical category, as it has been used by the scholars quoted in this essay.

[2] 'For Piece of Cloth, Ruining Education': Girl Who Took on Saffron Scarf Group" *NDTV News* 9 February 2022. See also '*hijab* row': The Indian woman who is the face of the fight to wear headscarf" *BBC* 10 February 2022.

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This started a public discussion in India on whether the secularism of the State could ensure a gendered citizen's right to exercise religious freedom against discrimination, in a plural democratic society. The matter arrived in the High Court of Karnataka on 31 January 2022, when the first writ petition was filed by several students from the Udupi Pre University college, pleading that wearing of *hijab* be recognised as a fundamental right under Articles 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution as it is an essential Islamic practice. The matter went before a full bench on 10 February. The High Court upheld the ban on *hijab* imposed by educational institutions on 15 March 2022, holding that *hijab* is not an essential religious practice under Islam and hence is not protected by Article 25 of the Indian constitution.

This article specifically locates the use of *hijab*, a practice signifying a particular religion, Islam, in the democratic state and plural society of India, wherein the Constitution[3] gives every citizen the right to practice, preach, and profess a religion. This is distinct from the practice of compulsory veiling following the dictate of a patriarchal, theocratic State that enforces a particular State religion – in a democratic, secular State, wearing the *hijab* in public may well be the choice of an individual citizen. The State being secular, must uphold that right. Elaborating Hannah Arendt's concept of the 'intersubjectivity of the world' (1951: 475), Sophie Loidolt (2018: 116) says 'all conditions are actualized simply by human existence, i.e. by being a living body, by being involved in the world of objects/tools and by existing in the plural, being human means to dwell, however passively, in all of these meaning-spaces at the same time.' Using this relational conceptual frame, we posit religious freedom, secularism, and women's agency as *related discourses and practices* in the interaction between the State, pluralistic society, and gendered citizens. We ask whether the secular practices mandated for the state by the Indian Constitution protect the right of the individual female citizen to practice her religion in public. Or is the ideal and practice of 'post' secularism required to ensure the freedom and dignity of the citizen in a multireligious plural society stratified by class, caste and gender?

RELIGION AS PERSPECTIVE: LOCATING THE SECULAR AND THE POST-SECULAR

Modernity is characterised by the 'pluralization of diverging universes of discourse…' (Habermas, 1998: 403), in which incompatible and even competing or mutually antagonistic comprehensive doctrines, ultimate values, and worldviews coexist. Habermas (2008a, 2008b) identifies normative protocols based on the juridical view of post-secularism that facilitate religious freedom in public space. He remarks that 'religious communities owe their persisting influence to an obstinate survival of pre-modern modes of thought', thus revealing the location of his theory. Religious pluralism is a structural trait of the modern Western secular world adopted by India and affects our perception of the democratic polity. The pluralism of values and worldviews that mark modernity, undermines the authority of traditional metaphysical and religious worldviews, rendering a unified image of the cosmos unthinkable (Habermas, 2008a). He maintains that in modernising societies, the constitutional state is only able to guarantee its citizens equal freedom of religion under the proviso that they do not live separatist lives, barricading themselves within their religious communities and sealing themselves off from one another. All subcultures, whether religious or not, are expected to free individual members from their embrace so that these citizens can mutually recognise one another in civil society as members of the same political community. Democratic citizens give to themselves those laws thanks to which private citizens enjoy the right to preserve their identity in the context of their own particular culture and worldview. State neutrality is the fundamental tenet of secularisation (Habermas, 2008b). From the point of view of governance, Habermas recommends the expansion of 'the range of values of the dominant political culture. Without the inclusion of minorities in civil society the two complementary processes will not be able to develop hand in hand, namely the opening of the political community to a difference-sensitive inclusion of foreign minority cultures, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the reciprocal opening of these subcultures to a state where they encourage their individual members to participate in the political life at large' (2008b).

Social differentiation leads to pluralisation and the loss of a single hegemonic religion as a socio-political force. Freedom of religion in a post-secular state must be 'granted by the liberal rule of law as a basic right [so that] the fate of religious minorities no longer depends on the benevolence of a more or less tolerant state authority' (Habermas, 2008b). Habermas' theorization of the post-secular is located in the same geopolitical areas, now 'caught in the painful process of transformation into postcolonial immigrant societies... the issue of tolerant coexistence between different religious communities is made harder by the difficult problem of how to integrate immigrant cultures socially'. He thus moves from secular modernity characterised by the private practice of religion and the strict division of the political, from the religious to post-secularism, 'a stance that recovers the existing vitality of religion in human life' such that 'the more blatant dissonances between different religions link up with the challenge of pluralism of ways of life typical of immigrant societies'. Building on Habermas' theories, Stoeckl *et al.* (2012: 4) define the post-secular as 'the co-presence or co-existence within the same public space of religious

[3] Constitution in higher case refers to the Indian Constitution; in the lower case it refers to constitutions in general.

and secular world-views and practices… a post-secular society is not a de-secularised society, but a society where religious and secular views are called to live together, and to live together differently.'

Locating his research across Protestant and Catholic religious discourses in Spanish, Portuguese, and English-speaking cultures across the world, Casanova (1994) questioned Enlightenment models of secularism dividing public and private between religion and politics. The 'deprivatization' of religion re-makes the public sphere, with religious institutions contesting dominant political and social forces. In modern Western societies, post-secular practices and policies indicate that co-existence with plurality is imperative. Despite the 'pressure of globalized labor markets, social integration must succeed even under the undignifying conditions of growing social inequality' (Habermas, 2008b). The practices of daily life in changed socio-economic circumstances lead to conceptualising the post-secular 'not as an overcoming of the secular, but more so as its reform, an improvement based on a critical rethinking of the normative exclusion of religion from the public sphere (Parmaksiz, 2016: 4).

Talal Asad (1993) and Bhargava (2006) interrogate the essentialisation of the religious and secular as absolute binary opposites and the assumption that modernisation means the movement of a society from one end of the religious/secular binary to the other. Mahadevan (2018) points out that Habermas does not account for the existence of multiple religions. There can be no universal model of secularity. The 'secular' and the 'post-secular' are beliefs and practices that do not operate in isolation from each other and are meaningful in the context of political and social arrangements in particular locations; the vital religious life functions within an arrangement of social relations, put in place by conventions through state and social intervention. In Habermas' (2008a, 2008b) view, the post-secular emerges as a political and legally enforced normative for the survival of democracy in a particular type of society, where plurality is born of global capital. He raises as a normative issue the question of how citizens of such a society should understand themselves – 'as members of a post-secular society... what must we reciprocally expect from one another to ensure that in firmly entrenched nation-states, social relations remain civil despite the growth of a plurality of cultures and religious world views?' (2008b).

As Mendieta and Vanantwerpen (2011: 1) say, 'Religion is neither merely private ... nor purely irrational. And the public sphere is neither a realm of straightforward rational deliberation nor a smooth space of unforced assent.' Hence, religious practice in societies resulting from a particular level of integration in the global economic order, cannot be used to typify the practice and discourse of religion in societies differing in these aspects. India did not undergo the Western process of secularisation; it is historically a pluralistic society where religion as belief and way of life has been central to political debates. So, the gendered practices and discourses of religion and citizenship in a pluralistic stratified society like India would differ from a theocratic society regulated by a state religion, such as Pakistan or Afghanistan, as well as from postcolonial Western Europe states, where different iterations of plurality and secularism operate.

Hence, instead of looking at religion as an aspect of identity or viewing the post-secular as an interpretative stance that translates the spiritual, the mystical (Braidotti, 2008), and the ethical (Habermas, 2008a) into a 'post-metaphysical' philosophical perspective replacing religion, we may take a perspectival view of religion itself. '(G)rasped in an intuitive way a perspective constitutes the ground of what is explicitly articulated' (Sayeed, 2021: 207). We become aware of such frames 'only indirectly through their operation of organizing the structure of our experience' (207). Perspectives articulated in language go on to form metaphysical systems. 'Religion is one such dimension of a metaphysical schemata (which) fulfils the function of organizing life and experience into a coherent pattern…a framework whose function is to define a way of looking at human existence and its relationship to the ultimate mystery of the universe' (2021: 203). Thus the religious and the secular cease to be binary opposites. The secular and post-secular become relational structures of experience situated within the religious perspective, rather than absolute categories, independent of time and place.

By investigating the Indian state's mediation between religion and politics in a plural society, we attempt to understand State secularism as a doctrine constructed by the Indian Constitution, distinct from the current iterations of the secular and its revision in the concept of the post-secular.

CONSTITUTIONAL SECULARITY IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

Secularism is a doctrine for the State. It posits the equality of difference in the eyes of the State as a necessary value for the survival of a plural society. Smith (1963) describes Indian secularism as an experiment of the coexistence of religions and the ways of life and world views attributed to them. Thus in the Indian Constitution, the classic description of secularism, that is to say the separation of state from religion, is replaced with neutrality towards all religions, advocating freedom of religion and equal citizenship. Smith (1963) marks this as a residue of the British policy of neutrality towards all religions in addressing the religious plurality of its former Indian empire. The goal of ensuring equality of every citizen before the law in all spheres of life despite cultural differences and social stratification, was a political and ideological imperative facing the makers of the Indian constitution. They attempted to ensure a space within a plural society for the practice of diverse religions. Hence they had to discard

the idea of a rigid division between the public political and the private religious sphere. As Bhargava (2006: 110) says, Indian secularism

> embodies a model of contextual moral reasoning (...), not erect[ing] a strict wall of separation, but propos[ing] instead a 'principled distance' between religion and state'. Moreover, by balancing the claims of individuals and religious communities, [Indian secularism] never intended a bludgeoning privatization of religion.

Bhargava's contention that India has 'always been post-secular' (Bhargava, 2015: 109) however, seems driven by his need to fit India into a label originating in and recognised by the West. The accepted Western view of 'post-secular' outlined above does not describe India either historically or conceptually. If the post-secular condition is a 'conscious contemporality/co-existence of religious and secular worldviews leading to a condition of permanent tension' (Stoeckl, 2011), it is quite distinct from the State secularism outlined by the Indian Constitution which conceptualises secularity as an existential condition in a plural society. The State as a political formation is tasked with ensuring an egalitarian multireligious, multicultural multilingual society through policy and practice.

The Preamble to the Indian Constitution[4] adopted in 1950 stated that all the people of India have the right to 'Justice, social, economic and political', 'Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship' and 'Equality of status and opportunity' (ibid 32). In 1976, the 42nd Amendment to the constitution declared that India was a 'sovereign socialist secular democratic republic'.[5] The Supreme Court of India ruled in a 1994 case that the basic structure of the Constitution rendered the Indian state secular since the formation of the republic, even before the word secular was added to the Preamble of the Constitution:

> In matters of State, religion has no place… The Constitution does not recognize, it does not permit, mixing religion and State power. That is the constitutional injunction. None can say otherwise so long as this Constitution governs this country. (S. R. Bommai vs Union of India 1994)[6]

The Indian Constitution recognises 23 official language-cultures, but no 'state' religion.[7] A number of religions are practised, but the number of adherents of each is by no means equal: minority religious communities are those with fewer practitioners. Regardless of the size of her community, Article 25 gives every citizen the fundamental right to practise, profess and propagate her religion, subject to public order, morality and health.[8] As a doctrine of the State, secularism ensures the just functioning of a democratic polity, upholding the fundamental rights of every citizen, by prohibiting discrimination on grounds of race, class, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15).[9] The Constitution mandates equality before law (Article 14) and enumerates the fundamental rights enjoyed by every citizen (Article 19).[10]

Though secularism of the Indian state means the state's equal tolerance for all religions, the 'reform' of inhuman practices is possible by legislation as well. In 1963, at the time Smith was writing, the state, by legislation, removed untouchability and caste discrimination as practices that the majority community believed had religious sanction. Smith (1963: 233) states that when 'religious practices tend to injure human beings physically or morally, or where social institutions connected to religion violate basic human rights'[11], reforms undertaken by the secular Indian state are incidental results of the state's protection of the public. Hence, though the state is neutral towards all religions, the constitution takes up the duty of protecting the fundamental rights guaranteed to all citizens. Protection of the human rights of citizens remains the highest objective of state policy – any reform of any religion is incidental, a by-product of this basic objective (1963: 234). Practices like 'untouchability' or ban on temple entry for 'lower' castes were discriminatory casteist practices banned by legislation – Constitutional secularity thus allowed the freedom of religious practice of one group to be curtailed to protect the human rights of other groups.

[4] https://lddashboard.legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/COI...pdf. All references are to this edition, cited in the text with page numbers following.

[5] See ff. 1 p. 32.

[6] 2SCR 644 AIR 1994 SC 1918 (1994 3) SCC 1. Judgment available at: http://www.indiacourts.in/S.R.-BOMMAI-Vs.-UNION-OF-INDIA_da9d12c5-6e12-4881-ae4e-b5028a3abd1c. (Accessed 30 January 2023).

[7] Article 356 outlines action that can be taken against a state government of the Indian union which pursues non-secular policies or non-secular course of action acts contrary to the constitutional mandate and renders itself amenable to action; state-owned educational institutions are prohibited from imparting religious instructions, and tax-payers money cannot be used for the promotion of any religion (Article 27). https://lddashboard.legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/COI...pdf, p. 46.

[8] https://lddashboard.legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/COI...pdf, p. 45.

[9] https://lddashboard.legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/COI...pdf, p. 37.

[10] ibid

[11] The British rulers, urged by some progressive, modern-minded Indian subjects, had undertaken legislative reform of religion by ending practices like widow-burning, child-marriage and polygamy. See also Mahadevan (2018).

In this context, the state's ruling that certain items of women's clothing, like the *hijab*, must be discarded, because they threatened equality and modernity by displaying religious identity in a 'secular' public space, is a weaponisation of the idea of secularism. The state cast itself in the role of the champion of secularism, the modern, scientific saviour of women from exploitation by traditional patriarchal norms imposed by a particular religious community (Braidotti, 2014; Sherin, 2021). This implies a polarised view of religious plurality, whereby public practices manifesting the vital religious life of female citizens of a minority community are castigated as communal and anti-secular by a majoritarian state. This is made a legal argument for withholding the fundamental rights of those citizens, unless they stop using that item of clothing in shared public places.

Discussing the judgment of the Karnataka High Court will show that this institution claimed for itself the responsibility of educating women of a minority religious community about their rights as female citizens. It represented hijab as regressive, unscientific and oppressive to women. It was thus manipulating an identitarian regime of signification to use and control women's lives. It appeared to be usurping the political agency of women of a minority community as citizens with the fundamental human right to personal autonomy, education and the practice of religion: the very same rights which a secular, democratic State was supposed to protect.

Replying to the women's plea that they be allowed to attend classes in *hijab*, thus upholding their right to education and to freedom of religious practice, the 2022 Karnataka High Court judgment interpreted State secularism thus:

> India is a secular but not an anti-religious State, for our Constitution guarantees the freedom of conscience and religion. Articles 27and 28 emphasize the secular nature of the State...Indian secularism oscillates between *sarva dharma samabhava*[12] and *dharma nirapekshta*[13] rather than a strict separation of state and religion.[14] (KHC2022 Part V, pt 2, p. 41)

'Secular but not anti-religious' differentiates Indian Constitutional secularity from the secularism that Habermas (2008a) attributes to the modern democratic State. The judiciary used this difference to justify its intervention in the public practice of religion, by barring women wearing *hijab* from educational institutions: hence arose the question of whether secularism means the State's equal tolerance for all religions, or whether it enforces uniformity upon a plural society, through erasure of visible difference. Sherin's (2021: 137) questions: 'Is violent erasure of identities required for maintaining secularism? Is modernity homogenous, and necessarily anti-religious? Is there is no place for reform within religion as an effect of modernity that shows in the outer world?' form the context of this discussion.

PUBLIC PRACTICE AND SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

The 2022 Karnataka High Court judgement opined that wearing *hijab* threatened public order by exposing young impressionable minds to difference. In dealing with a plural society, it decreed uniformity instead:

> …uniforms promote harmony & spirit of common brotherhood transcending religious or sectional diversities. This apart, it is impossible to instill the scientific temperament which our Constitution prescribes as a fundamental duty vide Article 51A(h) into the young minds so long as any propositions such as wearing of hijab or *bhagwa* are regarded as religiously sacrosanct and therefore, not open to question. They inculcate secular values amongst the students in their impressionable & formative years. (KHC2022, Section XIV, pt i, p. 96)

The neutral scientific liberal voice of modernity represented by the paternalistic state claimed to facilitate women's emancipation as a sign of its own secular progressive thinking. It asserted in a court of law that visible identification markers worn by women of a particular religion symbolise collective backwardness, thus essentialising and politicising their identity. The women's insistence on retaining the head-covering was construed as stubborn identification with a (regressive) religion. Rejecting the equality of uniformity in the public sphere as enforced by a paternalist State, these women were seen as communal – but did they infringe the principles of constitutional secularism?

[12] Ascribed to Gandhi, meaning equal respect towards all religions, intended to foster religious pluralism and dialogue.
[13] Without partiality towards any one religion.
[14] Judgment pronounced on March 15, 2022 by three judge bench of the Karnataka High Court, consisting of Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, Justice Krishna S Dixit and Justice J M Khazi, on WP no 3247 of 2022 and others. Available at: https://theprint.in/judiciary/restriction-on-wearing-hijab-reasonable-full-text-of-karnataka-hc-judgement-upholding-ban/874034/. Cited in the text hereafter as KHC2022, with details.

The majoritarian State, when interrogated from a feminist perspective, manifests the xenophobic nature of patriarchy operating through State institutions and discourses against the political agency and fundamental rights of women of a particular religious community. Has secularism then failed as a state policy because of its disruptive relation to liberal feminist struggle for political agency and equality in a plural, democratic society?

In order to answer this question, we must understand the plural nature of social space formed by the relations between different actors belonging to various communities who share this common space. According to Loidolt (2018: 123) plural 'spaces of meaning' result from intersubjective normativity: '[the] actualization of plurality is one form of creating a space where the qualities of plurality can unfold...only they can guarantee that life is not measured and brought under economic, utilitarian and ultimately totalitarian conditions'. Sayeed (2008: n. p.) views plurality as a doctrine for society and secularism as a doctrine strictly for the State – 'the State is an instrument... hence all its virtues must be instrumental. The only function of secularism is to enable and ensure the proper practice of pluralism. It will be a mistake to allow secularism to exceed that brief and become a societal doctrine' (Sayeed, 2008: n. p.). As a doctrine for the State, secularism guarantees and protects the rights enjoyed by any citizen regardless of her religious belief, by creating and guaranteeing an 'intersubjective public space.... in which relations between individuals and communities are structured by the concrete intersubjectivity of active cultural transactions' (Sayeed, 2008: n. p.) where these rights are operational.

Loidolt (2018: 97) suggests that 'visibility can enhance or diminish forms and characters of appearance but do not create them in an essentialist manner.' Difference signified as regressive promotes discord and hence must be countered by 'the harmonious development of the mental and physical faculties of students ... cultivating a scientific and secular outlook through education.' State institutions attempted to impose a discriminatory regime of signification by stifling uniqueness through imposing uniformity and linking difference with threat and danger:

> The object of prescribing uniform will be defeated if there is non-uniformity in the matter of uniforms. Youth is an impressionable period when identity and opinion begin to crystallize. Young students are able to readily grasp from their immediate environment, differentiating lines of race, region, religion, language, caste, place of birth, etc. The aim of the regulation is to create a 'safe space' where such divisive lines should have no place and the ideals of egalitarianism should be readily apparent to all students alike. Adherence to dress code is a mandatory for students. (KHC2022, Section XIV, pt ix, p. 107)

The foundational principle of a plural society is jeopardised by the weaponising of difference, creating a space of meaning wherein difference is signified as a threatening manifestation of otherness. In the 2022 judgement, plural space where difference is allowed to flourish is presented as a dangerous abnormal condition. The insistence on a homogenised safe space shows the relation to difference as one of natural antagonism rather than acceptance or tolerance; the other is always a threat because of her otherness, her difference from some imagined norm which transcends class, caste, religion, and so on. This principle of safety in homogeneity, a divisive doctrine for a plural society, contradicts the principle of Indian Constitutional secularism. The Indian Constitution signifies difference as a natural human attribute, and in the right against discrimination, guarantees the equality of difference.

Opposition to the demand for wearing the *hijab* in the classroom came from liberal civil society as well as the state: the argument offered was that the similarity in uniform imposed by secularism would free women from the shackles of patriarchal control which religious fundamentalism imposed upon them in 'other' theocratic nation-states governed by the same religious community, i.e., practitioners of Islam.[15] Instead of prioritising the fundamental right of every Indian citizen to education, the issue became diverted to a violent debate over whether the *hijab* was an essential religious practice.[16] This linked *hijab* to the on-going debate regarding personal law and 'essential' religious practices in Indian civil society. Discussions of these matters are not exclusive to either Hindus or Muslims, though they are increasingly being used by the Hindu right to foster disaffection among people of different communities in order to obstruct the functioning of plurality as a condition of life.[17]

CONSTITUTIONAL SECULARISM AND 'ESSENTIAL' RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

The Indian state's doctrine of constitutional secularism is the tool to ensure that no religious group imposes its practices upon followers of another – whether majority or minority. The aim of this neutrality is to protect diversity in a plural society by ensuring equal coexistence of all religions. Secularism as a State doctrine can hence be

[15] https://kafila.online/2022/02/06/why-feminists-must-oppose-the-hijab-ban-in-karnataka-colleges/. See also https://www.theindiaforum.in/forum/wearing-hijab-normalising-difference.
[16] https://scroll.in/article/1037405/why-has-the-muslim-personal-law-board-suspended-its-womens-wing.
[17] https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indian-politics-tainted-as-intolerant-towards-hijab-and-religious-freedom-7777222/. That the positions for or against hijab cannot be identified with the religion of the individual, is clear, for instance from https://thewire.in/women/muslim-women-hijab-kashmir.

effectively used to separate religious freedom as *subject to reasonable restrictions*, from fundamental human rights such as the right to personal autonomy and the right to education, both guaranteed by the Indian Constitution *without restriction*. The state upholds religious freedom as long as religious practices do not infringe public order, morality and health. It is unclear how any of these were infringed by women covering their heads in the classroom – yet the court gave this as the reason for ruling that they forfeit the basic human right to education unless they discarded *hijab*.

If the right to religious freedom had been separated from the right to education, the debate could have been resolved by taking recourse to the distinct secularity advocated by the Indian Constitution. Instead, it hinged on defining religious freedom through essential religious practices, which anyway fall outside the purview of legislation by the secular state. The bench ruled that constitutional secularism limited the right to freedom of religious practice by reasonable restrictions. Claiming to implement constitutional secularism, the judiciary upheld what was in its view a 'reasonable restriction' on the clothing of female citizens. *Hijab* was seen by the court as a coercive and regressive practice that was not essential to the religion. The court ruled that it should be discarded in the interests of a healthy scientific secular milieu. Women asserting their personal autonomy through choice of clothing manifesting religious identity, were seen as violating ideals of equality, progress and secularism.

The argument of the plaintiffs against the banning of *hijab* rested on the right to privacy and freedom of conscience and emphatically, on the principle of essential religious practices. This gave the judiciary scope to subject freedom of religion to reasonable restriction and argue that *hijab* did not fall within the scope of essential religious practices. Quoting the reference order passed by the empowered committee on 5 February 2022, the three-judge bench of the High Court, agreed that 'Whether wearing of hijab is a part of essential religious practice in Islam, is the jugular vein of all these matters...' (KHC2022, p. 16). It argued 'inasmuch as the practice robs away the individual choice of Muslim women; the so called religious practice if claimed as a matter of right, the claimant has to prima facie satisfy its constitutional morality' (KHC2022, Part XVII, pt ii, p. 124).

The petitioners emphasised education and the right to personal autonomy as fundamental rights but did not separate these from the right to religious freedom, which as we have seen, may be subject to restrictions in order to protect the fundamental rights of all citizens. The educational institutions and the court appeared as champions of secular, scientific modernity against the patriarchal conservatism of minority religions that oppressed women. Thus, the judgement claimed that *hijab* violated 'the individual choice of Muslim women'. This was substantiated by arguing further that:

> It hardly needs to be mentioned that ours is a country of plural cultures, religions & languages. Being a secular State, it does not identify itself with any religion as its own. Every citizen has the right to profess & practise any faith of choice, is true. However, such a right not being absolute is susceptible to reasonable restrictions as provided by the Constitution of India.[18]

Invoking the question of essential religious practices, it castigated the minority religious community of violating secularism and painted itself as upholding the same. Citing the restrictions in Article 25 clause 2, the bench stated: 'Whichever be the religion, whatever is stated in the scriptures, does not become per se mandatory in a wholesale way' and reminded us that they had used the same argument 'in Shayara Bano, [to] proscribe(..) the 1,400-year-old pernicious practice of triple talaq in Islam' (KHC 2022 Part IX, p. 73).

The uniform was upheld as a necessary pre-condition to education. The plea from women students to cover their heads in the classroom was likened to a 'pernicious' religious practice, against the interests of public order, health, and *suvyavasthe*[19], which, the court claimed, had secularism at its core. Trapped within the ambit of essential religious practices and reasonable restrictions, the debate hinged on religious freedom vs secularism as essential ideas rather than located relational practices. The fact that it was unconstitutional to deprive women of the right to education because they proclaimed their religious identity in public through choice of clothes, escaped attention.

As the guardian of a secular constitution, the judiciary went beyond its scope by airing its views on the 'pernicious practices' of a religion rather than reflecting upon the cognisable deeds of practitioners and interpreters of that religion. Constitutional expert Mustafa (2017) questions the court's authority to give judgements based on the essential practices of any given religion – he argues that the courts have no competence to decide what is essential to any religion. The courts are not clergy. They have no jurisdiction in religious law; they are educated to rule on civil and criminal procedures, not on religious practices, essential or otherwise. Indian Constitutional secularism acknowledges the plurality of Indian society by upholding the equality of difference through the state's neutrality towards all religions, without structuring difference into value-loaded hierarchies.

[18] Quoted from the Government Order on WP NO. 2347/2022 and connected matters, pt 8, p. 5 (https://karnatakajudiciary.kar.nic.in/judgements/WP_2347_2022.pdf).

[19] Literally, proper or good arrangements. Mentioned in the judgement as not akin to public order, but close to it.

RIGHTS IN SECULAR DEMOCRACY: EDUCATION 'VERSUS' RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

The educational institutions claimed that 'Permitting the petitioner - students to wear *hijab* (headscarf) would offend the tenets of human dignity' (KHC2022, Section XVII, pt ix, p. 35-6). The fundamental right to equality was made contingent on uniformity, making personal attire a basic threat to secular society.

> Prescription of school dress code to the exclusion of *hijab*, *bhagwa* (saffron), or any other apparel symbolic of religion can be a step forward in the direction of emancipation and more particularly, to the access to education. It hardly needs to be stated that this does not rob off the autonomy of women or their right to education, in as much as they can wear any apparel of their choice outside the classroom". (KHC2022, Section XVII, pt ii, p. 124)

The court expressed its neutrality by adding 'saffron' to '*hijab*' in the category 'apparel symbolic of religion', and made education and personal autonomy, contingent upon this neutrality. Plurality thus emerged not as a condition of social being, but as an aberration to be managed. The Government Order dated 05.02.2022 justified its stand by quoting a 1983 Act, which provides for

> cultivating a scientific and secular outlook through education (….) These Sections and the Rule intend to give effect to constitutional secularism and to the ideals that animate Articles 39(f) & 51(A). The children have to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of 'freedom and dignity'; the school has to promote the spirit of harmony and common brotherhood transcending religious, linguistic, regional or sectional diversities. The practices derogatory to the dignity of women have to be renounced. This will help in nation building. (KHC2022 Contentions of Respondents, pt v, p. 33-4)

This call for transcendence of diversity, replaced the ideal of plurality with equality manifesting in uniformity. It implied that secularism could only be upheld in a uniform homogenous society, not in a pluralistic, heterogenous one. Both secularity and personal autonomy were instrumentalised, forcing women citizens of a religious minority to choose between the right to education and the right to practise their religion.

It is signification rather than reason that deems it 'reasonable' to restrict women from covering their heads in a classroom. Banning an item of women's clothing signifies control – it is not synonymous with releasing women from the clutches of religious bigotry. By the conventions of majoritarian patriarchy, it is scientific to force women to forego education because they wish to follow a religious practice by covering their head. Appearing for one of the plaintiffs, Sanjay Hegde urged that,

> … the expulsion of the students for violating the dress code would be grossly disproportionate to the alleged infraction of the dress code. Nobody should pollute the congenial atmosphere required for pursuing education...the institutions should not insist upon the removal of *hijab* as a condition for gaining entry to the classrooms.[20]

This 'congenial atmosphere' was impossible if the court's interpretation was to be followed. Its contention was that the secular doctrine of the state does not allow the woman of a minority religious community to educate herself if she wishes to wear, in the classroom, clothes signifying her religion. The February 10, 2022, reference order stated: 'Ours being a civilized society, no person in the name of religion, culture or the like can be permitted to do any act that disturbs public peace & tranquillity' (G.O. 2022 pt. 9, p. 6). It is unclear how the wearing of *hijab* threatened public order, peace and tranquillity. The court expressed fear that if students were given the freedom to choose their attire in the school, 'it would only breed indiscipline that may eventually degenerate into chaos in the campus and later in the society at large' (KHC 2022, Section XIV, pt viii, p. 105). 'Endless agitations and closure of educational institutions' as predicted by the G.O. 2022 (pt. 9, p. 6) followed the unrest on campus and outside created by the protesters who threatened women wearing the *hijab*. Peace and tranquillity were disturbed by the failure of the state institutions to control the protestors and ensure the rights and safety of citizens. The majoritarian state's imposition of a uniform as a reasonable restriction on the practice of religion in public places, seemed like systemic discrimination against women of a minority religion, an obstruction to their education. By erasing difference in the name of uniformity, safety in school and scientific temper, by not enforcing the equality of difference as a secular policy, the state institutions compromised the citizen female's fundamental right to education.

[20] Quoted from the Government Order dated 10.2.22 on WP NO. 2347/2022 and connected matters, p. 2, p. 3 (https://karnatakajudiciary.kar.nic.in/judgements/WP_2347_2022.pdf). Henceforth referred to in the text as G.O. with date and page numbers following.

History documents the fact that the *hijab* as a practice had made possible the education of many women who would have been deprived of that benefit had they not followed this practice.[21] Women's empowerment through education and their professional success was achieved by using *hijab* to their advantage in negotiating the power of patriarchy (Akhtar and Bhowmick, 1998; Chanda and Bagchi, 2014; Sherin, 2021). State institutions and liberal critics also ignored the fact that wearing *hijab* could be a choice – it gave a woman freedom to operate in the public sphere without being obstructed by opinions of the conservative and patriarchal sections her own society that frowned upon her very presence in public. The possibility that a woman might choose to cover her head because she wished to acknowledge her adherence to her faith, through her own agency and choice, were also ignored. The judicial and educational institutions assumed that the absolutist majoritarian view constructing the *hijab* as contrary to freedom, modernity and progress, was sacrosanct and uniformly beneficial to all women regardless of faith or circumstances. Thrusting these norms upon women of a minority community was construed as combating communalism, advocating secularism and rescuing women of a religious community from the oppression of their own religion. Feminist opposition to patriarchy as an institution that usurped women's human rights, was used by the majoritarian state to castigate and demonise a minority religious community for usurping the rights of 'their' women. Arguments in favour of rejecting the *hijab* echoed the interim court order[22] which forbade the use of *hijab* in classrooms, espousing the cause of modernity and castigating the backwardness of the minority religious community, signified by this practice.

The court insisted that the unshakeable discipline of uniformity alone could fulfil the requirements of progress and secularism. For the judiciary and the institutions upholding majoritarian values, women of a minority community were a threat to the secular and modern fabric of India, their oppression by fundamentalist religious patriarchy made evident in their use of *hijab*.

MAJORITARIAN CHALLENGE TO CONSTITUTIONAL SECULARIM: FEMINIST PRAXIS AS TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICS

Striking down the plea that women have the personal autonomy to choose their own clothing, the court said:

> … such a proposal if accepted, the school uniform ceases to be uniform. There shall be two categories of girl students viz., those who wear the uniform with hijab and those who do it without. That would establish a sense of 'social-separateness', which is not desirable. It also offends the feel of uniformity which the dress-code is designed to bring about amongst all the students regardless of their religion and faiths". (KHC2022, Part IX, pt ii, p. 106)

The secular space of meaning constructed by the judgement includes the paternalistic enforcement of uniformity that signifies progressive scientific modernity. The bench claimed that the judiciary had ensured progress and emancipation of (Muslim) women through laws put in place to ban triple *talaq* and to uphold divorcees' right to maintenance (KHC2022 Part IX, p. 36). The banning of hijab in the classroom it was claimed, was 'another step in the right direction'.

The 2022 Karnataka High Court order interpreted equality as synonymous with uniformity, thus opposing plurality and difference. The judgement held that the petitioners' argument that 'the goal of education is to promote plurality, not promote uniformity or homogeneity, but heterogeneity' was 'thoroughly misconceived' (KHC 2022 section XIII, pt iii, p. 57). So they rejected the plaintiffs' submission that 'prescription of student uniform offends the constitutional spirit'. The judiciary's position contradicts the distinct secularity of the Indian Constitution (Bhargava, 2006). Unlike theocratic nations ruled by a religious patriarchy or those with official state religions, the secular democratic Indian state has no official religion, and cannot privilege the practices of one religious community over another. Since its aim is to ensure the equality before law of all citizens, it cannot allow the practices of any religion to obstruct the rights of any citizen. The judiciary's interpretation thus replaced constitutional secularism with an absolutist majoritarian and paternalistic iteration of both religion and secularism.

For a secular democracy to function in a plural society, citizens *must be equal in the eyes of the state because they are different from each other*. The constitution decrees state secularism committed to protecting the equality of difference, rather than creating hierarchies between the differences of belief and practice which form the basis of each citizen's personal autonomy. The debate around *hijab* occurs within a patriarchally structured polity, judiciary and society. A patriarchal regime of signification instrumentalises religious and gender identity through clothing. The feminist

[21] 'Impact of *Hijab* Ban on Educational Institutions', People's Union of Civil Liberties, Karnataka September 2022.
[22] WP NO. 2347/2022 Connected Cases: WP NO. 2146/2022, WP NO. 2880/2022, WP NO.3038/2022 and WP NO.3044/2022. https://karnatakajudiciary.kar.nic.in/judgements/WP_2347_2022.pdf.

interrogation of majoritarian paternalistic state practices would raise the question: can a secular State enforce the uniformity of practice in a society where plurality is constitutionally upheld by the equality of citizens regardless of caste, creed or gender?

Sherin (2021: 26-7) takes Indian feminism to task for failing to 'incorporate the multiple points of identification and inclusive/exclusive frameworks that apply to different citizens', tracing it to the mistake of 'addressing women in essentialist terms'. She states that gender is not a secular formation in India: not only does the state take on a paternalistic attitude of deciding what is good for women citizens, but also, acts as the agent of their freedom: 'Instead of viewing religion as a viable tool of female agency, the secularist model of women's emancipation views it as a monolithic tool of oppression' (Sherin, 2021: 26-7). The state 'decides the moral code' (Sherin, 2021: 26-7).

Braidotti's (2008) critique of secularism interrogates the humanist subject at the centre of liberal feminist analysis, 'including the subject of feminism itself' (Sherin, 2021: 16). Rethinking subjectivity as flows of inter-relationality, Braidotti (2008) asserts that feminism has moved on from the strategy of classical transcendence, towards feminist anti-foundationalism. Her view that the 'subject's ethical core is not moral intentionality but rather effects of relations of power and the potential for empowerment through her effect upon the world' (2008 :15) is in agreement with our location of secularism and postsecularism in the intersubjective realm as structures of experience with religion as a frame of reference. However, Braidotti (2008) too does not take account of the contradictions between 'collective national consciousness and moral heterogeneity' (Sherin, 2021: 27) which emerge from the majoritarian state's manipulation of the regime of signification to deny women of a particular religious community their constitutionally guaranteed rights. Sherin (2021: 24) observes that 'feminist rights and individual autonomies cannot be juxtaposed against fraught relations that secular citizenships have with minority identities'. Thus, the existing iterations of the postsecular in western European Marxist and feminist discourses cannot properly address the issue of religious freedom in a pluralistic society.

Sherin's (2021: 24) submission that challenging secular nationalism does not mean giving in to religious fundamentalism, behoves us to think of ways to interrogate patriarchal 'spaces of meaning' and signification manifested in religious fundamentalism as well as in the progressive opposition to it, whether from a liberal or a majoritarian perspective. In the final section, we ask whether social transformation can result from the implementation of constitutional secularism in order to fulfil the demands for women's political agency, equality and freedom.

ADVOCATING *HIJAB* – RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, SECULAR STATE AND GENDERED RIGHTS

Contextualising the roles of men and women in the gender organisation of a society and locating the discourse and practice of religion in a plural space, this article has thus far investigated the flawed operation and manipulation of constitutional secularism by the majoritarian state. Describing humanity as a 'paradoxical plurality of unique beings', Arendt (1958: 176) shows that, plurality belongs to the human condition which takes man (*sic*) as acting/being. Equality and distinction are aspects of the perspective through which alterity is viewed in society. They constitute the basic condition of action and speech, the modes in which humans appear to each other not as physical objects, but *qua* human.

The majoritarian state's isolationist idea of safety espoused by the state institutions, albeit located in a plural society, hold the ideal of plurality itself as the cause of constant imminent danger, as if difference is an abnormal condition. This perspective construes difference as a hierarchy of deviations from some preset imagined norm imposed by state-decreed homogenisation. Secularism as a doctrine of State implies that religion and the functions of the State cannot be mixed – the State has no role to play in religious affairs but is the main actor in ensuring human rights and freedoms. In a secular State, practices decreed or proscribed by any single religion cannot be allowed sovereign status over all aspects of human rights and freedoms of every citizen. But, as Mahmood (2008: 11) says, 'mere legal equality (…) in these liberal societies (…) is often contradicted by an uneven political and economic status'. So, the practice of secularism by the state becomes crucial for the functioning of a democratic polity in a plural society. The challenge then lies in the negotiation of difference and the ethics of engagement between different communities in a stratified plural society.

Regarding the political formation constructed by the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar held the view that in a democracy, no way of living could be prescribed as best for the future. He noted that colonised India's exposure to modern ideals neglected both equality and solidarity (Ambedkar, 2002: 189); decolonised India had to redefine them in its own way through syncretic social practice. Hostile relations between different communities which constitute a plural culture may threaten the very existence of a plural society: hence not normative prescriptions of

dialogue or tolerance (Habermas, 2008b), but practices following the principles of fraternity are advocated by the Indian Constitution.[23]

But, as the case discussed shows, the state machinery's religious majoritarianism and identitarianism instrumentalised the clause of reasonable restrictions on religious practices in public to deprive female citizens of their fundamental rights. In a secular polity where the right to education and the right to freedom of religion are both fundamental rights, an identitarian regime of signification makes secularism itself the weapon to deprive women of a particular community of the right to education and personal autonomy. The plaintiffs wished to identify as belonging to a particular religious community and appealed to the secular state to allow them to do so. The state institutions refused, imposing on them a progressive, modern scientific homogenous identity, thus enforcing un unconstitutional interpretation of secularism.

Arendt's (1958) idea of plurality as the dynamic of political power and Braidotti's (2008) idea of the relational subject can be used to address Sherin's (2021) complaint that Indian feminism and the secular Indian state essentialise women, by not accounting for their diverse religious experiences or political citizenship. Feminist praxis espouses an anti-foundational concept of the self as processual. Identity is neither prefixed nor absolute; gendering is a process of the becoming of a human self in relation to the world. The argument for human rights of citizens is founded on the principle of plurality, that is to say, equality of difference, rather than on categorical identities, gendered and religious.

Though his view of the ideal state was based on liberty, equality and fraternity, Ambedkar (2010) accepted at the outset, that equality is a fiction. His thinking on the equality of incommensurables (Kumar, 2013) has a stated practical, political motive in a democratic plural society:

> if it is good for the social body to get the most out of its members, it can get the most out of them only by making them equal as far as possible at the very start of the race...
>
> …treat all men alike, not because they are alike but because classification and assortment is impossible. The doctrine of equality is glaringly fallacious but, taking all in all, it is the only way a statesman can proceed in politics—which is a severely practical affair and which demands a severely practical test.' (Ambedkar, 1990: 24)

Invoking the need for mobility and contact between different parts of society, he calls for social endosmosis, or 'fraternity (...) only another name for democracy [which] is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards one's fellow men' (Ambedkar, 1990: 24-5).

Constitutional secularity bars the state from legislating on religious practices; the Constitution also gives every citizen the right against discrimination on the grounds of race, class, caste, gender and place of birth. Hence, constitutionally, the right to education of a female citizen from a minority community cannot be compromised due to the difference in clothing that identifies her religion. Operating the pluralist principle of the equality of difference, the plaintiffs argued that the court should guarantee their right against discrimination.[24]

Linking plurality with feminism is a political practice (Sherin, 2021) which forces a question to essentialism and squarely raises the issue of difference: Whose rights do human rights ensure? From the perspectival view of religion as an organising frame for experience, the secular and the postsecular are located practices framing our relations with difference in a multireligious, multicultural plural society. How do they inform our understanding and engagement with difference as existential reality rather than as norms and protocols rooted in abstract categories or chronologies? Loidolt (2018: 154) notes that 'the ontological fact of plurality demands a realisation in a special and particular form, and not just in any form of collectivity as such. Plurality is a located, actual transactional state attained through and making possible transformative practice.' The actual location, the social space itself must be refigured as plural and intersubjective, rather than as identitarian, totalitarian or transcendental. Ethical claims are implicit in the experience of actualised plurality, which for Arendt (1958), is a politically informed and ethically sensitive elaboration of Being-with-another. Instead of Habermas' (2008a) normative prescriptions, then, the relational framework opens the possibility of transformation: 'in everyday encounters with difference, a phenomenology of plurality does not aim at a neutral description of all possible forms of collectivity, but focuses instead on the fact that being plural is something that must explicitly be realised and defended against all other forms of collectivity that swallow individuality' (Loidolt, 2018: 155).

[23] Aishwary Kumar (2019), Cabrera (2021) and Christine Keating (2021) all point to the replacement of 'fraternity' with '*maitri*', friendship, in Ambedkar's later writings.

[24] The court justified its refusal to grant relief by interpreting constitutional secularity as transcending diversity rather than upholding plurality.

Conscious of plurality as an existential condition in Indian society, the makers of the Indian Constitution made the Indian state a secular formation by enumerating secular principles of State practice even before the word was added to the Preamble. To this end, the Constitution upholds social and religious plurality through the principle of equality before law and the right against discrimination which supersedes all sociocultural stratifications and divisions. As a doctrine for society, pluralism requires the State's neutrality towards and equal tolerance of all religions, regardless of the size of the community they comprise. The challenge posed by majoritarian patriarchy to constitutional secularism, may be met by feminist politics aiming for pluralisation of the hegemonic majoritarian socio-political space through principles of gender justice and egalitarianism. In such a space of meaning, women citizens of a religious community can exercise their right to personal autonomy and education, without being signified as regressive and anti-secular in choosing to wear the *hijab*.

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'I am on Guard': The Making of Race, Gender and Affect in Human-Dog Relations in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article will analyse human-dog relations in the post-apartheid White South African suburbs to show how they operate in the production of racial and gendered difference. The analysis draws primarily on my experience as a White woman growing up in the suburbs and my work as a dog walker, as well as interviews with the owners of two dog day-cares in Cape Town. Given this locatedness, the article tracks the affective and biopolitical effects of human-dog relationality to consider how they work in the socio-spatial structuring of the White suburbs. To begin, it uses Donna Haraway's understanding of relation across difference in interspecies 'becoming', augmenting this with Harlan Weaver and Sarah Ahmed's respective theorisations of the work of affect between bodies. It outlines White discourses of fear around crime and security and describes the spatial organisation of the suburb, which informs dogs' socialisation/enculturation with White people, and their hostility towards Black people. As such, suburban dogs become part of a racialised species kinship, in which they are cast as White people's companions, while protecting private property and White bodies. Drawing on Ahmed and Fanon's work on phenomenology, the paper considers how dogs reproduce the historico-racial schema so that Black subjects are made to feel vulnerable in White space. Finally, it looks at gendered racialised narratives of threat and the construction of White women as objects of protection in relation to the imagined threat of Black men. By analysing these modes of relation, this paper hopes to show how interconnectedness yields an ethical responsibility towards others, across differences of race and species.

Keywords: race, affect, animals, decolonisation, South Africa, whiteness studies

INTRODUCTION

I am what people, in the White Western culture, call 'a dog person': seeing a dog, I experience a strange compulsion to be close to it, to meet its eyes and have it press its nose or body into my hand. This feeling is neither exclusive to Whiteness nor Westernness, but is certainly facilitated by my position as a White person in post-apartheid South Africa. My family's first dog, Bijoux, a big black Bouvier, was considered, according to the logics of our racialised interspecies kinship, part of our family. Bijoux was a family dog, but also a guard dog. She let us pull on her fur and lie with our heads on her belly, but she had a big, deep bark and we had a sign on the gate saying 'Beware of the Dog'. This sign could be seen to address anyone, but it forms part of a long history in South Africa of dogs being used to police Black subjects:[1] by White settlers to protect their property, and by the apartheid police to quell protests. Historian Sandra Swart observes that the national psyche is haunted by this history: 'Nothing remains as strong in the public's imagination as the snarling German shepherd straining at the end of the apartheid policeman's leash' (Swart, 2022). The enduring violence of this is evident in a video that was leaked in 2000, of an event two years prior: in January 1998, five members of South African Police Services' (SAPS) Benoni Dog Unit recorded themselves setting police dogs on Gabriel Pedro Timane, Alexandre Pedro Timane, and Sylvester Cose, three Black undocumented migrants from Mozambique. The detainees were brought to an abandoned field near the mine dumps, where the policemen initiated a 'Dog exercise': using two old police dogs

[1] I capitalise Black and White, not to reify them as racial categories, but to acknowledge their meaning beyond descriptors, speaking to a mode of being, an identity and a culture, but also (crucially) to historical and ongoing structures of power or subjugation, which shape how that being is experienced. When quoting I have left the author's original orthography.

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to illustrate to younger dogs how to attack a 'human target' (SABC News, 2014). Cheered on by the policemen, the dogs chased down and mauled one man at a time. The men are heard screaming and pleading for the police to call the dogs off. The gratuitous brutality of this event reflects how dogs have been used by Whiteness for the control and violation of Black subjects.

The above vignette illustrates the kinds of intimacies and separations that characterize dog-human relations. Literary and postcolonial theorist Sakiru Adebayo reflects that in South Africa, both police and citizens' dogs become socialised into anti-Black racism. As such, 'most ordinary Black South Africans (especially men) are exceedingly cynophobic' (Adebayo, 2021). In my work as a professional dog walker walking with dogs on the mountain or in the suburbs, I have witnessed Black people often responding to dogs with wariness or fear. Moreover, while their behaviours vary, dogs seem far more likely to bark or become aggressive if the person passing them is Black. A dog's presence thus significantly affects the parameters of movement and interaction between people, tipping power further in favour of hegemonic Whiteness. I come to this study from a position of trouble, from my love for dogs and the empathetic fracturing I feel when a being I have such positive relation and affect with and which brings me such joy, responds aggressively to another person, inspiring equally negative affect in them. I want to consider how these affective exchanges – of interspecies love, arising from a 'familial' closeness and of interspecies fear arising from a violent enforcing of otherness – function in the reproduction of systems of power and separation. Finally, if we accept that all human-dog relations are shaped by specific socio-cultural forces, then how and to what effect are certain forms of relation encouraged and legitimated – that is, established as 'right' or 'normal' – in the South African context?

First, it is necessary for me to position myself in relation to this research, as one who is implicated in the dynamics about which I write. I am struck by a duality: I wish to expose the production of power and oppression, but risk reproducing this by theorising from a place of Whiteness. Following decoloniality's emphasis on the role of subjectivity in knowledge production (Snyman, 2015: 269), I aim to use my position within Whiteness to consider its extent and workings. I draw on Gerrie Snyman's advocation of a hermeneutics of vulnerability as part of a decolonial approach to knowledge production. Here, hermeneutics refers not to modes of interpretation, but to 'the problem of understanding itself' (2015: 279). This means acknowledging the limits of what I can understand. I am aware that there are innumerable discourses around dogs that I have no access to, by virtue of my position, my inability to speak any indigenous language and social segregation. The picture I provide here is one, primarily, of race and species *within* hegemonic Whiteness.

In this article, I map out how human relations and human-dog relations are figured in constellations of physical and symbolic closeness or separation and how this results from and reproduces the biopolitical ordering of things. I outline White discourses of fear around crime and security and describe the spatial organisation of the suburb, which informs dogs' socialisation with White people and hostility towards Black people. Focusing on the White suburban street and the mountain or forest path, I analyse the affective exchanges between humans and dogs in these 'public' spaces. In these relations across race and species, I consider how affect moves between or arises from an encounter between bodies, yielding feelings of love and fear; security and threat. I track the work of racialisation here through movements that extend beyond the boundaries of human bodies to reproduce the 'strange(r)ness' of Black people in relation to normative Whiteness, while at the same time reinforcing the place of White women as objects of protection.

To structure this argument, I use Donna Haraway's understanding of relation across difference in interspecies 'becoming', augmenting this with Harlan Weaver's and Sarah Ahmed's respective theorisations of the work of affect between bodies. The auto-ethnographic elements of this paper are not only based on my growing up with dogs in the White suburbs, but also my adult work as a dog walker in similar spaces. I also draw on interviews that I conducted in March 2022 with two female owners of dog day-cares in Cape Town. The interviews were part of a project entitled 'Dog Economies: Race, Gender and Commodified Care in Human-Dog Relations in South Africa', which looked at social reproductive care in the dog day care industry in Cape Town. The interview questions focused on the interviewees' understandings of human-dog relationships – between dogs and the company's employees; dogs and owners; and dogs and other people they encountered on the daily walks – and how these relationships were differently mediated by race and class. The interviews were semi structured and each one-hour long. Both of the interlocutors are personal contacts of mine and have chosen pseudonyms: V and Mila. Mila is White and V is Indian. Mila estimates that 90% of her clients are White; V says 75% of hers. The clients are also upper class, given that daycare is a 'luxury service' (V, 2022). As such, the interviews offer insight into dogs' behaviour in certain contexts, but are also reflective of a particular cultural paradigm that I wish to interrogate.

To understand the racialised dynamics of dog-human relations, it is also necessary to understand the racial structure of South Africa. Apartheid legislation classified the population into four racial groups: White, Indian, Coloured and Black. This allowed not just for separation but for hierarchical organisation and the designation of different rights, spaces and resources. The spatial segregation of the notorious Group Areas Act of 1950 saw the eviction and forced relocation of people of colour to poorly resourced areas on the outskirts of cities. Black

people's presence in White space was permitted only for work: the Influx Control Act denied Black people political citizenship and required them to carry an identifying 'pass book' – called colloquially, subversively a *dompas* ('stupid pass' in Afrikaans) – which would be used to justify their presence (More, 2016: 130). Black people became workers, legitimised by White employers and Black townships 'serviced' the White city (More, 2016: 131). In this, the colonial imaging of Blackness as inferior was materially inscribed: race, space and class became inextricable. This exploitative labour system still exists today. Every day, taxis, buses and trains bring Black people to Cape Town's White neighbourhoods, to clean the houses and work in the gardens. The economic system enforces Black presence in White space, but with the understanding of Blackness as a foreign presence. It is this specifically racialised social-spatial context that this analysis will address.

A FRAMEWORK FOR DOG-HUMAN RELATIONS

In the *Companion Species Manifesto* (2008), Donna Haraway argues that dogs have 'co-evolved' with humans, proclaiming them to be 'constitutively companion species' (2008: 2). Haraway emphasises the fundamentally relational nature of companion species, who, evoking Deleuze, 'become-with' one another, 'mak[ing] each other up, in the flesh' (2008: 2-3). She describes this as an ever-shifting 'ontological choreography' (2008: 12) – an ongoing embodied interconnectedness which evades human fantasies of sovereign control and makes space for animal agency in mutual becoming. She laments people humanising their dogs, overlooking the dogs' agency and 'otherness', saying we should see dog-human relations as 'otherness-in-connection' (2008: 45). This is her foundation for ethics; she writes: 'All ethical relating, within or between species, is knit from the silk-strong thread of ongoing alertness to otherness-in-relating' (Haraway, 2008: 50). Her use of the term 'otherness' raises, for me, the question of how race and notions of otherness figure the becoming of human-dog relationships. However, I find an analysis of race absent from Haraway's work on dogs. While she says that dog-human relations are 'relentlessly historically specific' (Haraway, 2008: 16) her understanding of specific-difference-in-relation in *Companion Species* is insufficient. Indeed, in South Africa, human-dog relationality cannot be understood outside of race relations and the biopolitical history of race and species[2].

Harlan Weaver extends Haraway's work to conceptualise the biosocial nature of interspecies relation – that is, the interdependence of material bodies and the systems that shape them and ascribe them meaning – to illustrate how dogs can become 'racialized', through contacts and connectivities with humans, within racialised systems (2021: 13). Weaver uses the term *sensibility* to describe the embodied 'ways of knowing that are shared by and move between humans and non-human animals' (2021: 18). He emphasises, however, that sensibility must be extended into a larger *awareness* of the structural violences and biopolitics of interspecies intimacy.

I find Haraway's perhaps ambiguous use of the term 'otherness' useful when considering the perception and agency of dogs in racialised interspecies becomings. Indeed, it would be too simplistic to understand dogs merely as 'tools' of Whiteness. Max Hantel reflects that animals do not only respond to their conditions 'through genetic pre-prescription but through cognitive processes we cannot fully apprehend' (2018: 75) and offers the example of the elephants 'mourning' a member of their herd. Though we 'cannot claim to know what this *means* for the elephants', Hantel observes that the elephants respond to death with a collective practice that *signifies* something (2018: 75). In line with this, Weaver argues that dogs engage in processes of meaning-making that involve 'odors, movements, "body language" [and] bodily sensings' (2021: 44) as carriers of significance which shape their world. Canine scientist Gregory Berns observes that the differences between human brains and dog brains (size and olfactory capacity, amongst others) mean that even though dogs have certain cognitive and emotional skills in common with humans, their brains may instantiate them differently (2022: 173). What, then, does it mean for dogs to be made 'racist', as Adebayo (2021) contends? Rather than seeing dogs as 'nature' co-opted into 'culture', we might consider how their processes of meaning-making and relationality inform human culture, without their 'meaning' correlating to ours.

This opens a view on affective relations between species. For Weaver, 'affect' describes 'how feelings can travel between beings and shape bodily movements prior to their concretization in the language of emotions' (2021: 14). Thus, I suggest that dogs are sensitive to affects, rather than emotions. Here, I echo Hantel's reminder of the opacity of animals' experience to us and my limited understanding of animal neuroscience. However, I feel I have experienced what Haraway describes between herself and her dog – a connection and mutual inscription of bodies signifying 'that nasty developmental affliction called love' (2008: 3). While 'love' here is equivocal, a dog and owner can form a biological bond, mediated by the hormone oxytocin, just by looking at each other (Nagasawa *et al.*, 2015). In studies of canine brains under an fMRI scanner, Berns and others found that 86% of the participant dogs showed equal or greater caudate activation (which relates to cognition, memory and emotions) to expectation of human praise than to expectation of food reward (Cook *et al.*, 2016). They also found a 'stable neurobehavioral

[2] See for example Lance van Sittert and Sandra Swart's collection *Canis Africanis: A dog history of Southern Africa* (2008).

preference for owner over high value food' (Cook *et al.*, 2016). Berns believes that such 'positive affective states are qualitatively similar to those experienced by humans' (2022: 175).

Further, dogs and humans are subject to emotional contagion: 'an automatic response to perceiving another's emotional state through which a similar emotional response is triggered in the observer' (Sümegi *et al.*, 2014). This occurs in an affiliative relationship, say between family of the same species, but also in interspecies relationships, as in the case of co-habiting humans and dogs. In another fMRI study, dogs' brains indicated neural machinery dedicated to human facial recognition (previously thought to be active only in primates), explaining the sensitivity of dogs to human social cues (Dilks *et al.*, 2015). Multiple studies reveal that dogs can discern emotional cues expressed through body postures, facial expressions, vocalisations and odours and that these cues can influence their behaviour (Albuquerque and Resende, 2023). For example, in a study of the transmission of emotional information via chemosignals, findings suggest that dogs can smell the fear of their owners: in response to the owner's body odour, the dog's heart rate and stress behaviours increased. The authors conclude that 'interspecies emotional communication is facilitated by chemosignals' (D'Aniello *et al.*, 2017). The results of another study suggested that the owner's state of anxiety was contagious to their dog: the emotional contagion was evidenced in the measured changes in the dog's memory performance (Sümegi *et al.*, 2014). I outline this to show how interspecies becoming involves the consciousness, affect and agency of animals.

I contend that affect is key to dog-human relation. Weaver describes relating as the ongoing process of 'negotiating togetherness', quoting Rosi Braidotti's phrasing of it as 'an affect that flows' (2021: 50). My love for dogs appears in a broader cultural narrative of dogs as family members and indeed, this was how I came to experience my relationship with Bijoux. Yet my sense of self was formed not only through the enaction of cultural narrative – of White humanness in loving relation to my companion species – but in this affective interspecies relationship. Crucially, this positive attachment was met and returned, in some form, to become a relation. Affect involves an exchange of feeling between bodies and changes the choreography of bodily disposition. Much of Weaver's training with his rescue dog involves attempting to 'read' her body language, but when they are walking together he *feels* her fear and tension at the prospect of fearful encounters, such that they become his own (2021: 31). He describes this as 'a bodily travel of feeling' which 'disrupts the many divisions between us, including that mediated by the leash' (Weaver, 2021: 38).

Indeed, affect is central to 'the joint building of a sense of togetherness, a "we", and the kind of beings we become' (Weaver, 2021: 50). However, I suggest that affect in relational identification does not only generate a sense of togetherness, but also separation: to extend this, I draw on Sara Ahmed's work 'Affective Economies' (2004). Ahmed suggests that we need to think beyond emotion as an individual psychological disposition. She uses the concept of affective economy to describe the way in which emotion, rather than being located in one specific body, increases in its circulation between signs and bodies, creating an 'affective economy' (2004: 119). Ahmed emphasises the binding power of emotions, which 'mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective' (2004: 119) working 'to align some subjects with some others and against other others' (2004: 117). Importantly, emotions create the very figures or objects within which they become invested. Ahmed offers the example of hate in nationalist discourse, which outlines and aligns the hated figures, constituting them as a 'common' threat. Here, 'hate circulates between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement' (Ahmed, 2004: 119). In the work of adherence – sticking certain affects and figures together – affective economies create coherence. I use this concept to consider the ways in which affective economies work in South Africa, to produce White fear and anxiety around Blackness and to institute certain relations with dogs.

The more affect circulates between particular signs, the more they are perceived as containing that affect (being *inherently* fearful, hateful, loveable) (Ahmed, 2004: 126). Ahmed draws on Fanon's writing to show how the association between signifiers – 'Negro, animal, bad, mean, ugly' – allows the object of fear, the Black man, to be generated in the present as animal, bad, mean, ugly (2004: 127). Thus, Blackness becomes attributed with emotional value that functions to support the coherence and supremacy of Whiteness. Because of historical accumulation, this becomes a 'sticky' attribution, which is then naturalised as inherent. I use this concept of affective economy to suggest that, in relation to White femininity, Blackness is invested with fear through the affectively laden symbol of the 'rapacious black man' (see Kim, 2015: 42; Kynoch, 2013: 428; Coetzee, 2022: 2); at the same time, Whiteness instates dogs as loveable companions. I suggest that interspecies becomings inform the generative relation between signification, bodies and affect, yielding different affective economies around dogs. For Black people, dogs belonging to White people often signify threat or violence and become invested with fear[3], whereas for White

[3] However, reducing the relationship between Black people and dogs to one consisting exclusively of fear and threat leaves no space for the love and companionship that many Black people do share with their own dogs. See for example, 'Animal likenesses: dogs and the boundary of the human in South Africa' (2016) by Gabeba Baderoon, which offers a genealogy to think through racial cultural narratives around dogs and consider how these narratives might be rescripted. Baderoon highlights how, in response to ex-President Jacob Zuma's assertion that buying, walking and caring for a dog 'belonged to

people, dogs often signify kinship and become invested love. The affective investment serves to outline the figure of the dog, preceding an encounter; a history with animals is also a history that 'sticks'.

Ahmed's concept works well with relational becomings because affect 'produces the "surfaces" of bodies' (2004: 126). Drawing on Fanon's phenomenological description of being fixed by the White gaze, in his encounter with a White child who recoils from him, Ahmed reflects: 'fear *does something*; it re-establishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface, as a reading that produces the surface' (2004: 126). Affects such as fear work not only to differentiate between bodies, human and nonhuman, but to produce those bodies. Through interspecies becoming, I consider the dynamics of power and affect between: dogs and their owners; dogs and Black 'strangers' and White female owners and Black men.

KINSHIP AND MORALITY IN THE VALUE(S) OF WHITENESS

Both Blackness and Whiteness in South Africa have historically been constructed in relation to animals. In *On the Postcolony* (2001), Achille Mbembe argues that colonial power relied on creating Black people as animal. Mbembe writes: '[Africa] is almost always deployed in the framework (or in the fringes) of a meta-text about the animal—to be exact, about the *beast*…' (2001: 1). Whiteness was thus established as *human*, as the agent of progress and civilization, against that which was constructed as 'strange' and 'monstrous' (Mbembe, 2001: 1). This justified two projects: the dehumanisation of Black people towards exploitation; and 'domestication' towards civilisation (Mbembe, 2001: 182). Animality could be excised 'through processes of domestication and training' (Mbembe, 2001: 2); the act of colonising power comes from the coloniser's instantiation of himself as Subject freed of constraint, with the ability to control, create and destroy at will (Mbembe, 2001: 189).

In '"South Africa Is the Land of Pet Animals"; or, The Racializing Assemblages of Colonial Pet-Keeping' (2020), Anna Feuerstein considers how, in the context of Victorian empire in South Africa, the narratives of domestication and control which informed colonial pet keeping functioned within the broader colonial project of mastering non-human others. As '[t]he right to own is as much part of the question of personhood as the right not to be owned' (Boisseron in Feuerstein, 2020: 310), pet keeping functioned to support White liberal personhood as autonomous and masterful. Feuerstein draws on Mbembe's arguments around the 'domestication' of Black subjects: 'Through the relation of domestication, the master or mistress led the beast to an experience such that, at the end of the day, the animal, while remaining what he/ she was—that is, something other than a human being—nevertheless actually entered into the world for his/her master/mistress' (Mbembe, 2001: 26). This reflects a dynamic in which the 'petification' of the colonized enabled a different, though no less violent, form of relation. 'Domestication' also came with a particular affect: the process of 'grooming' allowed for greater sympathy or 'even "love"' for the colonised (Mbembe, 2001: 26). However, Feuerstein also observes that while pet animals could be characterised as 'mischievous' and 'delightful', Black servants were often cast in contrast as sullen or disobedient (2020: 329). A hierarchy of intimacy is created in which closeness with certain kinds of animals in the domestic sphere is embraced, while closeness with Black people is rejected. Thus pet keeping became marked as a White practice, which instituted the human as White, established the White woman as both carer and owner and placed animals above Black people (Feuerstein, 2020: 313).

The construction of race is also contingent on the construction of morality. Mbembe observes that part of the colonial ideological mission held that the colonized could be 'rais[ed] to the level of human being' through 'moral education' (Mbembe, 2001: 34). Whiteness extends benevolence as a mark of humanity, creating the virtuous concept of the humane. This concept is essential in establishing moral discourse and the value of different human and nonhuman lives. Reflecting on the phenomenon which initially inspired this paper – the aggression of dogs towards people of colour – dog day-care owner Mila draws on the notion of violent Black masculinity to narrate dogs' behaviour. She says:

> [D]ogs are much more afraid of men than women. I think we also get a lot of dogs that come from rescue centres here… and then in general, I think they were being abused by Black men. But some of them are like, pedigree dogs, and they also bark at Black men. (Mila, 2022)

Her reading of the dogs' reactions locates the main reason for aggression in the imagined action of Black men. This abuse appears as a human cruelty which is racialised and void of history. At the same time, she also acknowledges that the pattern of dog behaviour extends beyond 'rescue dogs'. Apartheid history is intimated by

white culture and was not the African way' (Baderoon, 2016: 349), many Black South Africans (who were mostly but not all middle-class) posted pictures of themselves with their dogs on Twitter. This public proclamation of intimacy with the animal 'which has most been used to malign Black South Africans' (349), suggests a productive potential for relations across differences that have been constructed through historical violence. Here, Haraway's conception of bodies-in-relation speaks to the emergence of a multitude of affective relationships that emerge between dogs and human.

the qualification that 'pedigree dogs' are also hostile towards Black men: their desirable pedigree suggests a wealthy (White) context, in which, it is implied, they would have no trauma or abuse; the dogs' reactions in this case are, I propose, a result of segregation and part of the exclusion of Black people from White space.

When the narrative of 'rescue' is deployed, dogs are figured through Whiteness: 'rescue' dogs become moral symbols, constructed as innocent victims of racialised human cruelty from which they must be protected by humane benevolence. This not only dictates goodness, but also which bodies can matter. Tears Animal Rescue in Cape Town reports donations go towards health care and rescue for animals in 'vulnerable communities' ('Your Impact') – communities in which people's basic needs are often not being met. Dead Animals Walking, also based in Cape Town, is less subtle: 'We mission our way through poor communities by tackling flea and tick ridden, manged, sick, injured, suffering and unsterilised domestic township animals' ('Projects'). Townships, which, given the legacy of spatial and economic segregation, are primarily home to people of colour, are the site for this colonial-style 'mission'. In the designation 'township animals' these animals are made signifiers of the space, a space of Blackness, from which they need to be evacuated. In the shift from 'township animal' to 'rescue dog' the dog is transformed by proximity to Whiteness: species is made to articulate with race towards a moral end. Weaver observes that in being rescued, dogs are effectively segregated from Blackness by being placed into domestic spaces presumed to be 'good' and, therefore, tacitly White (2021: 7). Dogs become absorbed into Whiteness and made to signify in the ongoing production of race.

To me this reflects a primary schema in which dogs are figured into upper-middle-class pet ownership in my home city, Cape Town: they are accepted as surrogate children. Here, they function as a site for projection and human identification; I suggest that through this they are drawn into Whiteness, as animals that are innocent like children. At the same time, dogs are attributed individuated consciousness, which contributes to notions of dog subjectivity and 'personalities'[4]. This operates flexibly with understandings of innocence: a dog with aggressive tendencies is more likely to be labelled a 'problem child', or said to have an abusive past, than to be said to have an aggressive personality. Between these discourses of innocence and personhood, they are understood as having capacity to act with intention, for example in interactions with their owners, but not the same capacity and self-awareness as humans, thus excusing any aggressive behaviour towards Black people. Thus they remain innocent of blame and are special because of their supportive role in White sociality.

Haraway decries canine infantilisation in Western culture (2008: 39), but this phenomenon has further implications in the context of South Africa. In our interview, V observed that work in the dog care industry is largely undertaken by White women who love dogs or by Coloured and Black South Africans and African immigrants who need work. She hypothesised that the high turnover of staff in the latter category is not only due to more general precarity, but also sometimes to an inability to 'connect' with the dogs[5], especially when these dogs are treated like children. She reflects: 'It's a difficult thing to overcome if you're like, "but it's not a child and I see children who look like me, who live next to me, in a much worse situation"' (V, 2022). In V's perception, there is a barrier to affective relation, stemming from the racial paradox of South Africa, where Black subjects' humanity has been historically denied; unaddressed human suffering and economic need remains immense; and human and nonhuman welfare is prioritised according to the requirements of Whiteness.

The above illustrates how the pet dog is part of a racialised hierarchy which produces notions of kinship, love, ownership and control. This has further resonance when in considering the way in which Whiteness shapes private spaces. In his chapter 'On Animal Mediators and Psychoanalytic Reading Practice', from the edited volume *Race, Memory and The Apartheid Archive* (2013), Derek Hook considers how White subjects make sense of the paradox of racial proximity under apartheid, in relation to Black domestic staff who cared for White children. Hook uses Mbembe's phrase 'disjunctive inclusions' to describe the ambiguous inclusions of Black subjects in apartheid's White spaces (Hook, 2013: 146). Notably, Mbembe refers particularly Black 'nannies' who were allowed (required) to live on White properties. Using the reflections of White contributors to the Apartheid Archive Project[6], who recall their childhoods, Hook notes how pet animals appear as symbolic and affective 'mediators' when the subject is faced with the ambiguous nature of their relationship with their Black caregiver, whom they loved. One narrator describes being rigid and distant with his carer when he grew older and became aware of the 'implicit rules of contact' – he reflects: 'Try as I might I cannot think of touching him [the carer], of any loving physical contact,

[4] This is exemplified in an event held by the aforementioned interviewee's doggy daycare. The daycare 'host[s] a lively graduation ceremony to celebrate the beloved PUPils… [in which] each pup is given an award in recognition of what makes them unique and highlights an attribute that we have come to cherish. In true Dogwarts fashion, the pups are also sorted into houses based on their personality types'.

[5] This remains a generalisation, as V observes that her one Black staff member is 'phenomenal with dogs'.

[6] Initiated in 2008, this is an ongoing collaborative research project focused on the collection of personal everyday narratives from ordinary South Africans about their experiences of racism during apartheid. According to the project's original research document, it aims to spotlight the enduring effects of apartheid on memory, relationality, subjectivity and identity, in the face of the country's national and social 'self-imposed' amnesia (cited in *Race, Memory and The Apartheid Archive*, 2013: 7).

although I am sure that there must have been' (2013: 147). Following this, he announces that his family decided to leave the country and that the dogs had to be re-homed, 'a particular focus of tears and disbelief' for him, but that the most awful moment was seeing his carer crying on the day they left and feeling that he could not hug him. Arguably, this reading of the Black carer in relation to a beloved pet merely extends a long-standing colonial trope in which Black person and animal are equated. But Hook suggests that the narrative merits further consideration. He argues that the dogs provided a recourse for the unconscious to assimilate this 'disjunctive inclusion' and the impossible relationship it entails, of meaningful attachment across racial difference. However, such a relation is also constituted through domination. While this love might well have been genuine, Hook observes that 'one can love quite sincerely in a fashion that consolidates a relation of condescension, as one loves a child, or indeed, an animal' (2013: 157). Further, notwithstanding the affective bond that might develop in acts of intimacy and care, the Black domestic worker is beholden to the White family.

The above example suggests how, in the context of Whiteness, interspecies relations are more naturalized than interracial relations. Further, it indicates how the pet animal seemingly allows for love without condition: requiring from the subject no reckoning with 'difference' or social responsibility. Such a study, which is focused on the subconscious of the White subject, does not account for the emotional attachment or agency a Black person has in this context. Instead it points to Whiteness in its position of ownership and agency, in relation to a Blackness that is intimately known and submissive – or understood as such. This stands in contrast to the figuring of Blackness as fearful and strange, which will be discussed in the following section.

WHITE SUBURBIA AND STRANGERNESS

I now consider how dogs are part of constructing space and relations in the suburbs, where they are folded into White systems of power, recognising some bodies as familiar and others as strange.

While interviewing Mila, I asked if she perceives a racial pattern in dogs' responses to other walkers. She responded with a definitive 'yes' and, as if stating the obvious, said 'this is South Africa' (Mila, 2022). She qualified:

> [O]bviously some dogs are completely neutral and don't mind at all. But like, in general, when there is an issue with someone else on the mountain they do tend to be... not White... and generally Black. Sometimes I'll have problems with like, an Indian person or a Coloured person but it's generally Black people. And, yeah (…) it's men too. (Mila, 2022)

Though she speaks matter-of-factly, her hesitancy in saying the word 'Black' here reflects a sense of discomfort around acknowledging the way dogs respond to Black people. I ask Mila why she thinks dogs behave this way and she explains that they respond to what they are used to in their environment: their aggression towards Black people indicates that they do not encounter Black people very often in their homes. There is an exception with labourers – domestic workers and gardeners – to whom, Mila says, the dogs 'acclimatise'. Nevertheless, Black people are rarely present in White homes in non-hierarchical social roles. V, who is a canine physio-therapist and behavioural specialist as well as a day-care owner, confirms this, saying that the primary reason for racial aggression is 'a lack of exposure' (V, 2022). Indeed, she has done consults for racially aggressive dogs and was told by one client that they were looking for a White trainer because having her would just 'add to the problem' (V, 2022). However, dogs also respond to the behaviour of people: V offers the example of owners tightening the leash when they pass a homeless person – who, as V points out, will 99% of the time be a person of colour – or pulling their dog away when they're passing a building site (inferring that people who do manual labour are also Black). In this way, V explains, dogs are socialised to be aggressive towards Black people, who they perceive as something to avoid and therefore as a threat.

Dogs themselves respond to social environments. Mila observes that dogs '[pick] up on energies' (2022) of the people they encounter, so that when a person is friendly and greets them, they are better behaved. V reflects that when Black people 'are coming into the home, it's the maid, the gardener… so people are there to do a job'. In contrast, 'if your friend comes over and [meets] your new puppy, the first thing they're doing is getting down, saying hi, that sort of thing' (2022). From this V observes:

> That socialisation is basically telling the dog, okay, when White people come over, it's because they're friendly, I say hi, they say hi back. And the reverse side of that is when Black people come over, they avoid me so I better avoid them. And for some dogs that turns into aggression where they're like, I've not been socialised with people of colour, so instead of me avoiding them, and they may come close to me, I'm gonna let them know from the get-go to stay back. (V, 2022)

Thus, dogs develop their own terms of relational signification, which are not only based on instinct, but are influenced by human social systems. Their hostile responses to Black people indicate the registering of human

difference, a process which, though conditioned through relations with humans, is not reducible to human systems of meaning. Further, White social-cultural practices around dogs – greeting and playing – facilitate a positive relation. If a Black person is wary or distant the dog in turn might perceive them as a potential threat. Dogs thus become normalised to the presence of White people and not only recognise but also enforce the strangeness of Black people in White space, typically responding with hostility or aggression. This appears not only as a manifestation of enduring racial spatial and social segregation, but as the result of certain affective investments and responses, which themselves, appear as the result of historically accumulated economies.

Dogs are thus part of sustaining the inherent otherness – or what Sarah Ahmed calls 'strangerness' – of Black people in White space and discourse. In 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', Ahmed observes that over time, the power of Whiteness accumulates in spaces and bodies to the point where it appears as an ontological given (2007: 150). Ahmed observes: '[W]hiteness becomes worldly through the noticeability of the arrival of some bodies more than others' (2007:149). Thus, in their recognition of the strange(r)ness of Black people, dogs reproduce the normativity of Whiteness. Further, Whiteness constitutes itself in relation to Blackness as other: in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* Ahmed proposes that individual and collective identity is constituted in encounters with 'strange' others (2000: 7). Here, bodies materialise in 'spatial relations to other bodies… that are recognised as *familiar, familial and friendly*, and those that are considered *strange*' (2000: 40, my emphasis). The 'I' is constituted in this moment of recognising the other as Stranger, as embodied difference (2000: 7). This contrasts with the disjunctive inclusion of Blackness (as it is understood by Whiteness) which is 'domestic' and familiar, to which dog and White subjects are 'acclimatised'.

At the same time, many Black people are systemically and economically required in South Africa to be in the White suburbs. During apartheid, their presence was monitored with pass laws and allowed only for work, but with the end of apartheid, the unidentifiable Black *stranger* could move about freely in White space. This threat of Blackness took on the moniker of 'crime', informing the primary affective economy in the White suburbs, in relation to race: fear. Gary Kynoch finds that 'for a considerable portion of the White population race remains the predominant factor when it comes to fear of violent crime' (2013: 427). This has historical roots, as Kynoch observes that the separations of apartheid were justified, in part, by White fear, mandating the containment of 'the physical threat posed by what was constantly portrayed as an uncivilised black majority' (2013: 429). According to available statistics, violent crime increased in the final years of apartheid and spiked dramatically in the first several years of democracy (Kynoch, 2013). This had an acute effect on the psyche of the White population, which, '[p]reviously insulated from the worst effects of violent crime… was shaken to the core by the robberies, hijackings and home invasions that introduced a horrifying new element into their lives' (Kynoch, 2013: 428). Here, I suggest that White anxiety, while not entirely manufactured, was both incredibly biased and ignorant to the violences of the oppressive and exploitative apartheid system, on which the protection and privilege of White subjects was established. Kynoch finds that, despite the statistics which reflect that impoverished Black people are the most subjected to violent crime, White people perceive themselves to be disproportionately threatened and victimised (Kynoch, 2013). Thus, the lessening of control of Black people's mobility at a time of intense racial tension and political instability fed White people's fear around Blackness.

In South Africa, Whiteness thus comes into being in relation to the Black stranger, who is always already invested with fear. As Ahmed argues: '[C]ertain lives become liveable as both safe and valuable insofar as they are *alive to* the danger of strangers' (2000: 33, original emphasis). With Whiteness's fear of Blackness comes discourses of 'security', defining the 'not me' or 'not us' (2000: 132), from which 'we' need to protect ourselves. After the fall of apartheid, the policing of Black bodies shifted to private security companies: indeed, South Africa's private security industry has more employees than the national police force (Wilkinson, 2015). These security forces identify potential 'threat' in the White suburbs, informed predominantly by racial profiling. Further, Kynoch observes that 'this robust protection force is staffed almost entirely by black men, paid to protect whites from other black men' (2013: 436). This is evident in my suburb's private security company, ADT. When the alarm goes off and ADT calls, the guard always ask me if the dogs are 'out' and won't go over the wall to check the property if they are: the dogs can't tell the difference between Black security and Black burglars. They are thus part of the fixing gaze of Whiteness, in which 'what one sees as the stranger is already structured by the knowledges that keep the stranger in a certain place' (Ahmed, 2000: 131): the stranger is necessarily out of place, alien and invested with fear. Dogs are not necessarily trained to be aggressive towards black people, but are sensitized to racial relations, recognising Black strange(r)ness in White space. In their making White space hostile to Black people, dogs reproduce the racialisation of the 'we' or 'not-we' in relation to which they act.

Affective economies of fear also yield interspecies kinship: Ahmed observes how '(f)ear mediated by love [produces] identification': 'The turning away from the object of fear here involves a turning toward home' (2004: 130). While Ahmed is talking about the nation here, I understand this in relation to community and family, in which dogs are necessarily part of 'us'. Ahmed's notion of 'the familial' being 'familiar' resonates when seeing how dogs are incorporated as 'part of the family' (2007: 154). Returning to Weaver's understanding of interspecies

becoming as an affective negotiation of 'togetherness' it becomes clear how 'the accumulation of affective value shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds' (2004: 121), so that dogs and White subjects become together, through economies of fear and love. In this, interspecies relation allows Whiteness to experience itself as loved and loving. 'Love' is one of the primary rehabilitative invocations in dog-rescue discourses; in turn, I understand dogs' capacity for 'love', which is often taken to be 'unconditional', as allowing for an elision of ethical responsibility for others. This can offer a sense of reprieve, firstly from a sense of fear, and secondly, I believe, from the guilt and shame that come from recognising Whiteness's fundamental violence.

BIOPOLITICS: THE ORGANISATION OF LIFE

In her monograph *War in Worcester* (2013), Pamela Reynolds looks at the role of youth in the South African anti-apartheid struggle, foregrounding their narrated experiences of both harm and resistance. Broadly, she notes how rebellious communities faced massive intimidation, murder, torture and detention. One tactic employed by the police was to set trained dogs on crowds of people who were seen to be illegally gathering (2013: 31). This highlights how, in their use by the apartheid police, dogs became not merely a physical threat but part of the system of oppression: an obstacle to freedom and self-determination. Looking at the stories told in 1996 and 1997 at thirteen of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Human Rights Violation Committee hearings in the Western Cape, Reynolds considers the violent measures that children describe being used against them by security forces. This included 'hearing dogs bark and being told that they would be set on one's private parts' (2013: 93). Reynolds draws only on the accounts of those who were under eighteen-years-old when they suffered harm, and who did not identify as political activists, reflecting that 'their experiences represent those of thousands of children' (2013: 90). She focuses on these as bodily and sensory attacks, writing: 'I can only wonder how the harm changed the young people's perceptions of the qualities of the real world and how it affected their lives' (2013: 90). Her words suggest the physical imprint of such methods: the bark of a dog will always elicit fear. I outline this to show how the use of dogs by the racist state's security apparatus has had a significant and lasting impact on individual and social memory.

On a 2017 Facebook forum soliciting questions from Black South Africans about White South Africans, many comments referenced racial relations with dogs. Two comments are particularly illustrative of the dynamic between Black people and dogs owned by White people:

> Why y'all gotta leave the gate open after driving into your house, when you saw me about to walk past and you got 6 dogs. There are other ways of testing the limits of a black man's speed. (Mahlaba, 2017)

> And why do you say 'he/she doesn't bite' when your dog has teeth AND IS CHASING ME??? 🙄 (Dunywa, 2017)

The comments reflect overlapping issues: the first suggests the sense of threat a dog presents to the commenter, that is, the possibility of being chased and attacked; the second images the very real aggression of some dogs towards Black people, which is dismissed by White owners.

Affective economies around dogs thus function in biopolitical control: fear works to restrict some bodies through the movement or expansion of others, producing Whiteness as 'the body-at-home' (2007: 153). Dogs become part of how 'Whiteness… orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they "take up" space, and what they "can do"' (2007: 149). It is common to see signs hanging on the gates of houses in White neighbourhoods that say 'Beware of the dog/ *Pasop vir die hond*[7]/ *Qaphela Inja*[8]' or 'I am on Guard', with an image of a snarling German Shepherd or Rottweiler. Given the fear expressed by Black people in the comments above, I surmise that this threat of dogs would function as a violent reminder to Black people of their precarious presence in White space. In his description of the phenomenological violence of being 'fixed' by the White gaze, Fanon shows how Whiteness inhibits the development of the Black subject (1986: 87). Dogs, then, as they are historically imbricated in Whiteness, might too invoke an 'interruption' in bodily consciousness for Black people (Ahmed, 2007: 153). This links to Reynolds' suggestion that embodied fear mediates one's perception of reality and of being in the world in relation to others. As Emily Parker observes, affective exchange is part of the historico-racial schema: 'For Fanon, the corollary of his experience of *sensing* and *being sensed*, as a larger circuit… resides elsewhere than in Fanon himself' (Parker, 2018: 444, my emphasis). In relation to this, I offer Ahmed's concept of strangerness – as the figure which is over-determined and fixed from the outside as 'strange' – alongside Fanon's phenomenological sense of negation (I do so tentatively because I cannot make any claim to experience here). If the violent 'sense of

[7] Afrikaans
[8] isiZulu

otherness of Fanon's own body… becomes Fanon's lived experience' (Parker, 2018: 444), perhaps the barking dog at the gate elicits a similar experience? Most significantly, fear *does* something: it establishes boundaries between bodies and informs how those boundaries are experienced.

The following auto-ethnographic description suggests how these dynamics pre-figure an encounter between a Black person, a White person and a dog in White space.

> Walking my fourteen-year-old dog, Kodi, across a narrow pedestrian bridge in our neighbourhood, we encounter a Black woman walking towards us. Anticipating the woman's discomfort, I hold Kodi on a short leash, and nudge her to one side while we walk, so that my body is a barrier between her and the woman. Kodi, having grown placid with age, now rarely barks, but my body still tenses at the possibility. In turn, I hope my dog, showing white fur around her face and a noticeable limp, doesn't seem like too much of a threat. Still, I wish we had waited at the end of the bridge. My actions are a signal that the dog needs restraint and the woman presses herself against the edge of the bridge as we pass, so much so that her skirt hooks on the wire and tears as she tries to move forward. I apologise profusely and she turns away from me. (Rudolph, 21/03/2022, research diary)

Though my dog might show no signs of aggression, and though I am willing her not to, she acts as a barrier between myself and the woman because of a history of affective accumulation, which orients our bodies away from one another.

REIFYING COLONIAL GENDER RELATIONS

While it is clear that Blackness registers as strange for some dogs, I suggest their aggression might also relate to affective transmission between dogs and their owners. Indeed, dogs' hostile responses to and their threatening signification for Black people holds further racialised resonances. Mila says that she likes walking with a pack of dogs on the mountain and feeling safe, or – she pauses – 'saf*er*'. She describes the sense of freedom in having 'that silent moment on the mountain, kind of on your own, but have some form of protection around you' (Mila, 2022). It is not spoken, but implied that the 'danger' from whom the dogs will protect her is that of Black men.

Whiteness in South Africa also relies on the co-construction of race and gender: within the White imaginary Black men remain the threatening other and the predominant source of violent crime (Kynoch, 2013: 430). Azille Coetzee observes that the supposed advancement of Whiteness in the colonial context was evidenced in its gendered order, 'characterised by a strict heterosexual, monogamous and hierarchical binary; consisting of an active, rational masculinity set up against the foil of a passive and vulnerable femininity' (2022: 3). Conversely, the absence of this order was seen to connote the wildness and sexual 'primitivity' of Black colonised subjects. In the apartheid nationalist myth of *die swart gevaar* (Afrikaans for 'Black danger'), White women were seen as the hypervulnerable, 'virtuous' object in need of protection from sexual violation by Black men (Gqola, 2015: 11). Whiteness relied on the image and control of White female sexuality, as that which is pure, contained, and vulnerable to contamination; this legitimized White supremacy by necessitating '[the defense] of community, morality, and white male power' (Stoler in Coetzee, 2022: 4). This made imperative the separation of White women and Black men, for the future of Whiteness. This race-gender construct was pivotal to the establishment and maintenance of White solidarity and power (Coetzee, 2022: 4).

I shift my focus now to the moment of encounter between dogs, their White female owners and Black men. Indeed, upper-class dog ownership seems to reproduce, to some extent, White gender and heteronormativity. When Mila suggests that dogs fulfil a desire to 'be a mother', but without the same responsibilities, I ask if all her clients are women. She reflects: 'The single ones are women and then all couples. I don't think we have any clients like, just a single man and a dog' (Mila, 2022). Here, White femininity's instantiation through the role of carer, in an intimacy that is familial and domestic, echoes the colonial construction of White womanhood (Coetzee, 2022: 7). Corresponding to the model of gendered Whiteness that Azille Coetzee describes, these White women are deemed bodies in need of protection – a protection afforded by their dogs. This relates particularly to activities such walking or running in the suburbs, or in natural spaces like the forest and mountain. My father would always tell me to 'take the dogs' walking with me, and I felt safer with them. Dogs are thus part of the gendered-racialised rhetoric of safety: who needs to be protected, which areas are safe, and who can occupy them.

Given that majority of gender-based violence in South Africa is directed against women of colour[9], my sense of precarity is partly a response to the hypervisibilising of White female bodies and racialization of Black men as threatening. This reflects the vast affective accumulation of fear around Blackness. Ahmed writes that encounters

[9] According to Statistics South Africa, the percentage of Black women who *reported* having been sexually assaulted is two to three times greater than White women; see 'Quantitative Research Findings on Rape in South Africa' (2000).

with strangers '[open] up past histories that stick to the present' (2004: 126). Drawing on an interview with a young White South African woman, Azille Coetzee reflects that 'the fear of the Black man that [she] experiences has consequences for how she inhabits her body and how she moves within the world' (2022: 22). This speaks to the specific social location and power dynamics constituting White womanhood: vulnerability, as a White woman, is both biopolitical (used for social control) and experiential. This is not to say that vulnerability is equally distributed – indeed, as shown above, the protection of Whiteness is imperative – but that these vulnerabilities are part of a racialised social order, and human-dog becomings mediate these vulnerabilities. Walking with a dog makes me feel safer, because I know it will 'deter' threat (through inducing fear in another). This illustrates the co-production of affects by/with power and how these affective relations create race-species affinities and separations, towards the ongoing production of Whiteness.

How, then, can we think towards becoming otherwise? Coetzee suggests that White women might undermine the patriarchal imperative of Whiteness by refusing their role of victim; here, there is a responsibility 'to critically interrogate and reckon with her fear' (Coetzee, 2022: 11). She elaborates: if the White South African woman 'become[s] what she is' in relation to the Black man, conditioned by her sexual/gendered fear, she can become something else if she encounters him differently (Coetzee, 2022: 11). Coetzee acknowledges that it is difficult to know what such a transformative relation would look like. But, as Snyman writes, 'the focus falls on the one failing to understand that ethical moment when two persons meet face to face, i.e. the perpetrator of racism' (2015: 279). The above analysis comes from this position, firstly, from being a White person in the ethical moment where my dog makes another person vulnerable, and secondly from being a White woman in the ethical moment where I fail to see beyond my own fear to the history and structures of separation that produce it. I believe that dogs act as a barrier to interpersonal recognition or connection across racial boundaries. The separation which dogs enforce inhibits the ability to recognise the interconnectedness which Levinas observes as central to responsibility: 'a stranger who shares my humanity, exacts from me a certain responsibility to respect his dignity once I am aware of our interconnectedness' (in Snyman, 2015: 281). To reformulate Haraway, we might consider an ethics of otherness-in-relation where otherness is considered not only in interspecies relation, but also in the co-becoming of race and species, characterized by histories of kinship and segregation, violence and control. Here, an understanding of difference *and* interconnectedness yields an ethical responsibility towards the dignity of an-other[10].

I am aware that using the term 'otherness' here, as a provocation for questioning how difference is created, nonetheless reasserts Whiteness as the centre from which this differentiation occurs. I return to the paradoxical position of this critique, which is then less about interspecies relations or racial relations, and more about how Whiteness as a system (in)forms such relations. Here, I reiterate Ahmed's description of Whiteness as 'an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they "take up" space, and what they "can do"' (2007: 149). As much as the above raises the ethical question for the White subject, tracing the intimacies and separations brought about through constructions of otherness is also necessary in order to keep open the force of the critique against the ongoing and unfinished history of Whiteness.

CONCLUSION

The constellations of relationality traced above reflect how affect works 'through signs and on bodies to materialize the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds' (Ahmed, 2013: 191). It becomes clear that affective investments are integral to systems of power. I have suggested that the history of dogs in apartheid and colonial systems 'sticks' so that dogs pose a threat to Black people, yielding affective and biopolitical violence. Dogs, in turn, respond to and reproduce the systems of which they are a part, often acting aggressively towards Black people and thus functioning to make White spaces inimical to Black bodies. These dogs' registering of Blackness as a threatening otherness reflects the need for a deeper consideration of the affective movements and inscriptions of consciousness at work in our interspecies becoming. That such behaviour would become naturalised or taken for granted reflects an even more urgent need for re-imagining the way we become with dogs. Our current modes of relation not only perpetuate White domination and defensiveness, but also reinforce colonial racial-gendered systems. I believe that dogs act as barriers to interpersonal recognition; indeed, dog-human relations show how difference and fear are co-produced with power to create a violent social order. Foregrounding the relationality through which we create the worlds we experience and share, addressing this order requires an awareness of ongoing and historical violence, and a recognition of our connectedness and responsibility.

[10] Addressing the violence of Whiteness that continues to shape the relations of human and non-human beings is only part of the broader social responsibility in the face of an enduring apartheid, in its economic, social and spatial inequalities.

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Queer Renaturalisations: Guy Hocquenghem's Contradictory Nature Politics, Between Identity and Desire

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ABSTRACT

Queerphobic discourses variably frame nature as defined by reproductive heterosexuality or as defined by unruly desires that civilised heterosexuality promises a progress away from. This article argues that both these politicised determinations of nature follow the logic of 'renaturalisation' – a strategy that invokes nature and the natural to reinforce a normative process – and that the ambiguity in nature discourses stems from the conflictual construction of queerness as both social and antisocial. Because queerness oscillates between being a recognisable identity and a critique of everything social, nature discourses used to justify heteronormative ontologies are contradictory and must change according to the context of the argument. Excavating a theory of renaturalisation from Guy Hocquenghem, this article suggests that queer politics should take nature seriously not because nature is inherently progressive or conservative but because this very duality materialises through cultural anxieties around queerness.

Keywords: renaturalisation, queer ecologies, Guy Hocquenghem, materialisms, feminist epistemologies

INTRODUCTION

Nature is a contentious subject for queer people. Populist political movements and a re-emerging Far Right are these days using nature in queer- and transphobic discourses in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, these fractions claim queer sex and gender formation to be wholly *unnatural*. In this dominant discourse, heterosexuality epitomises nature and the natural, forming a moral imperative to perform binary, reproductive cultures and bodies. On the other hand, Far Right groups, following centuries of religious discourse, cast the queer and trans body as unruly and uncivilised and hence in fact *closer to nature*. According to this discourse, heterosexuality is a civilising force, fulfilling a certain human capacity for controlling wayward desires in the body. Here, nature exemplifies not something to mirror or aspire to, but something to keep a distance from, a queer non-human 'other' to avoid.

Since 'nature' is such an ambiguous term in queerphobic discourses, how does nature condition queer subject formation and politics in a heteronormative society? Within queer studies, the contradictory view of nature appears regularly in discussions about the possibility of queer lives that are at odds with society. 'Nature', writes Nicole Seymour, 'occupies a particularly strange position within queer theory: both abhorred and needed, as a kind of conceptual whipping boy' (Seymour, 2013: 4). Queer theorisations of nature variably regard nature as singular or multiple, conservative or liberatory, contextually dependent or a universal substratum. Some claim that heteronormativity deploys several irreducible conceptions of nature (Alaimo, 2016; Gosine, 2010; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, 2010; Seymour, 2013), while others hold that a queer project needs either a non-ambiguous or at least a non-reactionary conception of nature (Mehrabi, 2020; Morton, 2009; Nyong'o, 2012).

This article will suggest that although these conceptions of nature are irreconcilable, they have in common an argumentative structure, which is derived from generalised cultural anxieties around queerness. I will argue that the politics of nature deployed (both as essentially heterosexual and essentially non-heterosexual/queer) follows a logic of 'renaturalisation', defined as a strategy that invokes nature and the natural in order to reinforce a normative process, and I will show how these ambiguous nature discourses emerge from the construction of 'queer' as a liminal case. The structural marginalisation of queerness in social discourse ties heteronormativity to the aspirational figure of the human through deploying opposed discursifications of nature: nature as expression of reproductive heteronormativity, and nature as the space of unruly desire. This duality suggests that queer politics

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must rethink its relation to nature; not because nature discourses are inherently either conservative or critical, but because they produce and are produced by historical conjunctures that configure queerness.

For this argument, I will analyse the polemic work of early gay liberationist Guy Hocquenghem and his critique of how heteronormative humanism stages the relation between human and nature. Hocquenghem may be best known for his anti-capitalist and anti-establishment militancy of the post-1968 era, a sharp critic of the socio-sexual politics of capitalism and the nuclear family. Currently, the scholarship on Hocquenghem only pays scant attention to his discussion of the connection between sexual politics and the nature question, but I find in his materialist analysis of desire an understanding of how nature is constitutive of 'queer' both as queer or LGBT lives and 'antisocial' queer critique at odds with all established institutions and identities. Through an exposition of his fragmented work, I will excavate a theory of how sexuality-based othering operationalises nature through such renaturalisation strategies in both these uses of 'queer'.

The article is structured as follows: I first unpack heteronormativity's two contradictory articulations of nature which are present in queer ecologies literature and also in Hocquenghem's historical analysis of queer identity and desire. In these works, both discourses exhibit the logic of renaturalisation and reflect the modern heteronormative construction of queer(ed) minoritarian identity-affirmation and antisocial desire, respectively. The following part relates my Hocquenghemian concept of renaturalisation to existing work on the term, discussing its articulation of the relation between human and nature. In the last part, the article returns to Hocquenghem and using his writings speculate on how heteronormativity and the structural marginalisation of queerness not only interpellates but also entrenches the human-nature binary.

STAGING THE HETERONORMATIVE ENVIRONMENT: QUEER CRITIQUES OF NATURE

Part of the richness of the literature on queer ecologies consists in showing how heteronormativity defines nature and the natural in multiple and ambiguous ways (Anderson et al., 2012; Gaard, 1997; Gosine, 2021; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, 2010). To define this relation, queer ecologists work with two primary assumptions: on the one hand, nature as describing the imagined naturalness of heterosexuality in humans (unlike other sexual formations), and on the other hand, nature as signifying unruly desires against which heteronormativity claims to stand for civilised respectability. As I detail in the following, this dual modality of nature embodies a fundamental conflict that queer politics faces.

Firstly, heteronormativity casts nature as fundamentally heterosexual. In this view, heterosexuality belongs to the realm of the natural, and queerness, its inversion, is decidedly unnatural or, at most, accidental to the survival of the species. As the story goes, sexual reproduction is the cornerstone of species reproduction, and thus constitutes its primary driver for all non-human nature. In actual fact, however, this heteronormative epistemology is not concerned with or curious about non-human nature. It refers to heterosexuality in nature only in order to justify heteronormativity in humans. In this account, a select part of nature, reproductive sex, essentially defines the human. If heterosexuality is natural, and nature describes the essence of the human, heterosexuality is not only a nature-imposed imperative, it defines the human *par excellence*.

One queer response to this normative grounding in sexual reproduction has been to illustrate how nature overwhelmingly expresses queer socio-sexual forms. Nature often disappoints heteronormative expectations when looking at the social organisation of sexualities, care, and community in non-human species (Ah-King, 2018; Bagemihl, 1999). Sex behaviour in the natural world is diverse, defying heteronormative expectations of binary genders and complimentary monogamy (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Willey, 2016: 73–94). Animals and bacteria themselves exceed human definitions of gay, bi, queer, inter, and trans, and even elemental particles exhibit what could be called masturbatory and queer/trans properties (Barad, 2015; Hird, 2004). Non-normative sexualities of the (non-human) natural world are part of the core fabric of these non-human ecosystems – such sexual diversities are of course normative to those species. By showing the multifaceted organisation of social reproduction which so exceeds human definitions, queer ecologists problematise such normative fantasies of heteronormativity in nature, when imagined as primarily hetero-reproductive.

Secondly, heteronormativity casts nature as a space of wayward sexual multiplicity that heterosexuality promises a progress away from. This view typically posits non-normative sexualities as not-quite human, and therefore relegated to the space of the less-than human. Similar to how the mark of 'woman' under patriarchy designates inferiority because associated with nature (Merchant, 1980; Mies and Shiva, 1993), the queer other occupies the position of nature in the human-nature binary that constructs the human as a placeholder for civilised respectability (Gaard, 1997). These civilisational discourses intersect with colonial frameworks of paternalist rulemaking for the 'savage', the yet-to-become human, and the logically never quite fully recognisable subjects (Carter, 2007; Gosine, 2021; Luciano and Chen, 2015). Indeed, much queer theorising on the place of nature highlights this Enlightenment-based thinking and colonial heritage as regulating the deviant and their habitat. Think in this

context of dimly lit parks and cemeteries as liminal sites for cruising and gay male socialising; places that are constantly policed and under threat of disappearing (Gandy, 2012; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, 2010). Or think perhaps of so-called conversion therapy, which seeks to reshape and confine the differently libidinised body according to heteronormative ideals.

The heteronormative inculcation of what belongs to nature displays not only the centrality of the question of nature to a variety of queer politics; it shows how nature is strategically operationalised to the point of contradiction. In the words of Mario Mieli, 'Blinkered heterosexuals use the concept of "nature", like that of "against nature", according to their own convenience' (Mieli, 2018/1977: 27). Such a Machiavellian logic is by no means rare in the field of sexual minority politics, and indicates that contradictory discourses likely may exist contemporaneously (Chitty, 2020: 27; Henao Castro, 2019). Oftentimes, the (un)naturalness of sexual minorities is secured through racist stereotypes, depending on the historical conjuncture. For example, as Andil Gosine argues, if anti-sodomy laws of the colonial forces worked to question the proper humanity of colonised subjects, present-day homonationalist discourse casts their purported homophobia to be doing the same thing: 'homophobes trading places with homosexuals as the target in need of training and policing' (Gosine, 2021: 74). As such, nature strategies in the field of sexual politics has the effect of interpellating and renegotiating 'othering' politics surrounding the human as exceptional (Wynter, 2003). For the present case, invoking nature is a strategy of sexual othering where the natural indicates aspirational normalcy.

HOCQUENGHEM'S QUEER MATERIALIST ANALYSIS OF DESIRE

The duality of heteronormative strategies of nature suggests a splitting in the construction of the sexual minoritarian subject. Spread across his political writings, Guy Hocquenghem depicts this splitting as endemic to queerness, or to use his term 'homosexual desire'[1], which appears dually as both sexual minority identities and anti-identitarian desire. On both sides, nature constantly emerges as a central political axis in Hocquenghem's ideas. I here outline the basic elements of Hocquenghem's theorised tension between identity and desire, and I elaborate how nature as renaturalisation becomes a structuring principle of how queerness develops as a political category.

The politics of nature in Hocquenghem's work comes into view through his historical account of homosexuality and his materialist analysis of desire. As a first step, homosexuality and desire are counterposed. As he states: '"Homosexual desire" – the expression is meaningless' (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 49). Desire is for Hocquenghem unclassifiable as heterosexual or homosexual; it is polyvalent with no pre-given preferred sexual object. Desire as libidinal force can potentially connect to a multitude of differently gendered bodies. In his argument, he draws on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1983/1972) and understands desire relations to be constituted as a series of non-exclusive connections functioning according to the connective 'and … and' rather than the disjunctive 'either/or' (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 117). Desire in this early post-structuralist formulation is non-discriminatory and multi-functional, it is polymorphous, perverse, and even, he writes, bisexual (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 74).

In Hocquenghem's analysis, the generalised repression of same-sex desire creates the condition for the constitution of late modern homosexual identity. Hocquenghem cites Michel Foucault's (1988/1965) historical analysis of the medical regimes that advanced this construction. With the advent of modern medical technologies of classification, homosexuality was continuously confessed, repressed, and rigidified into a categorisable mental disease. Importantly, then, homosexual desire and homosexual identity do not coincide historically and are in constant tension. They constitute a personal and cultural battlefield between status quo-enforcing identity politics and desire's rupturing antisocial criticism (see Hocquenghem, 2022/1972: 94–101).

Rather than using a Foucauldian genealogical account[2], Hocquenghem explicitly grounds his analysis of homosexual identity in capitalist cultural politics, notably in struggles surrounding the nuclear family. For the sexual

[1] Since the scope of my article concerns contemporary sexual marginalisation, I use queer or queerness to designate both sexual identity and non-normative desires. The only exception to this in the article is several places in the section on Hocquenghem, where I attempt to stay faithful to his own vocabulary. Queer conveys bisexuality and non-normative gender presentations in ways that Hocquenghem's homosexual desire does not, which in my view attests to archival and political limitations in his scholarship – limitations that he himself articulates in several places. However, since the politics of 'homosexual desire' resonates deeply with the wider queer ecologies literature, I have decided to downplay these definitional differences for the majority of the article for reasons of clarity.

[2] The relation between Foucauldian and Marxist analyses of the development of modern homosexual identity has been the topic of debate for many years. It is not on this point that Hocquenghem offers the most insightful historical analysis. The reconstruction that I attempt here brings together Foucault's (1988/1965) work on the invention of homosexual identity through modern systems of classification, which Hocquenghem cites explicitly (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 51), with an analysis of Hocquenghem's constant reference to the determining role of the capitalism for the sexual identities. Of recent appearance, Christopher Chitty's *Sexual Hegemony* (2020) argues against a nominalist view such as Foucault's that the

deviant, the wound of homosexuality – violence, rejection, invisibilisation – largely concerns family relations with its static, gendered categories. The nuclear family is the site where the misfit first feels the violence of heteronormativity. The family as institution of course changes according to geographical, cultural, and historical location. Indeed, part of the expansive logic internal to the cultural politics of capitalism is the constant decoding and recoding of social institutions such as the family. With 19th century industrialisation, mass-urbanisation led to a population density in many major cities in the global North which also fertilised growing sexual minority subcultures. Union victories for labour rights freed up leisure time and gave a minimally expendable income for the growing middle classes. These material conditions contributed to the decoding of the family relation and potentialised greater individualisations of sexual experiences, expressions, and identities (D'Emilio, 1983; Drucker, 2015: 112; O'Brien, 2019).

Hocquenghem argues that this decoding of the family function, the loosening of the discursive rule of obligatory heterosexuality, was recoded increasingly so that the sexual minority internalised the logic of the family as a structuring principle centred around guilt. Instead of external parental figures to condemn same-sex activities, subjectification according to imperatives of 'the normal' increasingly regulated these desires. Cultural anxieties around queer desire and its critiques of heteronormative society ensued, leaving increasingly little space for identifications beyond the hetero-homo binary. As he writes: 'After capitalist decoding has taken place, there is no room for any form of homosexual integration other than that of perverse axiomatization' (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 93). By axiomatisation is here understood the cultural construction of a supposedly fixed identity that appears as given by nature. A good example of such an axiomatisation is the generic 'coming out' narrative so central to queer cultural affirmation. In what Judith Butler later calls the 'expressive model of gender' (Butler, 1990: 186), the queer person names their identity and in this utterance establishes a fiction of an internal and fixed sexuality, a performance that situates the origin of sexual minority formation inside the subject.

Hocquenghem's work demonstrates how the historical internalisations of the logic of the family constructs sexual identities in the tension between desire and identity. Desire is in Hocquenghem's writing first and foremost an antisocial impulse, which breaks open identities and shows their historical contingency. As he notes: 'Nobody will ever eliminate the polyvocality of desire' (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 50–51). With the stubborn axiomatisation of sexual identities, two conflicting axioms are created, which must exist at the same time. In this emerging duality, Hocquenghem's critical project sides with the popular 1970s construction of the anti-capitalist potency of homosexual desire, seeing it as an anti-social impulse, predominantly present in marginal sexualities. This politicisation of sexuality in Hocquenghem prefigures the later anti-social turn in queer studies and activism when it appears in the 1990s (see Bernini, 2017), but situates it clearly within the Marxist confines of anti-capitalist critique and activism, of the milieu in which he writes.

In the historical struggle over homosexuality, nature appears on both sides of the identity-desire binary as a determining logic. Despite its centrality, the category of non-human nature has largely gone unnoticed in the Hocquenghem scholarship until now or, at most, it has been dismissed as inconsistent (e.g., Marshall, 1996: 34–35). In this article, I contend that Hocquenghem is not inconsistent but rather fruitfully contradictory because he describes and explains the contradiction in heteronormativity's deployment of nature. The commonality in how both sides of this binary operationalises nature offers some building blocks for a common theory of renaturalisation in the field of sexual politics.

On the level of anti-identitarian desire, nature is that non-human force which seeks to break down identity, and replace it with non-regimented sexual flux. Throughout, Hocquenghem uses non-human sex as a codeword for the antisocial desire that queer positionality offers special access to. With its privileged position to the workings of desire, '[the gay movement is] turning Nature from a guilt-inducing reference to a term of equivalence with the immediacy of desire' (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 150). Nature is seen to embody the liberating potential of desire: 'flowers and insects have no sex; they are the very *machine* of sexual *desire*' (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 91, italics as in original). Animals repeatedly represent sexual polyvocality for Hocquenghem, a hope in non-assimilation to hetero-human sociality. Nature is productive, and signifies those processes that continuously break open sedimented sexual identities. For Hocquenghem, sexual liberation becomes possible in the attention to and care for these ruptures of the non-human.

On the level of social identity, nature shows up in the marginalisation of queer subjects as group. Shifting heteronormative strategies within capitalist cultural politics have regarded homosexuality as unnatural, as a flaw in

medical/linguistic construction of an identity would constitute a radically new set of sexualities and tries instead to situate sexual politics within interclass and intraclass dynamics. Hocquenghem appears to not have a clear position on this question but if anything might agree with this critique. As Deleuze states that Hocquenghem 'denounces homosexuality as a word (…) homosexuality as nominalism' (Deleuze, 2004/1972: 286). Because Hocquenghem's language is markedly permeated by Foucauldian terminology on this issue, it might be good to keep in mind that Hocquenghem's concept of 'homosexual desire' is exactly not homosexual in its late modern determination but 'a flow without origin or goal, a matter of experimentation and not interpretation' (Deleuze, 2004/1972: 285).

nature, or as a crime against nature (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 61, 76). 'Nature here plays its paranoic role as the supreme segregating authority' (Hocquenghem, 1993/1972: 62); the heteronormative deployment of this idea of nature functions as a moral command when invoked by traditionalist conservatives. Nature is here allied to a political project that continuously surveils bodies according to what is considered properly natural. In claiming this moral superiority, conservatives aim to restore nature's purported heteronormative equilibrium which is epitomised in the two sexes and heterosexual reproduction. Hocquenghem, however, repeatedly rejects nature on this account. As he writes: 'There are two sexes on earth, but this is only to hide the fact that there are three, four, ten, thousands, once you throw that old hag of the idea of nature overboard' (Hocquenghem, 2010/1973: 69). The heteronormative idea of nature as (heterosexual or homosexual) identity is in direct conflict with non-human nature as desire, because identity conceals the diversity and instability of the non-human.

In the tension between identity and desire, the concept of nature embodies a contradiction with a logic that is mirrored on each side of this contradiction. On both sides, nature exhibits two elements. First, nature is a process. Both identity and desire are continuously attempting to affect the social field despite neither being able to eradicate the other. In Hocquenghem's analysis, desire constantly challenges identity, a challenge that cannot be resolved. Second, nature conveys normativity; it signifies a normative field that attaches itself to a political project whether in attempting a reconsolidation of 'natural' homosexual identity or in attending to non-human homosexual desire. In sum, nature in Hocquenghem is a contradictory category that signals a normative process. It is this politicised definition that in this article I call renaturalisation.

This exposition of Hocquenghem shows how we can consider the politics of desire so central to the liminal construction of queerness as to be concerned with the question of nature. The heteronormative conceptions of nature as either expressive of reproductive hetero-exceptionalism or the space of unruly bodies are based on the dualism between identity-breaking desire and status quo-enforcing sexual identity. On both sides, nature is used as a renaturalisation: a strategy that invokes nature and the natural to reinforce a normative process.

MULTIPLE RENATURALISATIONS: THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

The two renaturalisation strategies, the two opposed heteronormative discursifications of nature, are not only different methods for queer marginalisation, they also rest on two different understandings of the relation between human and nature. If heterosexuality defines both humans and nature then the human is not categorically different from nature (monism), and if heterosexuality expresses a progress away from nature's unruliness, then the human is categorically different from nature (dualism). The operation of renaturalisation used here therefore has important implications for debates on the politicised relation between human and nature.

Renaturalisation as a term finds use in such disparate academic disciplines as law, politics, urban studies, geography, and architecture. When the concept appears, it commonly signals a normative project. In law, for example, renaturalisation refers to the process whereby a formerly excluded national regains citizenship (de Hart, 2015; e.g., Williams, 2014). We speak of renaturalisation when German governments grant German citizenship to victims and descendants of victims of Nazi de-nationalisation. Here, renaturalisation describes the desired effort to include the expelled back into the nation. Nature and the natural designate a moral imperative where the individual's return to the nation signals the rectification of a pre-given, normative natural state: the original belonging to a given nation. Legal scholars thus deploy renaturalisation to attribute nature and the natural to the national citizen such that it bestows the nation with normative qualities.

Renaturalisation typically also addresses nature as a more-than-human phenomenon rather than merely as a manner of speech. In architecture and urban planning, for instance, renaturalisation denotes processes where nature increasingly regulates human-built infrastructure: water streams, plants and animals stage the material context for human life. This project may either intend to bring nature closer to humans living in urban or industrialised areas or to let wildlife grow and expand outside big cities (Pech, 2016; e.g., Wlodarczyk and Mascarenhas, 2016). Whether the aim is to create more sustainable cities or to restore nature on its own terms, nature is meant literally and is once again desirable: it either appeases human ill-doings or signals a threatened wilderness that should regain its natural capacities. Like with renaturalised citizenships, nature indicates a normative imperative to let nature heal what human civilisation has destroyed. Like the Hocquenghemian notion of renaturalisation being deployed here, these fields' operationalisations of the concept designate a normative process that includes nature in a rather literal sense.

The conceptual landscape of renaturalisation also resonates with the emerging literature on queer ecologies which again regards nature as both political and referring to the more-than-human, in that nature signals a normative process that is not just understood figuratively[3]. Queer ecologists here analyse nature as an intersectional

[3] In certain strands of critical theory, the concept of denaturalisation indicates not so much an undoing of nature as a politics of questioning the natural givenness of social entities and relations and show them as socially produced. This deconstructive

space holder for diverging but mutually constituting kinds of oppression (Gosine, 2021; Kafer, 2013: 129–148; Smith, 1997). Astrida Neimanis (2014) works with the concept of 'natural others' to signify how nature and the natural are mobilised as othering strategies and how this othered position becomes discursified to originate in qualities endemic to the identity group itself. In other words, this mobilisation of nature projects a double move of first othering, mediated in nature, and then externalising to the target group the (supposed self-induced) cause of othering. In this context, the process of othering through nature simultaneously reasserts the human as norm: the human/nature binary marginalises those populations that are structurally cut off from acquiring full humanness. Nature is thus a series of marginalising enactments that reify a distinct segment of the human – typically white, straight, and male – to exemplify humanity. Inherited from a Cartesian mind/body dualism, the natural other occupies the space of brute matter which by human negation appears as a subordinate: 'Not only is nature *non-human* or *more-than-human*, but it is also *less-than-human*' (Neimanis, 2014: 28).

The nature discourses that Neimanis analyses rests on a fundamental dualist framework of the relation between human and nature. This binary logic implied by heteronormative civilised respectability politics is important, but it is only half the story. The Hocquenghemian concept of renaturalisation shares with Neimanis a concern for nature as othering, but such othering may, as we have seen, not necessarily invoke the binary relation between human and nature. In this article, I argue that nature as renaturalisation is a strategy for normative processes not only in dualist but also in monist ontologies.

Hasana Sharpe's work (2011) draws on Spinoza to argue for renaturalisation as a human realignment with nature in a monist positioning. Conceived as an antidote to human exceptionalism, the renaturalisation that Sharp advocates sees humans as part of nature and as sharing in the same ontological processes. Cause and effect determine human beings just like non-human entities, and our capacity to act, reason, think, and desire is radically materialised through our situatedness in a world that is simultaneously social and natural. As a critique of human exceptionalism, Sharp suggests an '*im*personal politics', a view to the more-than-human. With a nod to second wave feminism's insistence on the social importance of the everyday, Sharp argues that 'the impersonal is political' (Sharp, 2011: 155). This shift from the personal to the impersonal forefronts a critique of the supposed oppositional hierarchy between human and nature. Instead, Sharp's Spinozist monism holds that humans are part of nature because humans operate according to the same rules as natural beings: 'The renaturalization of humanity entails that humans are not different in kind from other finite beings: we all act by virtue of one another, by virtue of a power to be affected and affect others' (Sharp, 2011: 53). Renaturalisation, for Sharp, denotes the normative project of nurturing a practical understanding of this relevelling with nature as it asks how this realignment necessitates a reformulated mode of interaction. This endeavour entails acting with compassion and enhancing one's positive affective capacities together with nature.

Sharp reads a strong theory renaturalisation into the work of Spinoza, but her monism begs the question what constitutes the presumed difference between human and nature in the first place. That is, the project of reinserting the human in nature posits a primordial distance that we must explain rather than presume. As the Spinoza scholar Andre Santos Campos asserts:

> [T]o speak of renaturalization entails an awareness of a certain lack of nature in political issues that is supposed to be overcome (…) Even so, in Spinoza's philosophy nothing falls outside of nature, not even human exceptionalism or naturalistic ideologies – *they are rather imaginative ways of producing nature.* (Campos, 2012: 484, my emphasis)

If nature appears to not include the human in Sharp's Spinozan reconstruction, this analysis would seem to contradict the philosophy of immanence that standard readings of Spinoza emphasise. If an entity appears as outside of nature, we must demand an account of such an appearance. In other words, when the human emerges as exceptional, the question naturally rises which historical and political events prior to this appearance constitute the condition of possibility for such a dualism. How is this rather imaginative way of producing nature created?

The Hocquenghemian notion of renaturalisation encapsulates both the dualist politics of natural othering and the monist relevelling with nature. Through a historical analysis of the sedimentation of queer identity, it accounts for the material conditions that create the appearance of two conflicting, imaginative ways of producing nature. When cultural anxieties over queerness tie heterosexuality to the human by reference to nature, queer marginalisation as well as the possibility of performing the otherwise remains locked inside the contradictory field

move remains central to queer theory, which seeks to display sexuality, body and desire as an outcome of social and historical processes that by being disentangled from the necessary character of natural law become undoable (Butler, 1990: 107–193; Floyd, 2009). In Marxist theory, the discussion of commodity fetishism (Marx, 1990/1867: 163–177), which holds that under capitalism social relations become objectified and object relations become social, would later become the ground for a theory of reification that understands social relations as increasingly thing-ified and exchangeable. Reversing these progressive reifications would, not unlike the queer position, denaturalise that which appears with natural necessity and show its constitution as the product of capitalist social relations.

of nature politics. This complexity suggests that conflicting nature discourses do indeed appear simultaneously, but that this simultaneity is not arbitrary since they are rooted materially and historically in queer othering. Rather than a wholesale rejection of any talk of nature, this elaboration of renaturalisation shows how nature discourses are analytically useful for queer politics, insofar as far as they aid revealing and challenging oppressive applications of nature.

RENATURALISATION AND THE QUEER CRITIQUE OF THE HUMAN-NATURE BINARY

Even if renaturalisation strategies appear in both monist and dualist ontologies, Hocquenghem's careful attention to the latter points our analysis forward. Throughout his writings, Hocquenghem remained a serious critic of the human-nature binary as central to the persistence of heteronormativity and its violences. This focus invites us to take the analysis a step further and speculate on how the structural marginalisation of queerness might entrench the splitting of nature discourses, and by extension the human-nature binary. By way of concluding and expanding on the politics of renaturalisation for our time, the frictional social and antisocial elements of queerness in Hocquenghem's work provide tools to explain how queerphobic discourses also work to solidify the human-nature binary. If sexual politics are discursively generative, how may we understand the appearance of the human-nature binary in studies of sexual identity formation as a historical product of cultural anxieties around queerness?

In the mid 1970s, Hocquenghem found himself at the centre of a debate following the death of Italian gay filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, who was murdered by a hustler, a male sex worker. Hocquenghem wrote an essay in the French leftist newspaper *Libération*, in which he not only considers the murderer, Pelosi, a victim of his own act, but even applauds Pasolini's killing. As he writes, he finds his death 'neither abominable, nor even, perhaps, regrettable' (Hocquenghem, 2001/1978: 283). Rather than condemning the murder out of hand, Hocquenghem addresses the structural and material desiring mechanisms that caused Pasolini to seek out the ostensible danger, in Italian hustling working environment of the 1970s. Queerness as antisocial impulse remains at odds with respectable identity formation, and Hocquenghem finds in Pasolini a resistance to this assimilation. For him, something in the liminality of queerness ties desire to incivility. He suggests that perversion – the libidinised rejection of respectability and normalcy – is a characteristic of queer desire that ties it to danger.

Mario Mieli (2018/1977), Hocquenghem's contemporary, reaches a similar conclusion about Pasolini's murder but with a different argument. Mieli, too, considers desire to come logically prior to the establishment of sexual identities (hetero or homo), but rather than focusing on queer perversion, he argues that the repression of queer desires in identified heterosexuals translates into hostility towards the sexually non-conformist. Repression of desire becomes a desire to repress. Rumours say that Pelosi was a heterosexual hustler, which would bolster Mieli's analysis that 'the heterosexual who attacks a gay man both discloses and exorcises his own homosexuality (…) the aggressor, the torturer, stands in secret complicity with his victim' (Mieli, 2018/1977: 128, see also 161). Desire becomes the basis of complicity, a common ground that unfolds into aggressor and victim.

Hocquenghem and Mieli both contend that the complicity of the queer person, Pasolini, in his own killing cannot be overlooked when analysing the construction of queerness. This point, however, needs to be understood in its historical and political context. Irrespective of one's deeds or acts, murder can of course not be excused or explained away. Contemporary feminists rightfully attacked Hocquenghem at the time for victim blaming (Bourg, 2007: 186–192), and Mieli, though more cautious than Hocquenghem, should attract the same criticism. Nonetheless, what this analysis allows for is to consider how the violent encounter constructs the victim as de-agential; how the violent act performatively constitutes the binary of aggressor and victim.

Feminist scholars of queer ecologies such as Donna Haraway (1992) and Karen Barad (2007) often frame this encounter in terms of the relation between human and nature, between discourse and matter. Rather than seeing nature as a merely passive receptor of human categorisation, queer ecologists urge us to understand that human and nature emerge as opposed through particular, politicised encounters. In these creative encounters, the non-human is co-creative of meaning: the non-human becomes complicit in social world-making practices in the productive encounter between the human and its others. As Donna Haraway writes: 'Bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their boundaries materialize in social interaction among humans and non-humans' (Haraway, 1992: 297). Bodies, broadly conceived, produce meaning through boundary-making enactments; exclusions that engender agential properties. The separation of the human from the non-human creates a non-arbitrary constellation of subjecthood and objecthood that appear as ontologically separate. Karen Barad calls this process 'intra-action' which 'recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through their intra-action' (Barad, 2007: 33). These authors apply different vocabularies to emphasise the same thing: the splitting, iterative practices that separate out human/discourse from nature/matter. Unlike the renaturalisation of Sharpe, these monist ontologies can offer an explanation as to why we observe the appearance of dualisms.

Pasolini's murder is one such splitting event that opens up a structure of aggressor and victim, discourse and matter. The queer body, simultaneously *un*natural and all *too* natural, is a battle arena where tropes of proper humanness are exercised, delimiting the human as different from nature. These interpellations of the properly human echo and intersect with similar colonial demarcations of 'not-quite-humanness' (Wynter, 2003: 301) such that the queer object of investment changes according to the prevailing sexual hegemony (Chitty, 2020; Gosine, 2021). Heteronormativity – as well as its respectability-political sibling 'homonormativity' (Duggan, 2003) – can call upon a certain normativity of nature as desirable or as decidedly non-human to secure civilised respectability (Puar, 2007). In the present case, Pasolini's murder shows the liminality of sexual minority identity formation as both uncivilised natural other and disposable unnatural other. This not quite recognisable quasi-subject illustrates the double-sidedness of victimhood and complicity that the violent act creates.

Hocquenghem's work offers a tentative explanation for the material and historical sexual constitution of the human-nature relation. With the inculcation of modern queer identity, heteronormativity operationalises nature and the natural, or put differently, the imaginative ways of producing nature are contradictorily, but not arbitrarily, constitutive of queerphobic production of identities. Renaturalisation strategies are organised so that anxieties over queerness perpetuate the human-nature binary and solidify liberal fictions of self-contained humanness. Seen through a queer materialist lens, describing the decisive historical events points to the instantiation of certain sexual identities as an effect of the shifting cultural politics of capital. Hocquenghem's materialist analysis of desire allows us to trace both those processes whereby this splitting occurs in order to, finally, upend capital's cultural politics that utilise it.

Analysing the boundary-drawing events of the sexually othered, this argument for a project of queer renaturalisation invites the reader to engage with the differentiating processes whereby the human as exceptional emerges. This project highlights the boundaries that appear with and through the natural, pushing back against the hetero-human social world, and it portrays how queered others must navigate this liminal space of unnatural and too natural. Queer renaturalisations target the possibilities in exposing these contradictions and offer alternatives for engaging human and non-human natures otherwise.

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Managing Sex, Safeguarding the Soldier: Gender, Race, and Regulationism in Nineteenth Century Colonial Punjab

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ABSTRACT

Managing sex was an important part of Britain's imperial project in the colonies. Using a wide range of archival materials and examining the political debates and medical discourse from the nineteenth century, this study delves into the colonial military enterprise of regulating sexual recreation for British troops, and the processes through which the sexualised native woman was configured in colonial Punjab. I argue that paradoxical attempts to make sex available, while simultaneously emphasising imperial social mores of sexual respectability, led to the casting of the 'prostitute' as a colonial bogeyman; a vulgar but necessary evil, and a vector of disease.

Keywords: Empire and the British military, colonialism, nineteenth century India prostitution, venereal disease

> "Syphilis contracted by Europeans from Asiatic women is much more severe than that contracted in England. It assumes a horrible, loathsome and often fatal form through which in time, as years pass on, the sufferer finds his hair falling off, his skin and the flesh of his body rot, and are eaten away by slow, cankerous and stinking ulcerations; his nose first falls in at the bridge and then rots and falls off; his sight gradually fails and he eventually becomes blind; his voice, first becomes husky and then fades to a hoarse whisper as his throat is eaten away by fetid ulcerations which cause his breath to stink." (Lord Kitchener's Memorandum to the British Army, 1905[1])

INTRODUCTION

The British Empire in India underwent a vigorous militarisation in the aftermath of the Mutiny of 1857. The Army was 'Punjabised' (Talbot, 2011: 4) as fears of instability were stoked by the ongoing Great Game[2], and the threat of Russian invasion from the north-west. The steadfast loyalty of the Punjab troops, both Muslim and Sikh, along with the well-entrenched colonial belief in the theory of 'Martial Races' made for Punjab's allure as the new recruiting ground and military stronghold. Cantonments began dotting the province starting in the 1830s. As a cautious Army proposed raising the ratio of European troops to Indian sepoys, more regiments of young British soldiers made their way to India. Driven by the desire to provide recreation to the young men, along with other reasons rooted in a colonial mindset perceiving interlinkages between sexual vigour and masculinity, the Cantonment Act of 1864, provided for structured and regulated prostitution across military bases in India. This article highlights the colonial enterprise of managing sex and sexual relations to draw attention to a complex

[1] Lord Kitchener served as Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in India between 1902–1909. The quoted address is dated to 1905. This memorandum of warning was issued to young European soldiers in India and published in the journal of a social purity and reform association, namely, the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene (AMSH). See *Shield*, issue of June, 1/90, p. 19. The memorandum was found quoted in a 1937 confidential report by the AMSH titled 'A Rough Record 1858-1935 on the work of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene in Connection with the British Army in India'. National Archives of India (hereafter NAI)/ DGIMS/ Medical/ F. No. 247/ 1937.

[2] The Great Game was a political and diplomatic confrontation that existed for most of the 19th century between the British Empire and the Russian Empire over Afghanistan and neighbouring territories in Central and South Asia.

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Years.	Average No. of prostitutes on register.	Average attendance.	Total No. absent.	Average No. absent at each inspection.
1874	194·40	170·58	221	9·20
1875	191·11	170·50	201	8·37
1876	196·40	153·70	587	24·40

Figure 1. A Three-Year Average of Registered Prostitutes in Old Delhi. 1876. Source: NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 31-36/1876.

interplay of race, gender, class and sexuality underway in colonial Punjab. In policing the sexual relations of troops with native women, colonial fears of miscegenation and racial subversion become at once visible. The fear of native female sexuality, especially of the lower-class labouring female and the nomadic woman emerge as significant themes in State surveillance and casting of not only new colonial subjects but also new categories of 'criminal'. In a departure from previous studies in the region of prostitution in colonial India where Punjab – the chief garrison province – enjoys scarce focus, this study argues that the State viewed sexual relations as crucial to military stability and as a cornerstone of the Empire's stability in India. Over the years, an increasing number of historians such as Richard Price (2008, 2018, 2021), Kim Wagner (2007, 2010), and Harald Fisher-Tiné (2008, 2017) have considered the precariousness of Empire from different perspectives. Fears of Europeans 'going native'[3], the debilitating effects of heat, and colonial rebellions and insurgencies, were some of the concerns that triggered a sense of colonial insecurity. This research dwells on sexual relations with native lower-class women, and venereal disease as triggers for widespread fears. The article posits that perceptions of stability and State insecurity – given Punjab's centrality to the geo-strategic compass – were intertwined with constructs of a masculine and virile British fighting force. However, such constructs prompted paradoxical impulses to provide sex to maintain sexual vigour and machismo, while fanning fears of disease and miscegenation which prompted the casting of the British soldier as a victim of fatal seduction. Together, the two contrasting endeavours set the stage for the exploitation and persecution of certain groups of native women.

The subcontinental counterpart of the British Contagious Diseases Act, 1864 was introduced in India in 1868. That Act required that all women in the brothels of Lal Bazaars[4] had to be registered with the Cantonment Police. Each woman was issued a registration ticket containing her personal details including name and caste. Registration women were then allowed to solicit clients within cantonment bounds, upon the condition that they consort with British troops alone. The buildings which housed the registered women were rented and maintained by the stationed regiment. Separate brothels were maintained to provide services to native troops. Women providing services in the European *chaklas* (brothels) could not provide services in the native *chaklas* and vice versa. Chatterjee (1992: 51–55) suggests, that the act of registration completed the enrolment of each woman as a colonial subject, exposed to the probing and penalising gaze of the state which reserved the right to subject women to the rituals of medical examination in lock hospitals. The city of Delhi acquired a lock hospital in the year 1875. The hospital was built near the Turkman Gate and was occupied on 26 March 1876. Registration extended to the cantonment, as well as outlying areas like Sabzi Mandi, Paharganj and Sadar Bazaar, which lay within a four-mile radius of the Old Delhi military cantonment.

The daily average number of sick for the year in 1878, was 15.16. Inspections were held twice a month by the cantonment surgeon personally. Details of each woman, along with date of examination and the signatures of the surgeon, were entered on each ticket. Women found infected were detained in hospital for treatment for a minimum of two weeks, or until the symptoms of syphilitic infection disappeared. Two *dhais* (midwives) were employed to keep an eye on the women. The total number of fines levied on the registered women during the year was Rs. 96.12. The head matron was paid Rs.15 per month and the second, Rs.5 per month. A Report from Jalandhar lamented that failing to pay a fine, a woman went to prison for a week at best and that the penalty was scarcely sufficient punishment or deterrent against future 'misbehaviour'. Moreover, fines were considered an

[3] As defined by the Post-Colonial Studies guide, going native is 'the colonizer's fear of contamination by absorption into native life and customs'. See Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts. London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 115–120. Long a staple of the Western imagination, the going native myth forms the basis of novels like Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' and films like 'Dances with Wolves'.

[4] The term denotes red light areas or regimental bazaars in cantonments.

Diseases.	Remained.	Admitted.	Total.	Discharged.	Remaining.
Gonorrhœa	6	38	44	44	...
Syphilis	6	54	60	54	6
Leucorrhœa	1	92	93	89	4
Ulcer	...	11	11	9	2
Abscess of the labia ...	...	3	3	3	...
Cystic polypus of vagina ...	...	1	1	1	...
Itch	1	1	2	2	...
Total ...	14	200	214	202	12

Figure 2. Venereal Disease Cases Admitted and Discharged at the Lock Hospital in Colonial Delhi. 1876. Source: NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 31-36/1876.

ineffectual method of penalty as many officials believed that women often got their patrons or paramours to pay for them (Chatterjee, 1992: 52).

A rigorous system was put in place to collect information on the activities of 'prostitutes'. Discrepancies in the number of 'public' women known to reside in any town/city on the one hand, and the number of registered women on the other, led Rules to be implemented even more stringently and the coercion made more aggressive. In Lahore in 1867, a case of such discrepancy came to light. With the assistance of *lambardars*[5] and *dhais* it was gathered that there were around 8,000 'prostitutes' inhabiting the city. The number of registered women, however, stood at only 97 in 1870 and around 240 in 1881. Consequently, surveillance and registration methods were made more stringent. The 'Report on the Administration of Criminal Justice in the Punjab and its Dependencies during the Year 1881-1882' details the levy of heavy fines and arbitrary imprisonment of any woman suspected of being an unregistered 'prostitute' (NAI/ Home/ Judicial B/ F. No. 4-5/ 1883).

By 1875, of the 25 stations in the Punjab that were garrisoned by European troops, 16 had 'lock hospitals' – a specialised establishment for the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.

Apart from Ambala, Kasauli and Dalhousie, all military stations in the province reported a significant increase in venereal diseases between 1874 and 1875. Some stations such as Attock and Nowshera reported increases: in 1874, Attock had an admission rate of 37/1,000 compared with the significant increase of 273/1000 in 1875. Nowshera reported a similar surge from 62/1,000 in 1874 to 284 in 1875. The sharp rise of venereal disease numbers in some cantonments was attributed to the proliferation of 'unlicensed' prostitution. One Lock Hospital report laments:

> The class of women has been similar to those of former years. Some of them are old and unusually unattractive, which is to be regretted, as it increases the tendency of the soldiers to prefer unlicensed women. (Report on the Lock Hospitals in the Punjab, 1887: 2)

'Prostitutes' were detected with the help of *dhais* and reported to the Cantonment Magistrate if found to be infected. The use of *lambardars*, *chowkidars*[6] and local *dhais* to serve as eyes and ears of the State in conjunction with regimental police, was a common practice to seek out 'diseased' women. Frequently the *mohulladar*[7] or the sweeper, was also obliged to give notice to the police or Municipal Secretary when a registered prostitute took up her residence within a *mohulla* (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 85-92/ 1879).

Quite often, as in the case of Nowshera in 1874, it was found that while the number of venereal cases amongst the European troops were 'alarming', the registered prostitutes of the regimental *chakla* (brothel) were in fact relatively free from disease. Furthermore, the European troops, having contracted venereal infections elsewhere, passed it onto the women in the Lal Bazaars. The Chief Medical Officer at Jalandhar Cantonment Hospital reported that disease was spread amongst the men by 'the prostitution and laxed morals of the European women

[5] Revenue officials responsible for recovering land revenue and other sums due to the State.

[6] A watchman in a village or neighbourhood. The bureaucratic apparatus of the British colonial government contained certain auxiliary institutions of local surveillance and statistics collection, working in conjunction with the police and the judiciary. *Mukhiyas* (village headmen) and chowkidars were important for the colonial state to maintain public order.

[7] The term *mohulla* refers to an area of a town or a village, a community. A *Mohulladar* was a petty municipal official who often formed another cog in the wheel that was colonial state surveillance, recording births and deaths, reporting 'nuisance' etc.

of the regiment', who, when diseased 'did infinitely more harm than the same number of native women' (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 41-43/ 1876). Preoccupations of Imperial policy with maintenance of 'the moral character of the governing race' (Fischer-Tine, 2003: 183) and the attempts to suppress traffic in White women following from the racial argument notwithstanding, the archive does not yield any correspondence within medical or military files from the Punjab, to suggest any mandatory examinations or registrations for European prostitutes.

A report of the Medical Officer in Charge at Rawalpindi similarly reveals that 'native' women in the *chakla* of the 81st Regiment stationed there suffered chiefly due to infected troops (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 47/ 1887). As regards the Punjab province, the Army's files are replete with reports and letters, provide no reason to believe that European women or troops were summoned for examinations or produced before the Cantonment Magistrate to be fined for spreading disease or expelled from a Cantonment. Penal measures were reserved for native 'prostitutes'.

A SCIENTIFIC FRONTIER: MILITARISING THE PROVINCE

The second Anglo-Afghan war[8] gave a fillip to the concept of the Great Game and fuelled the desire to secure a 'Scientific Frontier' bolstered by sound military strategy. Within the British military bureaucracy, the ideas of a new organisational set-up for the Army in India gained ground. Consequently, the ranks of the military in Punjab swelled, recruited mostly from the 'martial races' – chiefly, the Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims. Overall, the number of native soldiers in the British army went from a quarter of the infantry in 1881, to half in the year 1893 (Mazumder, 2003: 17).

The European garrisons stationed in India were also strengthened as a bulwark against any future mutinies in the aftermath of the Mutiny of 1857. Several British groups of youth were recruited to make this possible, but checking the attrition of troops on account of infection and sickness also had the attention of the State, especially since the overall rate of venereal infections in the nineteenth century was staggering. One of every three Army sick cases involved venereal diseases at the time (Walkowitz, 1980: 69).

The Indian Contagious Diseases Act of 1868, and the affiliated Lock Hospital Rules reflect the attempts to justify increased European garrison in India by attempting to ensure that soldiers were in good health. This, however, was not the only reason. It was believed that if the costs associated with disease control and treatment per soldier made the European garrisons an expensive affair, it would undercut the rationale of stationing so many young soldiers in such a distant tropical colony. Indeed, the loss of service and weakening of martial strength of the Empire, accruing from a large proportion of infirm soldiers was a distressing prospect for the Raj.

BUYING SEX IN COLONIAL PUNJAB: MAKING AND RECRUITING WOMEN OF 'VICE'

On June 17, 1886, a military order known as the 'Infamous Circular Memorandum', since its first discovery and mass censure, was sent to all the Cantonments of India by Quartermaster General Chapman. Issued in the name of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, Lord Roberts, the order read:

> In the regimental bazaars it is necessary to have a sufficient number of women, to take care that they are sufficiently attractive, to provide them with proper houses, and, above all, to insist upon means of ablution being always available. (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 47, 1887: 10)

The officer in command of the 2nd Battalion Cheshire Regiment stationed at Ambala (now a city in the Indian state of Haryana) sent the following application to the magistrate of Ambala Cantonment:

> Requisition for extra attractive women for regimental bazaar, in accordance with Circular Memorandum 21a…these women's fares by one-horse conveyances, from Umballa to Solon, will be paid by the Cheshire Regiment on arrival. Please send young and attractive women, as laid down in Quartermaster General's Circular, No. 21a…there are not enough women; they are not attractive enough. More and younger women are required, and their houses should be improved (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 47, 1887: 11).

[8] The Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–80) is an important chapter in the intricate narrative of late 19th century geopolitics of the Central Asian region. The conflict was rooted in the Great Game reflecting the Russian and British empires' strategic and imperial manoeuvres, with Afghanistan caught in the crossfire.

> Another officer of the Regiment wrote: 'I have ordered the number of prostitutes to be increased to twelve and have given special instructions as to the four additional women being young and of attractive appearance. (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 47, 1887: 12)

The medical in-charge of the Ambala lock hospital commented in 1878, upon the 'desirability of inducing younger women to live in the regimental bazaars… large numbers of those now present are old and worn out, and younger ones seem reluctant to take their place'. Various means were proposed to induce women, ranging from tempting them with better accommodation. It was believed that this would 'pull a younger and more attractive class of women who would be glad to pursue their calling there (in the regimental bazaar)' (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 47/ 1887, p. 11).

The regimental *kotwal* was then instructed to take two policemen into the villages to find twelve to fifteen girls and women of fourteen years and upward; the sequestration of children for sex work was normalised under the Raj. They were asked to bring only the 'best-looking' (Report of The Committee Appointed by The Secretary of State for India, 1893: 18). These girls and women would then be given a licence and deposited with the keeper/matron of a brothel. Girls and women found to be diseased during the 'surgical rape' (Andrew and Bushnell, 1899: 8–9) of periodic examinations, were deprived of their passes, and incarcerated in the lock hospitals until the symptoms faded. In the event of any resistance, the girls and women were ousted by the police and forced to exit the cantonment. The girls and women were detained in the hospital, 'the compound door was locked and there was a chowkidar at the gate' (Report of The Committee Appointed by The Secretary of State for India, 1893: 19). If a girl or woman with even a mild infection attempted to escape, a hefty fine of Rs. 50 was imposed on them by the Cantonment Magistrate. Some problematics of the Report include the prejudiced and orientalised representations of Indian women. In their appeal to the British government to end their 'life of shame', the reformers exalted and underscored their observation of the guilt, lament, and humiliation displayed by the women that they met, as though stunned by the scrupulous propensities of the 'heathen women' of whom they expected a 'blindness of the moral sense' (Andrew and Bushnell, 1899: 22).

VENEREAL DISEASE AMONG EUROPEAN TROOPS: STATISTICS AND REMEDIES

During the colonial period, venereal disease accounted for 25 to 50 percent of all hospital admissions in any part of India. Syphilis was the most common of all venereal infections rampant in the colony, and there was increased spread of infection when compared with Syphilis numbers in England. The idea that the tropical climate exacerbated certain types of infections gained wide currency in India and in the UK, and the pathology of syphilitic infections came to be discussed obsessively in the nineteenth century.

Venereal infections stirred tremendous anxiety on account of the putative indication of moral failing – an element which set VD apart from other diseases commonly contracted by troops in India, such as Malaria, Dysentery, and Cholera. The main problems causing the Empire with venereal disease, specifically syphilis, in India were, firstly, the issue of manpower shortage. If a soldier was found infected, he was sitting out from active service for at least a month, being treated with mercury, often manifesting as unpleasant side effects for the soldiers, who were then infirm due to the time needed to recover from mercury-based treatments. Secondly, considering the cost of recruitment and their maintenance in India, along with medical care, the European troops posed serious costs, especially if the cost of lost service was added to the computation. The third issue was the issue of nuisance and indiscipline: the wanderings of the European soldiers scouting for sex, was a cause for concern. A seemingly mundane technological innovation like the bicycle, which appeared on the colonial scene in the 1880s, only made the challenge greater by enhancing the mobility of the British soldiers (Arnold and DeWald, 2011).

Reports on the cantonment hospitals revealed the state of venereal disease numbers amongst European and native troops and contained worrying statistics for the Empire, even into the early twentieth century[9]. 'In 1877 the admissions to hospitals from venereal diseases were 362 per 1,000. In 1895 they had risen to 537 per 1,000. In 1895, 45 per 1,000, or, altogether, 3,200 men out of a total force of 71,031, were constantly in hospital from this cause' (Report of the Departmental Committee of the India Office, 1897: 468). A general report on the incidence of venereal disease among British troops placed the number of Syphilis cases at 3,485 admissions for 1896, and 3851 admissions from soft chancre, another kind of ulcerative venereal infection. The overall number admitted with venereal sores were 7,336 and the average number of 'constantly sick' stood at 705.68. Gonorrhoea related admissions for the same year stood at 6,770 and in 1903; the total admission rate per thousand was 249.5, 200.3

[9] Florence Nightingale's report placed the number of venereal infections amongst European troops to be five times the number amongst Indian soldiers. For detailed statistics contained in the report, see 'Observations on the Evidence Contained in Stational Reports submitted to Her (Florence Nightingale) by the Royal Commission on the Sanitary State of the Army in India*, 1863*', p. 89. Wellcome Digital Collection, https://wellcomecollection.org/works/e6eb85ah/items?canvas=97.

for 1904. This was a significant increase from numbers at the close of the previous century. The per thousand infection rate in 1896, for instance, stood at 57. Reasons for the consistently high rate of venereal infections was attributed to the 'youthful inexperience of the soldiers' and the great proportion of 'very young lads'. In Lahore division, the rate of admissions in 1904 was 50.3/1,000, amongst the four highest numbers in the country, with Secunderabad, Poona and Meerut being the other highest three. The Northern Command divisions which included Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Dalhousie, Multan, Ferozepur, Jalandhar, Kasauli, Amritsar, Ambala, Solan, Dagshai, Jatogh and Subathu, were amongst the most affected. The lock hospital at Dagshai reported 91 admissions from venereal infections in 1883. By 1887, this number had grown to 229 admissions (Report on the Lock Hospitals in the Punjab for the year 1887, 1888: 27).

It is noteworthy that when compared, the prevalence of venereal disease amongst the Infantry soldiers was significantly higher than those of the Cavalry and the Artillery. This was attributed to the predominance of infantry battalions who frequently marched and lived in temporary camps along the stations of the Northern Command. This skewed pattern was attributed to 'agrarian prostitutes' – a class of women living in villages adjacent to cantonments as well as military camps. Considered 'more dangerous than the regulars in the bazaars', the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, Denzil Ibbetson even referred to them with the racist and misogynistic moniker of 'sand rats' (NAI/ Military/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 697-698, 1905: 17). The Punjab government especially voiced its anxieties regarding 'old standing agricultural villages where women lived under circumstances connecting them closely with cantonments…known to be freely available to the troops and to be spreading disease amongst them' (NAI/ Military/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 697-698, 1905: 19).

Recorded numbers on rates of infection can hardly be considered accurate, for it was not uncommon for European troops to seek alternate cures to evade the gaze of the army surgeon (NAI/ Home/ Public/ F. No. 155, 1871). This could be attributed not only to greater financial expense involved in going to the cantonment hospital, but also to the unpalatable nature of the mercurial treatments. The absence of sound medical understanding of venereal diseases until the early twentieth century, and the lack of antibiotics, meant that medicines administered were often a 'hit and miss' (Kennedy, 1996: 23) trial rather than a definitive treatment; an understandable disincentive to seeking treatment[10].

The mortality amongst British troops in India was 'compiled on the principle of accounting for every man becoming ineffective in the year' (Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Sanitary State of the Army, 1863: 10). It was reported that one company worth of troops in each regiment was lost in India every twenty months. The rate of venereal disease was particularly high amongst the younger soldiers, as the mortality of soldiers aged 20 to 25 years stood at 56.4/1,000 (Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Sanitary State of the Army, 1863: 14). The mounting cost of maintaining each soldier's health climbed to £100 by 1864. Imperial relations of production ensured that the financial costs of protecting the European troops from their own licentiousness were borne primarily by India. As one Sanitary Commissioner put it – 'the sanitary state of the army is intimately linked to the finances of India and influences them to a large extent' (Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Sanitary State of the Army, 1863: 20).

'SONS OF EMPIRE'[11] AND THE 'UNCHASTE NATIVE'

It is noteworthy that rates of venereal infection amongst Indian sepoys listed in the same report stood at 24.5/1,000 in 1903, 20.6/1,000 in 1904, a steady and considerable decline from the number in 1897, when rates were around 40.8/1,000. The disparity was attributed to the fact that most sepoys were married, many had families living in towns and villages near the military stations, and that they were more accustomed and immune to the 'unclean ways of the natives' (Statistical, Sanitary, and Medical Reports of the Army Medical Department, 1866: 20). An article in the *Indian Lancet* went as far as to say:

> The point made so much of, that the sepoys are more chaste, possess more self-control as regards sexual intercourse is not true. Anyone who has been any time in India, and has been observant, must have noticed crowds of sepoys visiting native prostitutes. It may possibly be found on investigation that the reason they suffer less from venereal disease than European soldiers is this: they have acquired immunity, having suffered from hereditary syphilis in youth. (*Indian Lancet*, April 1, 1897, p. 1)

[10] The Syphilis causing bacteria was not discovered until 1905. Often surgeons could not distinguish between Gonorrhoea, Syphilis and other ulcers of the genital area.

[11] British Army Medical Department's Statistical, Sanitary, and Medical Reports in the 1860s often used this term for European troops in the colonies. One example is the 'Statistical, Sanitary, and Medical Reports of the Army Medical Department', Apr 1866, 37(74), pp. 324–343. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5182640/?page=13.

From the middle of the nineteenth century the enclavist approach to sanitation and health shifted to accommodate public sanitation; envisioning the extension of sanitary measures to the native towns and villages surrounding the cantonments (Peckham and Pomfret, 2013). The city of Lahore was a constant sanitation disaster in the State's eyes; commenting on the condition of the Old City, an article in The Tribune read: 'the filth that is accumulated near the Moree Gate is very offensive and is per se sufficient to create an epidemic' (*The Tribune*, June 9, 1883: 8). An earlier article from the same year remarked upon the 'dirt and nauseating smells of the streets of the City and its choking population' (*The Tribune*, April 21, 1883: 3).

The perceived attack upon the European troops in India, as posed by venereal disease, played into the narrative of the larger siege witnessed in the form of the 1857 rebellion. The decades of 1850s and 1860s saw a very high incidence of death due to disease, sparking concern amongst the British public and Government about the welfare of the 'sons of Empire'. The narrative elicited an outcry over the well-being of the Empire's soldiers, using the imagery of men serving in hostile conditions to keep the sun from setting upon the Raj. As a response to the hue and cry, the British Royal Commission was set up in 1859, to Enquire into the 'Sanitary State of the Army in India', and its report was released in 1861. The data was published in the form of Annual Statistical Sanitary and Medical Reports. The international nature of the venereal disease debate in India is evidenced by the involvement of the then famous figure of Florence Nightingale. She was consulted by the Royal Commission and helped prepare the questionnaire circulated to military stations for the gathering of evidence on the effect of VD on military health[12]. She advocated the extension of concern for community health and sanitation, beyond the lines (Halvorson and Wescoat, 2020). According to Hume (1986), civilian Sanitary Commissioners in the three presidencies believed that improving the sanitary condition of the army would depend upon ameliorating sanitary deficiencies in India more generally.

The reports of the Royal Commission constituted in 1859 serve as one of the foremost sources which help trace the history of sanitary work in British India. The 1863 Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Army is a rich source that highlights the mortality rate amongst British troops was 69 per 1,000 (NAI/ Foreign/ General (Part A)/ F. No. 29, 1864: 17). The establishment of a Commission of Public Health in each presidency was one of the recommendations of the Commission. It also pointed to the need to improve sanitation and other prevention measures adopted by civil society to achieve improvements in the health of the British Army. Under the Military Cantonments Act of 1864, to improve hygiene within the military, a sanitary police force was formed and managed by officers of the Army Medical Corps.

To achieve similar regulation and surveillance in municipal areas, Sanitary Boards were formed in each of the provinces in 1864. However, a new class of officers known as 'Sanitary Commissioners' soon took over the tasks of the board as representation within the commissions, of members from the civil, military, and medical circles, became a sticking point. The Sanitary Commissioner of India and the provincial sanitary commissioners had no executive powers, and their chief role was to advise the Government (Harrison, 1994).

Epidemic diseases such as plague, leprosy, cholera, and malaria wreaked havoc, but venereal disease was an equally major cause of mortality amongst the European troops. Its seriousness was compounded not only by the fact that it dealt a blow to the muscular arm and source of stability of the Empire, but also because it seemed to undercut the belief in western moral superiority. It was not mortality alone that weighed heavily on the State. Morbidity associated with promiscuous sexual behaviour drew censure as it threatened to undermine notions of racial superiority. When compared with the 'Martial Races'[13] of the Punjab, who reported rather low rates of venereal infection, maintaining perceptions of European masculinity and robustness acquired even greater valence (Peers, 1998)[14].

MECHANISMS OF SURVEILLANCE: THE LOCK HOSPITAL SYSTEM

Mechanisms of surveillance, control and penalty built into the regulatory measures used against venereal disease were stacked disproportionately against the women. The system actively monitored women and hardly ever the

[12] A questionnaire was sent to every local Indian military station, highlighting topography, mortality and disease, sanitation conditions, drainage, water supply, and barrack conditions. A special sub-heading asked questions specifically related to venereal diseases.

[13] The category of 'Martial Race', also a category created by the British in India, included the Punjabi Sikhs and the Nepalese Gurkhas. The category and its nomenclature are flawed and represent the historical blindness to Indian culture and society amongst colonialists. The Sikhs have always been a religion and not a 'race' and the ranks of the Gurkhas regiments were composed of troops belonging to different ethnic backgrounds, not confined to Nepal alone.

[14] For a riveting discussion on the practices and processes through which two different elites, Indian and European, were constituted as 'masculine' and 'effeminate' during colonialist and nationalist politics during 1880s and 1890s in India, see Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.

men. The strapping expense of maintaining a large garrison in India, was often cited as the rationale behind attempts to maximise days of active duty per troop. Sick troops languishing in hospitals signified a financial burden. Hence, it was considered cheaper to treat the women than to treat their willing clients, in a long cultural tradition of seeing prostitutes as offenders, but not the men who use them. Furthermore, the unpleasantness of genital examination was considered a likely trigger for disaffection amongst the soldiers, while the presumed brazenness of native women offered good reason to subject them to the unpalatable and coercive examinations. Indeed, the mechanism was viewed by many as an 'act of charity to the poor women' (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 85-92, 1879: 11).

As a response to the grave concerns over venereal disease, of which Syphilis was the most common, the system of lock hospitals was introduced in colonial India in the early nineteenth century. The model was introduced in the Madras presidency district in 1805 before being exported to England, where it crystallised in the form of the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, which was ultimately replicated in India and other colonies.

The life of the colonial lock hospital was not without vicissitudes. The State sometimes celebrated and supported the system, and intermittently lamented its gross failure and the financial burden it entailed. A lock hospital report from 1875 stated clearly that 'the stations with lock hospitals have established no reputation superior to those where such institutions were not at work' (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 41-43, 1876: 7). In 1877, Dr Cunningham, the Chief Medical Officer advising the British Army Sanitary Commission, held that the hospitals had 'done little good and could not be improved' (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 41-43, 1876: 11). The Army Sanitary Commission of 1894, as well as Secretary for War, Lord Lansdowne, endorsed this view. During a House of Lords debate on this matter on 17 May 1897, Lansdowne articulated – 'I am bound to tell your lordships that the conclusion to which I am disposed to arrive is that this practice of regular inspection did not produce the desired effect'. Vexations with the lock hospital system only precipitated the sharpening of coercive military regulation of 'fallen women'. Measures ranged from incarceration, whether in jail or in the lock hospital, to expulsion from cantonments.

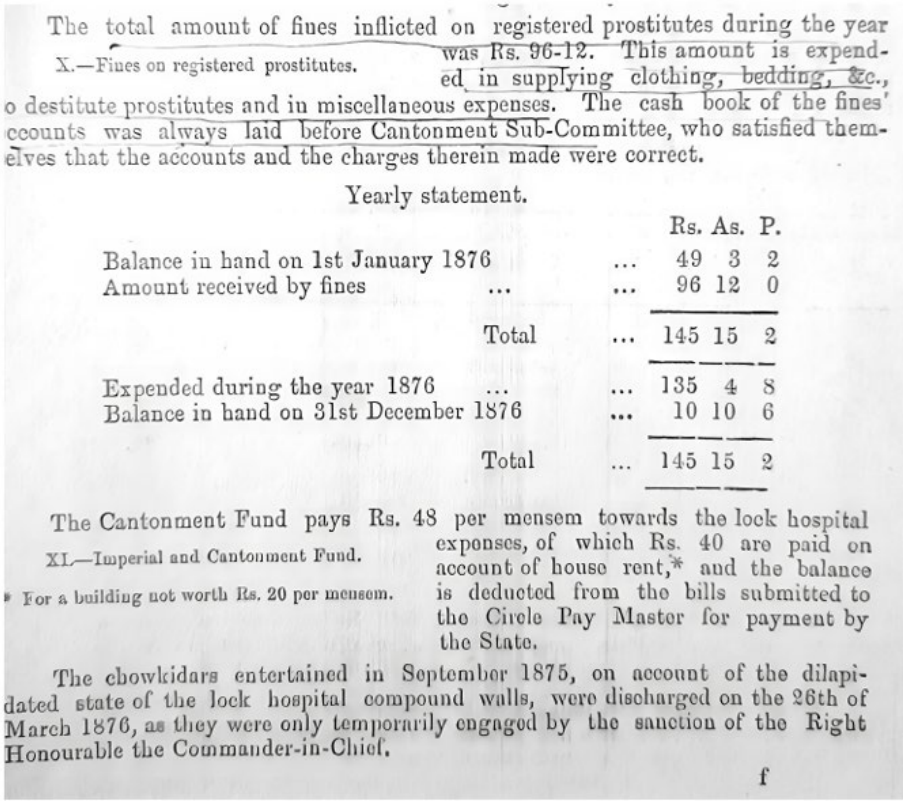
At Meean Meer cantonment in Lahore, the station lock hospital was renovated in the 1880s. The walls were made higher by a few feet and the doors boarded to ensure the women could not escape. No matter the institution, whether brothel or lock hospital, the women's' state of imprisonment emerges as a common strand. While fewer reports provide insight to the condition of women in brothels, some do register 'inhuman practices obtaining in brothels' (NAI/ Home/ Police A/ F. No. 173-189, 1919: 2). A report from the year 1919 talks about the *'challa kothis'*, a term denoting private brothel, in Rawalpindi and other parts of Punjab. It accounts for the 'inhuman treatment' of women and girls, many of whom were detained by brothel keepers to whom the women inmates often owed a debt. The recruitment of 'women police' to deal with the matter effectively, was proposed by the civil and military administrations alike. In the case of the lock hospital, women were treated in the inpatient department, subjected not only to the discipline and regimen of a colonial institution, but also to coercive and invasive colonial medical treatments (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 53-54, 1888).

Investigating such colonial perceptions in the treatment of venereal disease offers clues to discursive constructs of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Lord Kitchener's highly illustrative address, quoted at the beginning of this article, represents the very palpable fear of racial perversion:

> Syphilis contracted by Europeans from Asiatic women is much more severe than that contracted in England. It assumes a horrible, loathsome and often fatal form through which in time, as years pass on, the sufferer finds his hair falling off, his skin and the flesh of his body rot, and are eaten away by slow, cankerous and stinking ulcerations; his nose first falls in at the bridge and then rots and falls off; his sight gradually fails and he eventually becomes blind; his voice, first becomes husky and then fades to a hoarse whisper as his throat is eaten away by fetid ulcerations which cause his breath to stink. (Lord Kitchener's Memorandum to the British Army in 1905, quoted in Baynes, 1967: 269).

Such depictions of the British soldier victim of the 'Asiatic Women', underscored their peculiar threat to British masculinity. This is a case in point of the gendered and racialised views of native societies and the colonial imagery deployed to achieve a systematic process of othering. Unregistered women, as well as those seen to be evading disease were penalised by way of fines. Soliciting in public places and missing their periodic examinations at the lock hospitals also invited amercements. As it were, the 'vectors' bore the expense of their own surveillance and incarceration. A Cantonment Sub-Committee reporting on the working of the Delhi lock hospital revealed that the total amount of fines levied on registered prostitutes during the year amounted to Rs. 96.12. The amount was expended on supplying clothing, bedding, and so on to destitute prostitutes and on 'miscellaneous' expenses. In each district, the cash book of the fines was laid before the Sub-Committee tasked with inspecting the charges made (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 31-36/ 1878).

Analyses of the figure of the colonial 'prostitute' reveal the creation of a unique colonial subjectivity reliant on instilling fear of penalty and imprisonment. Discussion and deliberation as to how best the Indian Contagious



The total amount of fines inflicted on registered prostitutes during the year was Rs. 96-12. This amount is expended in supplying clothing, bedding, &c., to destitute prostitutes and in miscellaneous expenses. The cash book of the fines' accounts was always laid before Cantonment Sub-Committee, who satisfied themselves that the accounts and the charges therein made were correct.

X.—Fines on registered prostitutes.

Yearly statement.

		Rs.	As.	P.
Balance in hand on 1st January 1876 ...	...	49	3	2
Amount received by fines ...	...	96	12	0
Total	...	145	15	2
Expended during the year 1876 ...	...	135	4	8
Balance in hand on 31st December 1876	...	10	10	6
Total	...	145	15	2

The Cantonment Fund pays Rs. 48 per mensem towards the lock hospital expenses, of which Rs. 40 are paid on account of house rent,* and the balance is deducted from the bills submitted to the Circle Pay Master for payment by the State.

XI.—Imperial and Cantonment Fund.

* For a building not worth Rs. 20 per mensem.

The chowkidars entertained in September 1875, on account of the dilapidated state of the lock hospital compound walls, were discharged on the 26th of March 1876, as they were only temporarily engaged by the sanction of the Right Honourable the Commander-in-Chief.

f

Figure 3. Fines Levied on Registered Prostitutes. 1879. Source: NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 55-92.

Diseases Act XIV of 1868 could be aligned with rules framed under Act XXII of 1864, were widespread in the 1870s. Official reports pointed out that punishment for offences in the former Act, ranged from one to three months, while as per the Rules in the 1864 Act, the alternative punishment in lieu of fines was only eight days – a punishment considered 'entirely inadequate' in the case of repetition of offences. Women and girls incarcerated and performing sex work for the British Army were often poor and destitute, they were incapable of paying any fines and an imprisonment of eight days as penalty was considered ineffective. Where fines were considered inadequate and penalties not stringent enough, women and girls were imprisoned and subjected to hard labour in prisons. The Deputy Commissioner of Shimla in his correspondences with the Commissioner of Ambala division urged the need to provide for a long alternative imprisonment given that:

> … at Lahore, hundreds of women were inadequately punished, as they received only a quarter of the eight days in lieu of a fine (and) this was no affliction on them…here in the hills where hard labour cannot be inflicted on women, eight days is insufficient. (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 55-92/ 1879)

The term 'prostitute' was weaponised and deployed against all groups of women that were perceived as a 'nuisance'. Racial and gendered perceptions of hygiene and morality did not accommodate an understanding of the wide spectrum that was traditionally 'public' women. Furthermore, regulations and rules targeting 'vice' were actively used to collapse, conflate, and control different types of sexual relationships in the colonies. Concubinage and polyandry, for instance, were often conflated with prostitution. In 1870, the Deputy Commissioner of Kangra expressed that 'Magistrates should have the power to extend any provisions of the Act XXII of 1864 regarding registration, inspection, etc. to women keeping intercourse with Europeans under supposed immunity from laws and cohabiting with Europeans when not duly registered' (NAI/ Home/ Public/ F. No. 155/ 1870). The word 'cohabiting' here could apply to numerous kinds of relationships between Indian women and European men, which, although outside the domestic realm, lacked any commercial character.

Historians Erica Wald (2009) and Anne Laura Stoler (1989), urge historians to use the term 'prostitute' in the colonial context, with great care. Wald's (2009: 1471) note of caution ties in with the point made above, about colonial constructs of race, sexuality, morality and hygiene, which produced as well as resulted from the fear of disease. In the colonial context, 'prostitute' is a term that must constantly be problematised for very often the category included girls and women who would not see themselves as a 'common prostitute' – a flat and wide category of insult created by the State. Certainly, it would be unfair to say that this conflation and flattening to remould the definition of prostitute was a result of colonialism alone. There were other economic and political dimensions of this phenomenon:

- A new socio-economic milieu emerging in India. In the case of Punjab, for instance, after the creation of the canal colonies and extension of cultivation, labour thronged from other regions, such as the United Provinces, in large numbers. The results were especially visible in the western districts where population density became twofold in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Grewal, 1983: 517).
- The commercialisation of agriculture.
- The development of communication.
- The development of trade and industry.

The interplay of these factors with the changing sexual mores, notions of morality, and of femininity in the nineteenth century, played a role in altering the demographics but also the socio-economic milieu of towns and cities with the migration of a predominantly male labour force and new employment opportunities. The colonial State was, however, the main force informing changing ideas about prostitution. The State actively overreached and assisted in assigning this label to different groups of women, like servant girls and domestic slaves, who were not traditionally identified with sex work until the nineteenth century (Wald, 2009: 1472).

In the military as well as medical circles in nineteenth century colonial India, prostitution was seen by many as a safeguard against forms of intercourse perceived as perverse and 'unnatural', such as incest and homosexuality. In 1870, Dr W. T. Greene remarked that:

> I cannot look upon the existence in our midst, of a class of professional prostitutes as altogether an unmixed evil; for I believe that were such a means – deplorable as the necessity for it must ever remain – of gratifying their passions unattainable by the rising generation, far greater evils than those we deprecate at present would result. (Source: Greene, 1870: 181)

The prostitute was vulgar but necessary. She was loathed if visible and feared if invisible. The idea of a discrete and managed vulgarity underpinned the system of regulated prostitution in colonial India.

Registered women were expected to 'voluntarily' submit to weekly medical examinations checking them for visible signs of primary or secondary venereal infections, signs ranging from fever and fatigue, to body rashes, ulcers, and chancres. Moreover, medical treatment closely resembled coercive incarceration. Women were not allowed to leave the lock hospital until a certificate or clean bill of health was obtained. The resulting stigma and loss of income exacerbated the economic hardships of women, who found themselves returning to the *chakla* from lack of alternate recourse. The examinations themselves were invasive and conducted with the metal speculum – a device meant to investigate bodily orifices for signs of infection and other symptoms of disease. High rate of absenteeism at fortnightly medical examinations remained a constant challenge for the State. Observing the low rate of attendance at periodic examinations, one medical officer suggested that:

> … the use of the Speculum might be discontinued as much as possible, as giving the greatest offence and probably being unnecessary in the majority of cases… the use of the Speculum renders them liable to special ridicule and they are followed home by the boys of the place calling them by the native nickname of this instrument. (Source: NAI/ Home/ Public/ F. No. 155/ 1871)

THE ROYAL COMMISSION OF 1871

The Royal Commission of 1871 cited the evidence of a Dr Ross who had served in India, China, and England, and was familiar with the working of the Contagious Diseases Act in all three places. In Punjab he was attached to the 92nd Regiment in Jalandhar. He submitted that:

> … the Rules there (in Jalandhar) are the same as the Act in England. The women are examined periodically every fortnight, and diseased women are detained in hospital until cured. All the prostitutes are native women… the system was carried out in India and China for years before the Act was dreamed of. (Royal Commission Report upon the Administration and Operation of Contagious Diseases Act, 1871: 78)

On the question of subjecting men to weekly examinations, the report went on to mention that:

> the men were formerly subjected to weekly examination, but this practice has been discontinued on account of the strong feeling against it of the medical officers, and the belief that the men could conceal disease if they chose, and that it was therefore not much use. (Royal Commission Report upon the Administration and Operation of Contagious Diseases Act, 1871: 80).

In 1872, Lord Cardwell issued a circular ordering the suspension of pay for soldiers admitted to hospitals with venereal disease. Such a penalty was geared towards deterrence. The idea did not gain popularity for the fear that it would simply induce soldiers to conceal signs of VD. Several commanding officers, in their responses to the order, opined that the Army 'cannot rely on soldiers' moral force alone' (Peers, 1998: 138).

THE DISCIPLINARY MACHINERY OF STATE: ENCLOSING THE 'PROSTITUTE'

Michel Foucault wrote of the concept of 'disciplinary machinery' (1995: 143); it is insightful in understanding the mentality of the colonial State. The disciplinary machinery works space in a detailed way, primarily by 'partitioning'. A disciplinary space is built to separate certain groups by holding them within a designated 'enclosure' to eliminate 'the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation; it was a tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage, anti-concentration' (Foucault, 1995: 143). The principle of 'enclosure' discussed in Foucault's (1995: 141) 'Art of Distributions', relies on the ability to account for all presences and absences. The ability to locate certain individuals at any time, and to be able to supervise their conduct was pivotal to this distribution. Before disciplining individuals, it is important to be able to distribute them within a space, a procedure meant to know, master, and utilise individuals. The desire to know where and how to find the 'prostitute' was at the heart of the colonial Raj's regulatory mechanisms such as registration, as well as coercive invasive systems like the lock hospital. In seeking to extend Cantonment Rules to wider areas exceeding cantonment bounds, one may identify the State's attempts to expand the 'enclosure' and broaden the scope of its gaze.

Like in Delhi, the Peshawar Cantonment was in close proximity to the municipal area, resulting in the concern that 'the prostitutes residing there are as readily accessible to the European soldiers of the garrison as are those residing within the limits of the military station'. It was recommended by the Army that the Lock Hospital Rules be extended by 5 miles in all directions to include the areas within the city of Peshawar. The widening net and penetrative gaze of the state sought power in obtaining information from the inner labyrinths of towns and cities otherwise bent under the jurisdiction of civil municipal governments. The regulatory measures and the expansion of areas to which these applied were together meant to enhance the disciplinary powers of the colonial State, such that subject populations, especially those perceived as a 'threat', could always be under observation through robust mechanisms of surveillance. In this formulation, the body is an 'instrument', deprived of liberty and objectified by a robust system of 'constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions (Foucault, 1995: 11).[15]

NEW TECHNOLOGIES OF TRANSPORT AND THE THREAT OF GREATER MOBILITY

By the 1930s, the manufacture of bicycle components such as bells and carriers had become a well-established industry in Ludhiana and part of standard military issue (Report on the Industrial Survey of Ludhiana District, 1942: 73). The contribution of modern technology in enhancing the mobility of women deemed as 'prostitutes', became equally a cause for concern. The Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar suggested an extension of lock hospital rules to Kartarpur, even though it fell within the princely state of Kapurthala, as well as to Phillaur. In both stations, the Rules were to be extended to a radius of 2 miles from the respective railway Stations. He remarked that 'prostitutes appear to have taken up their residence in those (in the vicinity of railway stations) localities and are constantly going to and fro by railway' (NAI/ Home/ Public/ F. No. 155,1871: 9).

In official circles, another moot point raised during the later nineteenth century was whether there should be attempts to curtail the movement of the European troops to check their encounters with non-registered native women. The concerns over how obstructions to free movement might affect the morale of the soldiers, and possibly lead to disaffection within the ranks, loomed large over discussions between Commanding Officers of regiments and the doctors of the medical corps attached to respective military stations in the province and elsewhere in India. The fact that the treatment period ranged from a fortnight to twenty-two days made matters even worse by indisposing soldiers for long periods of time. The use of the chemical mercury in oral as well as vapour form also made troops averse to treatment (Walkowitz, 1980: 75). Mercury was administered in several ways: the 'blue pills' were given orally, as ointment and vapours (Report on Medical Topography and Statistics - Madras Army, 1842). Treatment was usually continued for 12 months or until the disappearance of symptoms.

[15] Michel Foucault's idea of 'disciplinary power' of the State, and the changing methods of surveillance in the nineteenth century, has been a trailblazing contribution to criminology. His work allows a study of how the nature of crime control has changed from resorting to the threat of violence and bodily punishment, to control through surveillance via the all-seeing eyes of the 'modern' state.

The intramuscular injections were a novel feature of venereal disease treatments ushered in during the 20th century and in Punjab, they were carried out at the military cantonments of Nowshera, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Attock, Murree, Sialkot, Fort Lahore, Mian Mir, Ferozepur, Dalhousie, Ambala, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Dagshai, Kasauli, Subathu and Jutogh. In certain other places, mercury and iodide of potassium were combined and administered in vapour form. The latter treatment was found to be more effective but was unpopular for its unpalatable nature, inducing cold sweats, excessive salivation, headaches, and nausea (Report on Medical Topography and Statistics - Madras Army, 1842).

COLONIAL ICONOGRAPHY: THE 'WICKED' PROSTITUTE AND THE 'SUFFERING' SOLDIER

Preoccupations with the health of the European soldier, given his perceived status as the cornerstone of imperial foundations in the colonies, tinted the colonial view of Indian society as well as inflected colonial relations with natives. More specifically, preoccupations with morbidity and hygiene within the Army proved to be something of a bee in the bonnet which mediated imperial perspectives on female Indian sexuality and native morality. A unique iconography can be seen at play in nineteenth century colonial discourses on disease, one that revolved around the male 'sufferer' and the perceived wickedness of the 'diseased', 'indigenous', 'poor', and female Indian subject and 'other' (Gilman, 1989: 238). In the year 1870, Commissioners of the military divisions of Punjab were addressed through a report entitled 'Measures for the Prevention of Venereal Disease', and asked to express their opinions on the following matters:

- Whether the operation of preventive rules needed to be extended beyond Cantonment lines;
- To communicate with police and military authorities and devise rules for 'preventing the access of strolling women, such as the vendors of milk etc. to cantonments';
- Instruction to District Magistrates to co-operate with Cantonment authorities on the matter;
- Directions on discontinuing levy of fees upon the women (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 1-5/1875)[16].

The State went to great lengths, formulating regulatory and legal measures, to ensure the soldier was protected. The overarching perception of native women in colonial official military discourse is one that laments their promiscuity and its indiscretion. The stereotypical representation of Indian women, especially those outside the upper-class Hindu monogamous domestic arrangement, subscribed to the iconography of the dangerous exotic native seductress; something of a monstrous gorgon propelling unsuspecting young men to their ruin.

THE CANTONMENT ACT XXII OF 1864: THE DEVIANT SEXUALITY OF 'COOLIE'[17] WOMEN OF DALHOUSIE

The subject of British and elite Indian men shaping the sexuality of lower class/caste or Dalit women has been explored by a number of scholars (Banerjee ,1998; Gupta, 2011, 2016; Burton, 2003). Charu Gupta highlights how both colonisers and elite Indian men constructed Dalit women as sexually available and loose in moral character, constantly contrasting them with upper caste Hindu women (2011: 23). A report from the military station of Dalhousie in the Chamba district, underscored the need for extending Clause 7, Section 19 of the Cantonments Act XXII of 1864[18] to the areas neighbouring the cantonment upon the belief that the European garrison stationed there, was under 'threat'. The grave risk was believed to be posed by the poor labouring local coolie women, who were employed by the Public Works Department (PWD) on Government buildings owing to scarcity of male coolies in the region. It was considered imperative to bring such women under the Cantonment Rules, as well as expedient to extend contagious diseases rules and police supervision over married women resident in native states to an area of 4 miles outside the cantonment (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 43-45/ 1877).

It was further proposed in the Report that no women labourers be allowed to 'hut' themselves within one mile of the barracks, and further that their departure from the vicinity of the works adjacent to men's quarters be secured before dusk. In the imagination of the State, stigmatised class and morality derived from and fed into each

[16] Every registered prostitute was expected to pay a fee of Rupees two *per mensem*, whereas every brothel keeper paid a fee not exceeding rupees five. In September 1873 the Government of India abolished the fee on the grounds that the payment made from the wages of the prostitutes was not a legitimate means for the maintenance of lock hospitals as per the regulations of 1868. Any fee levied and utilised for purposes of maintaining an institution, if paid out of earnings from 'amoral' activities and robust trade in 'vice', would essentially be synonymous with recognising and legitimising prostitution.

[17] A pejorative term used for low-wage labourers in India and the Far East. The term came to be used widely in the 19th century, during the British colonial period.

[18] The clause provided for inspection and control of houses of ill-fame and for the prevention of the spread of venereal disease.

other. The destitute woman was perceived as a vector, made more grotesque and 'dangerous' by her purported immorality and licentiousness – a deviant sexuality in constant need of supervision either by a masculine State or an indigenous patriarchy. It was proposed by the PWD Secretary that employment of female labourers may be prevented in the vicinity of soldiers' habitations 'unless their husbands are also engaged on the works' (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary/ F. No. 43-45, 1877: 12). Although beyond the immediate scope of this discussion, it is important to highlight here that in addition to exacerbating the labour and sexual exploitation of labouring women, such State processes entrenched the notion of male ownership of female labour, and presumably indirectly bolstered gender inequity within the household[19].

THE GYPSY AND THE VAGABOND

Peripatetic groups were just as disconcerting to the colonial imaginary, as was any other group that lay outside the realm of visibility. An encampment of gypsies was reported near Solan while the 73rd regiment was stationed there for yearly rifle practice exercises in 1877. Misgivings about gypsy, Traveller or Romany women stemmed from their nomadic lifestyle which complicated the issue of their surveillance, mapping, and regulation. They were often represented as prostitutes in colonial discourse, and it was deduced by the Commanding Officer of the 73rd, that

> … from their wandering and vagrant habits, it is very probable that venereal disease will be largely spread by their means… there is also a large number of wandering paharees (hill folk) who carry on their trade in and about the station and thus propagate disease. (NAI/ Home/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 13-14/ 1877)

Paharee[20] women have been known to enjoy relatively greater freedom than their counterparts in the lowland plains. They have been known to work the fields alone and tend to livestock. They have traditionally been an indispensable part of the labour force in the remote hill regions where harsh economic conditions ensured that all members of the household collectively performed tasks outside the household such as grazing cattle, collecting firewood, working the fields, etc. The relatively unencumbered movement of paharee women, coupled with their traditional practice of polyandry in certain hill regions, shaped and reflected understandings of their social position. Hill residents, generally, were seen as deprived and disadvantaged, while the women were viewed as less moral and difficult to surveil. Even in modern India, 'hill people's lives are understood as deprived, dirty and disadvantaged'[21].

The lower-class labouring identity of the women compounded the perceived sense of 'danger' posed by them. Female milk vendors, grass cutters, *pankha* (fan) pullers, 'tattie-waterers' (possibly a reference to the British slang for potato: 'tattie') and coolies were the groups most resented and suspected by both the military and medical officials, for being agents of disease and 'defilement'. Women were often employed on the works undertaken by the Public Works Department (PWD) at several stations, especially since female labour was cheaper (NAI/ Military/ Sanitary A/ F. No. 1103-1106/ 1899).

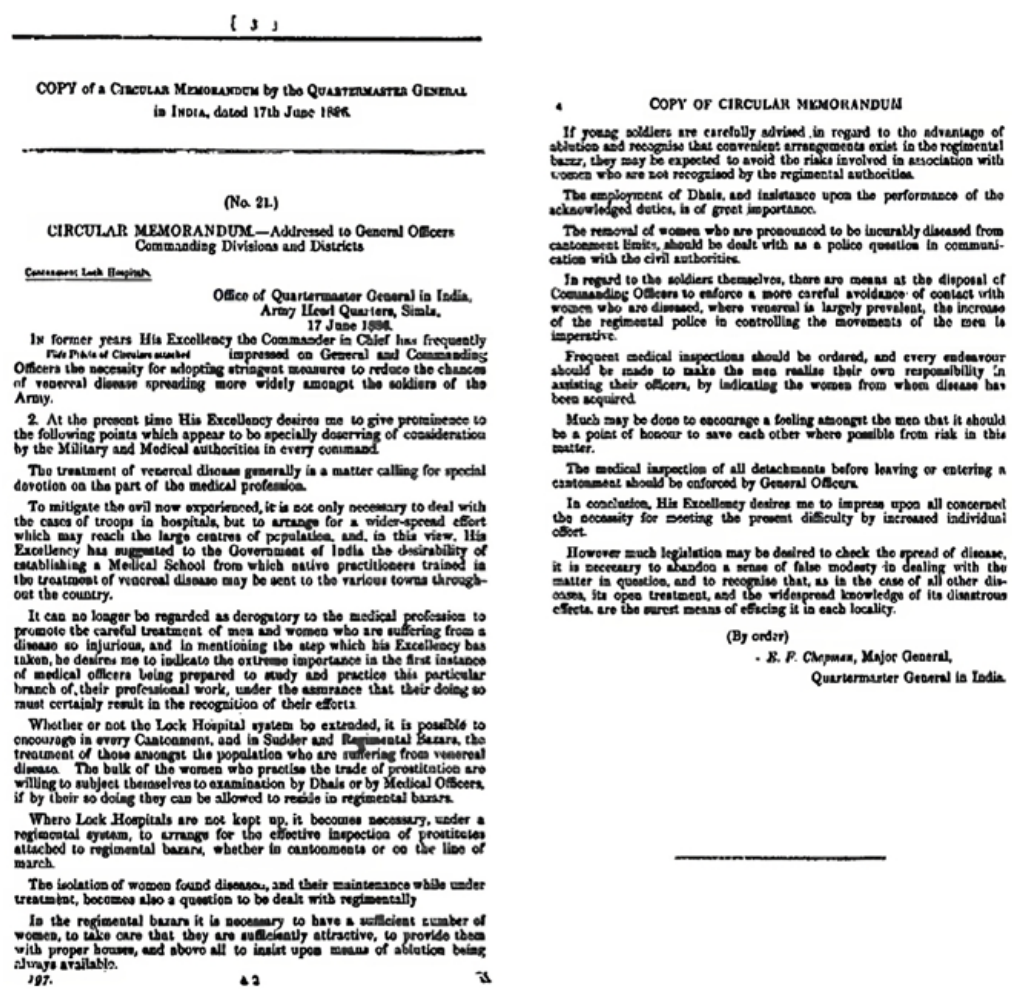
THE CANTONMENT ACT V, 1895 AND THE CANTONMENT CODE, 1899

The new Cantonment Act V of 1895 was designed to ban compulsory physical examinations and licensing, and end 'legalised vice' in cantonments. While examinations were not outlawed, they could be neither compulsory nor periodical. This Act had a short life and was repealed in 1897 so that periodical examinations could be allowed again, at the behest of the Army. In 1899, a new Cantonment Code was passed in response to a spike in the number of venereal disease cases. The new Cantonments Code placed unlimited powers in the hands of the Governor-General in Council to make rules consistent with this Code. Even amongst the officers stationed in the province, it was opined that 'too much latitude' was being taken in the reading of the Cantonment Code of 1889 and that a system of licensed house was even more rife than before (NAI/ Defence A/ F. No. 3088-89/ 1901). A few changes

[19] For a meticulous analysis of women's changing role in a labour market mediated by seismic socio-economic shifts of nineteenth century colonial India, and the labour and sexual exploitation that accompanied the 'proletarianisation' of labouring women to exacerbate gender inequity within the household and sharpen patriarchal control of women's physical and reproductive labour, see Samita Sen, "Without His Consent?': Marriage and Women's Migration in Colonial India', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 65, pp. 77–104.

[20] Same as *Pahari* – a term used for inhabitants of the hills.

[21] For an in-depth gender analysis of interior hill residents in the Himalayas, as well as an understanding of the processes through which the understanding of hill women's social position came to be shaped, see Karen Gaul, 'Travelling High and Low: Verticality, Social Position, and the Making of *Pahari* Genders' in *Trans-Status Subjects: Gender in the Globalization of South and Southeast Asia,* Duke University Press, 2002, p. 129. For a discussion on polyandry amongst peoples of North India, see 'Pahari Polyandry: A Comparison' by Gerald D. Berreman, *American Anthropologist,* Vol. 64, No. 1, Part 1, 1962, pp. 60–75.



[3]

COPY of a CIRCULAR MEMORANDUM by the QUARTERMASTER GENERAL in INDIA, dated 17th June 1896.

(No. 21.)

CIRCULAR MEMORANDUM.—Addressed to General Officers Commanding Divisions and Districts

Contagious Lock Hospitals.

Office of Quartermaster General in India,
Army Head Quarters, Simla,
17 June 1896.

In former years His Excellency the Commander in Chief has frequently impressed on General and Commanding Officers the necessity for adopting stringent measures to reduce the chances of venereal disease spreading more widely amongst the soldiers of the Army.

2. At the present time His Excellency desires me to give prominence to the following points which appear to be specially deserving of consideration by the Military and Medical authorities in every command.

The treatment of venereal disease generally is a matter calling for special devotion on the part of the medical profession.

To mitigate the evil now experienced, it is not only necessary to deal with the cases of troops in hospitals, but to arrange for a wider-spread effort which may reach the large centres of population, and, in this view, His Excellency has suggested to the Government of India the desirability of establishing a Medical School from which native practitioners trained in the treatment of venereal disease may be sent to the various towns throughout the country.

It can no longer be regarded as derogatory to the medical profession to promote the careful treatment of men and women who are suffering from a disease so injurious, and in mentioning the step which his Excellency has taken, he desires me to indicate the extreme importance in the first instance of medical officers being prepared to study and practice this particular branch of their professional work, under the assurance that their doing so must certainly result in the recognition of their efforts.

Whether or not the Lock Hospital system be extended, it is possible to encourage in every Cantonment, and in Sudder and Regimental Bazars, the treatment of those amongst the population who are suffering from venereal disease. The bulk of the women who practise the trade of prostitution are willing to subject themselves to examination by Dhais or by Medical Officers, if by their so doing they can be allowed to reside in regimental bazars.

Where Lock Hospitals are not kept up, it becomes necessary, under a regimental system, to arrange for the effective inspection of prostitutes attached to regimental bazars, whether in cantonments or on the line of march.

The isolation of women found diseased, and their maintenance while under treatment, becomes also a question to be dealt with regimentally.

In the regimental bazars it is necessary to have a sufficient number of women, to take care that they are sufficiently attractive, to provide them with proper houses, and above all to insist upon means of ablution being always available.

1897. A 2

4 COPY OF CIRCULAR MEMORANDUM

If young soldiers are carefully advised in regard to the advantage of ablution and recognise that convenient arrangements exist in the regimental bazar, they may be expected to avoid the risks involved in association with women who are not recognised by the regimental authorities.

The employment of Dhais, and insistance upon the performance of the acknowledged duties, is of great importance.

The removal of women who are pronounced to be incurably diseased from cantonment limits, should be dealt with as a police question in communication with the civil authorities.

In regard to the soldiers themselves, there are means at the disposal of Commanding Officers to enforce a more careful avoidance of contact with women who are diseased, where venereal is largely prevalent, the increase of the regimental police in controlling the movements of the men is imperative.

Frequent medical inspections should be ordered, and every endeavour should be made to make the men realise their own responsibility in assisting their officers, by indicating the women from whom disease has been acquired.

Much may be done to encourage a feeling amongst the men that it should be a point of honour to save each other where possible from risk in this matter.

The medical inspection of all detachments before leaving or entering a cantonment should be enforced by General Officers.

In conclusion, His Excellency desires me to impress upon all concerned the necessity for meeting the present difficulty by increased individual effort.

However much legislation may be desired to check the spread of disease, it is necessary to abandon a sense of false modesty in dealing with the matter in question, and to recognise that, as in the case of all other diseases, its open treatment, and the widespread knowledge of its disastrous effects, are the surest means of effacing it in each locality.

(By order)
E. F. Chapman, Major General,
Quartermaster General in India.

Figure 4. The 'Infamous Memorandum' 21 A. (Source: Andrew and Bushnell, 1899)

to the Act in 1910 placed even more power in the hands of the military, even empowering them to employ the Defence of India Act of 1915, to keep prostitutes from coming within a 2-mile radius of the cantonment. The Cantonment Code of 1899, as well as the Defence of India Act, 1915, were also extended to temporary military camps, which were otherwise outside the purview of the cantonment regulations. The aspect of a 2-mile radius was received with reservation by the municipalities of towns contiguous with cantonments of Punjab for it would entail even those towns having to oust the prostitutes and sex workers residing within their municipal bounds.

The reservations about the Act surrounded mostly about the question of intrusion into the private matters of Indians. Extending the area of supervision in the large towns of Punjab such as Lahore, Amritsar, and Multan, would be rife with challenges, for in these big towns,

> … prostitutes are maintained by sardars or rich native gentry and who hold no intercourse with Europeans of any class. These are women who enjoy considerable luxury and among whom it is said that venereal disease does not much prevail. In addition to their trade as prostitutes, they also dance and sing for hire. They possess graces and accomplishments which even the wives of the highest sardars do not and which render them welcome guests even at the courts of native kings. (NAI/ Home/ Judicial B/ F. No. 1891/ 1918)

Such municipalities also worried that if prostitutes were displaced from their usual enclaves in towns, it would lead to a surge in clandestine and street prostitution, with women of 'ill repute' soliciting clients publicly which would constitute a moral threat.

CONCLUSION

Nineteenth century colonial authority in India was premised on positive value attribution to all that was white, male, and European. These notions had a bearing on the sexual politics of the British Empire in India, and other colonies too such as in Hong Kong, Fiji, Ceylon, and the Strait Settlements (Levine, 1996). Notions of heteronormativity and machismo were pivotal to the trope of racial superiority. The discourse on 'regulated vice'

was grounded in the normalisation of men's sexual desire and the belief in correlations between masculinity, virility and Empire[22]. This narrative in turn, justified the surveillance and persecution of certain groups of girls and women, attempts at whose subjection, and control offers a glimpse of the coercive, penetrative, masculine and patriarchal face of an insecure colonial state.

A study of colonial prostitution with a view to exploring the relationship between domination and resistance, is useful for its capacity to illuminate not only the relationship between State and the 'underclasses', but also gender relations more broadly in colonial and postcolonial societies, and their legacies. An investigation of prostitution and venereal disease in British colonies also offers opportunities to see the tenuous relationship between the metropole and the Government of India. In January 1863, Brigadier Tucker, Commanding Officer of Rawalpindi Brigade wrote a letter to the Quartermaster General asserting that 'human nature is human nature, and our men will find means of sexual intercourse other than that authorised as between husband and wife (OIOC[23]/Home/ Legislative/ Nos 11-13, Part B/ 1864). The discourse in Britain was steeped in concerns surrounding the health of soldiers, highlighting the fears of racial perversion and emasculation from disease. This chasm precipitated vociferous parliamentary debate in the UK and 'constitutional crisis' in late nineteenth century Britain (Levine, 1996: 592).

While the military supporters of regulation normalised male sexual desire, emphasising the correlations between virility and machismo, and Empire, throughout the 1890s the British Liberal and Conservative administrators alike, pressed for legislative changes attempting to repeal controversial laws such as the Contagious Diseases Act.

While this article is limited by the absence of the women's voices themselves, a scrutiny of nineteenth century medical and political discourse on prostitution and venereal disease offers a moment where several stereotypes of race, class and gender may be made apparent. These sexualised and gendered notions about native women also present themselves in debates which seem to conflate British masculinity and colonial supremacy. Indeed, sexuality as a trope permeated and shaped power relations in the colonial context. The perceived salience of sexuality to the preservation of imperial power, is instructive for historians of the gender and Empire for it illustrates the significance of sex as 'an especially dense transfer point for relations of power' (Foucault, 1979: 103). This study has examined the paradox of images and stereotypes which led to the Empire being cast at once as all that was masculine but in need of protection, and the native women as the dangerous feminine capable of inducing decay; that which needed to be protected against. A perusal of nineteenth century medical discourse, political debates and the various regulations discussed herein, reveal how sexualities often came to be socially produced and regulated by dominant contemporary discourses, differentiating 'normal' sexualities from the deviant, perverted or criminal. The absence of any clear definitions of 'prostitute' in colonial discourse made it possible for various groups of Indian women, such as the peripatetic, labouring and non-domestic conjugal, to be clubbed together as being amoral and unchaste. By exploring the issue of venereal disease and the prostitution in nineteenth century Punjab, historians can unbundle some of the ambiguities and complexities of colonial rule which prompted segregation and control of subject populations.

The regulatory framework geared towards securing troop health in colonial Punjab was premised on the belief that native women possessed an innate propensity for clandestine prostitution. As gendered perceptions of labour coloured colonial administration, labouring and peripatetic women were branded as amoral and either evicted or enclosed/incarcerated. Ironically, the exclusion of labouring women deprived them of a means of income, ultimately making clandestine prostitutes of them anyway.

This study has dealt in lesser measure with the political crisis in which debates on venereal disease and military regulation of prostitution were precipitated in Britain. It engages instead with the casting of native womanhood and her supposedly debilitating malady as analogous phenomena in the colonial imaginary, to demonstrate that prostitution, sex work, and its regulation offer a vital arena to scrutinise the nexus between sexuality, gender, class, and race.

Although viewed within the wider context of prostitution regulation and venereal disease control in colonial India, Punjab offers a unique picture owing to its status as a major garrison and frontier province; pivotal to securing the Empire's stability in the northwest – a zone riddled with perpetually looming threats of invasion and tribal unrest (Ahmed, 1979). Although venereal disease has received less interest from political historians, this paper urges that the political discourse on venereal disease and regulationism – laden as it was with racial and gendered stereotypes of morality and sexuality – was inextricably linked to questions of military governance in the British colonies. Histories of not only gender and sexuality, but also of colonial politics, stand to gain from examining such complexities in colonial encounters, which extend beyond the simple dichotomy of coloniser and colonised. To this end, gender, race, and sexuality act as highly effective and useful categories of historical analysis

[22] For an insight on sexual attitudes and activities of those who ran the British Empire, and explanations of the pervasive importance of sexuality in the Victorian Empire, see Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience,* London: Manchester University Press, 1990.

[23] OIOC stands for Oriental and India Office Collections.

by enriching inquiries into the substantive construction of racialised, sexualised, and gendered identities, and 'others', in colonial contexts.

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Repression, Permeation, and Circulation: Retracing and Reframing *Danmei* Culture Online in Mainland China

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ABSTRACT

Danmei (耽美), which is also called 'boy's love' (abbreviated as BL), refers to fantasy textual stories depicting gay male romantic relationships (McLelland and Aoyama, 2015). The rapid proliferation of this popular culture has triggered scholars to reflect on the 'queer culture' in which it is represented. This article aims to explore the intrinsic connection between Chinese *danmei* culture and Chinese queer culture in digital media. By adopting the research method of media archaeology and culture materialism, I will map the development of *danmei* culture in mainland China into three periods: repression period (1994-2003) when the state authority compelled *danmei* and queer culture to find shelter in virtual cyberspace; permeation period (2003-2016) when queer culture reshaped *danmei* culture, and the former two generate multiple forms of expression on the internet; and circulation period (2016-2021) when digital media industrialised *danmei* culture. Then, a cultural framework, 'queer-*danmei*-media' will be proposed, in reference to the interaction of 'affect-body-world' described by Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth, and Lisa Blackman, to reinforce the social and political functions of *danmei* and transfer it from generalised pop culture towards the cultural representation and campaign position of queerness and feminism.

Keywords: queer, digital media, feminism, danmei, Chinese culture

INTRODUCTION

Danmei (耽美, an established translation for boy's love or BL for short, referring to Dan 耽as addiction and Mei 美 as beauty) is an overarching term for women's fantasies depicting gay and lesbian romantic relationships (Jacobs, 2015). As early as the end of the last century, novels on this theme were transmitted to mainland China from Hong Kong and Taiwan through pirate publishing (Yang and Xu, 2017). Given the early blowback from mainstream politics and culture, BL fans borrowed Japanese words, たんび (tanbi) to avoid strict publishing censorship (Chen, 2023), as its Chinese translation 'being addicted to beauty' (Feng, 2009: 1) aligns with the fandom for 'pretty boys' as protagonists and their romantic homosexual affections. TV series adapted from *danmei* novels are known as *dangai* series (耽改, referring to *Dan* 耽as *danmei* and *Gai* 改 as adaptation). In contrast to *danmei* series, the *dangai* series is filmed in a way that downplays or cuts out the same-sex sentiments of the original novel, to meet the censorship requirements of mainland China's National Radio and Television Administration [NRTA]. Some of the *dangai* series even can be said to enhance heterosexual normativity and reduce homosexual affections between male characters in the original fiction by adding female protagonists or turning heroes into heroines, such as *Forward Forever* (热血同行) and *Immortality* (皓衣行).

Though the *dangai* industry is cautious and discreet, *dangai* series and even the whole *danmei* culture have been suppressed by the state authorities in recent years. On 30 January 2023, the TV series *A League of Nobleman* (君子盟), adapted from a *danmei* novel written by Dafeng Guaguo (大风刮过), was broadcast on v.qq.com. Two months later, another series with the same theme, *Justice in the Dark* (光·渊) was tentatively released on youku.com, but was suspended airing after eight episodes. This seems to indicate that the return of the *dangai* series remains unknown. Since the SARFT issued a 'ban on *danmei*' (禁耽令) on 16 September 2021, announcing an authoritative boycott on the film and television adaptation of *danmei* works (China Xinhua News Network Corporation, 2021), various anxious voices have arisen on the Internet: should *danmei* series be forbidden entirely in mainland China or not; does the ban on *danmei* hint at a crackdown on queer culture by the authorities; how will *danmei* and queer culture

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be present in mainland China afterwards? The underlying concern is the development of the queer culture presented by *danmei* in heteronormatised mainland China, rather than merely the productive ecology and the financial value of *danmei* works.

To prospect the development after the ban of Mainland China's *danmei* and queer culture, it is worthwhile to review the past, and investigate the impetus and resistance, the forms and settings, and the sense and impact of *danmei* in history. The first section of this article will retrace the development of *danmei* in digital media from the moment when it emerged in mainland China until the enactment of the ban. In this part, I will adopt the research approaches of media archaeology and culture materialism, searching for media resources about *danmei* works, including *yuandan, tongren,* and *dangai* series, scrutinising how *danmei* develops on major creative and interactive websites of *danmei* such as lucifer-club.com (露西弗俱乐部), jjwxc.net (晋江文学城), and lofter.com (乐乎), so as to explore the process of indigenisation of *danmei* in mainland China, its dynamic movement on the Internet, as well as intertwining, coupling, and articulation between *danmei* and queer culture. This article does not conduct a case study or textual analysis of specific *danmei* novels, so authorship, reader feedback and reviews, and engagement metrics will not be emphasised. Based on the data, I will organise the trajectory of *danmei* culture in China into three periods: the first repression period (1994-2003) when the state authority oppressed *danmei* and queer culture, compelling them to find shelter in virtual cyberspace; the second permeation period (2003-2016) when *danmei*, queer and digital media are in symbiosis, as queer culture reshaped *danmei* culture, and the former two generate multiple forms of expression on the internet; and the third circulation period (2016-2021) when online media industrialised *danmei* culture.

Before the ban was issued, the evolution of *danmei* culture was expanding, yet why were *danmei* works suddenly halted, what kinds of political and ideological inclination did the ban reveal, what are the new dynamics in the development of *danmei* after the ban, and how did *danmei* culture come out of the dilemma of the chaotic, commercialised internet subcultures, and become a new alternative for women and queers to express their rebellion against the normative? To address these issues following the enactment of the ban, the second section of this article will first analyse the conflict between *danmei* and state authority, including the entanglement of the fandom as a trigger for the ban (Harville, 2022; Wang and Ge, 2022), the chaotic publishing market and creative ecosystem (Feng, 2009), and the cultural connotation of non-reproductive sexuality (Zhao 2022), among others. Subsequently, a cultural framework, 'queer-*danmei*-media' will be proposed, in reference to the interaction of 'affect-body-world', pointed out in Melissa Gregg, and Gregory J. Seigworth's *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010)[1], in order to reinforce the social and political functions of *danmei* and transfer it from a generalised pop culture towards the cultural representation and campaigning position of queerness and feminism.

RETRACING *DANMEI* ONLINE IN MAINLAND CHINA

Repression: The First Stage (1994-2003)

The development of Chinese *danmei* culture in the digital media era is characterised by the following three stages. The first stage was the repression period, from 1994, the first year of the Internet in China, to 2003. This period coincided with China's substantive negotiations with the Western world for the World Trade Organization [WTO], namely bilateral market access negotiations and multilateral negotiations around drafting China's legal instruments for WTO accession (Zhong, 2009). Accession to the WTO was key to China's openness to the outside world, for the infiltration of market economy awareness into the country, followed by capitalist multiculturalism. It was at this point that Internet culture entered China. After the Internet launch in China, the fourth type of media, then often called the 'new media', was born, distinct from the three traditional media, namely print, radio, and television (Wu, 2001: 43).

Before the emergence of the Internet in mainland China, Japanese *danmei* works, including novels, mangas, animations, and video games, had already landed in the mainland via Taiwan and Hong Kong through piracy channels (Yang and Xu, 2017). However, as the fan community of *danmei* expanded and the circulation of pirated publications became unstable, *danmei* works, which struggled to pass publishing censorship, moved to the emerging, unclear, and extensive cyberspace (Feng, 2009). Initially, *danmei* served as a niche exotic literary subject, and *danmei* fans only shared slash fiction[2] and original creations surreptitiously and grudgingly in salon-style online fora. For example, an early *danmei* fiction creation website in mainland China, Lucifer Club, set up a restrictive

[1] See also Lisa Blackman's *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (2012), and *The Body Theory: The Key Concept* (2021).

[2] The characters in the early *danmei* fiction are not drawn from reality but from published works of mass culture. This genre of creation is professionally labelled as 'fan culture' or 'slash'. Henry Jenkins (1988) first proposes the fans who participate in the creation and recreation of the original works as 'textual poachers', and explains this phrase further in his monograph, 'Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture' (1992). Since *danmei* creators use slash to label adaptations and characters, *danmei* works are also referred to 'slash'.

membership system where users had to correctly answer all five questions related to *danmei* culture before registering an account (*Membership Code 201012 Edition*, 2010). This measure prevented non-*danmei* fans from disrupting the creation-reading-communication ecology. In 1998, mainland China established 'The Great Firewall of China', a keyword filter for overseas information (Li, 2006). *Danmei* fiction involving erotic depictions and same-sex love was partially blocked from then onwards. *Danmei* fans in mainland China who wanted to access the full range of *danmei* fiction from overseas had to 'climb over the wall', they needed to bypass the state's corresponding IP blocking, content filtering, domain hijacking, and traffic restrictions, to access the web content.

Two conjectures have been put forward by academics around the reasons for the repression of *danmei* and queer culture by the state authorities in mainland China. On the one hand, the mainland Chinese government reinforces its ideology by opposing queer cultural production: *danmei*, as *danmei* and queer culture are considered as the output of 'the hegemonic Euro-American notion of modernity' (Ong, 1999: 31) and 'the colonial discourse of… western "civilisation"' (Stychin, 1998: 200, seen in Zhao, 2017: 71). On the other hand, the authorities believed that *danmei* and queerness have the potential to lead to a decline in fertility by challenging the basic societal assumptions and dominant values about marriage, procreation, and ethical relationships thus, reducing the labour force, triggering the ageing issue, and ultimately impacting economic development (Zhao, 2020). Indeed, these two speculations are able to merge into one fundamental fear, precisely that *danmei* and queer culture have the potential to destabilise power structure and state discourse in the eyes of the authorities. Although gay love is proven not to be unique to Western culture, as same-sex relationships and *danmei*-like literary works known at the time as *nanfeng* (男风, male practice)[3] had already existed in antiquity. Ancient Chinese *danmei* and queer culture have not escaped the spectre of heterosexual structure, *danmei* novels in the Ming and Qing dynasties distinguish between '*uke*', who acts as a woman and wife in sexual relations, and '*seme*', who functions as a man and husband. The essential marriage and reproduction, patriarchal and class relations were not destabilised, and thus it can be supposed why *danmei* was not repressed by the dominant culture.

Permeation: The Second Stage (2003-2016)

Admittedly, such repression continues to the present day, but given that *danmei* has found a path of compromise since 2003, that is to say that *danmei* has moved from being an underground pirate that was absolutely repressed, to an Internet platform that was 'acquiesced' to exist, the political repression by the state has turned into a potential development. This stage is regarded as the period of permeation, from the year when 'Jinjiang Literature City'[4] (晋江文学城) opened to 2016. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, the term 'permeate' refers to 'spreading through something and be[ing] present in every part of it' (2023). The application of this meaning not only emphasises the wide dissemination of *danmei* on the Internet, but also points out that *danmei* culture in mainland China has become more diversified in terms of both content and expression, such as creating original *danmei* works that are different from slash fiction, as well as generating various media works relying on online platforms.

Different from Taiwan's 'myfreshnet' (鲜网)[5] and 'Haitang Culture' (海棠文化)[6] which is full of erotically depicted *danmei* novels as well as mainland China's first Lucifer Club, which is operated by volunteer *danmei* fans who are not majoring in computer science, Jinjiang Literary City is the most influential commercialised *danmei* creation and interaction platform in mainland China, 'covering a large variety of literary genres, such as original heterosexual romance, BL (boy's love), GL (girl's love), and all types of fan fiction, but it is mostly known for its high-quality original *danmei* works' (Yang and Xu, 2017: 5).

For the time, Chinese *danmei* fiction could get rid of the spectre of imported North American and Japanese culture, it transitioned from fan fiction/slash to original works and developed rapidly. Taking Jinjiang Literature City as the main site of BL as an example, statistically, the number of original *danmei* fiction on this website grew from 330 to 618,309 between 2003 and 2023. **Table 1** is a chart ranking readers' preferences for Chinese original *danmei* fiction, taken from the statistics of Jinjiang Literature City. It seems to demonstrate that Chinese original

[3] During the pre-Qin period, there were allusions to homosexual affairs, such as 'the cut sleeve' (断袖). 'the love of the split peach (余桃之爱)', 'the interest of the Longyang (龙阳之兴)', and 'the joy of a back rub (抱背之欢)'; the first collection of poetry in China, *The Book of Songs (诗经),* also contains poems describing gay love between comrades and classmates, such as 'Beating the Drum (邶风·击鼓)' and 'My Robe (郑风·子衿)', and modern *danmei* fictions took shape in the Ming and Qing dynasties, such as *Yichun Xiangzhi (宜春香质)* and *Cap and Hairpin (弁而钗).*

[4] Jinjiang Literature City (www.jjwxc.net) is a popular Chinese online platform known for its vast collection of user-generated web novels and literature, particularly in genres like romance, danmei, and fantasy.

[5] Myfreshnet (www.myfresh.net) was established in 2000. It was the earliest and largest literary website in the Chinese community and the first website in the world to have structured interactive content. It was closed in 2016.

[6] Haitang Culture (ebook.longmabook.com), is a website under Taiwan's Longma Culture Publishing House, covering a variety of literary genres, especially in the fields of romance and fantasy, and has a wealth of resources. After myfreshnet was blocked, Haitang Culture gained a large number of writers and readers from mainland China because of its relatively loose censorship.

Table 1. Readers' preference ranking of Chinese original *Danmei* fictions (Reference data from Jinjiang Literature City)

Reader's preference ranking	**Background**	**Writing style**	**Ending**	**Relationship (sex behaviour)**	**Personality**	**Others**
1	Modern time	Comic	Happy ending	1 vs. 1	Handsome	Younger seme
2	Fictional time	Tragi-comical	Bad ending	1 vs. N	Powerful	Quarrelsome lovers
3	Ancient time	Tragic			Humorous	Mythical realm

danmei fictions, also known as *yuandan* (原耽, referring to *Yuan* 原 as the original and *Dan* 耽as *danmei* for short), are diverse in background, writing style, theme, plots, and characters.

In terms of textual background, signs of ancient Chinese culture distinguish Chinese original *danmei* fiction from other countries. The theme of time travel, martial arts, and dynasty history is prevalent. Different endings correspond to different writing styles, including recreation, seriousness, sorrow, and so on.

The rise of Chinese *yuandan* between 2013 and 2016 stems from three aspects. First, in terms of the broader cultural and political environment, the Chinese mainstream during this period advocated 'fostering stronger confidence in the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics' (Guo, 2017). Cultural confidence is manifested in China's long history of cultural accumulation, the engagement and network of Chinese culture with the rest of the world, and China's strong economy (Zhou, 2012). The wave of cultural self-confidence has also blown into the *danmei* literary world, therefore creators and audiences are no longer satisfied with the imitation and rewriting of European and American popular culture, such as *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*, and Japanese and Korean popular cultures, such as Japanese manga comics and Korean dramas. Chinese *danmei* fans are committed to writing original *danmei* works that are based on modern Chinese society, including real-life regions and industries; classical history, especially the Three Kingdoms period (220-280 AD) with confusing character relationships and the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) that was one of the world's most powerful kingdoms at that time; and the third fictional setting that mixes such fictional histories with modernity, reality and fantasy[7].

Secondly, the rapid development of the Chinese original *danmei* culture can be attributed to the increasing normalisation and systematisation of Chinese online sphere. China's public cyberspace is divided into regions according to different functions and affiliations. In particular, Jinjiang Literature City assembles online literature, where writers and readers rely on the Internet to form an interactive community for sharing their works; while WeChat Subscription Account, Sina Weibo, and QZone as social media provide spaces for *danmei* fans to create fragmented and instantaneous literature (Ge *et al*., 2020). The former focuses on the audience of online literature, whereas the latter has a broader user base. *Danmei* fans travel on multiple platforms, thus sharing *danmei* extends to all corners on the Internet in popularising *danmei* culture. Thirdly, the improvement of network technology has also provided *danmei* on the Internet with more ways to create, interact, and produce income. For example, *danmei* writers who transfer from Lucifer Club to Jinjiang Literature City or other literature websites can earn 'bonuses' from their readers. Although these bonuses are not regular or lucrative compared to the copyright income of other genres, the writers believe that they can produce a larger and more stable income by maintaining an efficient output, producing quality work, and achieving higher rankings on the site. This point also sets the stage for the third phase of *danmei* to sell copyrights and thus further commercialisation.

Circulation: The Third Stage (2016-2021)

The third stage constitutes the circulation period, from 2016 until now, in which the *danmei* culture is no longer satisfied with the production of purely textual forms and limited publishing profits. This stage intends to expand from simple literary works to proliferation of various media forms such as radio dramas and online drama series. The year 2016 is dubbed 'The Year of *Danmei* Series' because of the sheer number of *danmei* series and their significant impact (Deng and Han, 2021: 96). Except for 2022, each year has seen one or two prevalent TV series adapted from *danmei* fiction. *Danmei* culture has circulated from a niche subcultural salon to a vast online commercial market. Capital has expanded the market for *danmei* culture to further boost interests by selling a wide range of fancy commercial derivatives, such as theme songs, albums, and signed photos of actors. As **Figure 1** below shows, the typical communication process of *danmei* culture in the past was 'author-work-publication-reader', while after digital media dominated the circulation of *danmei*, the communication process transformed into 'author-textual work-film and television-derivative-consumer'. It is fair to say that the accumulation of capital has continuously consumed *danmei* culture and its underlying queer culture in order to create this mature proliferating space of integrated media. In addition, some creators and producers of non-*danmei* culture are tempted by the substantial economic profits of *danmei* culture, and then they add the performance of queer and *fujoshi* elements to

[7] Data is collected from Jinjiang Literature City.

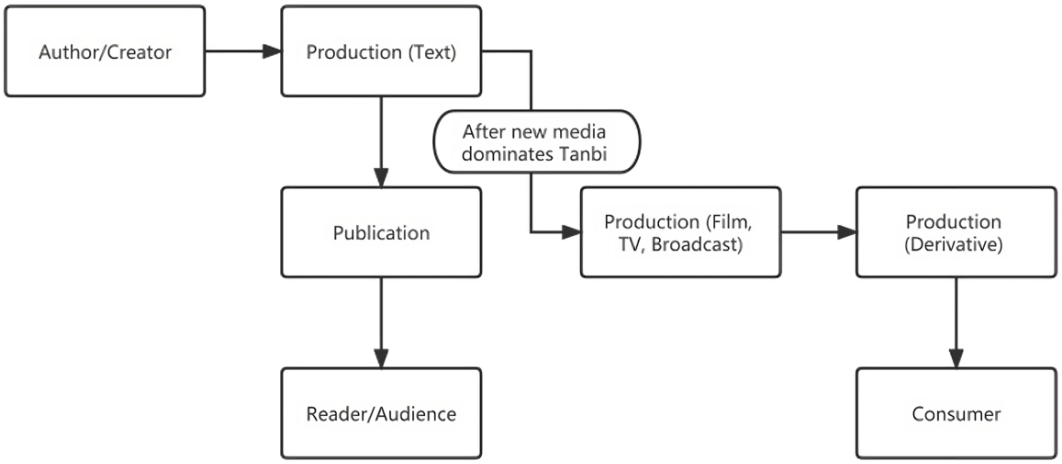

Figure 1. The process of publication and adaptation of *danmei* literature

heterosexual characters, to cater to the television market demand. This adaptation arguably results in a superficial *danmei* culture that does not allow for a deeper exploration of the reality of queer.

Owing to the uproar among 'fan groups' (饭圈) caused by the proliferation of *danmei* culture, China's National Radio and Television Administration [NRTA] held a meeting in Beijing on 16 September 2021. NRTA required the market 'to strengthen the positive guidance of TV drama creation and production, and resolutely resist the trend of '*danmei* adaptation' and other pan-entertainment phenomena' (China Xinhua News Network Corporation, 2021). Up to now, 57 *danmei* series have been banned in mainland China.

The reason this article ends with the first round of *danmei* development in 2021 is that in September of that year, China's National Radio and Television Administration made it clear that *dangai* was banned from release. Zhu Yonglei, deputy director of State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (China) [SARFT], explicitly raised a proposal in the television drama industry conference, the 'Symposium on Implementing the Deployment of Comprehensive Governance in the Field of Culture and Entertainment and Promoting the High-Quality Development of TV Drama Industry', stating that it is necessary to 'strengthen the positive guidance of TV drama creation and production, and resolutely resist pan-entertainment phenomena such as the supremacy of online celebrity, the chaotic phenomenon of the fandom, and the trend of *dangai*' NRTA, 2021). Although Zhu did not explicitly prohibit the production and release of *dangai* on behalf of the state at this symposium, the 'fan conflicts' (Wang and Ge, 2023: 355) Zhu criticised erupted between fan groups of the leading actors in two famous *dangai* television series, *The Untamed* (陈情令) and *Word of Honour* (山河令). Therefore, Zhu's speech was considered by the public to be the state's blockade against *danmei* and queer culture in the media.

There was state disapproval and denial of *danmei* and queer culture in the persistent attitudes and initiatives of the state and mainstream discourse towards *danmei* and queer culture, even before the ban was issued. On 30 June 2017, the China Netcasting Services Association (CNSA) held an executive council meeting in Beijing to approve the 'General Rules for Netcasting Programme Content Audit', in which homosexuality is explicitly defined as 'abnormal sexual relations', which are 'obscene pornography and vulgar vulgarity' (CNSA, 2017). On 13 April 2018, Sina Weibo, which is a Chinese social media platform with 586 million monthly active users (Yang, 2023), announced that it would launch a three-month intensive 'clean-up campaign' against images, texts, and clips on multiple topics, homosexuality included. Weibo users then used the hashtag #IAmGay# to run an influential LGBTQ socio-political protest on the Internet (Liao, 2019) to fight against the mainstream media's banning and discrimination of homosexuality. Two days later, the official microblog of *People Daily* published an article, '"Different Fireworks", Can Bloom Just the Same | Essays' (Yinuo, 2018), pointing out that 'homosexuals in terms of sexual orientation are a minority group, and protecting the rights of minorities is also a necessity for social justice' (Yinuo, 2018). On 16 April, Sina Weibo administrators added that the game and animation clean-up was no longer targeting queer content, since they are distinguishable from pornography and violence. This series of rules and declarations not only reflects a more flexible attitude of the authority towards the queer community and culture, but also demonstrates the intervening function of the Internet public opinion on political decisions.

However, this does not mean that netizens have won an absolute victory, since the dominant discourse neither bans *danmei* and queer culture nor encourages its development. The *dangai* was manufactured by the market and fans to circumvent the suppression of *danmei* by the motion of *jingwang* (净网, referring to 'purifying the Internet'), and the ban in 2021 signalled a further non-indulgence and sequestration of the last public expression of *danmei* by mainstream culture. Though the current situation is that *danmei* novels can still be published on the Internet, film, television, radio dramas, mangas, and games adapted from *danmei* novels are restricted from release, and *danmei*

novels have returned to the salon-style model of the end of the last century, where the core fanbase creates and exchanges ideas internally as a subculture, and engages with the public to a lesser extent.

Conjecture: The Second Round (To Be Continued)

However, these phenomena do not mean that *danmei*'s development has to come to a halt. Rather, *danmei* appears currently more like a repetition and regression of its previous history. That is to say, *danmei* is currently entering into another round of repression-permeation-circulation. Yet the development of the new round of *danmei*, that is to say the development after the ban to date, is not entirely consistent with the process of the previous round (1999-2021). For one, compared to the first round, the second round has significantly accelerated in production. The oppression in the first round continued into the second round, but unlike the previous time when it was absolutely suppressed, by this time the *danmei* culture had acquired experience in coping with it and responded accordingly. In addition to shifting the platform of publishing from Jinjiang to the overseas archiveofourown.org and the mainland's Lofter.com, *danmei* fans also transferred the form and passion for creation from *yuandan* back to *tongren*/slash, in the literary works that 'often lifts characters and settings from existing works but also adds portrayals of homoerotic relationships that do not exist in the canon universe' (Feng, 2013: 123). For example, *The Knockout*, which aired on Chinese state television CCTV in January 2023, sparked an online debate about the same-sex couplings surrounding the two male protagonists, An Xin (安欣) and Gao Qiqiang (高启强), and a large number of *tongren* works featuring same-sex couplings appeared on Lofter.com and Bilibili.com. By July 2023, there were nearly 1,000 videos uploaded to social media that were related to *The Knockout* male coupling on Bilibili.com. *Danmei*/*dangai* audiences' fondness for *tongren* can be seen as empathy and compromise. Under the heterosexual matrix, *tongren* can escape strict censorship because it does not involve commercialisation, plus both the original producer and the secondary creation platform are interested in facilitating free promotion. Despite the low market value of *tongren* compared to *yuandan*, the creative ecology is vibrant. The popular *tongren* works are often adapted from or derived from strong genre films with rich, logical plots and fully developed characters, rather than purely romantic dramas, because such works not only provide a reliable basis for the creation of *tongren* in terms of plots and character relationships, but also satisfy the rebellious audience's assumptions about the same-sex ambiguous relationships of heterosexual characters (Zhou and Zhang, 2022). Progressively, *danmei* has changed from a novelistic theme to 'a way of watching' (A Po, 2023) and a mode of thinking, including the appreciation of same-sex relationships and emotions. From the first round of *danmei*'s development, it is possible that *tongren* will take over from *yuandan* as a consumer product in the future; however, there is an ongoing concern that *tongren* will be censored due to the generalisation of their creations, and that *danmei* fans' field of activity will then be further reduced.

REINTEGRATING *DANMEI* WITH QUEER AND ONLINE MEDIA

At present, there are multiple reasons for the decline and even stagnation in the development of *danmei*. Externally, there are growing conflicts between *danmei* and mainstream culture. These conflicts fundamentally stem from the contradiction between the same-sex relationships depicted in *danmei* and traditional Chinese marriage and fertility culture. But with the prevalence of *danmei* works, *danmei* gradually has transformed from a minor literary theme to a more widespread popular culture. The disadvantages of popular culture and consumerism have also appeared in *danmei* culture afterwards. For instance, the commercialisation of *danmei* has catalysed intellectual property rights violations such as copying, plagiarism, and piracy. There are cases of *danmei* novelists *ronggeng* (融梗, blending some of the common motifs in *danmei* works as original) and plagiarising each other. One of the most discussed cases is that Tangqi Gongzi's romance novel *Eternal Love* (唐七公子, 三生三世十里桃花, 2009) plagiarised the *danmei* novel *The Peach Blossom Debt* (桃花债) published by Dafeng Guagguo (大风刮过) in 2007. Except for the different gender of one of the main characters, there are overlaps in their plots, character relationships, character identities and descriptions. The former was also originally serialised in Jinjiang Literature City but was moved to 17k.com due to a copyright dispute. However, because of the suppression of *danmei*'s novels by the mainstream publishing industry over a decade ago, *The Peach Blossom Debt* not only failed to sue *Eternal Love* for plagiarism and copyright infringement, but it was also instead published seven years after *Eternal Love* was published.

Another problem is the fan conflict that *danmei* and *dangai* have caused in the entertainment industry. The sensational '227 incident' (Wang and Ge, 2023: 356) and the ban of *dangai* (Huang, 2022) were considered to be caused by fans of the main actors of two famous *dangai* television series, *The Untamed* (陈情令) and *Word of Honour* (山河令). Remarkably, although these issues are not closely linked to *danmei* and queer culture *per se*, the state has been able to take the opportunity to compress the creative environment for *danmei*, as demonstrated by the difficulty in publishing physical books of *danmei* (Yang and Xu, 2017), the stringent censorship of online content

involving elements of *danmei* and *dangai* (Wang, 2020), and the downplaying of queer elements by *dangai* (Nim, 2022), among other things.

In response to the situation of state repression and censorship of *danmei* by the government, some scholars have put forward suggestions for the future development of *danmei* and *dangai*. Shana Ye argues that it is important to develop *danmei* works with Chinese characteristics, not only:

> 'fostering properly gendered consumer-subjects and heteronormative social harmony for national building' by establishing the perfect male who meets the desires of female *danmei* fans, but also allowing 'the militant masculinity to be 'homonationalised' in service of rebranding Chinese nationalism in a time when Chinese global expansion is fiercely criticized on the global stage' and resulting in united and loyal people (2022: 1).

Ye presents active suggestions for the development of *danmei* and *dangai* from the point of view of the authorities. Similarly, Eve Ng and Xiaomeng Li believe that *guofeng*-infused (Chinese-style) *dangai* reinforces what they call 'brand nohomonationalism', which means that 'the queerness of *dangai* is downplayed or disavowed, while elements identified as showcasing Chinese cultural power are highlighted in nationalist terms' (2022: 626). Admittedly, these scholars have actively engaged in public discourse and have offered the prospect of dialogue and cooperation between mainstream culture and *danmei*, but their proposal is based on the idea that *danmei* should be included as a constructive element of Chinese mainstream discourse and patriarchal culture, which seems to be inconsistent with the aspirations of *danmei* fans and the LGBTQ community. Rather, I will argue in the following paragraphs how *danmei* can be reshaped in terms of its connections to queer culture and online media, specifically to tackle issues of internal chaos, burnout, and pan-entertainment within *danmei*.

Theoretical Framework: The Relationship of Affect, Body, and World

With reference to the 'affect-body-world' model (Truran, 2019: 21) in body theory and affect theory, I propose a structure, 'queer-*danmei*-online media', to express the intervention and articulation of these three elements. That is to say, queer, *danmei*, and online media will constitute an integrated analytical concept which confronts the dominant discourse, and each part can function both independently and in conjunction with the other two parts.

Before exploring the way that 'queer-*danmei*-online media' structure operates, we need to figure out the sense and relationship of affect, body, and world. In the light of Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677), LeBuffe explains the concept of 'affect' as referring to 'as any affection "by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections"' (LeBuffe, 2023: 149). Instead of concentrating on an individual's feeling, affect focuses more on the flowing and altering emotions that arise between the bodies of different individuals as a result of their interactions. Therefore, as Lisa Blackman argues, affect is a 'relational, intersubjective, co-produced, co-constituted' process of the becoming of bodies (2021: 51). In the structure of 'affect-body-world', affect highlights the inseparable connection between the body and the mind. Emotional experiences are not solely limited to mental processes but are embodied in physical sensations and responses. Affect enables individuals to communicate and express their emotions to others. Through affective expressions, such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, individuals can convey their emotional states and inner experiences. Then, affect enables individuals to communicate and express their emotions to others. That is to say, affect makes the body as what Martin Heidegger calls 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 2001: 200). Nevertheless, the body 'being-in-the-world' here does not mean that the body is fixed and sealed, rather the worldly body only emphasises the relationship between the material body and the world. As for how the body exists in the world, affect will navigate individuals in making choices, determining preferences, and initiating behavioural responses, by stimulating individuals to construct their identity and influencing individuals to interact with others. Since affect is fluid, the body being in the world is also changing.

If the body is subservient to affect, it will eventually become hollow flesh for the flow of feelings around the world. However, the body has agency and subjectivity. According to Lisa Blackman, this agency is regarded as 'emergent and produced from the compossibility' (Venn, 2018, seen in Blackman, 2019: 130), which results in the dissolution of binary structure and ontology of mind in nature and culture (Alldred and Fox, 2017), since it has the 'capacities to resist, negotiate or refuse the workings of disciplinary power' (Blackman, 2019: 37). The agency of the body ties the body to an individual's subjective experience. It is not only an object, but also a subject that shapes personal thoughts, emotions, and consciousness. The body plays a role in the formation of personal identity and the subjective experience of embodiment, as it is the instrument through which individuals navigate and interact with the world.

If there is only affect-body or mind-body, it is less possible to see the interaction between multiple subjects in the structure. Therefore, the structure of 'affect-body-world' emphasises affect-body in the world, which indicates that both affect and body connect to the world by being influenced by culture, society and power. Affect is intertwined with cultural context, power dynamics, and social relations. Emotional expressions, norms, and

responses vary across different backgrounds, as the awareness of class distinctions, cultural differences, power structures are enacted through the dynamics of feelings (Charlesworth, 2000). Whereas the aggregated force of individuals' affect can in turn influence social and cultural constructs. As for the body, it is also socially and culturally constructed, meaning its meanings and interpretations are influenced by cultural norms, values, and beliefs (Blackman, 2019). The way in which culture constructs the body is it enables the performative body to express meaning and communicate messages through gestures, movements, and bodily practices. It participates in cultural rituals, social interactions, and symbolic performances that convey societal norms, identities, and power dynamics (Gil, 1998). Therefore, one can see that the body is shaped by societal expectations, in standards of beauty, gender roles, and other cultural factors, which vary across different contexts and historical periods.

A Proposed Structure Articulating Queer, Danmei, and Online Media

The structure I propose, 'queer-*danmei*-online media', draws on the integrity of the 'affect-body-world' structure, the interrelationships between three parts, and the attributes of each component. One can view the connection and relevance between these two models as follows: queer can be the affect impetus which is embodied in *danmei* works; *danmei* is the material, tangible subject of expression which enables fans to engage in activities and make choices and play a role in the formation of queer and woman identity; and online and digital media are the setting in which *danmei* and queer culture can survive state repression, which in turn influences the development of *danmei* and queer culture.

Regarding the development of *danmei* and queer culture, the environment of digital and online media is essential. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, from the second phase onwards, when the state suppresses queer culture with the suppression of *danmei* and *dangai*, such media can provide as much space for them to survive as possible under limited conditions, reserving them from losing discourse. On the other hand, these media offer a new alternative for both queer and *danmei* to establish subjectivity: a peripheral culture transforms qualitatively through quantity accumulation. Michel Foucault (1982) argues that subjectivity is established by two forms: the power to expel the heterogeneous, and the knowledge to shape the subject. At present, in this highly globalised world, the internet can constantly and repeatedly deliver homogeneous content to every corner, and then 'information cocoons' come into being. This phenomenon indicates that the more frequently and widely homogeneous content is promoted, the more convincing it becomes. With the push of online and digital media, people can be extensively exposed to queer representations through the ubiquitous *danmei* fiction. Queers can access their 'comrades' (referring to Chinese queer) on the Internet, orient themselves in the characters of *danmei* fiction, and discover their ethical relationships with others in society from *danmei* audiences. In the third stage, online media reforms the promotion of *danmei* culture from large print volumes to multiple digital formats, such as producing IP games and selling derivatives online.

From the perspective of artistic styles and cultural thought and practice, most contemporary queer literature/gay literature can be categorised as realistic literature because queer literature reflects the plight of queer people in the patriarchal world. Queer literature highlights the strong spirit of realism with 'authentic writing'. In comparison, *danmei* fiction is inherited from 19th-century romanticism, but it then eschews the magnificent narrative of traditional literature and focuses on popular stories of love and entertainment. The primary audience for *danmei* fiction is '*fujoshi*' (ふじょし), who are generally heterosexual women engaging with the creation, recreation, and dissemination of *danmei* fiction (Tanaka and Ishida, 2015), and as such, *danmei* mainly describes boy's love rather than girl's love and the protagonists are usually written as gays rather than lesbians. Their underlying appeal is the ideal romantic relationship, the liberation of repressed sexuality and eroticism, and the domination of men who are dominant in love and sexual relationships in the 'RL' patriarchal society. *Fujoshi*s seek alternative mechanisms for 'loving and being loved' in fiction, which they do not have in real life. Therefore, *danmei* fiction can create a space of pure love and a utopia of gender equality constructed by female writers, a 'secret garden' for women's thoughts and imagination (Wang, 2015), rather than a panoramic literature of queerness.

Some queer literature is even autobiographical, whereas gay protagonists in *danmei* fiction are fantasised by the authors, and most of these characters taken from previous works aggregating the realistic desires of *fujoshi*s, such as beauty, wealth, high-class extraction, superpowers, and good virtue. As a result, these fictional images do not entirely resemble real queers in many specific ways. *Fujoshi*s attribute aesthetics and beauty to their characters, reshaping the already existing characters as they wish, to become masculine or feminine, alpha or omega, dominant or dominated. The bodies of male characters in *danmei* fiction become objects of desire for women, including women authors and women readers. The desire of *fujoshi* is not a female sexual desire for the male body, but a desire for an unconsciously heterosexual-like romantic relationship between boys. As Yanyan Zhou, Bryant Paul, and Ryland Sherman argue, 'BL stories typically paired a masculine character with a feminine character... [so] heteronormative gender stereotypes exist in BL stories, even if these stories depict gay male characters and romantic relationships' (2017: 107). Actually, except for their biology, which is judged to be male, uke/omega are closer to women in terms of appearance, psychology, ability, and responsibility.

The major difference between *danmei* and queer literature is in the division between the subject of narration and the object of depiction, with the subject of writing in the former being a woman, and the object of depiction being a heterosexualised variant of gay men; in the latter, the subject of writing and the object of depiction overlap, as both can be read as queer. However, in order for this body of writing to be more directly relevant to queer people in China, the body of *danmei*'s writing should be transformed from an imaginary protagonist with heteronormative affections and social relationships, arguably to depict more of the real queer community, so as to reflect on the plight of the real Asian queerness, including such ongoing stressors as the lack of legal protection for same-sex marital relationships (Han, 2013), the contradiction between coming out of the closet and the requirement of transmission of the family lineage in the East Asian family (Bui, 2014), as well as the discrimination and bullying in schools, workplaces, and society, among other things (Rider *et al*., 2023). It would be sensible to incorporate queer culture into the creation of *danmei*, as queer culture can play a transformative and enriching role in both the contents and expressions of *danmei*. In terms of content, queer culture can bring diverse representation to *danmei* literature by introducing a wide range of LGBTQ+ identities, experiences, and relationships. It allows for the exploration of various sexual orientations, gender identities, and non-normative expressions of love and desire, providing a more inclusive and authentic portrayal of queer lives. By infusing *danmei* literature with queer themes, authors could address important societal topics and spark meaningful discussions among readers. Incorporating queer culture in *danmei* literature could empower LGBTQ+ individuals by providing them with visibility and representation. Queer readers can find solace, validation, and a sense of belonging in stories that reflect their own experiences and emotions. As for non-queer *danmei* fans, *danmei* fiction representing queer culture on the Internet could arouse social and political commentary on issues such as discrimination, prejudice, and social injustice, encouraging the public to reflect on the real world and learn how to respect queer people. More and more people could engage with queer community and culture, and 'decriminalisation and depathologisation of LGBT' (Wang, Y., *et al*., 2019) can be reemphasised. By infusing *danmei* literature with queer themes, authors can also address important societal topics and spark meaningful discussions among readers, which allows *danmei* fiction to move perhaps from pure fantasy to incorporate some realism in the form, as it moves from traditional print media to online proliferation, in its many narrative dimensions.

CONCLUSION

I have emphasised the need for *danmei* on the Internet to both seek the intervention of queer culture over the creative bottom line and to retain the function of *danmei* where female fans are also able to express their discourse. However, this study is founded on the assumption that *danmei*'s current audience is predominantly female, downplaying the contributions of a few queer producers and audiences, which requires concrete case studies to support

There are two dimensions of aesthetics in the context of Chinese *danmei*: the external aesthetic refers to its beautiful appearance, since most *danmei* protagonists are adorable and stereotypically attractive men. The internal aesthetic derives from a Confucius virtue, 'fearlessness' (Legge, 2011). Fearlessness of *danmei* characters refers to the courage to transcend the secular demand for 'a patriarchal and hypermasculine male image, complete with a heteronormative and reproductive family' (Bao, 2020: 21) and the search for self-identity occurs beyond the construction of the traditional heterosexual matrix and core socialist values. The bravery is not confined to the gay characters in *danmei* fiction, but also exists outside the text among *danmei* fans. Many also desire to confront the patriarchal culture and liberate themselves from normative and traditional forms of marriage and reproduction. Hence, *danmei* already takes on gender issues and is against patriarchal organisation. To review and explore this literary genre, this article begins with an overview of the development of *danmei* in three terms: the period of repression, indicating how *danmei* was scrutinised; the period of permeation, suggesting the way that *danmei* flourished on the Internet; and the period of circulation, referring to the commercialisation of *danmei* on the Internet. This structure reflects the extensive presence of queer culture on the Internet in the form of the *danmei*, which also has a subjectivity that hybridises and embraces feminism, queerness, and other anti-patriarchal forces, while the diversity of representations on the Internet provides a shelter for the *danmei* and queer cultures to exist and perpetuate.

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Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles*: Teaching Queer Caregiving Memoir on Disability, and Pedagogy as Resistance

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Sarah Leavitt's graphic novel *Tangles: A story about Alzheimer's, my mother and me* (2010, 2011 UK), in relation to queer identity, feminist wilfulness (Ahmed, 2014), and critical disability studies. *Tangles* takes up themes of lesbianism, disability, and activism, and it does so through storytelling. Studies around life writing and disability, including the dementia disease Alzheimer's, point the reader strongly toward recognition of the key importance of storytelling in the preservation of selfhood. Whose stories are told, and whose are not, and by whom? How can or does patient selfhood emerge or survive in caregiving narratives written and/or drawn by others? This article examines graphic memoir in the contexts of Comics Studies, Canadian Gender Studies and Critical Disability Studies.

Keywords: Alzheimer's, graphic medicine, disability, memoir, intergenerational trauma

INTRODUCTION

I am a Canadian Gender Studies academic living with disability, and it has seemed to me timely to revisit Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles: A Story About Alzheimer's, My Mother and Me* (2010, 2011 UK), in light of current events. I am writing this article as a call to use graphic novels in teaching to fight back against hate directed at minority groups, and for teachers to consider the potential that Comics Studies has to serve as a platform for positive LGBTQ+ texts, and for narratives that engage actively with disability. In June of the summer of 2023, a former student walked into a Gender Studies class at the University of Waterloo, in Canada, and stabbed the professor and two students, in what police described at the time as a planned hate crime; I suggest that more education is needed, so in this article I will revisit how queer creativity can provide a useful teaching aid in the classroom.[1] It is important to work towards more inclusive classrooms and ways of teaching, and visual learning is accessible for students. The Graphic Medicine Movement teaches how valuable comics can be in the classroom.[2] Graphic medicine, a phrase coined in 2007 by Ian Williams to describe the interaction between the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare, has become a large international area of research, study, and art-creation. In her chapter on 'The Uses of Graphic Medicine for Engaged Scholarship,' in *The Graphic Medicine Manifesto,* Susan Merrill Squier argues that graphic medicine promotes:

> engaged scholarship beyond the medical or health humanities. This category includes women's studies, environmental studies, disability studies, and science and technology studies, as well as critical race studies, queer studies, and animal studies. Each of these areas has a mandate for real-world commitment and engagement that comics can serve well. (2015: 43)

On Disability Studies, Squier observes that '[c]omics can play a powerful role in DS by framing disability as an experience that may include but also frequently transcends the medical context' (2015: 49).

[1] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/university-of-waterloo-vivek-goel-gender-course-continues-1.6897673 (Accessed 6 July 2023). https://www.cp24.com/news/u-of-waterloo-stabbing-at-gender-studies-class-amounts-to-terrorism-prosecutors-1.6554045 (Accessed June 2, 2024).
[2] https://www.graphicmedicine.org/ (Accessed September 16, 2023).

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Continuing with the engaged classroom as a goal, I turn here to bell hooks, and to her foundational call within feminist critical pedagogy for educators to challenge simple ideas around the mind-body split in the classroom. hooks says:

> While I wanted teaching to be my career, I believed that personal success was intimately linked with self-actualization. My passion for this quest led me to interrogate constantly the mind /body split that was so often taken to be a given. Most professors were often deeply antagonistic toward, even scornful of, any approach to learning emerging from a philosophical standpoint emphasizing the union of mind, body, and spirit, rather than the separation of these elements (1994: 18).

The comics classroom encourages a reading engagement with the body as well as the mind, and such a visual-verbal double impact can support work towards integration of the reader's senses, especially in relation to the often-difficult materials represented in graphic medicine.

In Rosemary Garland Thomson's groundbreaking *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (2017), the Preface points out that while the book was a 'latecomer' in feminist literary and critical race studies, it was at the forefront of Critical Disability Studies. Garland Thomson reminds the reader that establishing Critical Disability Studies was the product of activism as well as scholarship, of networking, of protests, all with "disability diversity as a political and ethical goal" (2017: ix). In a similar way and responding to this call, *Tangles* takes up themes of queerness, disability, and activism and it does so through storytelling. Martina Zimmerman's work in *The Poetics and Politics of Alzheimer's Disease Life-Writing* (2017) brings literary and medical work together to emphasise that patients' voices must be made central to dementia discourse, and considered in relation to broader discussions around caregiving, aging, dementia, and Alzheimer's patients. Zimmerman's work around life writing and disability, including Alzheimer's, can point the reader strongly toward a recognition of the key importance of storytelling in the preservation of selfhood, however imperfectly. Such narratives will consider: whose stories are told, and whose are not, and by whom? Readers also need to consider: can or does patient selfhood emerge or survive in caregiving narratives written and/or drawn by others?

The *Tangles* part of the book's title invokes the tangles of Alzheimer's itself – the neurodegenerative disease is caused by the accumulation of proteins called neurofibrillary tangles in the brain. Leavitt's graphic memoir tracks her family's care for her mother Midge after her diagnosis with early-onset Alzheimer's disease, at the age of 52, to her death. There are other tangles in the memoir: in family roles, in relationships between the sisters Sarah and Hannah, in people's hair, in queer feminist life for Sarah, in the creation of her tangled archive of notes and sketches about Midge's experience that become this graphic memoir later, over a period of four years of drawing and learning. Throughout this article, I will use 'Leavitt' to denote the author/artist, and the name 'Sarah' to denote the character of the author as represented in the story. In her introduction, Leavitt concludes that '[i]n the end, this is only my story: the tangled story of my mother, and me, and Alzheimer's' (2010, 2011: 8). The book negotiates the simultaneous presence and absence of Midge, physically and mentally, and asks difficult questions about the representation of disability and aging, questions that are now, in 2024, being taken up in the world of digital storytelling, so valuable to disability arts, and disability activism, and the evolving engaged classroom. Leavitt's *Tangles: A Story about Alzheimer's, My Mother, and Me* is also being adapted for film.[3]

Tangles is a queer, feminist contribution to life-writing, and graphic medicine, which as the *Graphic Medicine Manifesto* defines, is the 'intersection of the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare' (2015: 1).[4] My own approach to comics study is 'an intersectional, feminist one, invested in the many and various ways in which a large body of women's comics art makes a point of expressing interconnections between gender, race, class, nation, and sexuality' (Tolmie, 2013: ix). The cross-connections between caregiving, the politics of queer resistance, and mother-daughter closeness are laid out in an early set of images of mother and daughter appearing together at the same political event. Leavitt's spare black and white renditions of a protest of queer people, with the note that she had never called herself queer before, is made funny and approachable by her mother joining in the protest and adding to the chants of 'We're here, we're queer!' with her own version: 'We're here, we're straight, we're also great!' (2010, 2011: 69). The bond between mother and daughter, between straight and queer, is a key theme in the text. The fragility and precarity of it all is laid out clearly too, as Sarah introduces her mother to a friend who was subjected to domestic violence, and readers know from the book's title that that invocation of 'great' is fragile and temporary.

Hillary Chute in *Graphic Women: Life Narrative & Contemporary Comics,* says:

[3] https://freehand-books.com/sarah-leavitts-tangles-on-the-big-screen/ (Accessed June 2, 2024). It will be a feature-length animated movie produced in collaboration by Monarch Media, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Point Grey Pictures, Lylas Pictures and Giant Ant Films.

[4] https://www.graphicmedicine.org/ (Accessed July 6, 2023).

> I am interested in bringing the medium of comics – its conventions, its violation of the conventions, *what it does differently* — to the forefront of conversations about the political, aesthetic, and ethical work of narrative (2010: 3).

Similarly, I want to focus in here on the political, aesthetic, and ethical work done in *Tangles,* which carefully represents the mother's work of allyship. Without claiming claims for herself, or naming names for herself, the character of Midge Leavitt is represented as doing the quiet, sustained *work* of allyship with her lesbian daughter, and readers see that work, represented in the book's text and images, and by extension offers the teacher the potential for discussions of allyship as labour in the classroom.

Figure 1. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled' (*Tangles,* 2011: 16). Used with permission.

In **Figure 1**, Midge and Sarah attend a demonstration against police violence together. In *Willful Subjects* (2014), self-described feminist killjoy author Sara Ahmed describes wilfulness as a 'sweaty concept' that 'involves persistence in the face of having been brought down […]. Mere persistence can be an act of disobedience' (2014: 2). I want to focus in this article on the classroom as a potential space of persistence, as pedagogy as persisting in the face of having been brought down, threatened, and made dangerous. Academics in Canada teaching things like reproductive justice are routinely consulted about safety plans, and not putting our classroom numbers and student names out publicly, partly as a result of the 2023 stabbing, but also because educators remember the antifeminist mass shooting of women in 1989, at the École Polytechnique in Montreal. In this terrible incident, fourteen women were murdered; another ten women and four men were injured[5]. Teaching narratives such as Leavitt's beautiful, loving caregiving memoir is a quiet form of resistance and persistence in feminist pedagogy, in a context in which protests around so-called gender indoctrination in public education are being still being staged outside Canadian universities. On September 20th, 2023, conservative right-wing activists planned nationwide events to protest teaching queer curriculum content in Canadian schools, using the rhetoric of 'protecting the children'. According to the activists' description of the protest, it was: 'A day to unite all religions in the defence of children against LGBTQ+ indoctrination in Canadian schools.'[6] I lectured about these protests, and made it clear that in my university classroom, LGBTQ+ material is welcome, and as readers learn from the character of Midge in *Tangles*, it is something to be welcomed. In a political context in which in the Americas and other continents, the language of protection of children is being invoked to advocate book banning, the erasure of history and of lived experience alike, and the increased marginalisation of already-marginalised groups, the burden falls on us as educators to respond with counter arguments.[7]

Ahmed (2017) also identifies wilfulness as a key aspect of feminism in *Living a Feminist Life,* noting that the word '*willfulness* implies the problem with being feminist is feminist being' and is related to the 'acquisition of a voice' (2017: 71, 73). Her analysis foregrounds such concepts as resistance, refusal, and disruption, and moments in which '(t)o be called willful is an explanation of why we ruin things' (2017: 73), Ahmed's introduction of the

[5] https://engineerscanada.ca/news-and-events/news/remembering-the-montreal-massacre-30-years-later (Accessed June 2, 2024).

[6] https://blueprintforcanada.ca/planned_protests.html (Accessed September 16, 2023).

[7] Some people consider this to be a period of crisis for LGBTQ+ rights in the USA. Human Rights Campaign declared a state of emergency in 2023. https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/06/us/hrc-lgbtq-emergency-declared/index.html (Accessed June 2, 2024).

concept of wilfulness concludes with the assertion that the feminist's 'willfulness or obstinacy means that she makes the world about herself' because she is not 'willing to recede' (2017: 75). Her subsequent discussion of wilfulness presents wilfulness as a 'diagnosis', centrally connected to self-expression, acts of understanding and misunderstanding, and of course, to resistant and recalcitrant attitudes and behaviours (2017: 75). Her diagnosis of wilfulness is about harnessing both control and resistance, and can also be about the loss of both things. Caregiving memoirs, similarly, spring from an interrogation of our relations and connections to care; care, too, is often connected to resistance, disruption, and to things being formed, ruined, or spun out of control. It is a form of wilfulness, that it is not willing to let the cared-for recede.

Leavitt's *Tangles* documents her mother's Alzheimer's diagnosis at the early age of 52 and the subsequent degenerative processes of the disease as its affects both her mother's body-mind and spreads outward into the well-being of the entire family. Sami Schalk (2018) uses the word bodymind in her work on speculative fiction in *Bodyminds: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction,* the mind is extraordinary, and in this caregiving memoir the protagonist and her mother try (and fail) to prevent it from receding. Other disability books also represent this theme of the disappearing mind within their book; one such example is *Uncanny Bodies: Superhero Comics and Disability* (2019) edited by Scott T. Smith and José Alaniz. Leavitt kept sketches and notes throughout the period of her mother's illness and up to her death, and those sketches and notes became this book. Ian Williams, in the *Graphic Medicine Manifesto,* observes that graphic medicine 'combines the principles of narrative medicine with an exploration of the visual systems of comic art, interrogating the representation of physical and emotional signs and symptoms within the medium' (2015: 1).

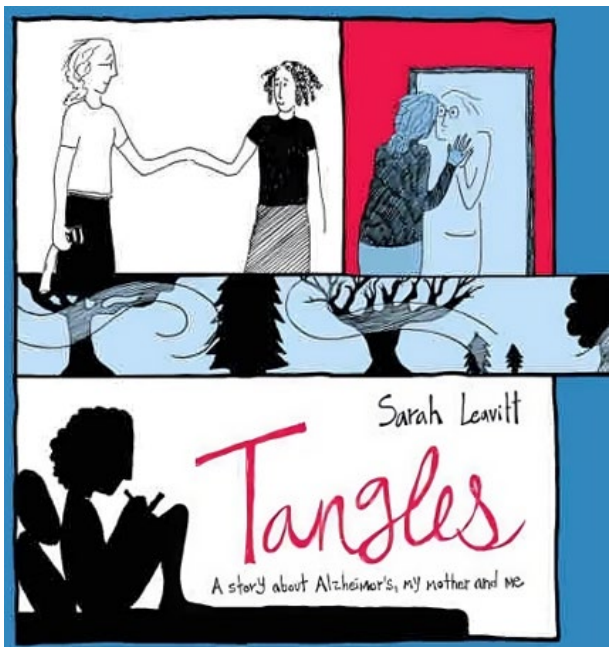

Figure 2. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' UK title page. *Tangles.* 2011. Used with permission.

The graphic novel *Tangles* was a finalist for the 2010 Writers' Trust of Canada Non-fiction Prize, the first graphic narrative to be a finalist in this category, just as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986, 1992) was the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize (with no fixed category), in 1992. Genre problems, like gender trouble, are represented frequently in comic narratives. *Maus* (1986) tackles the story of Spiegelman's mother, whose destroyed journals were lost and her voice was excluded from the family archive of intergenerational trauma. Similarly, *Tangles* brings another form of painful exclusion from the archive into sharper view: mental decline means that memories become more and more difficult to represent. In talking to the author Leavitt about why a comic book might be especially effective when dealing with a difficult topic such as terminal illness, she expressed:

Often in the middle of the most painful situation there's a moment that makes you laugh. Like if you're taking care of someone with a terminal illness and they crack a joke about it, or you and your fellow caregivers collapse in semi-inappropriate laughter after a hellish day. Comics are a great tool for conveying this sort of mixed-up, crazy combination of tears and laughter — a way of forcing the reader into that uncomfortable space that you occupied. (2011: personal communication)

Figure 3. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles*. (2011: 124). Used with permission.

In **Figure 3**, there is a 'SCREECH!' from a departing car, and a steaming casserole on the doorstep. The scene captures something of the unspeakability of it all: this is the gift you cannot give in person, because you cannot say the right words. The image captures it, as the steam rising in streams is all the unspoken words flying uselessly into the air. The experience of chronic suffering, physical and emotional, is extremely difficult to convey in language, but can be rendered more approachable, indeed more wilful, via a combination of creative techniques and of visual storytelling.

There is something universal about the insights offered in Leavitt's book, given the truth that we all die, and we all think about the way in which we will die, and the ways in which people around us and especially people close to us, die, have died, and will die. Leavitt's work is successful storytelling because it draws the reader in through pictorial detail rather than generalization or the use of 'we.' Drawing on Ahmed's work and on ideas from the Graphic Medicine Movement, there are productive tensions between claims of universal experience, and the narratives of particular, individual experiences. I will discuss how the personal, the political and the so-called universal play out in a medical memoir such as this. The book offers a narrative of dementia that is applicable to wider narratives about disability; the specifics are a mess, but the mess of illness and decline is something readers can identify with. The simple, clear lines of Leavitt's drawings are in contrast to the lived mess, emotional and mental, depicted in the frames of the comic: what *looks* clean and simple visually, is messy to live and experience, but Leavitt persists through the mess, working through it, drawing through it, writing through it, making a coherent story. The narrative takes the reader through caring for Midge at home, to Midge moving into a nursing home, to her death in that home. The author/artist Leavitt guides the reader through her autobiographical journey from her mother's diagnosis on page 37 to her death on page 122, making the many kinds of mess visible and accessible to the reader.

M. K. Czierwiec and Michelle N. Huang in their article about hospice comics come right to the point by both naming the neurofibrillary tangles that are part of the 'valence of *Tangles'* title' and by adding they cannot be untangled, in so many ways (2017: 101). Victim and observer come together, mother and daughter shift roles, private and public mix together. Alzheimer's is a life-altering and fatal disease, which is mirrored in the narrative structure. In their article about life writing in disability narratives, Czierwiec and Huang point to experiential messiness in another way, by talking about the overlap of the categories of life writing and comics. They discuss the genre of the graphic caregiving memoir or the 'graphic somatography' that brings conflicting, and conflicted, selves and others together (2017: 74). Quesenberry observes that since 'comics and lifewriting are already outside of some of the norms of narrative and literary traditions, they can open up understandings of "a life"—as well as "a body", "an experience", "a story" – that are not only more inclusive but also less-normatively expressed, circulated, and discussed' (2016: 77).

Leavitt's *Tangles* is not just a universal retelling and illustration of the death and dying of a mother. It is culturally specific, in that it is a Canadian woman's queer comic that tells a story of a developing lesbian identity and of the accompanying feminist politics, written from the position of white academic privilege, informed by a Jewish identity. These are some of the identitarian tangles represented in the comic. It is also 'crisis witnessing', in the terms of the acute difficulties of living with Alzheimer's. Crisis witnessing can also be seen in *Maus* (1986, 1992) and in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000, 2001), these other graphic novels depict traumas about the Holocaust, and international intergenerational trauma; themes of the war and family and the Iranian revolution are part of intergenerational trauma there. Such powerful visual media can also be about dementia, and about intergenerational trauma there, and all the concomitant, multiple crises of suffering that can be told. Creativity, in all three of these texts, becomes a literary response to trauma. Hillary Chute takes readers through the possibilities of both presence and absence in the framing of such trauma in *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*:

> As I have suggested before, while all media do the work of framing, comics manifests material frames – and the absences between them. It thereby literalizes on the page the work of framing and making, and also what framing excludes. While it has become commonplace to identify and praise a work's self-reflexivity, the textual feature of self-reflexivity is not necessarily a value in and of itself. Comics offers attention both to the creation of evidence and to what is outside the frame. It invokes visual efficacy *and* limitation, creating dynamic texts inclined to express the layered horizon of history implied by 'documentary.' (2016: 17)

Leavitt draws reader attention to both such an absence and presence in her treatment of the coming-out process in this comic:

Figure 4. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles*. (2011: 17). Used with permission.

Sarah describes the act of coming out as 'pretty anticlimactic' (Leavitt, 2010, 2011: 17). The act itself is handled as an everyday sort of thing, and her mother Midge's acceptance of it is also handled calmly as an everyday and welcome thing - such is the work of allyship. In the classroom, using texts like *Tangles*, teachers can open up positive discursive spaces, making cultural space for queerness and queer attachments. Leavitt's own personal story of growing into her lesbian identity and finding her partner, Donimo, who appears as a character in the novel and is a witness and supporter throughout her mother Midge's decline, is key to how this story of loss is told. Following in a long line of feminist cartoonists such as Roberta Gregory, Phoebe Gloeckner, Alison Bechdel, and so many others, Leavitt's text is an exploration of how to negotiate a personal and political self within a family context.[8] Whereas the protagonist's coming out is represented as fairly quotidian, her sister, Hannah, is offered up as a contrasting figure, a woman without easily-identifiable feminist politics, whose primary cultural affiliation instead is Orthodox Judaism. This depiction is a demanding one, that prompts the reader to think about the high prices that might be paid by secondary characters in memoirs of any sort. Hannah celebrates her upcoming marriage, commenting 'I always said my life would really start once I got married, and now it's really going to happen!' In the book, the character of Sarah describes herself as 'pissed off' by this attitude and asks, 'Why is every single heterosexual wedding cause for celebration?' (2010, 2011: 74). Ahmed observes that:

> To make a case for a feminist life can be about keeping open the question of how to live. This opening up can be experienced as a judgment: I have heard this. For instance, if you decide not to marry and have children, your decision can be narrated as somehow rejecting that life, or passing judgment on those who life that life, as if by not doing *x* you are saying *x* is wrong. Maybe sometimes you do speak of wrongs – you might say it is wrong to assume those choices are right or are the only right choices. But you can be heard as being judgmental or dismissive just by virtue of not following a well-trodden path. (2017: 197)

The main character's sister Hannah takes on her role of wife and mother, within a conservative Jewish context, and is treated – because she makes that particular choice – as one who responds without wilfulness, and consequently without a sense of strong emerging adult-self. Her non-feminist convention (as it is depicted), becomes a negative and stilted choice, against which the protagonist's own queer partnership and artistic set of priorities are highlighted as aspects of independence and political and emotional growth. The more conventional choice is represented rather critically as a thoughtless reproduction of cultural norms, so the protagonist's sister Hannah pays the price of the woman who is not wilful, as *Tangles* celebrates instead the wilful author/protagonist. The angry Sarah comments, 'She's changing her fucking name!' (2010, 2011: 74).

[8] Taking Roberta Gregory as the example here, it would be a disservice to pick simply one publication and date from this prolific writer in different genres, and the same is true for Phoebe Gloeckner and Alison Bechdel. https://cbldf.org/2017/03/she-changed-comics-roberta-gregory-interview/ (Accessed June 2, 2024).

Ahmed's own experience of being engaged with as a feminist is described as both a source of pain and of inspiration, which leads ultimately into the materials she subsequently developed in *A Killjoy Manifesto* (2017), in particular in the Conclusion 2 (pages 251-268). The adoption of wilfulness for oneself, and its deployment as an analytic category, becomes a source of pride, anger, and activism; Ahmed makes connections here to other feminist texts touching on illness and mental health, most notably Charlotte Perkins Gillman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892), in which the author's own experience of postpartum depression inspires a short story, which itself becomes a textual form of political resistance and disruption raising awareness around lack of understanding and awareness about mental health disorders during the nineteenth century. The story itself, in which the husband forbids writing and journal-writing, affirms the importance of storytelling through and about difficulty (2017: 76).

Anger, pride, and activity are all part of fighting back through creative and academic writing alike. Giving a voice to trouble, owning it, articulating it, and living resistance - these things become for both feminist critic Ahmed and for *Tangles* author Leavitt a reaffirmation of a proud creative feminism that celebrates and makes space for diverse forms of queer storytelling. Ahmed observes that:

> Perhaps a lesbian feminist struggle for recognition comes out of rage against the injustice of how some dwell by the dispossession of others. Perhaps the signs of this struggle are neutralized by being represented as a gift. (2017: 221-2)

Figure 5. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles*. (2011: 17). Used with permission.

Hannah's eyes are closed and her head is down as she waits for life to 'start' after marriage (Leavitt, 2010, 2011: 17). The image speaks to a serious rift between the sisters, and to a dynamic tension of representation that endures throughout the text – a lesbian feminist sister on the one hand, and on the other hand a sister who marries a conservative Jew and has a traditional family. Both sisters, however, must cope with the decline and death of their mother Midge. This raises a point that must always be made about memoir, in that it is partial. I doubt very much that Hannah appreciated Leavitt's representation of her beliefs and attitudes in the book, in which she appears as someone who believes that marriage and childbearing give automatic, intrinsic meaning and validation to life. Leavitt, perhaps indicating this bifurcation of vision, makes the disclaimer in her 'Introduction,' saying that 'Other people may remember things differently' (2010, 2011: 7). That is an important truth: autobiography is always about the author as self, a constructed self, and it often hurts other people. As the late Queen Elizabeth II is said to have said about Prince Harry's book *Spare* (which he did not write himself), 'recollections may vary.'[9]

Autobiography is perhaps unconvincing if it causes no pain, especially when pain itself is the subject. Leavitt tells the story of her sister alongside her own story, and that appropriation is part of how memoir works: it works uncomfortably. Leavitt, the character, is depicted as wary of her sister's decision to marry a conservative Jew and contemptuous of her sister's idea that marriage will solve everything. But in fact, the narrative logic suggests that through the representation of Leavitt's protagonist's own misgivings and pain and her serious choices, the reader is invited to consider that with one family crumbling away, the desire to form a new (queer) family in the way that one chooses makes clear emotional sense. All of these choices made by her daughters, made as forms of building new lives at a difficult time, are made against the backdrop of Midge herself losing the ability, and the time, to make her own choices.

Sarah's own choices are laid out in the graphic memoir, albeit selectively. Throughout this text, the strengthening and supportive relationship that Sarah shares with her partner, Donimo, is key. Yet readers learn almost nothing overt about Donimo's politics or self-identification, she is represented as the foil to the

[9] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/10/recollections-may-vary-how-the-papers-covered-queens-response-to-meghan-interview (Accessed June 2, 2024).

protagonist's selfhood. Again, in contrast to the representation of Hannah, this is one of those sets of representative choices that reminds readers that selective memory is a key to good story-telling, (and that some people are punished while others are rewarded). So while the protagonist's queer identity is key to the text, only certain aspects of it are explored. This next image shows readers the central importance of the novel's queer relationship and how it is essential to appreciating her relationship with her mother.

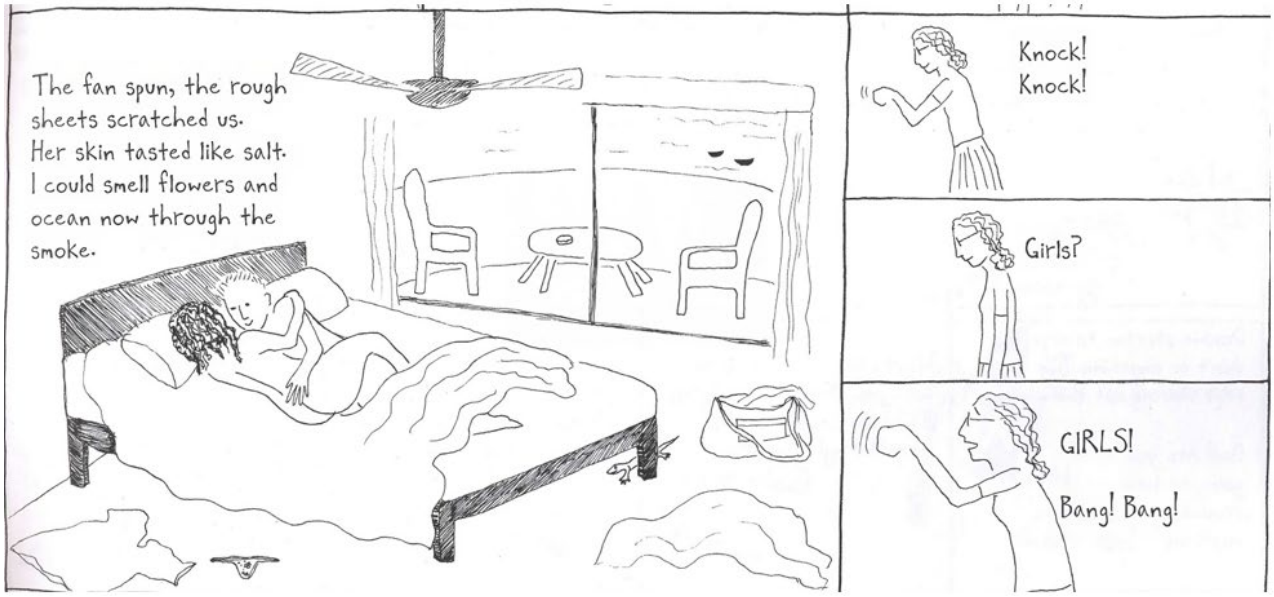

Figure 6. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles*. (2011: 31). Used with permission.

A scene of lesbian tenderness and intimacy is interrupted by Midge's knocking, and her banging on the door is set up visually to interrupt in many senses: to interrupt the readers with a spatial transition, and to interrupt the lovers in the story. It is one of many moments in which Midge's sense of social context has fallen away, leaving her banging at the outside of things, literally and figuratively. Calling them 'Girls!' she strikes at the door, and one sees the frustration on both sides – Midge's frustration at not being answered right away, and Sarah's frustration at not having her adult relationship understood or recognised. Many of Leavitt's particular authorial and artistic techniques are on display in this set of scenes. Note the spare black and white lines, the strategy of juxtaposition rather than explanation, the rendering of the mother in profile which is her frequent position throughout the text. It is entirely possible, and desirable actually, to read this as Midge being wilful, being interruptive, making and claiming her own space, and I suggest that the imagery is left open for that reason.

Tangles is a lesbian feminist Jewish text sometimes about hair, pubic and otherwise. Both Sarah's own hair and her mother's hair deserve some discussion here in this context.

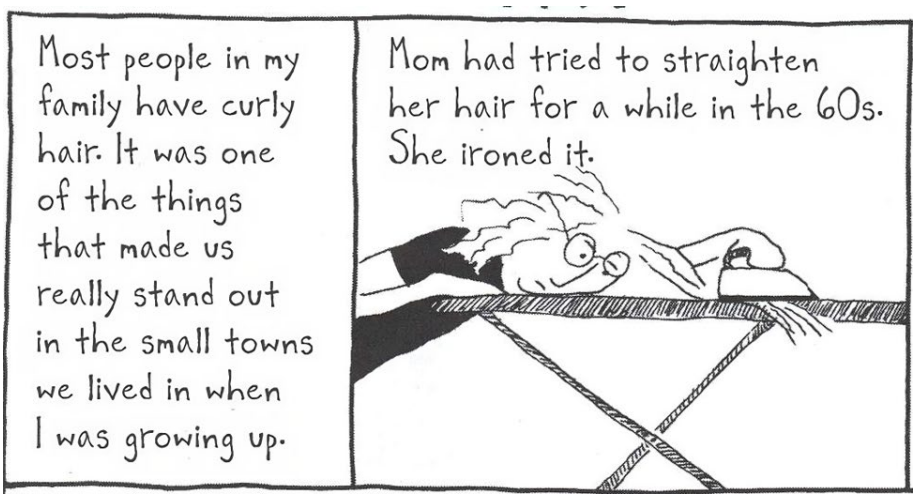

Figure 7. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles*. (2011: 63). Used with permission.

Consider the scene in **Figure 7**, in which Midge irons her own hair, on an ironing board. At a conference in Leeds, I saw the author Leavitt talk about her own work, and she showed some family photos. One was of her with her

mother. Both had curly brown hair, the mother's medium brown and Leavitt's very dark brown. Yet in the book, her mother's hair looks light. At the time I asked her about this, and she replied to me:

> Her hair was a medium brown until she died with only a bit of grey. I didn't realize it seemed light in the book till someone told me recently at a talk I gave. It seemed to me that she lost colour/density as the illness progressed, so I think her hair got fewer lines. Also, I needed her to look distinctly different from me. (2011, personal communication)

There is a great deal of wilfulness at stake here: memoir selects what is important to the person writing, not necessarily what is most accurate, and memoir is not realism. And yet, accurately rendered or not, at several points in the story, hair is key. Sarah combs her mother's hair with her fingers, and starts to keep the hair that comes out. She starts to collect her own hair, too, and puts the hairs together into boxes. They comfort her somehow. It is emphasised in these sections of the text that the hair is the same – dark, curly, dense. So it is important to note that in her own drawing, she erases that similarity as the narrative progresses, even while insisting on it in the text. In the case of Leavitt's book, Quesenberry points us to the mixing of is 'queer life and disability' in *Tangles* (2016: 65). As queer caregiver and as narrator/artist, Leavitt brings together complicated, (dis)abled selves and conflicting meanings, through and into what Squier calls 'productive dissonance' (2016: 73). Productive dissonance is a useful and flexible concept, like wilfulness.

Lesbianism, feminism, Jewish identity: Leavitt uses them to particularise the universals, and to bring in wilfulness. Alisia Chase in *Drawing from Life* has written about the ways in which women's alternative comics use everyday messiness to express profound emotional truths (2013: 207). Chase's focus here is on the alternative comics of artists such as Phoebe Gloeckner, Julie Doucet, and Debbie Drechsler, women who use the same technique of using the personal, diaristic quotidian mess that is at work, similar to Leavitt's *Tangles*. *Tangles*, in the tradition of feminist art since at least the 1970s, also depicts the everyday lived experience of women as a legitimate subject for art. The story of the decline of Leavitt's mother is worked out against a backdrop of Leavitt's own emergence as a lesbian feminist artist, working through a series of intergenerational issues with candour and vigour. Picking up Midge's soiled clothes, cleaning her mother's bum, trimming her mother's pubic hair, her horror at a group of kids yelling 'Dykes' at her when holding her mother's hand – all of these everyday instances are included, cumulatively giving a sense of the grinding, exhausting, humiliating progress of a physical and mental decline. Leavitt emphasises the mess, the dirt, the everyday of women's work of care.

In 'Autography's Biography,' Jared Gardner (2008) observes that the gestation of the autobiographical form in comics was partly inspired by 'the feminist movement and revolutionary politics that were very much in the air' in southern California in the early 1970s. In the same volume, Chase argues further that 'feminist artists' consciousness-raising sessions from the mid-1960s onward were another important influence on the rise of the confessional form' (2008: 14). At such sessions, women not only encouraged one another to share their 'neuroses, body-issues, and [worries about] sexuality' (as Gardner points out, Aline Kominsky-Crumb would later do this in her comics) but helped each other recognise that these psychological hang-ups were largely due to one's biological gender and the institutional sexism that prevented women from making equitable social progress in the art world as elsewhere. In sum, to affirm that the personal was indeed political. What Gardner describes as being the greatest surprise of the first comics autobiographers is that: 'the most personal stories became the ones that forged the most meaningful connections with others, opening up a dialogue with audiences and a sense of communal experience and release,' (2008: 13). This might just as easily describe how feminist artists felt when they discovered that art about the female experience liberated the psyches of makers and audiences alike (2008: 13). Chase says:

> I propose that is … female comic artists' similar use of feminine iconography, or as feminist performance artist Carolee Schneemann later termed it in 1975 – 'personal clutter' — that educes identification and empathy in the reader. (2013: 207)

My focus here is on Schneeman's use of the phrase 'personal clutter,' as personal clutter and mess are key to understanding the success of *Tangles*, which is about messy situations and unsolvable problems, though in this case drawn with spare and clean lines. One thing Leavitt mentioned to me is that she feels her text has been particularly successful with women readers.

Gillian Whitlock (2006), in an article about the unique power of comics autobiography, which she has termed 'autographics,' posits that the comic art form in particular has the potential to speak across cultural divides. Gender and its many, many, various embodied experiences is one more area in which this speaking-across works well. Scott McCloud argues that comics possess a universality, but Whitlock warns that scholars should 'be wary of claiming universality in mediations of comics and cartoon drawings' (2006: 970). This caution is well taken. In McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, now a canonical text like *Extraordinary Bodies,* he draws a literal portrait gallery of creators who 'shake things up.' There readers can see such reputable comic artists as McCay, Spiegelman, Herriman, Sterrett and

Moebius. In an odd bracket underneath the gallery appears the comment '(In *other* art forms: Stravinsky, Picasso, Virginia Woolf, Orson Welles, etc.)' (1994: 179). Woolf's presence is jarring in its suddenness and uniqueness. The impression McCloud's gallery of 'pioneers and revolutionaries' leaves the reader is an unbalanced one, and not a universal one; this has to be brought forward when using a text such as *Tangles* for teaching purposes. Pedagogy, too, needs to shake things up through presenting an inclusive Comics Studies field that is fully engaged with all comics artists: with female and male artists, with non-binary and transgender artists.

In their anthology, *Interfaces: Women/Autobiography/Image/Performance* (2002), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson draw attention to the frequency with which women's visual art during the twentieth century has engaged the autobiographical, not only in order to illustrate the politics of self-representation, but to politicise the personal, and by doing so, to offer it up as mode of communication with the viewer. They also propose that feminist autobiography frequently occurs at the interface of image and word, illustrating how this intentional, and frequently jarring, juncture of two separate discursive modes provides a way for female artists to rupture conventional and expected meanings, ultimately providing a site of artistic resistance to heteropatriarchal culture. The comics form is capable of both liberating the reader from a traditional, linear method of reading/interpretation, and providing a site of resistance and agency for writers/creators, who can capitalize on the multitude of ways in which image and text confirm, contradict, and/or complement one another. Additionally, by sharing the individual articulation of their subjective experience with a wider readership—which is perhaps functioning as a consciousness-raising session in a reproducible and circulating narrative form—comic artists seek to make the personal public, and to challenge the Cartesian mind-body split.

Turning back to the question of particular versus universal, it is notable that frustration with the universal is both specific and unspecific, at the same time. Here both mother and daughter are frustrated.

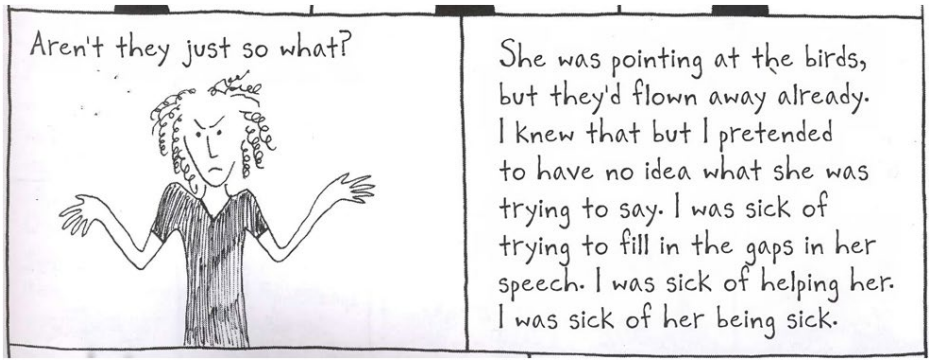

Figure 8. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles*. (2011: 73). Used with permission.

Midge's scowl is met by Sarah's feigned incomprehension: 'I pretended to have no idea what she was trying to say' (2010, 2011: 73). Sarah is represented in the novel as losing her temper with Midge's inability to express herself clearly. Author Leavitt does not shy away from representing her characters' anger, tiredness, and frustration within the disheartening arc of the Alzheimer's story, with Sarah acknowledging that she was 'sick of [Midge] being sick' (2010, 2011: 73). There is no hiding the anger and frustration that attend unending illness. Author Leavitt represents losses of patience and even moments of cruelty. In another scene, Sarah talks about how the whole family talk about Midge as if she were not there, even when she is right there in the room.

In this image of a car drive with her mother as passenger and Sarah as driver, the car's positioning against black space can be interpreted as a visual representation of the endlessness of care. Mother and daughter are together, looking much the same, driving through a part of life that smells like, and is, shit.

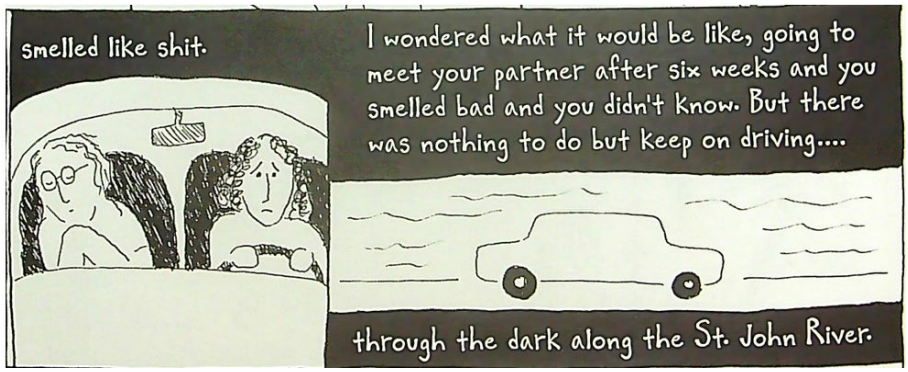

Figure 9. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles*. (2011: 62). Used with permission.

Many of the more intimate scenes in *Tangles* are illustrations of Leavitt's personal care of her mother – personal in very mundane, dirty ways, such cleaning her poop, cleaning her clothes, picking up her stuff, leading her away from social situations in which she has behaved oddly. In the graphic memoir, there is no clean-up of the relentless of personal clutter. The everyday nature of caretaking is represented to a wide audience. Anne Rüggemeier (2019), addressing the ways in which practices of caregiving are charged with shame, observes that shame, much like graphic narrative itself, collapses categories. When Midge soils herself, Sarah in a triple sense loses her mother: first, because their roles as dependent child and competent adult are ultimately reversed, second, because Midge (unconsciously) breaks another taboo and thereby further alienates herself from the social world to which the daughter still belongs, and finally, because the daughter might very well perceive her mother's excrements as disgusting and thus finds her own mother repulsive (2019: 269).

Sarah, in the novel, describes the complicated emotional and intimate process of trimming her mother's pubic hair with her sister Hannah, and how she feels a sense of shame. Rüggemeier connects this shame in the narrative to Leavitt's own queer identity, saying it is 'entangled with her fear of discrimination as a lesbian' (2019: 273). It is also part of Sarah's 'solidarity and sympathy' with her mother, a shared shame, a shared knowledge of physical weakness and disability (2019: 277). The text indicates that Sarah's lesbianism is also a shared knowledge, and shared accepted knowledge.

Figure 10. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles.* (2011: 75). Used with permission.

Figure 10 literalises the body as being a prison. In this image, Midge's head is turned to the side in anger, as both the house and her body are prisons for a declining selfhood. Leavitt represents Midge's anger and frustration at being locked in her own house by locking her in her own body visually. Midge's hands disappear so that her arms seem locked together. Midge is trapped in her own body, trapped and helpless to stop the progress of the disease or to take control of her own life. Readers can see how other people such as neighbours fail to help, or cannot cope, with the dirt, the ugly emotions, the social failures of dementia care. Discomfort, mess, and tangles: things that are tangled: hair, bodies, stories, lives are tangled together. Leavitt tries to represent the universality of this suffering – the non-culturally-specific details that are transferable to many people living with long-term illness in their own tangles of anger, frustration, filth, exhaustion, and loss of autonomy.

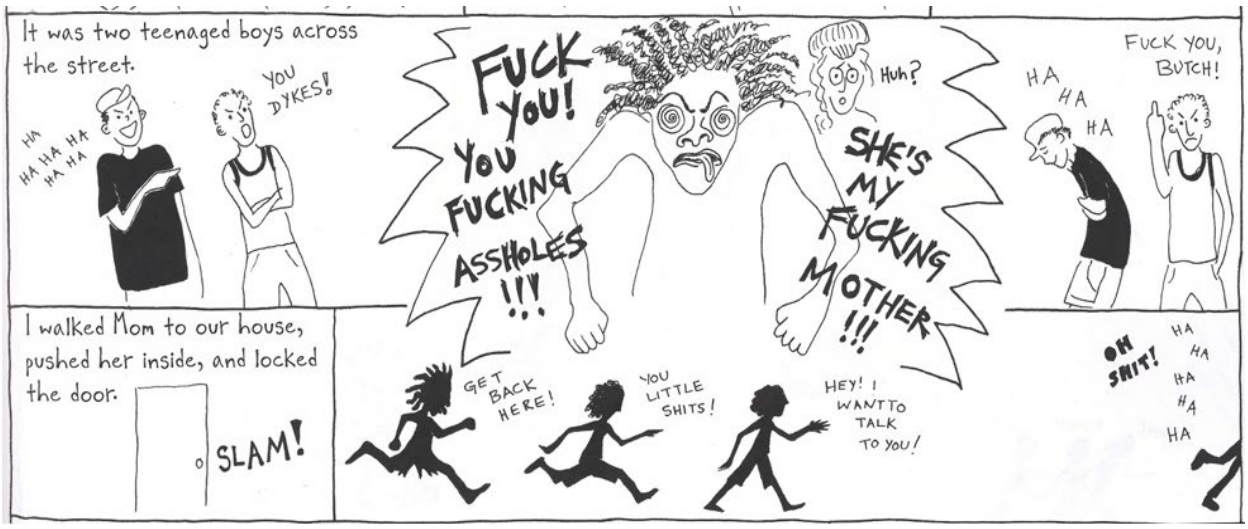

Figure 11. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles*. (2011: 77). Used with permission.

Frustration takes many forms in the book. This image from the novel, of anger, brings into mind Diane DiMassa's classic comic hero *Hothead Paisan*: *Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist* (1999); the narrative shows Sarah in a rage after some kids yell 'Dykes' at her when she is holding her mother's hand in the street. Readers here will also recall Alison Bechdel's many years of work (1983-2008) in *Dykes to Watch Out For*, and the novel has many parallels to Bechdel's oeuvre of representing family discord and trauma. Sarah's anger in *Tangles* repositions the text within a particular set of political and personal discourses, bringing readers back to the designation of wilfulness. Wilfulness can be angry, and moments of disidentification are just as important as moments of identification in feminist rage. Storytelling can be one way forward through such things, as community arts projects can show, such as the Re•Vision Centre for Art and Social Justice, which brings together disability arts, feminist arts, and community arts at the University of Guelph.[10]

Ahmed's figuration of wilfulness is what started me re-thinking *Tangles* as a form of feminist resistance, but the novel depicts the ambiguity of wilfulness. The sister, Hannah, is not given credit for her own wilfulness. She too comes into herself in the environment of her mother's falling-apart. She too, like Sarah, comes into her relationship and produces a family – not the alternative feminist one, but the traditional, heterosexual, religious one. The wedding scenes detail her mother's mental absence and the emotional pain of it. Tellingly that set of scenes is prefaced by Sarah apologising to the sister for 'being an ass' (2010, 2011: 74). The wedding scenes end with Midge not remembering the wedding – though she attended – and saying 'I wasn't there' (2010, 2011: 75). And of course, there it is. That is the central pain of the Alzheimer's story, that people can be there and not be there at the same time.

Similarly, Ahmed's reflections on wilfulness bring her to the realisation that 'it is not always self-evident which bonds we are damaging' (2017: 196). Her ruminations about living a feminist life teach that 'difference and deviation are often registered as damaging those who are different, those who deviate' (2017:197). Particular forms of feminism become expressed as forms of harm, including self-harm (2017:197). *Tangles* makes me wonder whether self-harm is being assigned in the narrative diegesis to the conventional sister, perhaps feminist wilfulness is being withheld from her in a problematic way. What, in the end, does it mean to be 'rash,' to use Ahmed's word? What is it about getting married in a conservative context that is not as rash as finding a queer partner and getting a dog? In both cases, one world is falling apart and another is being built. I admire Ahmed's work and consider the killjoy manifesto to be both valuable and entertaining, but its central premise is that 'a manifesto not only causes a disturbance, it aims to cause this disturbance. This intimacy between manifestation and disturbance has implications for how we write a killjoy manifesto' (2017: 251). Perhaps Ahmed is talking about productive dissonance. Perhaps, the novel suggests that conformity itself can cause or embody resistance. *Tangles* made me rethink a series of easy assumptions about wilfulness and how it is expressed, assigned, and owned. I recognise the anger and pain underlying *Living a Feminist Life*, very much so. But I also take the warning visible from *Tangles,* which is that both assigning and withholding wilfulness is power, and returning to Ahmed, perhaps most importantly, 'If feminism is a bubble, we need the bubble to burst' (2017: 259).

In terms of the difficulty of representation of selfhood for Midge, Leavitt takes up the challenge through the inclusion of Midge's own words, in her own handwriting, carefully reproduced as both Leavitt's art and Midge's self-expression, character-Midge and real-Midge at once, in a tangled way. This is done via instances such as the recreation of a handwritten loving note to Donimo, complete with mess and hearts. Through inclusion of this

[10] https://revisioncentre.ca/ (Accessed July 6, 2023).

image, Midge's personhood appears; there is persistence of self, even in the face of having been brought down by illness and disability. Her mother's handwriting makes it in. Her mother's selfhood gets included. Midge, unlike Spiegelman's mother Anja, here briefly enters into the archive of intergenerational trauma in her own words, as an ally, and a loving one. Anja's exclusion from the archive of intergenerational trauma in *Maus* (1986, 1992), where her diaries and written materials are destroyed by Vladek, is more like a black hole of pain and anger for Art Spiegelman, who calls his father 'murderer' (1986: 159). But Leavitt brings her mother into the archive, and Midge's allyship lives on.

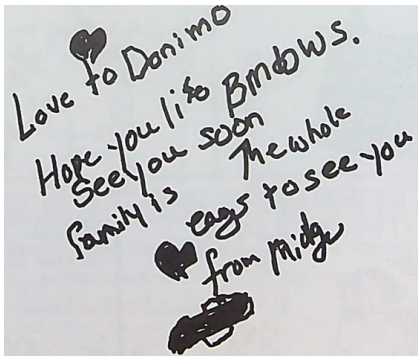

Figure 12. Sarah Leavitt. 'Untitled.' *Tangles.* (2011: 61). Used with permission.

Midge's note to Donimo is the *work* of allyship (Leavitt, 2010, 2011: 61). Zimmerman's book *The Poetics and Politics of Alzheimer's Disease Life-Writing* (2017) on dementia life-writing was inspired by an encounter with a patient that made her critical of simple ideas about selfhood, and conscious of the potentially problematic ways in which caregiver narratives can dominate the cultural reception and understanding of Alzheimer's patients' experiences. She emphasises the difficulties presented to self-narration by cognitive impairment, and in her own discussion she highlights the ways in which *Tangles* self-consciously addresses the limitations of caregiver discourse. As such, *Tangles* is, as its subtitle suggests, Leavitt's story as much as it is her mother's, especially since Leavitt comments in her introduction that '[a]s my mother changed, I changed too, forced to reconsider my own identity as a daughter and as an adult and to recreate my relationship with my mother' (2010, 2011: 7). Leavitt's memoir becomes a space in which she can also come to terms with herself, and her coming out. And her narrative gains further meaning, because it deals with the added complication of providing dementia care in what is represented as a heterosexist environment (2010, 2011: 3).

I use the word ally carefully, and I close this essay with an image about the labour of allyship, in order to advocate for that labour in the classroom, with making it an everyday labour, as is coming out in *Tangles*. Ally, as Canadian trans artist and activist Sophie Labelle points out in her ongoing project *Assigned Male* (2023), is not something you can or should name yourself, it is work that you do.[11] The swimming platypus, **Figure 13**, produced by Sophie Labelle in Pride Month 2023, signals that there is important visibility and inclusion work to be done. 'Ally' is a title to be earned, as readers saw in the scene in the novel in which Midge joins her daughter at a queer protest, and also in her note to Donimo, drawn for us by Leavitt, in which a picture is worth a thousand words.

Figure 13. Sophie Labelle. 'Untitled.' *Assigned Male.* 2023. Used with permission.

[11] Image access from: https://www.facebook.com/assignedmale (Accessed June 3, 2023).

Leavitt's partner Donimo was an activist for queer and disability rights, and she died on April 21, 2020, choosing to end her suffering with medically assisted dying (MAiD). Leavitt's next queer, creative work on grief and memory is scheduled to come out in 2024, and I look forward to what that can teach the reader, and to bringing it into the classroom. Ahmed has left academia to become an independent scholar, and Leavitt has entered academia through the School of Creative Writing at UBC in Vancouver, Canada, working to make visual learning through comics studies more available, and perhaps also education to be more open to different forms of learning. I learned about Ahmed's resignation from academia from the acknowledgements in her 2019 book, *What's the Use?,* where she expresses appreciation to all those who made her 'feel part of a killjoy collective as [she] made the difficult but necessary transition to working as an independent scholar' (2019: xiv), In the feminist killjoy blog, Ahmed uses the image of 'chipping' just as Labelle uses the image of swimming, as an image for shared and shareable work:

> By saying resignation is a feminist issue I am not saying to resign is an inherently feminist act even when you resign in protest because of the failure to deal with the problem [of] sexual harassment. I am saying: to be a feminist at work means holding in suspense the question of where to do our work. The work you do must be what you question. Sometimes, leaving can be staying, with feminism. Sometimes. And not for all feminists: other feminists in the same situation might stay because they cannot afford to leave, or because they have not lost the will to keep chipping away at those walls. (2016: 1)

In light of the hate-motivated stabbing of a professor and two students in a Gender Studies class at the University of Waterloo in pride month, 2023, I turn to queer creativity in pride month 2024 for inspiration, for tools to build a better classroom, a better pedagogy. Comics pedagogy offers many tools for resistance and persistence, for 'chipping away'.[12] This is the feminist work I choose to do. I will turn and return to the teaching of queer imagination, to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ materials in the classroom, and to the teaching of more material around disability - to the labour of allyship.

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Outbursts, Discipline, and Wake-Up Calls: Gendered Emotionalities in Men's Gambling

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ABSTRACT

Within gambling debates and research, emotions are associated with irrationality, loss of control, and problem gambling. Simultaneously, they have a complex relationship to masculine positions, which are said to be connected to both stoicism and aggressivity. Using interviews with Swedish men gamblers and feminist and critical theorisations of emotions, this article discusses experiences, negotiations, and performances of emotions within men's gambling. The article demonstrates that emotions and control were entangled themes in the research, but discussed as separate by the interviewees, who used emotion work in order to navigate their own experiences in relation to larger discourses about gender, health, and 'sovereignty' in relation to gambling. The article expands feminist research about gender and emotions by providing in-depth, detailed discussions about men's emotionalities. It also contributes to gambling research by integrating problematising perspectives on emotions and to research about the production of gendered emotionalities under capitalism.

Keywords: gambling, gambling behaviour and gender, masculine positions, emotions, emotion work

INTRODUCTION

Emotions have a 'bad rap' in gambling debates and research as they are primarily associated with irrationality, loss of control, and problem gambling. Simultaneously, emotions are fundamental to gambling; when buying a lottery ticket, the price does not pertain to the slip of paper but to hopefulness and excitement (Nicoll, 2019: 67). Despite the complex role of emotions in gambling, problematising approaches which deconstruct the rationality/emotionality dichotomy and see emotions as embodied *and* discursive (Wetherell, 2012, 2013) have hardly been used, a gap addressed in this article.

Emotions have a similarly complex relationship to gender. White men have long been connected with rationality and control, ideas which co-exist with ones about men as aggressive and competitive and with emerging ideals of allegedly progressive emotionality in men (de Boise and Hearn, 2017; Lloyd, 1993). Given this complexity, an improved understanding of men's lived experiences of emotions and how they relate to them is crucial. Men's experiences of gambling provide an opportunity to better understand these issues. Also, as a multibillion-dollar industry, closely linked to contemporary forms of capitalism which interpellate us to feel (Gill and Kanai, 2019), gambling is highly political and of interest to feminist scholars.

Using interviews with Swedish men gamblers as well as qualitative analysis using feminist and critical theorisations of emotions, this article asks how emotions were lived, performed, and negotiated in men's gambling. I demonstrate that, while seen as separate by the interviewees, emotions were entangled with rationality and control. Emotion work was used to navigate feelings, which were understood in relation to larger discourses about risk, health, and 'sovereignty' in gambling. The article expands feminist research about gender and emotions by providing in-depth, detailed discussions about men's emotionalities. It also contributes to research about the production of gendered subjectivities and emotionalities under capitalism, and to gambling research by integrating problematising perspectives on emotions.

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EMOTIONS AND GENDER

Emotions and affect have been subject to intense discussions during the last decades. Theorists within the 'affective turn' see affects as embodied sensations, intensities, or forces which circulate beyond discourse (Massumi, 1995), and some have accused feminist and discursive research of focusing too much on emotions, rather than on affects, and on social, cultural, and discursive aspects while discarding embodied sensations. In fact, feminist research has long been interested in embodiedness and emotions (Hemmings, 2005). Moreover, the distinction between emotion and affect within the turn is based on views of bodies and psyches that are contested within psychology and neuroscience and by constructivist researchers (Wetherell, 2012, 2013). It also may reproduce dichotomies such as inner/outer, body/intellect, and nature/culture, thus reducing the complexity of social and embodied emotional processes while also overlooking decades of feminist critique of such dichotomisations (Reeser, 2017).

In this article, I follow the feminist formulation of emotions as political, discursive, *and* embodied (for example see Wetherell, 2012, 2013; Ahmed, 2014). As Wetherell argues, 'it is the discursive that very frequently makes affect powerful, makes it radical and provides the means for affect to travel' (2012: 19). I use the term 'emotions' rather than 'affect' in order to emphasise this composite understanding. This approach, making use of feminist theories, rejects views of emotions as solely irrepressible forces from within the body, *or* as solely discursive. Instead, emotions are seen as produced and circulated through culture, discourses, and within and between bodies (Ahmed, 2014). Moreover, they may be stable, pervasive, idiosyncratic, or unusual (Wetherell *et al.*, 2020).

This approach enables the study of 'how forms of feeling come to be conceivable, how these are articulated and legitimated, and open to further elaboration or repression' (Wetherell *et al.*, 2020: 15). One way of understanding such processes is through Hochschild's (2003) groundbreaking theories about 'emotion work', which outline how feelings are lived and shaped in relation to power. Using a view of emotions as embodied and discursive (2003: 28), Hochschild studies female flight attendants who are required to placate passengers by smiling from the heart; they should not only display certain gendered emotions but are expected to actually feel them. Emotion work is guided by 'feeling rules', which establish 'the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges' (Hochschild, 2003: 56). Feeling rules are connected to capitalism in several ways; not only are workers' feelings shaped and exploited (Hochschild, 2003), but capitalist systems also operate through 'intimate psychological governance', interpellating us to become subjects who feel in certain, gendered ways (Gill and Kanai, 2019: 132; Goedecke, 2023a).

Emotionality and rationality have a long history as a gendered dichotomy. Not only have rationality, objectivity, and the mind been connected to white men while women have been connected to irrationality, emotion, and the body (de Boise and Hearn, 2017), but rationality in itself is gendered: '[i]t is not a question simply of the applicability to women of neutrally specified ideals of rationality, but rather of the genderization of the ideals themselves' (Lloyd, 1993: 37). The distinction between rationality and emotionality produces women, people of colour, and disabled and working-class people as irrational, uncontrolled, and more closely connected to the body, thereby reproducing gendered, raced, classed, and ableist power relations.

Men's emotions are a complex area: early feminist critique portrayed men's emotional lives as impoverished, and nineteenth-century stoicism was seen as central to gendered power relations (e.g., Sattel, 1976). Consequently, in popular feminist thought and self-help culture, emotionality in men has been hailed as progressive. This view should be problematised, as men's emotions are neither 'new' nor necessarily progressive (de Boise and Hearn, 2017). With this in mind, the importance of the question of *whether* men are emotional fades; instead, *how* men's emotions are lived, understood, and negotiated, and their significance in relation to gendered and other discourses and power relations are of crucial importance. Men's emotions must be understood not as individual states but as potentially 'fit[ting] into, and circulat[ing] within, neoliberal-capitalist, patriarchal frameworks as a way of maintaining inequalities' (de Boise and Hearn, 2017: 788).

In order to understand this, this article draws upon feminist and discursive approaches to men and masculine positions (Butler, 1990; Edley and Wetherell, 2001; Whitehead, 2002). The relation between 'men' and 'masculine' is by no means linear, but the notion of 'man,' together with 'the male body' constitute 'the central, possibly most stable, reference point for the masculine subject as it seeks to create and realize its own existence' (Whitehead, 2002: 212). Living as a man, and embodying an intelligible masculine position, is connected to certain embodied and emotional experiences which must be made intelligible discursively. In the article, I use the term *masculine positions* to capture how gender was produced, made sense of, and lived by the interviewees (see also Edley and Wetherell, 2001). Emotions are 'one element of a process that temporarily composes or decomposes' such positions, and 'may produce new gender configurations as part of the unending chain of gendered becomings' (Reeser, 2017: 111), and emotion work refers to deliberate or unconscious efforts to feel in intelligibly gendered ways (Hochschild, 2003). Emotions form patterns which 'shape a context or horizon for action, a complex subjectivity and personal history' (Wetherell *et al.*, 2020: 15); that is, they form part of our multi-layered, gendered

selves, our emotional and embodied habits and our attempts to make sense of them. Gambling, where negotiations around emotionality and rationality are central, provides a lens where men's emotionalities, how they are lived, shaped, and understood, and what consequences they have, may be investigated.

GAMBLING, GENDER, AND EMOTIONALITY

Gambling research tends to be dominated by medical and psychological perspectives and quantitative methods (Cassidy *et al*., 2013; Nicoll, 2019). Like qualitative approaches, gender perspectives are relatively uncommon, and research that does bring up gender often treats it as a variable: Men gamble more than women, and spend more money gambling. Moreover, game choice is gendered, with men gambling more on skill or strategic games than chance games (e.g., Phillips, 2009; Svensson, 2013).

A growing body of research acknowledges that gambling is a cultural and discursive phenomenon which varies across time and space (Cassidy *et al*., 2013), which may contribute to the production of gendered positions (e.g., Casey, 2008; Scott, 2003). For instance, Cassidy's (2014) research participants (male bettors) deemphasised elements of chance in their gambling while emphasising mathematics, logic, control, and knowledgeability (traits described as unavailable to women). Skill games were not a preference among male gamblers but produced the gamblers as masculine. In a similar vein, Volberg and Wray suggest that:

> … the broad range of gambling activities deemed suitable for men coexists with widely accepted views of men as risk takers, innovators, and speculators. In contrast, women in Western cultures are generally viewed as caretakers and nurturers, social roles that are not easily reconciled with many types of gambling (…) views of appropriately gendered behavior vary across racial, ethnic, and class boundaries and further influence the acceptability of different types of gambling for men and women of different groups. (2007: 65)

The gambling forms discussed here (primarily poker and sports and horse betting) are based on a combination of skill and luck. Within them, logic, knowledge (e.g., about sports), and risk are central, which can be expected to connect to normative masculine positions. Importantly, gambling may reinforce *and* subvert gendered patterns (Scott, 2003).

Within the medical and psychological perspectives which currently dominate gambling research, emotions are seen as distinct from control and rationality and associated with problems. For instance, American Psychiatric Association criteria of Gambling Disorder posit that the problem gambler gambles 'with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired *excitement*' and '[o]ften gambles when feeling *distressed*', while failing to '*control*, cut back, or stop gambling' (American Psychiatric Association, 2013: 585, my emphases). The influential pathways model (Blaszczynski and Nower, 2002) similarly argues that problem gambling is characterised by emotive states such as excitement and arousal accompanied with irrational beliefs and illusions of control. Allegedly, children are extra vulnerable to gambling as their brains are 'dictated by their *emotions* and *feelings*. The *rational* part of their brain has not fully formed' (UK gambling information quoted in van Schalkwyk *et al*., 2022: 14, my emphases). Emotions are not only associated with problem gambling, but also with gambling badly: 'Although tilt[1] and chasing are closely linked to gambling problems (…) all poker gamblers are likely to *feel intense emotions* and *consequently* lose gambling sessions and money' (Mathieu and Varescon, 2022: 2, my emphases).

In this gambling literature, emotionality is pathologised and treated as irreconcilable with control. Underpinning this, I suggest, is the emotionality/rationality dichotomy, where emotions are seen as separate from or as precluding rationality which is associated with control, and where emotionality and rationality are placed in a hierarchy and linked to the mind/body and health/pathology dichotomies as well as gender. These suppositions have not been sufficiently problematised in gambling research in which emotions tend to be treated as located within the individual's psyche or neurochemistry, which underplays their interpersonal and political significance and the ways in which emotions are produced by and produce cultural meanings.

A more developed understanding of emotions as not precluding but possibly co-existing with control and rationality, and as embodied, discursive, gendered, and situated in time and place, is necessary. The emotionality of gambling is produced in relation to larger discourses: 'depression and other mental states connected to gambling should not be understood as located primarily within individuals' but as immanent to 'systems that connect states and subjects within American neoliberalism's social order' (Nicoll, 2022: 143; see also Casey, 2008; Nicoll, 2019). Neoliberalism is the economic ideology of individual choice, which is appropriated and sympathetic to contemporary notions of the clever, strategic and rational (male) gambler. Reith (2007) makes a similar connection

[1] 'Tilt' is when a poker player 'has great difficulty controlling their game through rational decisions, but rather acts very emotionally after having suffered a loss' (pokerstrategy, n.d.).

when she argues that contemporary capitalism produces 'sovereign consumers' of gambling, subjects which should 'consume, (…) give in and abandon themselves to the pleasures of self-fulfilment' while also 'exercis[ing] self-control and restraint' (2007: 40). Connections between gender and emotionalities have been implicitly discussed by some gambling scholars, such as Wolkomir, Cassidy, and Casey: US men poker players displayed aggression and used sexist and homophobic 'needling' to intimidate their opponents (Wolkomir, 2012), men sports and horse bettors in the UK were expected to respond to wins *and* losses with stoicism (Cassidy, 2014), while UK working class women expressed both happiness and fear in their discussions about gambling and winning the lottery (Casey, 2008).

In this article, gambling is regarded as embedded in everyday life and consumption (see also Nicoll, 2019), and as an arena where gendered negotiations about emotionality and control play out. Like many seemingly mundane activities, gambling is highly political; it is a lucrative industry, part of contemporary capitalism, and the ways in which we understand it normalises and de-legitimises certain understandings and subjects (Nicoll, 2019).

Before presenting the methodology, a few words about Swedish gambling are needed: During much of the 20th century, the Swedish gambling market was an oligopoly, dominated by state-owned company *Svenska spel* (Swedish games). In 2019 a license system was introduced; now all gambling operators must be licensed, which includes legislation requiring a duty of protection of their customers. However, even during the oligopoly, neoliberal views, including ideas about individual rather than corporate responsibility, were influential in Sweden, as were medical discourses, framing excessive gambling as an illness (Alexius, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The research draws on in-depth interviews with 14 men, conducted in the Spring of 2021. They were recruited through advertisements posted in online groups (devoted to gambling in general, poker, and sports and horse betting), betting shops, and other venues, as well as through my personal networks, and using the snowball method. The advertisement asked for men aged over 18 who gambled or had gambled but were not problem gamblers.

The interviewees lived in small towns or larger Swedish cities. They ranged from working class to upper middle-class; among the latter, several spoke of working-class origins. 12 had experience of some higher education, all were heterosexuals, most where white, and all but two had grown up in Sweden. Their ages ranged from 24 to 78 (median = 41). Nine had children; nine had (female) partners while four interviewees were single or widowed. While they were racially and sexually homogenous, they were diverse in terms of class and geography.

The interviewees varied in terms of gambling habits, they were occasional, frequent, professional, or ex-professional gamblers. All were mainly engaged in games based on a combination of skill and luck: horse and sports betting and poker (some also occasionally visited land-based casinos and participated in lotteries). Half of them were engaged in multiple forms of gambling, often a combination of sports betting and poker or sports and horse betting, and half of them were engaged in poker only.

The interviews were semi-structured, lasted 35-90 minutes, and were organised around themes like gambling practices, how the interviewee started to gamble, with whom he gambled, and what gambling meant to him. Due to the then ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, 13 of 14 interviews were conducted online. Online interviewing may exclude people without access to and/or knowledge of the relevant technology, but it may also enable people pressed for time or without access to transportation to participate (Roberts *et al.*, 2021). In this case, it expanded the geographical scope of the study but led to, I believe, a slightly younger, more digitally literate sample who mainly gambled online. Consent forms (and prepaid envelopes) were sent out via post. The interviews were carried out by the author, a white woman in her thirties. The gendered dynamic did, I believe, affect the interview interaction. For instance, previous knowledge about gambling was seldom presumed, as interviewees explained accumulated bets and poker rules in great detail.

The audio of the interviews was recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the author, whereby all names and cities were changed, as well as any potentially identifying information. The research was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (no. 2020-05017). All interviewees consented to participate and they were informed that their participation was voluntary and could be aborted at any time.

The material was studied using qualitative and discursive approaches, which entailed repeated re-readings and listenings, copying quotes concerning prominent themes into separate documents, whereafter the interviews, themes, and quotes were re-read and re-evaluated and read together with theories and previous research in a back-and-forth, hermeneutic process (see Potter and Wetherell, 1994). Interviews are based on speech as well as interruptions, inflexions, body language, and other circulations of feeling, and are arenas where the full complexity of emotions can be studied, even if there is a risk of overemphasising talk (while other methodologies may offer better insight into non-verbal aspects of emotions). I therefore looked for stories about emotions as well as emotional expressions, including shouts, enthusiasm, and other changes in intensity.

Below, I discuss emotional narratives, and then go on to discuss different kinds of emotion work. Lastly, I discuss the emotionality of losing control while gambling.

EMOTIONAL NARRATIVES: 'A ZONE OF EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS'

The interviewees' motivations for gambling varied and overlapped; some spoke of a great interest in sports, horses, or poker, some (also) saw it as a social activity, while others gambled in order to earn money. However, all emphasised emotions like fascination, competitiveness, and excitement. For instance, Frank (31), a sports bettor, said: 'I think [placing a bet] is a bit of a *frisson*'.[2] He was echoed by Torsten (45), who recalled the blackjack gambling of his youth as 'titillating' while he characterised his present-day horse betting as more of a 'quiet suspense' which he shared with his father and brothers.

One of the most overtly emotional narratives came from Kjell (61), a sports and horse bettor. As a child, Kjell used to accompany his stepfather to the horse racing arena, which he described as a 'zone of emotional outbursts (…) the racing tracks, the home straight, and everyone has bet a lot of money (…) it's a great excitement and drama'. As a young man, Kjell had once won a lot of money on the V5 horse races, where one is supposed to pick five winners. He told me about this in great detail, describing the horses of the race and the betting shop where he found out that he had won:

> Kjell: I can't remember if I cried but it may well have happened, kind of. It was a feeling of bliss, or kind of, to read in… because at that time one read [the results] in the newspaper, well: 'results from [the local racing track]' and sort of… and this, just going through [the results], shit, 'first, second, third, fourth…' just… and then… close your eyes and take a deep breath and: 'fifth' and just AHH, well it's a, well… it's a big… (laughs) it's a fantastic… (…) and how *satisfied* I am, I can still tell you, can still feel how *satisfied* I was (KG: Yes) that I had… it was a kind of… well, no, it was a feeling of bliss.

This rather incoherent narrative was told with sighs, laughs, and shouts. This was 'one of the happiest days in my life', Kjell said, an 'almost orgasmic feeling'. The moments of reading the results were etched in Kjell's memory in a hyper-real fashion despite having taken place over 40 years ago.

Filip (24), a professional poker player, also held intense feelings. He told me about his first experiences of poker with his friends in secondary school. The stakes were low, but the game and the company were like a 'cocktail of, just, it was great, great fun'. Filip got '*totally* stuck', and when his friend sent him a link to *World Series of Poker*, he sat for hours "*ploughing* through it, as soon as I had time":

> KG: It sounds like a falling in love?
>
> Filip: yes, yes, yes!
>
> KG: You kind of fell for it completely!?
>
> Filip: Yes, definitely! And that was… I can say that as much fun as poker was then, *so much fun*, poker hasn't been and won't be that fun again. That was something really, really special. Few things have ever been so much fun.

Filip's enthusiasm when talking about his first encounter with poker was palpable. These strong feelings produced new relationalities and possibilities in his professional and social life (see also Reeser, 2017), shaping his feelings for the game even in his present life as a professional poker player.

Parallel to these stories, there were ones of anger, disappointment, shame, and fear. For instance, Adam (39), a sports bettor and ex-professional poker player, talked about outbursts of anger among his poker playing friends which he associated with 'hits of adrenaline': 'many people with big egos came there [to play] and didn't come back (laughs) because there may be feelings, very easily'. Filip mentioned being scared of losing money at the outset of his poker playing, and fearful to tell his 'very strict' parents about playing poker. Kjell felt ashamed: '[I'm] not entirely truthful about the amounts I've spent (…) [my family] would probably just think that… 'but cut it out, can't you spend your time on something better', something like that'.

Gambling was subject to strong and varied emotions, sometimes lingering long after taking place. Wolkomir (2012) argues that men poker players are seen as more emotional while women players are considered more rational, which she interprets as an inversion of gendered ideas about rationality and emotionality. While my material similarly points to emotional expressivity among gambling men, I suggest that the idea of an inversion reproduces a dichotomous view of emotionality and rationality; being emotional cancels out being rational.

[2] Quotes have been translated by the author and edited slightly for readability.

I instead suggest that emotionality was *intertwined* with rationality in the gambling narratives. Emotions, both positive and negative, were ubiquitous and not automatically related to a loss of control or poor or compulsive gambling, and rationality and emotionality co-existed. One example of this was provided by Vide (35), an ex-professional poker player. Vide was one of the interviewees who emphasised the importance of being strategic and rational the most. To him, every poker game was a chance to gather information which he then analysed and evaluated. However, he also emphasised the emotionality of gambling:

> Vide: it's gut-wrenching to lose that much money (…) you have invested a lot of time and all that time just goes down the drain, time here is translated into money. And to feel that, it's very disheartening. Then there's the opposite (…) there have been times where I've won 300 000 SEK in a day (…) After that kind of gambling session it's not like you can just leave and think about… think about other stuff, you have a lot of… well, a lot of emotional processing that follows.

Notably, winning was just as emotional as losing, and while likening the emotions of poker playing to being on a 'roller-coaster', Vide saw his gambling as highly rational. The entanglement of rationality and emotionality was also evident in Frank's and Kjell's narratives about the thrill of being right:

> KG: is [the excitement] the charm of gambling to you?
>
> Frank: yes, and being right about football. That I really know my football (laughs), or better than the betting companies (laughs) (KG: right) So it's that, a bit of excitement, a bit of fun. (…) Winning is the proof that you know what you're talking about.
>
> Kjell: You feel a bit smart if you have nailed, sort of, three-four matches… kind of. Some unexpected odds and then you pat yourself a little on the back and kind of feel a bit good about it (laughs).

Being 'smart', strategic, or rational did not only co-exist with emotionality in these stories, but they *constituted* highly emotional states. As de Boise and Hearn point out (2017: 786, original emphasis): 'to be rational, often, is to, quite literally, *feel* rational'. Rationality and emotionality were entwined, both on a conceptual level (the definition of each was dependent on the other) and on the level of lived experience.

The emotions were presented through speech, and connected to cultural concepts like money or probability theory. However, they were also embodied. Adam associated poker playing with anger and hormones, Vide saw losing as 'gut-wrenching', and Kjell described his win as 'orgasmic'. These are figures of speech, but they also indicate that to these interviewees, the emotions of gambling were located in the body, in surging stomachs, sweaty palms, and the highs of winning (see also Wetherell, 2013). Additionally, the emotions were not only narrated but evoked and performed, especially during Filip's and Kjell's interviews, who were plainly not just telling me about their feelings, but reliving and circulating them (to some extent) to me; I could feel their joy and suspense and I could almost smell Kjell's newspaper.

EMOTION WORK FOR SOVEREIGN CONSUMERS: 'IT'S ABOUT CALIBRATING YOURSELF'

Emotions were central to the interviewees' stories, but they were controversial in the same way as in the gambling debates discussed above. Frequently contrasted with being in control, emotions were not only experienced but handled. The poker players had the most elaborate strategies:

> Vide: it's not only about being able to do the maths (KG: No), you have to be sufficiently disciplined to stick to reasonable decisions and keep caring about mathematics or rational decisions.

Vide deliberately analysed both the cards and his co-players: 'it's about calibrating yourself and adapting to how often I am right in my assessment about a person'. He connected winning to rationality and emotional control; the successful poker player did not only know the maths, but kept caring about them even in heated situations. Relatedly, Edvin (60), a poker player, had 'learnt to not get mad but stow [my mistakes] away so that I will recognise them and not make them again'. Hampus (41), a former professional poker player, had similar views: 'you have to read yourself a bit: which are your own limitations, and try to get to know them kind of. Sometimes you go into a tilt mood and that's… You need to recognise when you're on tilt'.

To keep control and continually evaluate one's own gambling are central to cultural narratives of poker. Thus, it is not surprising that it was the poker players that discussed these issues most explicitly. However, the other interviewees also strived not to get 'carried away' while gambling; they emphasised staying within financial and time limits, and not gambling while drunk or on online casinos, which were considered extra dangerous.

These narratives point to the presence of emotion work (Hochschild, 2003) aimed at suppressing anger and emotionality in general in order to remain rational. Relatedly, the concept 'tilt', which has been connected to gambling problems and to uncontrolled losses of money within poker research, links emotionality to loss of control (Browne, 1989; see also Mathieu and Varescon, 2022). Being emotional and being in control were thus formulated as distinct and control was equated with rationality and non-emotionality, ideas that made sense in relation to the rationality/emotionality dichotomy and how this dichotomy has been formulated in relation to gambling.

Parallel to the stories about suppressing emotions, there were ones of using gambling to *become* emotional. For instance, Torsten suggested that betting 'makes the watching experience much more fun', and Henrik (35), a football bettor and live poker player, similarly suggested that betting intensified the experience of watching football, which could be variously exciting in itself depending on the teams involved:

> Henrik: I can't save a division three game by betting on it but I can make a quarter-final in champion's league a bit more fun, significantly more fun, by betting on it.

When Sweden's national football team played, Henrik and his friends felt no need to bet, but other kinds of games were less engaging and needed to be enhanced by betting: '[Y]ou have to make it interesting for yourself', Henrik said. Gunnar (78), a horse bettor, reasoned similarly when I asked him about whether frequent losses could make him lose interest in gambling:

> Gunnar: No, you try anyway, it's fun to be a part of it, for otherwise you wouldn't watch the horses at all and if you haven't [placed a] bet it doesn't matter which horse wins.

To Gunnar, who had gambled for many years, betting rendered the horse races on TV exciting; without it, he implied, the races would become meaningless. Olof (41), a poker player, made a similar argument:

> Olof: There needs to be something extra, and that is hard to achieve if you don't sort of have to *bet* something! You need to feel that something is *at stake* because then you *get a grip* in another way.

Poker without betting money would become pointless; as above, betting was a shortcut to being able to engage with the game.

In these narratives, caring about the outcome of a game or a race did not always come naturally. Instead, the interviewees needed to wager money in order to really engage with the races, football games, or poker. Feeling strongly seemed almost like a duty, or differently put, these interviewees related to feeling rules prescribing emotional engagement, using betting as a kind of emotion work aimed at regulating their emotions (Hochschild, 2003). However, emotionality had to be kept within limits:

> Henrik: I'm not sure (…) why I don't evoke these feelings week after week, because I theoretically could, and bet a lot of money and really AHH! I realise that that's what problem gamblers do… But I think I have too much healthy self-preservation to put myself in that situation.

The stories about restraining *and* evoking (a reasonable amount of) emotions point to conflicting feeling rules of gambling, prescribing stoicism on the one hand and emotional engagement on the other. Relatedly, the interviewees were engaged in different kinds of emotion work, aimed at experiencing emotions of the right kinds and intensities.

The feeling rules and the emotion work were carefully calibrated and legitimated in relation to various larger discourses (Wetherell *et al.*, 2020). Firstly, both sets of feeling rules made sense in relation to normative masculine positions. On the one hand, emotion work was used to avoid tilt; aggressivity and competitiveness were to be replaced by the position of the calculating machine. This answers very clearly to the connection between rationality, stoicism, and masculine positions (Lloyd, 1993), even if I suggest that the goal of the emotion work was not to suppress emotions but to shape a new emotionality characterised by control, calm, and self-awareness (or feeling rational, see de Boise and Hearn, 2017: 786).

On the other hand, the interviewees felt a duty to engage emotionally with sports and in competitions. Sports and competitiveness are associated with men (Sabo and Jansen, 1998; see also Wolkomir, 2012), and in these contexts, emotional displays are socially accepted, even expected. The interviewees' emotion work and the contexts it was applied to were thus congruent with normative masculine positions. However, as suggested in Henrik's story, the emotion work needed to be carefully calibrated, as excessive engagement with gambling was seen as dangerous.

Secondly, and relatedly, the emotion work of gambling was made sense of in relation to the rationality/emotionality dichotomy and to linked discourses about health and pathology. Several interviewees equated being in control with non-emotionality, and even Henrik, who advocated feeling strongly, connected

excessive emotionality with a loss of control. Moreover, in line with gambling debates (above), several interviewees shared Henrik's association between emotionality, loss of control, and problem gambling.

It would seem that the interviewees navigated between two extremes, where the first, a (masculinised) rationality, was preferred to the second, a (feminised and pathologised) emotionality. However, it has already become clear that their experiences were much more complex: (a curated) emotionality was congruent with masculine positions, and rationality was in fact highly emotional.

In an investigation of men's views on health, Robertson suggests that his interviewees navigated between control and release when it came to indulging in, for instance, smoking, unhealthy foods, and risk-taking. While it would be easy to associate control with being masculine, Robertson argues that the balancing between control and release was integral to 'achiev[ing] or maintain[ing] 'healthy' hegemonic, male citizenship' (2006: 185). Relatedly, Reith (2007) suggests that contemporary capitalism produces conflicting expectations of so called 'sovereign consumers' of gambling to indulge in *and* control their gambling, and if they fail, they are defined as problem gamblers. Robertson's balance is comparable to Reith's notion of sovereignty, and the conflicting feeling rules and the emotion work performed by my interviewees can be interpreted as efforts to reach a similar balance or sovereignty, associated with health.

By thinking about the incompatible demands in terms of conflicting feeling rules and the interviewees' efforts as emotion work, it is possible to argue that this balance or sovereignty was upheld using emotion work. Additionally, it is clear that several variants of balance were accessible to them: There was a range of emotionalities that were congruent with normative masculine positions and with being a sovereign consumer of gambling (see also Goedecke, 2023a). Moreover, the balancing should not be conceptualised as a hovering between emotionality and rationality/control, seen as opposites, but as an employment of both, using emotion work, to produce (a variety of) emotional states which made sense in relation to being sovereign and upholding masculine positions.

The parallels between my research and Robertson's (2006) suggest that the sovereign gambler is a masculinised figure (this is discussed more closely in Goedecke, 2023b). The parallels with Reith (2007) suggest that emotions, in the context of gambling, are produced in relation to a global industry arguably aimed at producing and profiting off of feelings (Nicoll, 2019). The emotion work discussed here is arguably connected to and made sense of in relation to interpellations from this industry. This will be returned to below.

CHAOTIC EMOTIONS: AN 'UNHAPPY COLD SHIVER RUNS THROUGH YOU'

Emotion work and control were essential to the interviewees' relationships with gambling. There was not only one but a range of acceptable emotionalities to be experienced while gambling, but there were limits; on this topic, several interviewees told of chaotic and frightening emotional experiences. For example, in the case of tilt, the interviewees' emotions were often connected to their performances in the game. Adam described becoming furious while playing and trying to break his laptop over his knee (luckily, he said, this attempt failed). Olof had a different sort of experience:

> Olof: when you gamble for money, and if you've bet quite a lot, relatively speaking (…) You thought you were safe and then it turns out that you weren't (…) Then there's this kind of unhappy cold shiver that runs through you… that you, partly that you've made such an error of judgment and that it was, after all, a bit of money (…) some self-image: 'I thought something but I didn't judge it properly' like, you get a wake-up call, sort of: 'you thought you were good but you weren't'.

Both Olof and Adam described strong feelings surging through their bodies. Olof described surprise, a 'wake-up call', alerting him to the risks he was taking as well as his temporary loss of control. Interestingly, Frank also described a 'wake-up call', one he had experienced at a casino in his early twenties:

> Frank: It wasn't good. We had drunk, well, I wasn't completely drunk, but we had drunk too much to make deliberate or good choices (…) and started chasing money. (…) That night, I went to the cash-machine in the casino twice (KG: Wow.) Mm. No good. Chasing money.

After having lost a quarter of his monthly income at the time, Frank made a desperate bet and won: 'I just took the chips, took the money, and left'. Frank described feelings of panic and of financially spiralling out of control: 'it really was a wake-up call: "shit!"'. It was clearly an important night to him, and one that he was not proud of. He seemed to have planned telling this story; before doing so, he asked if it was an appropriate time, and afterwards, he assured me that I was welcome to write about it: '[my wife] knows about it, so it's ok'.

Edvin had a slightly different experience:

> Edvin: I was worried last Sunday when I was shut out [from the poker site] because I had forgotten to log out [the day before], when I had put together a small tournament for my friends (…) I wasn't allowed to join… because I had come up to one of these limits, by being logged in for more than 16 hours, but I hadn't played, I had just been [logged] in you know
>
> KG: Aha.
>
> Edvin: And then I felt longing, and then I got worried that I felt longing and disappointment…
>
> KG: Right.
>
> Edvin: … disappointment not to see friends and not to get to play you know, that's one thing, but it's difficult to keep these forms of longing apart… The urge was there – is it harmful, does it lead to problematic behaviour? I don't think so.

Edvin described a complex string of emotions: urge, longing, disappointment, and subsequently, worry. His emotions indicated to him that he might have lost control of his gambling and developed a gambling problem.

These men's stories were about losing control and about the emotions they experienced when that happened. The interviewees told of losing control of the ongoing game and the wagered money (Adam, Frank) or questioning the idea of oneself as a sovereign, healthy gambler (Edvin), a good poker player (Olof), or a person in control of his finances (Frank). At a first glance, the stories confirmed the idea of rationality and emotionality as extremes and the association between loss of control and strong feelings. However, it is important to note that except possibly in Frank's example, the stories did not resemble the stereotype of emotionality or lacking rationality *causing* financial losses or gambling problems. Instead, the stories were about emotions experienced when losing control.

Being out of control was worrying and intensely embarrassing, as in Frank's story: 'there's this idiotic male pride, in that you can't tell your mates that you've lost that much… So you want to sort it out, right the situation'. As Nicoll suggests, the problem gambler 'works affectively' (2019: 49) as a cultural figure and is surrounded by gendered, raced, and classed feelings of disgust. The embarrassment, fear, and worry discussed here were related to such disgust; they constituted acute, embodied, emotional reactions which came alive in the telling of these stories.

Emotion work was carefully conducted in order to produce the right kinds and intensities of emotions and to uphold sovereignty and masculine positions. The importance of this emotion work is understood as without it, gambling was a scary and risky enterprise. In these instances the interviewees found themselves, vertiginous, at an abyss where not only money was at stake but the very ideas of health, the sense of being able to judge a situation, and their sovereign, masculine selves. Reeser argues that affect may 'break the hold of masculinity' and 'disintegrate a body, rendering it vulnerable or connected to other bodies', thereby 'overpowering' 'normative masculinity' (2017: 111). In the moments of emotional turmoil, the interviewees' masculine positions temporarily disintegrated.

Control was regained, however: the interviewees spoke of experiencing a 'wake-up call' or of feeling worry, which made them see themselves, their feelings, and their gambling in a new light. A wake-up call evokes the image of having been sleeping or drifting but suddenly being brought back into consciousness. It is an alarm, directing one's attention to the alarming nature of the situation. The emotions discussed here took place in this moment, and were followed by intense emotion work to return to a more suitable emotive state. While Edvin spoke about a multi-layered, emotional-intellectual process where his worry led him to evaluate his feelings, Frank made a desperate bet to 'sort out' the situation and then left without alerting his friends; he redrew his embodied and emotional boundaries, preventing their disintegration, and hid the gendered crisis he had just experienced from his men friends.

The chaotic emotions were productive, and their force reverberated through time; not only were the events etched in the memories of the interviewees, but they produced new relationships and practices (see also Reeser, 2017: 115):

> Frank: In retrospect, I'm grateful that it happened, because it became clear that… you need to be careful, you need to be aware that losing money happens very quickly.

Frank's experience had cautioned him against casino gambling, and his relation to gambling was now one of wary respect. Similarly, (the memory of) Olof's 'wake-up call' alerted him, and kept alerting him, of the thin border between order and chaos. The emotional experiences, and their embodied memories produced a lingering awareness of the importance of continued, ever more refined, emotion work while gambling.

Just as emotions circulated between me and the interviewees while telling these intense stories, control was asserted during the interview itself. The very act of talking about these moments re-established them as located in the past, and above all, as educational situations that had been reflected upon and processed emotionally ('[my

wife] knows about it, so it's ok'). In other words, the telling of these stories constituted performances of emotion work and sovereignty *vis-à-vis* gambling, and indirectly, efforts to maintain their masculine positions. Having lost control once, these interviewees produced themselves as seasoned gamblers who could now enjoy the emotionality of gambling in a safe manner.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have used interviews with men gamblers in Sweden to discuss lived experiences, performances, and negotiations of emotions in men's gambling. Using Hochschild's (2003) theories about emotion work and a view of emotions as discursive and embodied (Wetherell, 2012, 2013) and by critiquing the unquestioned use of the rationality/emotionality dichotomy within gambling research, I have demonstrated that emotions were pivotal to narratives about gambling, and that they were linked to, not distinct from, rationality or control, and were controversial and subject to complex emotion work. They were negotiated in relation to the rationality/emotionality dichotomy and ideas about gender, health, and sovereignty in relation to gambling (Reith, 2007).

The article contributed to gender studies by investigating the particulars of how men's emotionalities in the context of gambling are lived and understood. While some emotions of gambling bolstered the production of sovereign, masculine positions, arguably 'fit[ting] into (…) patriarchal frameworks as a way of maintaining inequalities' (de Boise and Hearn, 2017: 788), they could also cause crises. As Reeser notes, emotions may 'compose (…) or decompose (…) masculinity' (2017: 111).

Importantly, the article has demonstrated a that a range of emotionalities, congruent with masculine positions, were accessible to the interviewees. This can be connected to the hybridisation of masculine positions within contemporary consumerist culture (e.g., Barber and Bridges, 2017); a variety of such positions are accessible and may be combined in various culturally intelligible ways. This article shows that emotionalities are part of this process. Increased emotionality in men has been seen as progressive (de Boise and Hearn, 2017), and increased flexibility through hybridisation does indicate an increased freedom for men to express and experience new types of emotions. However, more flexibility in men's lifestyles is not the same as crumbling gendered power relations (Barber and Bridges, 2017).

Instead, the range of acceptable and accessible emotionalities on offer for men gamblers should be understood in relation to wider capitalist and consumerist systems within neoliberalism, which increasingly interpellate human subjects on emotional and psychic levels (Gill and Kanai, 2019; Nicoll, 2019; Goedecke, 2023a). Research on such interpellations has so far mainly focused on women's emotions (they should feel confident or in control, often through consumption) (Gill and Kanai, 2019), but I suggest that the emotionalities on offer through gambling and the flexibility in how men may experience these emotions should be seen in a similar light: as encouraged by and profiting the gambling industry. Simply put: A range of ways of relating emotionally to gambling means more potential consumers.

The article has shown the importance of integrating problematising perspectives on emotions and emotionalities into gambling research. It has confirmed the importance of emotions to gambling (as seen in Casey, 2008; Nicoll, 2019; Wolkomir, 2012) but required more focus on the gendered particularities in the significance of these emotions. Additionally, the article has developed Reith's (2007) notion of sovereignty in relation to gambling with a discussion of emotion work as the way in which such sovereignty was upheld.

As mentioned above, Reith (2007) suggests that contemporary capitalism produces the 'sovereign consumer' and that it is the individual gambler, not the gambling industry, who is obliged to:

> … temper his or her enjoyment of the thrills of gambling with a prudent awareness of the risks involved, to exercise self-control, to manage losses and, in extreme cases, even to exclude himself or herself from gambling venues altogether—because no one else will. (2007: 40f)

Within the ideology of neoliberalism, individual sovereignty is largely the responsibility of the subject, and with this in mind, the centrality of emotion work to this process is obvious. Emotion work is conducted by the individual, as by and large internal processes where discursive truths shape and are shaped by our personal histories (see also Wetherell *et al.*, 2020: 15). The individualisation of responsibility within gambling has been heavily critiqued by critical gambling scholars (e.g., Nicoll, 2019; Reith, 2007), also in Sweden (Alexius, 2017), and is reminiscent of discussions about health as, increasingly, an individualised concern (Crawford, 2000). It ensures 'business as usual' for the gambling industry, as problems are to be solved by the proposed treatment of errant individuals rather than systemic prevention policies. Applying Hochschild's thoughts on emotion work clarifies aspects of this individualisation; gambling sovereignly was about engaging emotionally with gambling in just the right way; this emotion work was fine-tuned and deliberate, and crucial to avoid risks.

Critical perspectives on emotions are a crucial necessity for gambling research. Instead of pathologising emotionality, gambling research must further investigate the emotional, lived experiences of gambling, which are likely to differ between groups of gamblers (such as men and women gamblers, poker players and lottery enthusiasts) and between gambling contexts. Studying different contexts and using a variety of methodologies, especially those which attempt to go beyond the textual in order to grasp how emotions are lived and embodied in the context of gambling, is desirable. It would be useful to investigate further the emotion work in gambling, in the light of concerns about health, addiction and compulsion; in this process, it is important to avoid interpretations of emotion work that deploy a simple binary between reason/emotion. A next step would also be to study a variety of men, e.g. minority groups. Additionally, more research on how men's emotionalities in gambling are shaped by interpellations to feel from the gambling industry, through advertising, offers, and within games, is desirable, as part of consumer culture and entertainment more generally.

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'Get Fierce in 5!': Depictions of the 'Healthy' Girl Body in *Seventeen* Magazine, 2016 to 2017

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ABSTRACT

Seventeen Magazine, the longest running magazine for adolescent girls in the United States, reinforces problematic images of the 'healthy' adolescent girl by routinely featuring slim celebrities and models, all of whom adhere to a desirable body ideal of hegemonic beauty. Misleading and contradictory narratives of postfeminist, neoliberal empowerment include telling girl readers to love their bodies while simultaneously portraying the slim body as preferable. Additionally, most issues of *Seventeen* feature a diet-themed section, thereby encouraging food restriction and the surveillance of eating. Findings from this feminist content analysis of the magazine from 2016 to 2017 challenge *Seventeen's* stated mission of 'celebrating real girls with our social-first approach, inviting them into the conversation and engaging them in real experience as they navigate major milestones' (n.d., n.p.)

Keywords: fitness, health, neoliberalism, postfeminism, teen magazines, *Seventeen* Magazine

INTRODUCTION

In this article I conduct a feminist content analysis of the USA teen magazine *Seventeen* for the years 2016 and 2017, focussing on themes of body and health. Despite *Seventeen*'s online claims, particularly since 2012, to promote body positivity, decrease photoshopped and other aestheticised images, and increase the diversity of representation by 'celebrating real girls' and the 'major milestones' they navigate (*Seventeen* media kit[1]), my findings reveal that little has changed in magazine's presentation of the 'healthy' adolescent girl body. The construction and reconstruction of—and obsession with—the predominantly white, slim, fit body as 'healthy,' remains the focus of this section and is presented as the only acceptable body type for adolescent girl readers. This idealised image is further complicated by *Seventeen* adding layers of postfeminist empowerment discourse by encouraging readers to love their bodies while simultaneously bombarding teen girl readers with images of homogenised beauty and editorials stressing the necessity of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-maintenance. According to Gill (2007), these opposing messages 'emphasise[s] the contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses and the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes' that include 'the shift from objectification to subjectification… a focus upon individualism, choice, and empowerment…[and] an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference' (149). These themes, Gill argues, 'are structured by, stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to "race" and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability as well as gender' (149). A review of existing literature shows a gap in how the white, slim, able-bodied teen girl is presented as the consummate 'healthy' body in *Seventeen* magazine. This study calls attention to this absence.

A large body of research (see Grabe, Ward, and Hyde, 2008; Hargreaves and Tiggemann, 2004; Riebock and Bae, 2013; Tylka and Sabik, 2010) has examined the relationship between mass media exposure and adolescent girls' and young adult women's body perceptions and has found that adolescent girls may be uniquely impacted by online and print media content. Furthermore, studies have found that media engagement is associated negatively with body satisfaction and positively with negative eating behaviours (see Ferguson, 2013; Grabe, Ward, and Hyde, 2008; Levine and Murnen, 2009). Other studies have found that compared to adolescent boys, adolescent girls

[1] The original *Seventeen* Media Kit, that had neither author nor date, has been removed and replaced. http://www.seventeenmediakit.com/r5/home.asp.

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report lower body satisfaction and internalised body ideals to a greater degree, (Hargreaves and Tiggemann, 2004) and may continue to do so throughout their development (Daniels, 2009a).

Studies focused specifically on teen magazines, including their adherence to traditional western norms of femininity and beauty as cultural truths that are internalised by adolescent girls, found that teen magazines regularly featured advertising and self-help articles and quizzes that instruct adolescent girls how to improve themselves physically (Duke and Kreshel, 1998; Evans 1991; Pierce, 1990, 1993). Such 'blue prints for living' (Duffy and Gotcher, 1996: 33) and 'introductory handbooks in the lifelong continuum of women's "how to" guides' (Massoni, 2004: 51) exploit and exacerbate adolescent girls' anxieties about their bodies and can serve as a source of 'fear, insecurity, competitiveness and even panic' (McRobbie, 2000: 70). McRobbie (1991) further argues that women's magazines occupy a privileged position in that they 'define and shape the woman's world, spanning every stage from early childhood to old age' (83), noting that there are no male equivalents to these products. Men's magazines, McRobbie states, tend to be based on leisure pursuits or hobbies, which implies that there is no 'sense of a natural or inevitable progression' lifecycle for men (83). In recent years, men's lifestyle print magazines have become more commonplace with publications such as *FHM*, *Men's Health*, and *GQ*, however, they are fewer in number as compared to women's magazines, and are generally not geared towards adolescent boys. Moreover, Rosalind Gill (2007) asserts that women's magazines and media 'stress upon . . . personal choice,' postfeminist notions of self-surveillance, self-monitoring and self-discipline, where 'femininity has been portrayed as contingent—requiring constant anxious attention, work and vigilance,' (155), ideas that are regularly promoted in the health and fitness sections of *Seventeen* magazine.

More recent research studies examine the complicating layer of postfeminism that 'disdains feminist activism even as it relies on feminist gains and uses neoliberal and empowerment rhetoric to revivify traditional feminine appearance regimes' (Whitney, 2017: 353) and encourage consumerism (see also Mann, 2012). Azzarito (2018) posits that 'ideologies of individualism, self-determination and self-responsibility are at the core of the neoliberal configuration of "new femininities" working at both the micro and macro levels to produce a "neoliberal body" needed for success in contemporary global economies where the ideal white feminine body is presented as 'being a result of an endless investment in the discipline, maintenance and control of the body' (136). The adolescent girl body that is 'slim,' and 'lean,' as well as 'active' is, according to Azzarito (2018), 'symbolic of an appropriate style of new idealized feminine presentation, as well as emblematic of girls' self-management and compliance to the neoliberal agenda' (137). Health practices, fitness, and physical activity cultivate the girl body to be disciplined and compliant, thereby creating the neoliberal body that becomes a "metaphor for success, morality, and good citizenship" (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009: 38). Similarly, McClearen (2018) contends that postfeminist media culture valorises 'self-discipline through exercise and dieting,' while simultaneously 'promot[ing] the idea that women of all shapes and sizes may find contentment within themselves and their bodies' (46). *Seventeen* has adopted these contradictory and problematic narratives throughout the pages of the health and body sections of the magazine, as further discussed below.

My analysis builds on Ballentine and Ogle's (2005) 'The Making and Unmaking of Body Problems in Seventeen Magazine, 1992–2003' with a more specific focus on depictions of the adolescent girl body in the health and body section of the magazine. In their 2005 study, Ballentine and Ogle examined 266 body-related articles appearing in 132 editions of the magazine between 1992 and 2003, categorising them as the making and unmaking of body problems, respectively. The making of body problems included showing only tall, thin models over models who might be described as 'curvy.' This trend implies that to be seen as attractive, readers must achieve this ideal, and these ideals are reinforced when 'describing or constructing for readers a variety of body problems, or appearances that were to be avoided and distained' (209). The magazine then provides readers with ways to fix these "problems" by 'zap[ping]' arm flab, and 'stomach fluff,' so that their readers can 'be the girl they really want to be' (290). In this unmaking of body problems, readers are invited to try *Seventeen*'s suggested workouts and diets to achieve the ideal *Seventeen* girl body. These two separate but parallel categories of editorial content conveyed to readers a contradictory message that is commonplace in *Seventeen* magazine—how to love your body, but also how to force it into adhering to narrowly defined, hegemonic ideas of white European beauty, all under the guise of health and fitness. Ballentine and Ogle posit that this content helped to

> normalize the body as a locus of control, advising readers to undertake body management routines or to consume given body products and services in an attempt to rectify bodily woes. Second, content advised girls to stage resistance against dominant female beauty ideals, redefining cultural messages for personal relevance, as a means by which to unmake their body problems. (292)

These scholars define 'the body of desire' in *Seventeen* as 'smooth, trim, toned, tight, long, lean, flat, strong, young, sexy, healthy, clean and free of odour and certain types of hair' (Ballentine and Ogle, 2005: 290). To achieve this body of desire, *Seventeen* readers must spend time, money, and energy to achieve this ideal, thereby creating extensive body projects (Brumberg, 1997). The above definition is adopted for this essay when describing the

desirable and/or slim, fit, healthy body in this study. A survey of existing literature found that there are few studies that focus specifically on the health and fitness section of *Seventeen*, making an updated analysis of this segment an important area of inquiry and contribution to research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Seventeen was chosen for this study not only because it was the site of Ballentine and Ogle's 2005 study, but also because it is the longest running teen magazine in the United States. *Seventeen* was specifically marketed to teenage girls starting in 1944, and regularly featured a section of the magazine focused on health and fitness for many years. In addition, *Seventeen* was selected in order to assess the truth of its claims to increase diversity in the magazine, specifically the issues articulated in the April 2012 Change.org petition, submitted by thirteen-year-old Julia Bluhm, who called for the magazine to feature 'real girls,' arguing that photoshopped images have caused her and her peers to feel bad about their bodies (*HuffPost*, 2012, n.p.). In response to Bluhm's petition, then *Seventeen* editor-in-chief Ann Shoket met with Julia, had a 'great discussion' and stated that 'Julia left understanding that *Seventeen* celebrates girls for being their authentic selves, and that's how we present them. We feature real girls in our pages and there is no other magazine that highlights such a diversity of size, shape, skin tone and ethnicity' (*HuffPost*, 2012, n.p.). Later that year, Shoket stated that she and her team felt that they needed to be more 'public about their commitment' to being authentic, and created a Body Peace Treaty for the magazine staff, which was a 'list of vows on how we run things here to always make you feel amazing' (*HuffPost*, 2012, n.p.).

The materials examined in this study consist of the body and health sections in sixteen print issues of *Seventeen* magazine from December and January 2015/2016 to November/December 2017. The body and health sections contain approximately four pages of editorial content with two to four pages of product advertising for items such as tampons, deodorant, shaving gel, and make-up. Given the feminist perspective of my research, I employed a content analysis; according to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), feminist researchers have used content analysis to 'explore a range of issues that are central to our understanding of gender and difference, as well as research aimed at social action . . . [to] explore issues that are central to women's lives' (234). Qualitative methods are often used in feminist research to position women and their experiences at the centre of inquiry and can, therefore, lead to social change and facilitate social justice for women (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007; Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

Following Lindlof and Taylor (2002) I used a two-phase data analytic technique of open and axial coding. I began with multiple readings of all the content in the body and health section of the selected issues of *Seventeen* magazine, including the advertisements, articles, and sub-articles in that section. From there I engaged in an open coding process to generate a list of recurring themes across the content in the body and health section. Sample codes addressed who was in the editorial, what activity they were participating in, the gender of the models/athletes, the copy accompanying the editorial (for example, words like 'empowerment,' 'fun,' 'fitness,' and 'health'), the products being sold, narratives of foods/diet/meal plans, and the physical size of the models. This open coding process required multiple iterations as I built my coding scheme. Next, I combined broader themes into more concise categories that addressed the relationships between fitness and health in the magazine such as faux empowerment and the importance of celebrity. This inductive approach yielded four themes directly from the data during the coding and analysis process. The four themes that emerged from this feminist content analysis included the slim and fit (white) body; the right kind of celebrity; faux empowerment; and diets, not riots.

The Slim and Fit (White) Body

Out of the sixteen issues of *Seventeen* included in this study, twelve body and health sections featured pictures of models, celebrity trainers, or Fitstagrammers (Instagram fitness experts) on the opening page of the section. Importantly, only one health and body section (June/July 2016) featured a professional female athlete, suggesting that showcasing female athletes is not a priority for the magazine, as further discussed below.

Six of the twelve section opening pages of the health and body section featured white women. Surprisingly, six of the sections featured bi-racial and Black models on the opening page, challenging narratives that, historically, *Seventeen* magazine is solely focused on the white middle-class girl (Pierce, 1993). While this racial diversity is important to note, girls of other races, gender identities, and ethnicities are virtually absent from this section of the magazine, indicating that *Seventeen* defines diversity as limited to a handful of African American and biracial teen models. Furthermore, the inclusion of girls of colour does not negate the narrative of the fit, slim, healthy body that is racialized as white. Rather, this limited inclusion is depicting black bodies that conform to a European idea. Muhammad and McArthur (2015) argue that 'being both Black and female in society has continued to create and reinforce a U.S. culture satiated with derogatory representation of Black women and girls,' adding that Black girls' responses to representation is 'timely because their perspectives have been consistently understudied in education, misrepresented in public outlets, or simply overlooked' (134–135). While *Seventeen* has not directly claimed that anti-racist work is part of their mission statement, 'celebrating real girls' should go beyond superficial narratives so

that the 'buzzwording of intersectionality' (Joseph and Winfield 2019; 409), or in this case 'diversity,' is not exploited in the pages of this magazine.

Of the twelve editorial pages that feature models, trainers, and Fitstagrammers, eleven are fit, athletic, and slim, conforming to the desirable body described by Ballentine and Ogle in their 2005 study. The March/April 2017 issue features a white appearing model, dressed in a white bikini top and sweatpants, stretching on the grass before a workout. She is tan and slim, with well-defined arms and a flat stomach, despite leaning forward towards her toes. She is not shown participating in an actual sport, nor is she sweating. This type of exercise related photograph, according to Daniels (2009a) is common in teen magazines, where static photographs of women are routinely used. This trend is repeated in October 2016 where Caucasian appearing trainer and Fitstagrammer Katie Austin showcases five 'Netflix and chill' moves readers can do while watching their favourite shows. Her pink crop-top reveals a thin, tanned stomach and defined arms, while she demonstrates exercises such as side leg lifts, lunges, squats, and spider planks (62–63). Austin's hair is styled in a tidy braid, and she is smiling in each picture.

When Black and multiracial models are featured in this section of *Seventeen*, they are shown in very similar ways in four of the six issues. August 2016 model Sarah Kaufmann's flat stomach and slim arms are visible in her crop top. The May/June 2017 model is wearing short shorts, and a low-cut tank top while leaning (not riding) on a bicycle. Similarly, December 2016/January 2017 showcases a model in a boxing gym sporting short spandex shorts and a shirt that reveals a sliver of her flat stomach, and thin arms. She has boxing gloves artfully draped around her neck, but she is not shown exercising. Rather, this depiction could be read as a racist trope of black aggression by readers. These three editorial pictures exemplify Daniels (2009b) findings where models shown participating in a physical activity were more likely to be engaged in fitness, rather than sport activities (19). The May 2016 section of 'Health and Body' focused on the benefits of running, including mention of an increase in brain cells to entice readers into this type of exercise. Next to a full-page picture of an unnamed, Black, thin model in a multi-coloured sports bra and leggings, the copy reads,

> Can't imagine the sport will ever be your OTP? We feel you. But before you decide that next time you're going to lace up is . . . never, get this: Science shows there is a runner in all of us. (The structure of our bodies is perfect for it.) BTW, it's also free and gets you crazy fit. So grab your kicks and let's do this. (75)

The copy implies that running is an accessible form of exercise for all readers, however, the hurdles that Black adolescent girls who want to participate in sports like running are not included (Ogunrinde, 2022). Furthermore, only one body type is shown, indicating that running is a sport for slim, already fit *Seventeen* readers. The model shown has a focused look on her face and her arms are bent at the elbow in a running pose, however, she is only shown from the waist up, indicating that she is likely not actually moving.

The December 2016/January 2017 issue highlights trainer Olivia Amato, creator of 'feel good cardio' (69) from Shadowbox gym in New York. The accompanying pictures depicts Amato participating in her fitness activity, a rare finding in the cadre of magazines analysed for this study. Amato is shown smiling widely in fitted camo printed leggings and a cropped top, jumping rope in a boxing gym with her muscled abs on display. This is one of the few examples depicting a model or trainer participating in a cardio-based activity. Amato is the rare visual example of how 'depictions of women engaged in sport suggest that women, like men, can be powerful and strong' making their bodies 'not for display but rather are instrumental,' which contradicts 'traditional media representations of women' (Daniels, 2009b: 19).

These examples show that regardless of race, there is one (racially coded as white) ideal body type that is acceptable in *Seventeen* Magazine and this has not changed in more than a decade: she is slim, she is very fit, she is perfectly coiffed, she is rarely shown exercising, she is somewhat muscular but still feminine, and she does not sweat. The celebrities and Fitstagrammers highlighted in this section are toned, but not overly muscular so as to appear the least bit masculine, thereby reinforcing traditional concepts of femininity (Young, 2015). Furthermore, she embodies desirability (see Ballentine and Ogle, 2005) and idealised beauty and style even when exercising, furthering images of the sexualised female athlete for an assumed heterosexual, white male audience as Crosby (2016) notes. In sum, her investment in a fit, slim body will lead to her success in society (Azzarito, 2018).

Only two out of sixteen body and health sections of *Seventeen* challenge the trend of the slim, athletic, desirable body described by Ballentine and Ogle in 2005. The November 2016 issue of the magazine features a ten-page *Seventeen* 'summit' in place of the usual body and health section in which five adolescent readers discuss issues surrounding body insecurity, social media struggles, and the power of words. Three of the five summit girls are Caucasian-appearing. The girls' pictures vary between two full body shots and three close ups, none of which appear airbrushed and may not have been taken by professionals. This feature attempts to show girls in more realistic ways and allows them space to discuss issues that affect them, a sentiment echoed in the *Seventeen* magazine toolkit. In the following section that *Seventeen* dubbed the 'body confidence special' five additional readers who have faced body image issues such as anorexia, facial scarring, and being labelled 'chubby,' are featured along with

a bilateral amputee. The Summit girls are presented as 'overcoming' various hardships by embracing their individuality and eventually, finding peace, and fulfilment in their uniqueness. In this section, *Seventeen* challenges the perception that there is only one way to be beautiful by using postfeminist neoliberal language that encourages readers to love their bodies even if they do not embody the slim idea that is pervasive in other sections of the magazine. *Seventeen* also provides a rare example of a teen girl with a physical disability in the pages of the magazine. Seventeen-year-old Pamela shares that due to losing her legs at a young age, she considers her 'body normal because this is the just the way I am,' adding that she has a 'strong self-image because my parents and sister have always told me that I'm perfect' (Stanley, 81). Pamela states, 'But I've had to deal with other people's awkward stares and reactions to my prosthetics, and that's when it's hits me that I don't look like most people. I've wondered, is that okay? Should I feel sad? But then I remind myself that I rock at life' (81). Pamela discusses the many sports she participates in including cheerleading, tennis, softball, track, soccer, volleyball, and swimming, concluding 'my body can do what any else's can do – and a lot of times, it can do it even better' (81). In this example, *Seventeen* is attempting to challenge the belief that girls with disabilities live lives that are filled with barriers, violence, and stigma (Stienstra, 2015) however, Pamela's story may also be read as an example of 'inspiration porn,' a term coined by advocate, comedian and journalist Stella Young in a popular 2014 TED Talk[2]. Inspiration porn can be defined as a 'visual image of a person with a disability' who is 'successfully engaged in or mastering a physical activity or sport along with a caption suggesting the viewer should be inspired' (Martin, 2019: 198; Grue, 2016). Ayers and Reed (2022) posit that 'inspiration porn reinforces to non-disabled people the central idea that disability is a tragedy to overcome, and a plight that non-disabled people are grateful to avoid'… further adding that 'a disabled individual must not only overcome their disability, but also strive to achieve goals far beyond their disabled and non-disabled peers alike' (91). *Seventeen* illustrates these ideas by showing photographs of Pamela carrying a surfboard on the beach, along with a stylised picture of her soccer-shoe-clad feet with a soccer ball and caption stating that she recently made the all-star team. While *Seventeen* should be commended for showcasing 'real girls' in this specific issue, content is limited to ten pages and the rest of the section is filled with airbrushed models or, in some cases, drawings of girls who also fit this hegemonic beauty ideal while exercising (see March/April 2017; June/July 2016; October/November 2018), thereby negating this pseudo message of empowerment and body acceptance. In this, *Seventeen* is not living up to its mission statement of 'celebrating real girls' (*Seventeen* media kit, n.d., n.p.).

Only one issue of *Seventeen* challenges the trend of featuring thin trainers, celebrities, and models in the body and health section. In September/October 2017, a popular plus-size yoga instructor, podcast host, blogger, and Instagram 'fave' Dana Falsetti is featured. According to Falsetti's website, they were not a 'traditional' yoga student and felt that studios were not 'particularly welcoming to her, nor did they embrace the notion of including less able-bodied people' (Feature Friday, 2018[3]). Falsetti's goal was to make 'a safe space for a community of marginalized people to explore a practice originally intended for all' (Feature Friday, 2018), and address the body privilege that thin and fit people may not be aware of when exercising. Harjunen (2019) notes that exercising for non-normative bodies is 'not always a source of well-being, empowerment, or positive embodied experiences' as 'some body types are not so welcome in the field of exercise' (173), a problem Falsetti is attempting to remedy through their advocacy.

Falsetti is the only fitness expert featured who does not fit into the slim and taut ideal featured in the body and health section of *Seventeen*. They are also the only expert whose body is mostly covered by long leggings and a full-length tank top, indicating that while *Seventeen* preaches acceptance of all bodies, perhaps the only bodies that should wear stomach revealing clothing are slim ones. Furthermore, pictures on Falsetti's website show that they often wear cropped tops or sports bras while teaching and practicing yoga, indicating that the decision to photograph them in this particular outfit was likely made by magazine editors and could be interpreted by readers as a form of body shaming.

Overwhelmingly, in the health and body section of the magazine, *Seventeen* still showcases the young, fit, able-bodied, often white model who is solely responsible for her own fitness success. While *Seventeen* has made improvements in showcasing racial diversity in the past decade, there is still work to be done. Girls with more diverse body shapes, different sizes, abilities, races, and ethnicities should be regularly featured. Additionally, *Seventeen* should work to move away from the discourse of the fit girl body as the primary 'source of power' for girls and work to change the narratives of the teen girl body as 'already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipling and remodelling (and consumer spending)' (Gill 2007: 6) if the magazine wants to truly embrace the 'real girl' message it claims is important to highlight.

The Right Kind of Celebrity

As a way to legitimise the body projects and body repair that *Seventeen* details, the use of named experts is common, as is referencing popular celebrities. The presence of celebrities can, according to King (2017), function

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxrS7-I_sMQ

[3] She/her pronouns were used for Falsetti at the time of this interview in 2018. Falsetti currently uses they/them pronouns.

in allowing fans to 'identify with celebrities and aspire toward their success while also offering a conciliatory explanation to fans for why they have not achieved similar eminence' (87). Belch and Belch (2013) found that celebrity and 'expert' trends have been popular in magazines for more than 60 years, adding that teen magazines were the most likely to use celebrities such as popular actors/actresses, models, and entertainers in their advertisements, with only two examples of professional athletes shown in their study (381). This indicates that in the health and body section of *Seventeen* magazine, adolescent girl readers are more likely to encounter popular entertainers, models, and actresses than professional or decorated athletes, further contributing to the invisibility of female athletes.

The use of experts and routines presented in a step-by-step format in this section of *Seventeen* 'provides readers with a seemingly no-fail plan for successful implementation of the given body project,' while the use of experts 'legitimize[s] the project as effective' (Ballentine and Ogle 2005: 293). These articles encourage self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline, and the risk of failing (Gill, 2007) to adhere to these expectations. In the magazine issues examined for this study, the trend is now focused on a specific sport such as running, yoga, surfing, or boxing that celebrities supposedly participate in. Instead of placing importance on improving what Ballentine and Ogle referred to just one 'body malady' (293), this shift in focus from one body 'problem' to whole body health may be seen as an improvement over past years, however, almost all of the celebrities, models, and trainers adhere to an aestheticised body ideal that implies that girls and women 'are responsible for producing themselves as desirable heterosexual subjects' (Gill, 2007: 8).

Celebrity status shows up in several ways in this section of the magazine; for Gill (2007) this offers a clear example of 'the cultural obsession with celebrity, which plays out almost exclusively over women's bodies' (6). Belch and Belch (2013) state that the use of popular celebrities is a way to attract the attention of the reader in a 'cluttered media environment' and to 'impact consumers' decision process by favourably influencing their evaluations, feelings, attitudes and purchase intentions toward their brands' (370). One example of celebrity endorsement in the health and fitness section of *Seventeen* is by referencing a female celebrity by name and picture, claiming that this is her exercise of choice, thereby giving readers the opportunity and know-how to attempt to emulate her. The December 2015/January 2016 issue features a trainer at a boxing gym and the copy asks if readers are '[i]nspired by Gigi Hadid's boxing Instas?' (69) and provides five boxing manoeuvres that readers can try at home to acquire Hadid's impossibly thin body. Here, Hadid has been linked to a form of exercise that readers may have available in their hometowns or bedrooms, exemplifying the celebrity 'match up' theory that Belch and Belch (2013) explore. Using Hadid as an example of what one can look like if they work out at a boxing gym, *Seventeen* is illustrating the connection between her workout routine, attractiveness, and her popularity. With a following of almost 79 million on Instagram, Hadid embodies the 'stopping power' that according to Belch and Belch (2013), will bring attention to the product, or in this case, exercise featured. Hadid is mentioned again in the March 2016 body and health section that explores the 'deal with celeb health trends' (80) where her cryotherapy treatments are shared. These 'celeb health trends' include the waist trainers that several of the Kardashian women have helped to popularise, Bella Thorne and Nicki Minaj's tea-tox (a diet tea that supposedly helps one lose unwanted weight), and the vitamin infusions that Cara Delevingne, Rhianna, and Rita Ora favour. In an attempt to promote realistic and potentially less dangerous methods for weight loss, *Seventeen* turns to expert Rebecca Blake, a senior director of clinical nutrition at Mount Sinai Beth Israel Hospital in New York, to debunk these trendy celebrity practices. Blake states how unbeneficial and possibly dangerous these trends can be while *Seventeen* provides readers with an 'instead try' suggestion that includes taking a yoga class, avoiding these trends all together, or practicing moderation when following any trend. Quashing these myths may be helpful for some teen girl readers but the pull of celebrity may entice others to try these trends, regardless of the opinion of a medical professional.

Popular Instagram trainers, not professional female athletes, are featured in three of the sixteen magazines in this study, confirming Sherwood, Osborne, Nicholson, and Sherry's (2016) assertions that media coverage of female athletes is still lagging. Only two covers of the magazine mention anything about working out (October 2016: 'the couch workout' and May/June 2017: 'lazy girl workout hacks') and none of the covers feature a professional female athlete, indicating that this magazine may have little appeal for girls interested in sports while simultaneously reinforcing the otherness that often accompanies female athletes (Pirinen, 1997). The three Instagram-popular trainers featured are body inclusive yoga instructor Dana Falsetti who advises readers on five yoga moves to help with better posture (September/October 2017), Fitstagrammer Katie Austin models five moves readers can do while watching television (October 2016), and Olivia Amato who shows readers how to get slim like Gigi Hadid by using her boxing methods. While *Seventeen* has the option to interrogate and intervene against oppressive and homogenous depictions of the 'healthy' adolescent girl, the magazine instead reinforces the 'feminine persona' (Crosby, 2016) required of the successful, attractive teen girl, usually by referencing popular, young female celebrities.

Faux Empowerment

Seventeen, like magazines aimed at older women, is full of contradictions that send teen magazine readers mixed messages about their bodies (Ballentine and Ogle, 2005). Ballister (1991) states that

> women's magazines posit a collective and yet multivalent female subjectivity, which they simultaneously address and construct. In doing so, despite the often-contradictory nature of this collective subjectivity, there are clear limits and boundaries to the variety of 'readings' and 'interpretations' available in the text. (172)

Currie (1999) suggests that women's magazines are a commercial medium that orchestrate women's activities in relation to their bodies and are increasingly mediated by these social texts. Duke and Kreshel (1998) argue that the focus on home and family has been replaced with a focus on the body so that 'an obsession with the physical has replaced women's former obsession with "home and hearth"' (49). *Seventeen*'s focus on the slim, fit body reinforces the preoccupation with physical appearance, then further complicates this by adding layers of postfeminist faux empowerment through which readers are encouraged to love their bodies via language such as 'strong,' '*every* body,' and 'fun.' Here, *Seventeen* continues 'to function as a way to keep women's power restricted, to subtilty equate whiteness and lighter skin with beauty and desirability and to keep women separated from one another' (LaWare and Moutsatos, 2013: 191).

The faux empowerment presented in the body and health section of *Seventeen* Magazine is evidenced by a close reading of the text in this section as well as the visual representations the magazine chooses in which the vast majority of the Fitstagrammers, models, and celebrities featured adhere closely to the slim and taut body ideal Ballentine and Ogle found in their 2005 study. The postfeminist, neoliberal language of self-love, empowerment, and self-achievement (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018a) that *Seventeen* uses in this section encourages teen girl readers to love their bodies regardless of their size, colour, and physicality. However, rarely is a variety in bodies shown, and this, according to McClearen (2018), produces a disciplinary discourse that encourages men to 'bulk up' and women to 'slim down' (46). This slimming down likely hinders the performance of female athletes and, in order to increase their performance, they may need to add more weight to their frame 'than images of the ideal body sanctions' (McClearen 2018: 47) thus creating an undesirable body in broader culture that would likely not be featured in *Seventeen*.

Perhaps the best illustration of this faux empowerment can be found in the June/July 2016 issue in which 18-year-old pro surfer Bella Nichols is featured holding her surfboard on a beach. She is looking over her left shoulder, smiling at readers, wearing short swimsuit bottoms that reveal the bottom part of her buttocks. She is white-appearing, young, tan, thin, conventionally attractive, and epitomises that 'desirable body' ideal analysed by Ballentine and Ogle (2005). The copy on this picture says, 'get surfer-girl strong' and '*every* body is a beach body! But if you're looking to boost your strength game, this rad workout from 18-year-old pro surfer Bella Nichols will help you crush it.' Interestingly, Nichols is the only professional athlete featured in the issues analysed for this study, and she is not shown participating in her sport (surfing) in any of the pictures chosen for her editorial, a common trend according to Daniels (2009b). Out of 620 images of female athletes in several teen magazines including *Seventeen*, Daniels found that only 7% showed women engaged in sport or fitness activities and the majority of these (64%) were engaged in activities such as walking, aerobics, stretching, or abdominal routines (18). Additionally, if one did not read the tiny accompanying copy, readers might assume Nichols is a model, not a professional surfer who won the 2016 World Junior Championship and was sponsored by Billabong. Several contradictions are evident in this feature. Clearly, '*every* body' is not a beach body as *Seventeen* exclaims since Nichols is the only professional athlete featured and she exemplifies a slim, desirable body ideal. Also, readers do not see Nichols participating in her sport, thereby rendering her talent invisible and secondary to her attractiveness. While the pictures of Nichols are not highly sexualised as is common practice when the 'sex appeal' of female athletes is the predominant focus of media coverage (Riebock and Bae, 2013), Nichols's beauty is very much the central focus. Thorpe, Toffoletti, and Bruce (2017) posit that 'the growing popularity and visibility of athletically competent, strong and beautiful female athletes . . . suggests the emergence of a potentially ruptural femininity that steps outside gender binaries and therefore offers the potential to disengage the long-standing articulation of sport and masculinity' (366). However, Thorpe, Toffoletti and Bruce also note that 'this mode of femininity is not available to all' and is restricted to those who embody 'desirable White Western femininities' (367), as shown in the pictures of Nichols.

In discussing the 'disciplining' of Olympic athlete Lolo Jones, Crosby (2016) critiques the double binds that many female athletes must negotiate: the interlocking and inseparable oppressions that include the feminine/athlete and the virginal/exotic. *Seventeen* has enforced this double bind by feminising Nichols and displaying her athletic ability as 'incompatible with appropriate feminine markers' (Crosby 2016: 237), which is likely why she is not shown surfing. Furthermore, Crosby posits that 'when a heterosexual, feminine persona is

cultivated, women are more likely to receive benefits, such as media attention, fan approval, reduced heterosexist discrimination, and necessary financial endorsements, while a masculine appearance often impedes a female athlete's ability to make a living in sport' (238). Regrettably, very little information is given about Nichols; she is asked a total of six questions, one of which asks for her 'Insta' (Instagram) name and another one which asks about her 'go-to snack' (yogurt and bananas). She is asked about her 'first time on a board' (she was eight and her dad made her do it) and about her 'peak career moment' (winning the 2016 World Junior Championship) (June/July 2016, 57–58). The superficiality of most of the questions *Seventeen* asks Nichols may indicate to readers that the sexism that Nichols has likely encountered in a male dominated sport are not important and that it is her beauty, not her skill, that landed her in the pages of the magazine. The magazine missed an opportunity to provide Nichols with the space to share any challenges she has faced in her sport due to her gender and her age. Instead, *Seventeen* stayed away from any sort of content that might be considered controversial or remotely political, leaving readers with a peripheral, one-dimensional image of Nichols that weds faux empowerment and postfeminist ideas in the way she is represented, suggesting that girls in sports have moved beyond sexism and are 'autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever' (Gill, 2007: 12).

The faux empowerment language used in Nichols' editorial can also be found in other issues of *Seventeen*. La Ware and Moutsatsos (2013) argue that appropriation of the language of empowerment and feminism can be 'defined in terms of an assertive, socially conscious, individualism which resists limiting definitions of femininity and possibility by reinterpreting and redefining those possibilities and by recognizing that each feminist has an opportunity to create a world of her choosing' (190). Examples of this appropriation of faux feminist and faux empowerment language can be seen in the commonly used language in the body and health section of *Seventeen* that include an emphasis on the words 'strength,' 'fun,' and 'power' but not on weight. While this change is a welcome departure from the magazine's long-term trend of describing normal body features as problematic and in need of 'zapping' so that readers can become 'the girl they really want to be' (Ballentine and Ogle, 2005: 291), a focus on self-surveillance and a desirable body ideal are still present. The March 2016 issue claims that while 'group workouts can be intimidating AF' [as fuck] they 'can actually be a lot of fun' (69). A boxing work out featured in December 2015/January 2016 is a 'powerful mix of strength-building punches and feel-good cardio' (69); and the August 2016 issue introduces readers to 'HIIT (high-intensity interval training) moves . . . [that are a] Beyonce dance party' (63). Surprisingly, *Seventeen* is very careful to avoid words such as 'tone' and 'sculpt' that may be read as objectifying in nature and position the body as something malleable and mouldable (Hauff, 2016; Prichard and Tiggemann, 2005), perhaps in an effort to appear to be promoting self-acceptance and body positivity to readers. Instead, *Seventeen* uses phrases that are focused on overall fitness and feeling 'good' with headlines such as 'feel good cardio' (January 2016: 69), 'get fit without working out' (May/June 2017: 64), and 'songs to get you fitter' (November/December 2017: 64). However positive this change in language is, *Seventeen* still promotes a false idea of empowerment by focusing on only one body ideal for readers in their attempt to produce positive copy. Unsurprisingly, *Seventeen* rarely presents any kind of alternative to this image of 'health,' thereby reinforcing the 'class-less, race-less sameness' (McRobbie, 2000: 69) of the teen magazine reader.

Diets, Not Riots

Seventeen Magazine has a long history of including diet advice alongside visual representations of idealized, slim beauty (Ballentine and Ogle, 2005), making a connection between restricted food intake and a slim body clear for readers. As Ballentine and Ogle found in their 2005 study, *Seventeen* also regularly included copy that blamed readers for dietary indiscretions, indicating that corrective measures must be taken to slim down and to do so quickly. In the selection of magazines analysed in this study, the trend of openly shaming readers for not following a strict, low-calorie diet is absent. While this is another positive, corrective measure to note, *Seventeen* still places a focus on a low-calorie diet in the health and body section of the magazine, indicting to readers that food restriction should still be part of their body projects. The health and body section of the magazine is still overwhelmingly staffed with images of the slim, fit body, continuing to link a strict, low-calorie diet to an ideal physique in a less obvious way. In this regard, little has changed since Ballentine and Ogle's 2005 study.

Eleven of the sixteen issues of the magazine examined in this study featured a section that was focused specifically on food labelled as 'healthy snacks.' *Seventeen* has replaced the more blatant diet language noted by Ballentine and Ogle (2005) and has attempted to shift the representational focus to 'healthy' foods that have the added benefit of 'clearing skin, banishing bloating,' and giving readers more energy (May 2016: 80). Absent are the glaringly blameful tones that were common in Ballentine and Ogle's study that presumably made readers fearful for the upcoming swimsuit season or holiday parties. Health coaches and dieticians are often featured as experts, suppling readers with their personal favourite recipes (March/April 2017; February 2016) and explaining the benefits of eating 'emerald-hued vegetables' (November/December 2017, 63) and other 'healthy' fare. Experts and suggested recipes are commonly used strategies in women's magazines, according to LoRusso and Reynolds (2016), and were regularly featured in *Seventeen*. The October 2016 issue encourages teen girl readers to eat the 'rainbow'

of vegetables, explaining that some can boost your immune system, reduce the risk of certain kinds of cancer, and 'amp up your energy' (64). This editorial did not feature any models, but rather large photographs of each food, a trend that was repeated often in this section. May of 2016 providers readers with a guide to fruits and vegetables that they call 'blends with benefits' that will help readers with improving their brain health, reduce bloating, produce flawless skin and provide ample energy (80), further masking the distinction between appearance and health. This focus on 'healthy' food and its connection to a slim body may be read as part of the makeover paradigm that constitutes postfeminist media culture, according to Gill (2007). This paradigm, Gill argues,

> requires people (predominantly women) to believe first that they and their life is lacking or flawed in some way, and second that it is amenable to reinvention or transformation by following the advice of relationship, design or lifestyle experts, and practicing appropriately modified consumption habits. (16)

For *Seventeen* readers, the health coaches featured in the magazine may serve as a reminder that their lives (and diets) are in need of constant surveillance and monitoring. In this case, the 'consumption habits' that Gill (2007) addresses is encouragement to consume 'healthy,' low-calorie foods while readers are inundated with repeated images of slim, attractive models throughout the magazine.

When readers fail to follow the consumption habits postfeminist media culture mandates, *Seventeen* offers suggestions of how to get back on track and does so without using the 'blaming' language found in Ballentine and Ogle's study. The February 2016 issue featured an editorial that pitted an egg sandwich against a chocolate muffin for breakfast stating, 'Having a dessert-before-homeroom kind of morning? We feel you! If you already had your cake this is how you can still eat well, too' (56). *Seventeen* encourages readers to avoid a sugar crash by eating cheese or fruit, followed by a turkey sandwich, hummus and veggies '(Get this: It's good for your skin!), and a well-balanced dinner of lean beef and broccoli stir-fry' (56). In the September/October 2017 issue, the focus is again on breakfast options that are 'easy, healthy recipes that will fire up your body (and brain!) even when you're in a hurry' (68). The goal of *any* breakfast, according to Brigitte Zeitlin, R.D., is a combination of fibre and protein to 'get your energy going' (68). In both instances, *Seventeen* has shifted the focus to 'health' via performance-based foods that can help with focus, fighting inflammation, and clearing skin.

Two of the sixteen issues address 'health' by debunking food myths such as celebrity diet trends that include tea detoxes and vitamin infusions (March 2016) and the various claims made by flavoured water companies (August 2016). Neither focuses on 'health' in the same way as other months; this may speak to editorial staff attempts to move away from the connection between a desirable body and dieting. Both issues featured nutrition experts' opinions that the health benefits claimed for these products are misleading, false, and possibly dangerous. Only one issue (June/July 2016) featured homemade snacks that did not include a slant towards being low-calorie or labelled as 'healthy.' Readers are taught how to make various 'frosty pops' [popsicles] for their 'next chill sesh' [session] (60). These 'pops' include watermelon slushes, key lime pie, and chocolate banana. A dietician from the Cleveland Clinic is quoted as saying, 'On hot days, cold liquids can be absorbed into the system faster than warm liquids, which helps fight against dehydration' (60). The focus on 'health' and low-calorie options that is common in this section of the magazine is absent in this month's issue. Further, it is important to note that the word 'diet' rarely, if ever, appears in the copy of this section of the magazine, particularly in the context of encouraging readers to practice food restriction to achieve a desirable body. This is a trend reversal from Ballentine and Ogle's 2005 study when a focus on changing the body rapidly through dieting and exercise to lose weight quickly was regularly presented as a goal for readers. While this is a positive change, the celebrities and models featured in the editorials were overwhelming slim, making the connection between a strict, limited calorie diet and a desirable body indisputable.

CONCLUSION

Seventeen has attempted to correct some of the problematic messages it ignored for decades, specifically in the re-tooling of its body and health section, and this trend is encouraging. However, while many of these attempts at inclusivity, diversity, and the narratives about loving one's own body are commendable, this study's feminist content analysis of the body and health section of a year of *Seventeen* Magazine issues (2016 to 2017) demonstrates that it has continued to promote a very narrowly defined idea of the 'healthy' adolescent girl body. These depictions have the potential to contribute to teen girls' low body satisfaction and their growing obsession with self-surveillance, self-monitoring, and self-discipline, which can negatively impact mental health. *Seventeen*'s strategy has largely failed to remedy the contradictory nature of its messages about adolescent readers loving one's body and continuously monitoring and trying to fix it. Instead, as this study shows, layers of neoliberal, postfeminist faux empowerment messages through the language, models, and celebrities are represented throughout the magazine. *Seventeen* is still only providing occasional examples of positive bodies that have previously been devalued in the

health and body section of the magazine, while simultaneously encouraging readers to 'listen to their own voices rather than to define self through others' expectations and values' (Ballentine and Ogle, 2005: 301). Unfortunately, little progress has been made since Ballentine and Ogle's 2005 examination of the body-related articles in the magazine's 1992–2003 issues.

It is not surprising that the editors of *Seventeen* magazine continue to favour the female celebrity or model who is young and white, traditionally feminine, able-bodied, and fit over professional female athletes who may not fit this narrow ideal. These elements are essential in recreating the neoliberal, postfeminist girl-power ideal that scholars have analysed and that many of the celebrities and models featured in the magazine have promoted. *Seventeen* readers are encouraged to consume products that will lead to a slim, fit body, emulating celebrities as well as Fitstagrammers who have been encouraged and rewarded for turning themselves into commodities through self-marketing (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018b), all under the guise of 'health.' Not only does this supposed ideal help to mask the structural inequalities *Seventeen* readers negotiate in their daily lives, it also fails to address their various social identities, further marginalising readers of various races, ethnicities, religions, body types, sizes, and abilities. One response to the lack of representation of adolescent girls with disabilities can be seen in how they self-represent on various social media platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. Referencing girls with disabilities specifically, Sarah Hill (2017) argues that this self-representation on social media can 'act as a form of social advocacy and awareness raising' (114) that is clearly absent in *Seventeen* Magazine. In another example of self-representation, in 2012, Andréa Butler founded *Sesi,* a magazine geared specifically for Black teens in response to the lack of diversity she saw in magazines like *Seventeen* growing up (Walsh, 2020). Further research and content analysis on this publication, as a comparison, would be welcome. In these examples, we see adolescent girls creating media that addresses their needs and interests when magazines like *Seventeen* are insufficient.

Moreover, *Seventeen* has missed the opportunity to showcase professional female athletes in a way that challenges the 'othering' depictions that Pirnien (1997) discusses. Research on sports media demonstrates that women in traditionally feminine-stereotyped sports (e.g., gymnastics) that emphasise grace and aesthetic beauty are portrayed more often than women in traditionally masculine-stereotyped sports (e.g., basketball) that entail power and strength (Daniels, 2009b: 17) and this is shown in the pages of *Seventeen*.

Seventeen Magazine's continuing promotion of postfeminist ideals and apparent refusal or failure to understand the potential impact on girls' body image, despite pleas from readers and a significant body of media research studies, exposes broader questions, including for example, how can *Seventeen* provide teen girl readers with more authentic depictions of 'health' without recreating problematic narratives about dieting and a slim, fit (white) body as the only acceptable body type for adolescent girls? We need more content analysis of teen magazines to make visible the ways in which such body problems and issues have been manufactured and normalised in late 'post-feminist' capitalism, allowing for misleading solutions from often uninformed or misinformed sources. This also has implications for feminist research and analysis that is aimed at social action and facilitating healthy body attitudes for adolescent girls and boys.

In 2018, *Seventeen* announced that the magazine will no longer be in print on a regular basis and will instead, move to a digital platform, as is the current market imperative for many magazines. Now in its manifestation as an online publication, we can only hope that the magazine will use its digital platform to further more positive, varied depictions of health and fitness, whilst providing more inclusive and diverse representations of 'real girls.'

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Between Refusal and Refuge. Queer Feminist Bookstore Savannah Bay

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ABSTRACT

Feminist bookstores have played an important role in the creation of feminist spaces since the end of the 20th century. In the Netherlands, Savannah Bay is one of the last remaining in a previous network of feminist bookstores. This article explores how the bookstore manages to uphold its function as a feminist space while operating in relative isolation. The data used for this analysis consists of a series of interviews with volunteers working at Savannah Bay. This data is analysed via Bonnie Honig's *Feminist Theory of Refusal* (2021), which connects three forms of feminist resistance within one arc of feminist refusal. Crucial to this arc is the circular movement where the women first leave the city, then organise a new way of living, and then return to the city to implement their ideas. By reading the experiences of Savannah Bay volunteers via Honig's theory of refusal, this article analyses how the bookstore manages to uphold a feminist space while being embedded in a predominantly patriarchal public sphere. It demonstrates the complex ways in which Savannah Bay continuously negotiates its relationship to the customers and volunteers it caters for on the one hand, and a patriarchal public sphere which it seeks to reform on the other hand. Additionally, this reading extends and nuances Honig's theoretical approach by relating it to empirical data, which raises questions about the conditions for fulfilling Honig's feminist arc of refusal, and about the relations between the various moments on the arc.

Keywords: feminist, queer, refusal, bookstores, counterpublics, Bonnie Honig

INTRODUCTION

> 'even when refusal seems to reject the world, it betrays a deep attachment to it, if not to the world as it is, then surely to a more just world that is not yet.' (Honig, 2021: 3)

It is well-documented that feminist bookstores, magazines, printing presses, and publishing houses played an important role in the feminist activism of the end of the 20th century (often called second wave feminism). Nancy Fraser describes the 'variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places' as the most striking example of an alternative public sphere in her famous critique of Habermas (Fraser, 1990: 67). Building upon the work of Gayatri Spivak, she understands these extensive networks of feminist thought and action as *subaltern counterpublics,* existing alongside and in opposition to the mainstream democratic public sphere.

The specific role of feminist bookstores in North America is explored by Kristen Hogan in *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* (2016). Hogan focuses on bookstores not as isolated places, but as connected organisations sustaining relational practices of accountability among bookwomen in the US. In the Netherlands the role of books, magazines, and publishing presses has also been documented: for instance, Jann Ruyters (1993) describes the landscape of Dutch feminist magazines; Gloria Wekker recalls the importance of finding Audre Lorde's book *Zami* in a Rotterdam bookstore for the organisation of the black, migrant and refugee women's movement (Frank, 2019); Marja Vuijsje (2018) centres her recollection of the feminist movement around the feminist books that she found discarded on flea markets and by the roadside; and Marijke Huisman (2016) focuses on feminist publishing collective *Uitgeverij Sara* as a case study for writing inclusive histories. Recent exhibitions such as *Feminist Design Strategies* and *Gerse Vrouwen* and the online interview series *In conversation with the Black, Migrant and Refugee women's*

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movement shed light on the activist infrastructures of feminist organising in the late 20th century in the Netherlands.[1] They mark what Gieseking (2020) calls the 'constellations,' networks of orientation points that include people, events, publications, and places, of feminist and queer lives.

Dozens of women's bookstores opened their doors in the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s, bearing names such as *De Feeks ('The Hag'), Dulle Griet ('Silly Broad'), Dikke Trui ('Fat Trudy'), Sappho, 't Wicht ('The Wench'),* and *Xantippe*. The oldest one is the only one still in existence as a feminist bookstore: *Savannah Bay* in Utrecht. Named after Marguerite Duras' play, Savannah Bay is an independent bookstore in the centre of Utrecht, the Netherlands. It first opened its doors under the name *De Heksenkelder* (*'The Witches' Cellar'*) in 1975 as the first feminist bookstore in the Netherlands, initiated by Dorelies Kraakman and Sylvia Bodnár. Marischka Verbeek became the owner in 1997. She opened the bookstore to a wider audience and Savannah Bay became a general bookstore with feminist literature as its specialty. In the early 2000s, many feminist spaces in the Netherlands went online or closed their doors. Savannah Bay continued to exist and survived what its owner Marischka Verbeek called a 'long feminist winter'[2] (in Huisman *et al.*, 2019: 63[3]). Whereas at the end of the 20th century, Savannah Bay was one star in a larger constellation of the feminist movement, in the past 20 years it has been a more isolated refuge for feminist and queer stories. Although Savannah Bay never functioned in complete isolation, it clearly no longer operates in the cooperative network of feminist spaces that is emphasised in most of the literature on feminist bookstores. Instead of relating to a broader network of feminist bookstores and other like-minded spaces, Savannah Bay now primarily faces a public sphere that remains predominantly patriarchal. How then, does this bookstore still function as a feminist space? How does it continue to serve the queer feminist community while navigating the patriarchal public sphere in which it needs to maintain itself?

If existing theory locates the political potential of feminist spaces in the counterpublics that they form in relation to each other, it seems as if a relatively isolated space like Savannah Bay lacks this potential. It might even appear as an apolitical refuge for a specific subculture. But we argue that this view does not do justice to the roles that Savannah Bay plays in the city and lives of clients and volunteers. We propose that Bonnie Honig's recent *Feminist Theory of Refusal* (2021) helps understand how Savannah Bay continues to function as a queer feminist space in Utrecht in the absence of a strong network of feminist bookstores. Honig's theory allows us to see Savannah Bay's practices as moments of feminist refusal and attunes us to the possibility that these practices are part of a political struggle for feminist futures. At the same time, the specific context of Savannah Bay raises several theoretical questions for Honig.

A Feminist Theory of Refusal connects three forms of feminist resistance within one arc of feminist refusal. Honig draws these three moments of refusal from her feminist retelling of Euripides' classical Greek play *Bacchae*, where they correspond to three stages in the tragedy. The women in the *Bacchae* first refuse their dedicated roles in the city. They then move out of it, to the mountain Cithaeron, where they dance, eat, rest, and eventually kill the king. But Honig stresses that they do 'not stay on Cithaeron: it is one stop on a larger arc of refusal' (2021: xii). Her feminist understanding of refusal includes the three concepts of inoperativity, inclination, and fabulation that together form refusal's arc. In the third move, the *Bacchae* women return to the city. Honig speculates that their return aims to claim the city to 'make their freedom permanent' (2021: 95). Our analysis of Savannah Bay contributes to Honig's theory by emphasising the interdependency between the city and practices of refusal, and by raising questions about the relations between the three moments: what material conditions need to be fulfilled for the arc of refusal to truly lead to feminist futures?

METHODOLOGY

In this article, we use Honig's theory of refusal as a conceptual framework to analyse a set of interviews with the people who work at Savannah Bay and for whom the store serves as a cornerstone in their queer feminist lives. This data was collected in the context of Savannah Bay's 35th anniversary, when a group of academics came together to write a communal history of Savannah Bay. One of the authors of this article, an active volunteer at Savannah Bay since 2018, was connected to this project and conducted a series of 11 interviews with contemporary volunteers to understand the role the bookstore plays in their (feminist) lives (Huisman *et al.*, 2019: 197–222).

[1] *Feminist Design Strategies* is one room of the exhibition *Designing the Social,* at *Het Nieuwe Instituut* in Rotterdam. https://ontwerpvanhetsociale.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/en/feminist-design-strategies; *Gerse Vrouwen* explores the women's movement in Rotterdam was organized in 2021 by Dig it Up and Dona Daria in Rotterdam; Atria, 'In gesprek met de Zwarte, Migranten-en Vluchtelingenvrouwenbeweging.' (February 2022) https://atria.nl/nieuws-publicaties/feminisme/feminisme-20e-eeuw/in-gesprek-met-zwarte-migranten-en-vluchtelingen-vrouwenbeweging/.

[2] See Wekker (2016) for a discussion on the impacts of political re-organisations and financial cutbacks in the social sector on feminist movements in the Netherlands during this period.

[3] Much of the historical information in this article is based on the research conducted for this commemorative book, marking Savannah Bay's 35th anniversary in 2019 (Huisman *et al.*, 2019).

Participants were recruited via an email addressed to all active volunteers in this period. Additionally, the owner of the bookstore was interviewed.[4] In preparation for the interviews, participants used mapping methodology to draw an image of the bookstore indicating the lay-out of the space. The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2019 in the bookstore itself by this same author. The participants were asked to reflect on the lay-out of the store (both via a walk through the space and via their drawing) and then answered questions on their personal connection to the store, the feminist function of the store, and the store as a place for community building. By focusing on the experiences and ideas of the volunteers we want to acknowledge both the important role that Savannah Bay plays in the lives of these people and the formative work that these volunteers do for the upkeep and continued reshaping of the bookstore. Below, we model the analysis of our data around Honig's three-part theory via the concepts of inoperativity/intensification, inclination, and fabulation.

REFUSAL 1: INOPERATIVITY AND INTENSIFICATION

In Euripides' play, the *Bacchae* starts when the women of Thebes use the arrival of Dionysus, god of wine and theatre, as an opportune moment to leave the city. They abandon their work, refuse to return to their looms and households, and join the Dionysian rituals. The king, Pentheus, imprisons some of the women but they escape and leave the city for Cithaeron. The key point for Honig's first step of refusal is based on the women putting down their work and leaving the city. Honig connects this moving away, this interruption of (re)productivity, with the concept of 'inoperativity' as she draws it from Giorgio Agamben's discussion of Bartleby's famous formula 'I prefer not to'. Criticising Agamben for his primary focus on the suspension and pure passive potentiality of becoming useless, of refusing functionality and instrumentality, she argues that an 'inoperativity that abandons the city, or suspends the everyday, is a move in the feminist arc of refusal, not its destination' (Honig, 2021: 15). Refusal, she argues, includes not a suspension but an *intensification* of use (22). The bacchants, contrary to Bartleby, do not just put down their work individually but 'seek freedom in work refusal, then in abandon as assembly, and then in defence of their new form of life against sovereign intrusion' (Honig, 2021: 21). Building upon Judith Butler's performative theory of assembly, Honig reads the women's refusal to go back to their looms not as the end-goal of their political action but as the start of new forms of collective life. What happens when we use Honig's concept of inoperativity to analyse Savannah Bay? Where can we locate 'no use' in this bookstore? And where can we locate the 'new use' in Savannah Bay? What work is intensified?

A Suspension of Dominant Norms

The first suspensive step of Honig's feminist inoperativity is easily recognised in Savannah Bay. The bookstore, like all parts of feminist subaltern counterpublics started in the 1970s, was arguably born out of a moment of suspension of patriarchal and commercial norms. As regular bookstores and mainstream literature hardly had any material on women, emancipation, and feminism, feminist bookstores, cafés, and magazines were started in refusal of this male-dominated mainstream (cf. Fraser, 1990). Co-founders Dorelies Kraakman and Sylvia Bodnár designed the space to be a source of knowledge around all aspects of women's emancipation. Rather than a conventional business space, *De Heksenkelder ('The Witches' Cellar')* was to be a non-commercial meeting space where women could relate to each other outside the patriarchal structures that shape public life. The connected café *De Heksenketel* (*'The Witches' Cauldron'*) was supposed to finance this idealistic enterprise and further stressed the social dimension of the project. Both spaces were regulated via a collective of mostly lesbian women. When asked for her definition of a 'feminist bookstore' by a journalist during the opening of bookstore, Kraakman explained that it related to: '[w]omen exploring each other. It relates to the rejection of a masculine culture that controls society as a whole. We want things to do things differently' (Huisman *et al.*, 2019: 13).

When the feminist movement in the Netherlands started to dwindle in the 1990s, the collective dismantled and Marischka Verbeek became the owner in 1997. The collective organisational structure had to give way under pressure of new regulations from the Social Services in the Netherlands. People who had been able to support the store were increasingly forced to take up paid labour and the store struggled financially because of this (Huisman *et al.*, 2019: 29–88). Marischka opened the bookstore to a wider audience – Savannah Bay became a general bookstore with feminist literature as its specialty. Gone were the days when men were banned from the store to facilitate the radical feminist pursuit of creating a 'women's culture.' Over time, Savannah Bay's ideas on feminism have broadened and become more explicitly intersectional (Huisman *et al.*, 2019: 88–118). Today, the bookstore presents its feminism as a counterpart to general notions of 'patriarchy,' broadly understood as a conglomerate of

[4] The design of this project was approved beforehand by the ethical committee of the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences, Netherlands.

heteronormative patterns that govern the public sphere. This includes misogyny, but always in direct connection to queerphobia, transphobia, racism, ableism, neoliberalism, and anthropocentrism.[5]

At its inception, Savannah Bay operated in active refusal of the dominant commercial and patriarchal public sphere. But over time, these political commitments became less explicit. Given the increasing context of economic precarity for the bookstore's existence since the 1990s, many of the forms of inoperativity and intensification found at Savannah Bay are not always conscious decisions on the part of the owner or the volunteers but are informed by necessity and survival. The refusal of neoliberal and patriarchal norms is far from complete, rather it is a continuous negotiation. Honig reads the inoperativity and new use of the *Bacchae* women as a conscious political decision on their part.[6] However, the context of Savannah Bay suggests that a full arc of refusal is not always possible: the survival of the bookstore was partly dependent on toning down feminist political commitments in favour of a more general and economically viable approach. Savannah Bay also highlights (as we will now argue) that in austere political-economic contexts, remaining practices of refusal can follow from necessity, and are often undertaken by people who fail to comply with the dominant economic norms. Without idealising these far-from-ideal moments of inoperativity, Honig's work allows us to see the political potential of these moments. Savannah Bay's context contributes to this insight by also emphasising the material conditions for refusal.

As Savannah Bay is shaped and maintained almost exclusively by unpaid volunteers, the people who perform this work have suspended their regular participation in society in quite a literal way. Most volunteers do not have a full-time paid job, but are students, (temporarily) unemployed, or officially exempt from paid labour due to health issues. Although there are also volunteers who contribute to Savannah Bay in addition to paid forms of employment, the bookstore significantly builds on the work performed by volunteers who fall (partly) outside of traditional forms of paid labour. During our interview, the owner explained that this is not an idealistic decision but a result of economic necessity. Even so, this still facilitates different kinds of working relationships. By retreating from paid forms of work, the volunteers working at Savannah Bay redirect their care and efforts towards contributing to the bookstore. The owner of the bookstore explains what other forms of intensified use can be gained:

> No one works for nothing, but not everyone needs money. With every new applicant I ask: what is in it for you? Distraction? Knowledge of the book trade? A social environment? Sometimes they do not yet know themselves. This is something you have to make happen for them, which does not always work out. At times I am like a mother with 14 children who can't keep track which of them is in need of attention.

Working with volunteers seems to immediately invite a rethinking of the way we reward labour. Stepping away from the default system of financial compensation, the personalised rewards that Savannah Bay offers require a different type of management wherein the owner and the volunteers pay attention to each other's specific needs, limitations, and requirements. During several of our interviews, this relationship was referred to by the volunteers as resembling a mother-child relationship.

During our interviews, the volunteers frequently mentioned the causal relationship between their retreat from regular labour and their engagement with Savannah Bay. One volunteer describes having fallen into 'a black hole' for two years after a heavy study program and wanting to give back to society upon recovery by taking on this job. In response to the question of how they started working for the bookstore, another volunteer explained:

> I remember very well how I started here. I became ill in 2007/2008 – I suffered from tinnitus and hyperacusis. I could not do anything due to the pain in my ears. Everything worked out in the end. After a couple of years, I wanted to re-enter society so I looked for a volunteer job that could be done in silence – a bookstore!

Other participants explained that they started at Savannah Bay because volunteer work was a mandatory part of their therapy, or because they were too intimidated by applying for a more regular job and therefore continued to work for the bookstore:

> What else was I supposed to do? I had never applied for a job before. I was a socially anxious person. I still can be today. What if I have to apply for a job? And what then if I get hired and I have to chit-chat with colleagues? Here, I have a function I understand so it is not difficult.

[5] The bookstore prides itself on being an inclusive space that does not dictate the limits of feminism. Therefore, we will make use of this same broadly defined but clearly intersectional understanding of the term of patriarchy in this paper.

[6] Her feminist reading of the play criticises the more traditional understanding of the bacchants as merely intoxicated by Dionysus (Honig, 2021: xii).

Savannah Bay is therefore mostly shaped by people who have, voluntarily or involuntarily, withdrawn from traditional forms of work. Even if this is not always the result of political intentionality, we can still see this as a refusal of dominant economic norms of individual productivity that do not work for everyone – for instance for people with mental or physical disabilities. It should be noted that this turn to volunteer work out of refusal is not open to everyone. Only those who have the social and financial network (either personally or supported by welfare benefits) to live outside the structures of regular working conditions can afford to do volunteer work at Savannah Bay. This practical condition affects the group of volunteers that shape the bookstore.[7]

Intensification and Rest

Honig's critical feminist reading of inoperativity builds upon the recognition that suspension of regular work does not mean stagnation or isolation. Honig invites us to recognise how putting down traditional use facilitates new assemblies, 'intent on *enjoying* themselves in proximity to each other in ever new, queer, nonreproductive ways that are irreducible to use' (Honig, 2021: 32). This focus on enjoyment and rest is central for Honig and resonates with Savannah Bay, where many volunteers describe the bookstore as a place 'to be yourself,' which in turn creates a sense of calm and relaxation. Outside the direct grip of everyday restrictions on non-normative identities and lives, the volunteers experience a sense of quiet, almost peaceful relief. The owner remarked: 'There is a book that is titled: *Waiting to Exhale*. I remembered that phrase. That's what I see people do here.' The volunteers all describe Savannah Bay in different variations of the following:

> This is still something you recognise in Savannah Bay: everyone can be themselves and can present themselves as they want without anyone thinking it is strange – this holds both for volunteers and for customers. We try to break free of categories. We don't look at how you are supposed to behave but rather: if you like to be a certain way, then be so! And be welcome.

From these stories, it becomes clear that living in a patriarchal society can be hard work for volunteers. Savannah Bay provides a nurturing environment where they can cease the work of upholding societal expectations around norms relating to gender, sexuality, and productivity. This desire for engagement with a feminist space seems to drive the attraction of many of the volunteers to the bookstore. When asked to describe the volunteers of the bookstore, the owner responded as follows:

> I think that they are all people who look at the world and think: what am I doing here? Does this world want me? Does it even understand me? And do I want this world? And here they think: Oh, but *this* I understand, here I can be and here I am allowed to be. It is like landing.

Based on the interviews, it became clear that an important part of the intensified care that facilitates the new uses of Savannah Bay is directed at this creation of a space where the volunteers experience that they can 'be themselves.' For most of the participants this is explicitly related to queerness and as such more difficult to find in the dominantly patriarchal public sphere. Many of the volunteers we spoke with indicated that their first interaction with Savannah Bay was the result of their search for queer or queer-friendly spaces. The bookstore was a place where they could lean into their interest in and affection towards this community and move beyond the hetero environment of their day-to-day lives. One participant related:

> I came to Savannah Bay because it had a queer section. A section that I didn't grow up with but that I always felt I wanted. It is still quite a difficult conversation topic for me. I am not even that old and people know that I'm gay – I think – but I never really talk about it. It is impossible to discuss it with my parents. It is also complicated with my friends. Growing up in [a small city in the Netherlands] it was almost a forbidden topic, it was a forbidden topic at home, it remains something of a forbidden topic in my mind today. I really enjoy when people are very open about it and walk directly to the queer section and start discussing books. It makes me think: how fun! I wish I could do that.

For some volunteers, it is essential to stress that the store does not differentiate between people and that everyone is equally welcome. Other volunteers put more stress on facilitating people and voices that are marginalised in other spaces, including women, queers, people of colour, and people with disabilities. For many of these volunteers, Savannah Bay was a welcoming space when they needed support or care. Volunteers relate stories about the ways the Savannah Bay community provides intensified and specialised care in different situations. Examples include caring for a community member with chronic pain during Pride celebrations, support for a volunteer grieving the loss of her father, and guidance for people who are exploring gender identities and/or sexual

[7] Previous studies indicate that people without a higher education are less likely to volunteer in the Netherlands, as are people with a migration background. See Schmeets and Arends (2017).

orientation. This care is partly provided by the Savannah Bay community itself. Due to the plurality of bodies and identities, the community can provide different kinds of support. Sometimes, it is the mere presence of other people with similar queries or problems that can help someone out. This openness was very important for one volunteer who related the story of their gender transition:

> It is clear to me that my transition is connected to the store. The people here see it as such a positive thing. Before I came here, I didn't know anyone else who was transgender. Now I am very open about it, because I think it might help others as well. Everyone seems to be struggling on their own. But everyone who works here and all the customers let you know who you are and that is a very important thing for this store.

Savannah Bay is presented as a place that opens up possibilities that seem impossible or are marginalised in the world outside. Similarly, Honig understands the bacchants' departure of Thebes not just as the suspension of norms, but reframes it as the intensification of all kinds of new uses on Cithaeron:

> They establish a heterotopia where they can practice another way of living. Organized into three women-led bands rather than male-headed households, the bacchants together transgress all the norms by which they were governed in Thebes and they ground new normativities. The women flee the city that maternalizes them, but rather than refuse to nurture, which would be a 'no use' refusal of maternalism, they breastfeed animals out in the wild. Their nursing refuses the maternalism of heteronormative reproduction but not the intimacy of care. (Honig, 2021: 22)

The heterotopian space that the women in the *Bacchae* have created for themselves allows more room for rest, relaxation, slowing down, and thereby: intensification. In the context of the *Bacchae,* Honig relates this mainly to forms of slow time, slow cooking, and raw food. These practices can easily be understood as feminist practices that work to resist patriarchal and capitalist insistence on productivity and investment in the nuclear family. In the context of Savannah Bay, we have seen how the suspension of dominant norms of productivity and gender create space to exhale. This intensification is most clear in the relaxation that results from the absence of patriarchal labelling and judging people based on gender, sexuality, and productivity.[8]

The volunteers describe Savannah Bay as a space that allows for shaping new relationships which are not dependent on the strict norms and identities that structure the world outside the bookstore. The intertwined norms of patriarchy and productivity are both suspended here – enabling other, caring, forms of being together. Honig understands this suspension and intensification as one step in a larger arc of refusal that is ultimately committed to going back to and changing the city. Is this also the case in Savannah Bay, where we have seen that volunteers are sometimes politically motivated, but often guided by practical concerns? What happens in this space where people seem to feel welcome and valued? In the next section we further explore how we can understand the bookstore as a withdrawal from, and alternative to, the city.

REFUSAL 2: INCLINATION

Honig finds the second step of her arc of feminist refusal in the life the bacchants build for themselves outside the city walls. Here, the women live a lazy and wild life, nursing wild animals while milk, wine, and honey well up from the earth. Honig connects this life on Cithaeron to Adriana Cavarero's conceptualisation of 'inclination' as developed in *Inclination: A Critique of Rectitude* (2016). Via this concept, Cavarero invites us to explore and critique the consequences of the 'privileged upright posture and ethics of moral rectitude' by creating 'a new moral geometry of relationality and care' (Honig, 2021: 46, 4). This project enables Honig to explore what comes after the first moment of inoperativity/intensification. It points the way forward by looking for new, intensified ways of usefulness based on care, mutuality, and altruism. Cavarero finds this potential in the inclining body of the mother. Honig, however, criticises Cavarero's focus on altruist maternal care, and aims to 'disorient inclination from a maternal gesture of pacifist care to a sororal, agonistic gesture of feminist refusal made up of love, care, and violence' (2021: 47). In Honig's agonistic theory, there is an inescapable violence to politics – she argues that to recover Cavarero's understanding of inclination for a feminist theory of refusal, there needs to be space for conflict, not only care.

[8] Although many of the volunteers we spoke to relate this openness to Savannah Bay as a queer space, not all our participants stress this dimension as significant. The owner also remarks that queer spaces are not necessarily open to everyone by default: 'When I first came here, I was allowed to be bi and Dutch-Indonesian and queer and a book lover (…) That is not the case in all sections of the gay movement.'

Building upon Honig's reading of Cavarero, we ask: what corporeal choreographies are invited by the structure of Savannah Bay? Can we understand Savannah Bay as an inclinational heterotopia? How do bodies relate to each other and to their material context in the bookstore, and how does this create opportunities for restructuring care and relationships? Can we understand Savannah Bay as a place of maternal relationships, or can it provide space for more agonistic and political sororal relations?

A Choreography of Bodies and Bookcases

To prepare for the interviews, we asked all participating volunteers to draw a map of the bookstore. At the start of every interview, we asked the participants to give us a tour of the store and to indicate how bodies – both customers' and volunteers' – move through the store. It became clear in these conversations that volunteers distinguish between the front and the back of the store: where the front is oriented to a more general audience, the back of the space, past the cash register, is the site of the books that more explicitly focus on gender, postcoloniality, and sexuality.[9]

When asked how customers move through the store, all volunteers described a similar choreography, or rather: set of choreographies. Our participants explained that they differentiate between different kinds of customers based on the way they move through the store. There are those customers who are not specifically interested in the specialised profile of Savannah Bay as a feminist bookstore. These customers mainly browse the front half of the store and then move directly to the cash register. The people who come specifically for the specialised selection of Savannah Bay might browse the front half of the store but quickly find their way to the bookshelves in the back that hold titles on feminism, postcolonialism, and queerness. The volunteers remarked that this second type of customer might have some reservations in marching directly to the queer section. Some of the participants recognised this in their own first encounters with Savannah Bay. One volunteer remarks: 'LGBT people sometimes first pretend to be interested in general fiction and take their time to arrive at the LGBT corner. I always did the same thing. You tend to beat around the bush for a bit.' Another volunteer remembers:

> I came out the closet in Utrecht so I ended up here. I knew someone who volunteered here. I used to come as a customer. I was that customer who sneaks in and wants to be left alone to browse through the pink books in the back of the store. You couldn't do that online back then.

This secrecy around the queer corner of the bookstore has shifted significantly as societal norms around queerness also changed and the volunteers remarked that customers are much more confident in indicating their interest in these bookshelves than before. Some volunteers mentioned that they wished this section would not be located at the back of the store, as it seems to imply secrecy and even shame:

> Where I lived in the eighties – when I was not out of the closet but I really should have been – there was this dark and secretive corner. You had to ask the employee for the *gaykrant* [a gay magazine] which was kept under the counter. They gave it to you in an opaque bag so no one could see what you had bought. This is what it reminds me of a bit.

However, other volunteers explained that customers appreciate that this section is in a quieter part of the store so that they can take their time while they browse the shelves and have conversations with each other and the volunteers about the stories they are looking for. What is more, there is an ongoing and open-ended debate among the volunteers whether or not the queer section needs to be separated from the more general section at all. During a renovation in 2015, the bookstore experimented with placing queer fiction among the general fiction. The volunteers who were working in Savannah Bay at the time related that the customers were not happy with this new approach and on their request the queer section was re-installed (Huisman *et al.*, 2019: 114–116). The volunteers remarked that one of the great practical benefits of having a separate queer section is that they can more easily help queer customers find relevant books. On a more ideological level, the section indicates to customers that they are explicitly welcomed and catered for in Savannah Bay. One volunteer remarked: '[Those customers] think: how nice, a whole section just for us!'

The interviews sometimes showed a tension between focusing on customers (out of economic necessity) and creating a refuge for volunteers. The owner of Savannah Bay explained how this realisation shapes the store: 'Inspired by a course titled *bookseller of the future* I learned to look at the store from the perspective of the customer. I always used to focus completely on the volunteer, now I think about the customer.' Based on these insights, the organisation of the store started to become directed more towards creating an appealing shopping experience for customers, than allowing the volunteers to be as comfortable as possible. The volunteers noticed this:

[9] The layout of the bookshelves is reorganised every couple of years, which affects the ways people move through the store. This analysis is based on the descriptions of the space by the volunteers at the time of our interviews.

> Before the renovations the person working the cash register would be completely hidden which we really liked. It meant we didn't need to see the customers. (...) I like sitting in that big chair, but I am not allowed to anymore. That is one of the first things Marischka told me.

Besides the owner, however, none of the volunteers showed any interest in engaging structurally with the economic conditions Savannah Bay operates in. The volunteers frequently noted their lack of knowledge on financial matters and sale strategies and only mentioned finances as a vaguely perceived obstacle in the way of some of their own dreams for the bookstore, such as stocking the space with books from top to bottom or making it an even more specialised and dedicated space for feminist action and activism.

In her discussion on inclination, Honig criticises Cavarero's location of inclination as 'an imaginary completely apart from geometric verticalism' (Honig, 2021: 70). Instead, Honig argues that the bacchants should not stay on Cithaeron: the next step in her arc of refusal is to move back to the city, to kill the king and claim the city. Heterotopias, in her view, 'valuably serve as spaces or times of rehearsal where alternative forms of life can be tried out and explored' (2021: 71).[10] The value of these places of withdrawal and inclination, for Honig, ultimately lies in bringing those alternative forms of life back to the city. But where, in Honig's theory of refusal, the bacchants completely withdraw from the city (to return later), this withdrawal is much less complete in Savannah Bay. Rather, there are processes of hesitant withdrawal and coming back, afforded by both economic constraints and a material organisation of the space that creates a distinction between front and back, and where queer customers take time to make their way to the books of their actual interest.

Between Maternal and Sororal

The organisational structure of Savannah Bay seems largely horizontal. There is no discernible hierarchy *among* the many volunteers (there is a clear hierarchy between the volunteers and the owner) and no apparent conflict within the team. When asked to describe the volunteers and the community of Savannah Bay, many participants use words like 'quiet,' 'calm,' 'kind,' 'sincere,' 'friendly,' 'open,' 'trusting,' 'charitable,' 'sweet,' and 'reflective.' We find no mention of conflict or resentment and many words of appreciation for other volunteers and for the owner of the bookstore. In this remarkable peacefulness, we can recognise a hint of the heterotopian space of peacefulness and plurality that Cavarero explores via her notion of inclination. Honig, however, has her reservations about this pacifist conceptualisation because it leaves the notion of inclination 'vulnerable to mocking dismissals' (2021: 51). She argues that this might give rise to the idea that what happens in this heterotopia will never have any bearing on the vertical world outside. At a superficial glance, the inclined maternal body is easily (mis)understood as a passive and non-threatening entity. In fact, this very posture has been at the heart of the patriarchal positioning of women's bodies as subservient and self-sacrificing. While Cavarero acknowledges this, arguing that focusing merely on care 'not only risks repeating the stereotype of the self-sacrificing woman; it also, and above all, obscures the ethical valence of inclination, which consists in the alternative between care and wound,' Honig argues that she ultimately focuses too much on the side of altruistic care while leaving out the side of the wound (Cavarero, 2016: 105; Honig, 2021: 62). Honig therefore proposes to shift from Cavarero's maternal structure of care to a sororal structure as found in the *Bacchae*, changing the peaceful altruism of the maternal to a more agonistic approach:

> The Bacchae dramatizes inclination as refusal, but the central agency of inclination in the play is not maternity but sorority. This is important for a feminist theory of refusal because the sororal relationship is the more egalitarian of the two. In addition, the mood of inclinational refusal is not per se altruistic, as Cavarero says. It is agonistic: intimate and contestatory. (Honig, 2021: 60)

This differentiation between maternal and sororal relations might help us understand the peaceful environment of Savannah Bay – for it is apparent from our interviews that Savannah Bay aligns more with Cavarero's text than with Honig's in this aspect, and as such is susceptible to Honig's critique. This might indicate that the bookstore works along semi-hierarchical maternal relations rather than along the more egalitarian structure based on sororal relations. And indeed, even if the volunteers do not remark on any hierarchy among themselves, they clearly indicate the owner of the bookstore as a central maternal figure. The volunteers discuss her role in Savannah Bay as crucial. 'She keeps an eye on everything, works on everything in the background,' one volunteer remarked. Several volunteers explained that their affection and respect for the owner is an important reason for them to work at Savannah Bay and that 'Savannah Bay would not be Savannah Bay without her.' The owner herself is aware of her position. She admitted: 'For a long time I insisted that people do this for Savannah Bay, but in fact they also do this for me.' During our interview, the owner also frequently used language that indicated her maternal role in relation to Savannah Bay. For example, when she talked about the ways she supports, encourages, and lovingly corrects the volunteers: 'I might not have children, but I direct all of that energy to my volunteers.' Because

[10] Honig's theory here resembles theories of prefiguration.

Savannah Bay functions around this central maternal figure, the volunteers do not experience specific forms of ownership or responsibilities in relation to the bookstore. One volunteer remarked: 'Marischka really runs this place, I just do the work.' A number of the volunteers also expressed daughter-like concerns for the owner, wishing she would be able to take some rest and let someone else shoulder some of the responsibilities. We discussed in the first section how when collectively running the store was no longer viable in the 1990s, ownership was transferred to the current owner. We can now understand this move, which helped Savannah Bay survive, as a sororal, horizontal structure changing to a vertical, maternal one. But extending Honig's critique of Cavarero to critically look at Savannah Bay, we can see how it also limits its political potential. Indeed, most volunteers are not interested in co-formulating the strategic and economic orientation of the bookstore – they follow Marischka's decisions. This results in a peaceful way of relating to each other, but also in a lack of equal and agonistic politics.

Honig's theory presents feminist refusal as three subsequent moments: in, out, and back to the city. Derived from a reading of a play, this conceptually linear succession makes sense. Unsurprisingly however, these moments of refusal are messier in real-life situations like Savannah Bay. Honig implicitly admits this when she describes the arc as 'exemplary' and emphasises that it is not teleological, but phenomenological (2021: xiii, 103). But the context of Savannah Bay also raises a more structural question for Honig's theory. We have seen how, in Savannah Bay, the possibility of withdrawal and the continuation of heterotopian practices take place in economically precarious circumstances and are as such never complete, but rather a continuous negotiation. Moreover, they are dependent on a change from sororal to maternal relations. In this context, how can we understand the relations between the moments of feminist refusal? Do they necessarily follow up on each other, or are there specific conditions that need to be fulfilled for the full arc of refusal to be fulfilled? The next section looks at the relations of Savannah Bay with going back to the city.

REFUSAL 3: FABULATION

This third and final step of Honig's model is least developed, as it does not prominently feature in the *Bacchae* – but it is rather a speculative suggestion of what could have happened had the city been ready to receive the bacchants. It emphasises feminist refusal's 'obligation to return' and 'the promise of refusal as a world-building practice' (Honig, 2021: 104). When the slow time of Cithaeron is interrupted by king (and son of bacchant Agave) Pentheus, who dressed up to see what was going on, the women are notified by Dionysus that 'a "creature" is watching them, and the women attack the creature, at first singly and without success, then together' (2021: 9). They kill the king with their bare hands and with his head in their hands, they return to the city calling for a feast, where they are returned 'to the patriarchal fold' and exiled (2021: 80). The violence of this scene is shocking, but Honig embraces it as a parable about regicide, showing 'the need to dismember (…) patriarchy' (2021: 58).

In the absence of a successful return of the bacchants to the city, Honig turns to a *Bacchae* reading of Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019). In Savannah Bay, however, the return to the city is a constant feature. As a bookstore located in the heart of the city of Utrecht, Savannah Bay is fundamentally linked to customers, publishers, authors, and distributors, but also to neighbours, tourists, and other people who might wander past the store. The bookstore is also more purposefully linked to different feminist and literary spaces and initiatives in Utrecht. The store often provides mobile book sales at literary events, co-organises events with other cultural institutions, and provides a space for third parties to organise events in the bookstore. The boundaries between Savannah Bay and the city are constantly shifting and have different degrees of permeability (as we also saw within the shop in section 2). Two of the most prominent manifestations of the outside world entering Savannah Bay that were discussed by our participants included the books and events that Savannah Bay offers to its public, and the customers who themselves engage with these books and events.

Claiming the City Through Stories

Honig turns to fabulation and telling stories to inspire freedom in her thinking about how a practice of feminist refusal can go back to claim the city. Citing Hannah Arendt, who writes that 'it is as though the men who returned from the Trojan war had wished to make permanent the space of action which had arisen from their deeds and suffering,' Honig sees the city as the physical manifestation of stories made permanent. She reads the bacchant's return to Thebes as a call for glory and remembrance (Arendt, 1958: 198; Honig, 2021: 91).

Honig argues that fabulation has a place in the arc of refusal because it allows for narrative contestation, for bringing in those stories that have been forgotten or deemed irrelevant or ugly. Where Hartman's fabulation gives centre stage to the lives and experimental practices of freedom by Black girls and women living in New York and Philadelphia between 1890 and 1930, Honig also looks for a way for these fabulations to 'collectivize or politicize' (Honig, 2021: 74). Can they change the city through changing the archive of public remembrance?

Volunteers stress that books and storytelling are at the heart of Savannah Bay. Most justifications for this stance revolve around the idea that books are ideal vehicles for the exchange of stories. The volunteers see an important

function for Savannah Bay as a place where unheard stories are available and promoted. In this insistence on 'unheard stories' we recognise the rejection of hegemonic storytelling and the desire to explicitly create space for counternarratives that can challenge the existing cultural archive and can 'claim the city,' as Honig would say. Asking if books are central to Savannah Bay, we received an almost affronted confirmation. In explaining the central position of books in this space, one of the volunteers remarks:

> Yes! Besides the fact that we love books (…), the stories that are concealed in these books can help you and you can share them. I don't know how else you can facilitate that. What would this place be where people come together? Organised events are only disconnected moments, but a bookstore is always open. (…) The added value in selling books are the conversations that occur around those books, by talking about those books.

When asked what are 'books typically sold at Savannah Bay,' the volunteers struggle to find satisfying examples or explanations, but most of them settle on the phrase 'untold stories' – seemingly indicating books and voices that are marginalised or absent in other bookstores. The volunteers stress that they find it important that anyone can find a moment of recognition, learning, or exchange in Savannah Bay. They enthusiastically described the conversations with customers where they could recommend certain books, and sometimes they emphasised the responsibility that they feel while doing this.

The promotion of unheard stories to the wider community is also done via events that are organised by Savannah Bay. The volunteers told stories about events that were specifically memorable to them, including the many editions of *Uit de boekenkast* during Pride celebrations where queer authors are celebrated, an event around historical and personal storytelling by members of the Dutch-Indonesian community in Utrecht, and a lecture on the concept of afro-veganism.[11] Via these events the city is explicitly invited into the store to share in the reconstruction of the existing archive, but these encounters can also have a reshaping effect on the volunteers themselves. During our interviews, the volunteers expressed appreciation for the opportunity to come across new stories and voices. One volunteer remarked on the event around Dutch-Indonesian storytelling:

> I heard many stories about people like Marischka: born here, with parents who were born there. And the battle to be accepted. I learn a lot from that and I notice how privileged I am that I don't have to deal with that. I like going to events on topics that I know very little about. That is one of the great things about Savannah Bay: you always learn something new.

Challenging existing narratives can also lead to discomfort on the part of the volunteers. This perhaps shows the political and agonistic nature of what happens when new stories are told. For example, several white volunteers indicated that they felt uncomfortable during events about colonial histories or events around storytelling practices by people of colour. Some indicated that they appreciated this feeling of estrangement, because it encouraged them to think critically about the many ways in which they are allowed to be comfortable as white people in the bookstore and in society more generally. Others found it more difficult to reposition themselves in such a situation. These feelings of estrangement can result in volunteers questioning their own position within the bookstore. Several of the male volunteers whom we spoke with indicated that they had these types of experiences when customers remarked upon the perceived irony that a man was helping them to find books on feminism. One volunteer remarked:

> It has happened to me a couple of times that customers were looking for feminist literature and apologised to me because I'm a man. That makes me question my position. Perhaps I am not the best person to advise you in this.

Similarly, hetero cis-gendered volunteers explained that they at times felt inadequate when a customer asked them for advice on queer books or queer culture in Utrecht. While the volunteers actively encourage and support the refusal of the normative archive, they are not always sure about their own position in this project. At times they feel explicitly included in the reshaping of the narrative, at other times they feel themselves excluded from it. Perhaps these emerging conflicts (rare within the friendly atmosphere of Savannah Bay) also indicate the conflictual nature of going back to the city: 'fabulation is agonistic,' it is a 'contest over meaning' (Honig, 2021: 103). If you do not just refuse and withdraw, but also want to change something beyond the bookstore, existing differences in position and viewpoint become more explicit. So far, however, Savannah Bay operates through a peaceful maternity, as we argued in section two, and these agonistic conversations are rare.

[11] The prominence of the Indonesian community in the Netherlands is linked to the colonial connection between the two countries, which lasted up until shortly after the Second World War. Another reason why Savannah Bay is invested in this community comes from the owner's personal connection to it.

The City is Not One

Honig uses the city as a metaphor for the archive and the public remembrance of great deeds, as well as a metaphor for the dominant patriarchal norms in society. Reclaiming the city means to take down patriarchy – to cut off the head of the king. We have already seen that Savannah Bay never completely leaves the city, and that returning to the city is also a continuously negotiated process. Any real city itself, however, is also continuously changing and is not as singular as it is presented in Honig's parable.

Savannah Bay is evidently in a constant dialogue with the city. This means that it is partly dependent on the willingness of the outside world to go along with the rewritings of the archive that the bookstore proposes. Following Arendt in describing the city as a 'site of public remembrance, keeper of its values and houser of its vernacular,' Honig describes fabulation as 'a right to the city: this means a right to retake its archive and maybe even transform the city. Like all new rights, this one demands a response from those who may not be ready for the claim, and so it may or may not succeed' (2021: 97).

Savannah Bay also faces this resistance from the city and has developed strategies to deal with this. Mostly, the bookstore positions itself as a gentle interlocutor. When asked if they consider Savannah Bay to be a feminist space, one volunteer explained:

> When people think of feminism they think of activism, but it simply means that all people are equal. It is an odd term because it immediately refers back to the boxes of 'man' and 'woman'. [Q: Does Savannah Bay take a position in that debate?] I think so, but I'm not sure what it is. It is definitely there, but it is not very explicitly propagated. Otherwise it would stigmatise us. People tend to really like this store. You can be very casual in your comments, without judgement. Keep it low-key and accessible.

Many volunteers mentioned this approach: to be a gracious and good-natured conversation partner who seeks to be non-judgmental and non-dismissive of other voices and opinions. Some volunteers regret this strategy of navigating potential resistance from the city. One volunteer explained that she feels this strategy restricts her feminist activism:

> Sometimes people ask me: 'Is this still a feminist space? Haha!' And then I have to respond: 'No, we do unheard stories now.' Which is fine, but I just don't think 'feminism' is a dirty word.

Despite her reservations about this strategy, she does align with it in the context of the bookstore. Another volunteer expressed some frustration at being partly dependent on the whims of the outside world.

> Since a couple of years, feminism is cool again. You can find it on T-shirts everywhere. It is getting a bit diluted because of this popularity. It is becoming a way of selling stuff. It is nice that we can ride that wave, there is a lot of new research and there are new books. But we now also sell socks and stuff and the anti-capitalist in me does not like that. But it does make us money. General bookstores in the city also started selling feminist books such as the *Rebel Girls* series, but they don't have our history behind it to back it up. They just recently initiated a little corner with feminist children's books, while we have had that for ages.

Although Savannah Bay clearly chooses to be willing to move along with the city's shifting relation to feminism, this co-operating strategy requires quite a lot of humility from the bookstore and the people who maintain it as a feminist space. Honig concedes that the city is not always ready to receive the bacchants upon their return, and that although feminist bacchants have 'an obligation to return,' 'this commitment is not for everyone all the time' (2021: 104). But can the city ever be truly ready? If we wait for the city to be ready for feminist futures, will we not end up endlessly delaying our claim to the city? While this strategy allows Savannah Bay to continue to exist, providing a peaceful refuge for its community, Savannah Bay's feminism has not (yet) reclaimed the city.

CONCLUSION

Connecting the personal experiences of the volunteers of Savannah Bay with Honig's theory of feminist refusal, we have analysed the relationship between this queer feminist bookstore and the dominant patriarchal world which it resists but to which it also must relate to survive. Placing Honig's theory of refusal in relation to empirical data has several important implications. Analysing Savannah Bay as a place of continuously negotiated feminist refusal and refuge raises questions about the conditions for fulfilling Honig's feminist arc of refusal, and about the relations between the various moments. Whereas most discussions of feminist bookstores understand them as broader networks of political and social organising, Honig's theory helps understand how a moment of feminist refuge and withdrawal in the (temporary) absence of such networks can be part of a larger effort to claim the city in the future.

But truly claiming the city is an agonistic, contestatory process, that might threaten the peaceful unity of a feminist refuge.

Savannah Bay refuses dominant norms of gender and productivity (as we argued in Refusal 1). No longer needing to conform creates space for relaxation, other modes of working, untold stories, and solidarity. However, contrasting with the conceptual clarity in Honig's work, the withdrawal from the city is never complete – as a bookstore sustaining itself through customers' purchases, this would be impossible. There is no clear cut between the bookstore and the city. Rather, the volunteers and customers are engaged in a continuous choreography of bodies and bookcases where the line between the norm and refuge from the norm is constantly negotiated (Refusal 2). This manifests itself symbolically, with the bookshop taking on a different meaning for different kinds of customers, but also spatially, with the more general books in the front of the shop, and the feminist and decolonial books at the back. In these mediations, and influenced by economic constraints, the people working at the store try to create spaces to exhale.

If Savannah Bay's withdrawal from the city remains incomplete, so does its return (Refusal 3). In Honig's reading of the *Bacchae*, the return fails, and the bacchants are exiled. But the bookstore is in constant conversation with the city through its transforming stories. At the same time, the gentle organisation of the bookstore is not interested to fully, politically, claim and change the city. The dynamic between the norm and refusal of the norm, between city and refuge, has enabled Savannah Bay to continue existing as a queer haven even when the feminist tide was low. To survive the 'long feminist winter,' Savannah Bay has become a place of refusal mostly in Honig's first two senses of the word: a place of inoperativity of dominant norms and intensification of inclined care. But Honig completes the feminist arc of refusal by 'returning to the city to claim it. At that point, it is up to the city: is it ready to receive them?' (Honig, 2021: 71). With the rise of queer, decolonial and feminist activism in the past years, Savannah Bay's temporary isolation has been broken from the outside in. Perhaps the city is increasingly ready. Perhaps it is time to claim it.

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Precarity Factors of Street-Based Sex Work Within Criminalised Contexts: A Study in Athens, Greece

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ABSTRACT

This community research study aims to investigate the intersecting self-identified precarity factors and identities associated with street-based sex work in a criminalised context, specifically in Athens, Greece, to improve the effectiveness of individualised care interventions. Interviews of 264 cis and trans female sex workers were conducted from June 2021 to December 2022, at a community day centre for sex workers in Athens. The community-based precarity index for sex workers was used, which was developed at the community centre, using factors identified by sex workers themselves. Street-based sex workers more commonly reported interrelated precarious factors, such as perceived problematic substance use, homelessness, client violence, medical issues, and trouble with the police. Trans and refugee identities were both associated with street-based sex work as well. Harm reduction, gender-affirmative and multilingual and multicultural interventions are essential in street-based sex work intervention programs. Decriminalisation of sex work is recommended to reduce the harms and risks associated with sex work.

Keywords: street-based sex work, precarious factors, female sex workers, community-based, decriminalisation of sex work

INTRODUCTION

Sex worker organisations worldwide define sex work as a contractual agreement on sexual services between consenting adults (GNSWP, 2021; UNAIDS, 2009). The term sex worker (Nagle, 2018) refers to a person who engages in commercial sex, consciously considering this occupation a source of income (Berg, 2014). Sex workers face health, social and human rights disparities (Armstrong, 2017; Marshall, 2016; Platt *et al.*, 2018; WRC, 2016) that can only be properly identified under an intersectional lens (Harari and Lee, 2021), taking a community-based approach, namely collaborating directly with sex workers to address their challenges, enhancing working conditions, and offering support (Garofalo Geymonat and Macioti, 2016). By intersectional we mean the multiple, interconnected and changing social identities sex workers carry (Bowleg, 2021; Harari and Lee, 2021) and the stigma they face (Chandler *et al.*, 2022; Jackson-Best and Edwards, 2018), that construct distinctive experiences of adversities (Boonzaier, 2019; Rosenberg and Bakomeza, 2017). Among the many factors affecting the intersecting forms of oppression in sex work are the type of sex work and the social context, like the relevant legislation (Altay *et al.*, 2021). Of many sex work types (Harcourt and Donovan, 2005), the most prominent are brothel- and street-based (Platt *et al.*, 2018; Weitzer, 2017). Brothels are venues where sexual services are offered, usually operating in rented or privately owned apartments or houses, managed by individual sex workers or by third-party operators (Abel and Ludeke, 2020). Street-based sex workers, on the other hand, meet clients in several areas and usually negotiate with them on the street or in a vehicle (West *et al.*, 2022).

This present and retrospective qualitative and quantitative community research aims to identify the specific issues and propose individualised care interventions designed for street-based sex workers in Athens. It was conducted on one specific site, the Red Umbrella Centre in Athens, which is a day centre for sex workers, providing

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assistance, advocacy, and resources to promote their health, safety, and well-being, operated by the Greek Association of People Living with HIV, called Positive Voice. The centre, now situated at Michail Voda 200 in Athens, benefited from funding provided by the Bodossaki Foundation for a certain period during the research.

Specifically, the study examines how the identities that sex workers carry and how precarity factors they encounter are related to their frame of work, either street- or brothel-based. Aligning with the principles of community-based research this study's aim derives from the sex work community itself and the need to properly address the disparities and marginalisation street-based sex workers face. More specifically, we investigated how identities like motherhood, migration status and gender identity, as well as precarity factors, such as lack of social network, homelessness, substance use, police issues, client violence, and health and identification papers issues, are associated with each type of sex work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sex Work and Intersecting Identities

The sex work type that is within reach for females is, in many cases, related to the different intersecting identities they carry, like gender identity, migration status and motherhood (Goldenberg *et al.*, 2017; WRC, 2016; Zangger, 2015). The non-conforming gender presentation of female trans sex workers limits their employability (Blewett and Law, 2018; Grant *et al.*, 2011; Nadal *et al.*, 2014). It excludes them from the managed sector, including brothels (Zangger, 2015), so trans women mainly work on the street (Wickersham *et al.*, 2017). Migrants, on the other hand, mostly work in indoor venues rather than outdoors, even though they can still be arrested if they work in brothels (ICRSE *et al.*, 2019; Goldenberg *et al.*, 2017; Richter *et al.*, 2014). This seems to be due to the language barrier and lack of industry experience sometimes causing complete dependence on third parties where everything is arranged for them (GNSWP, 2017). Refugees, meanwhile, usually face challenges in the managed sector, with the more serious being their illegal status (Jamil *et al.*, 2012), as well as high levels of distress and pre-existing trauma, caused by the war(s) or oppression that have forced them to flee their homes (Bajwa *et al.*, 2017; Ben Farhat *et al.*, 2018). Finally, sex-working mothers report higher income (GNSWP, 2017; Renshaw *et al.*, 2015) and flexible working hours (WRC, 2016) among the advantages of street-based sex work. That is possibly the reason motherhood is a common identity among street-based sex workers (Duff *et al.*, 2015; Minescu *et al.*, 2022; Renshaw *et al.*, 2015). It also disproves the myth that sex workers, in general, are lonely individuals (Azhar *et al.*, 2020), which represents them as a threat to the social ideals of monogamy and heteronormative family structure (Poulios, 2018).

Sex Work and Precarity Factors

Street-based sex work, however flexible, relates to discrete, often intertwined precarity factors mostly due to the level of work-related exposure and intersectional adversities (Boonzaier, 2019; Easterbrook-Smith, 2020). Street-based sex workers more commonly report homelessness (Aidala and Sumartojo, 2007; Duff *et al.*, 2015; Minescu *et al.*, 2022), as indoor working may not be a feasible option for people without homes. Substance use is also more common among street-based sex workers, because of the strict rules and anti-drug culture of brothels that make the indoor work environment hostile to drug-using sex workers (Sanders *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, the dual criminalisation of street-based sex work and drug use renders sex workers vulnerable to arrests and police harassment (Tomko *et al.*, 2021; Wirtz *et al.*, 2015). Regardless of substance use, though, there is a long history of mistrust between street-based sex workers and the police, due to a history of hostile, unjust actions by police officers (Armstrong, 2017; Logie *et al.*, 2017) and wrongful arrests for vagrancy, public nuisance, stopping the flow of traffic, obscenity and so on (UNAIDS, 2009). Health inequities, experiences of violence and human rights violations are also more commonly reported by street-based sex workers. They are often displaced to isolated, unsafe work environments (Deering *et al.*, 2013; Goldenberg *et al.*, 2017), and their condoms or clean needles get confiscated by police, diminishing access to HIV prevention tools (Logie *et al.*, 2017; Zangger, 2015). Indeed, the prevalence of STIs and the increased risk of HIV infection amongst sex workers has been associated with criminalisation, sexual or physical violence from clients or intimate partners, and condomless sex (Blanchard *et al.*, 2018; GNSWP, 2022; Platt *et al.*, 2018).

It seems that the dangers sex workers face and the behaviours they adopt are associated with the relevant legislation model in place in various countries (Goldenberg *et al.*, 2017; Platt *et al.*, 2018; Tomko *et al.*, 2021), full decriminalisation is argued to create the safest market for sex work (Benoit *et al.*, 2021; Brooks-Gordon *et al.*, 2021). Partial criminalisation models, like the German-Dutch, criminalise some aspects of sex work. However, street-based sex work is almost always criminalised in such legal contexts (Weitzer, 2017), relieving states from their duties to protect sex workers' human rights, mostly by dehumanising the 'deviant others' (Wijers, 2022). Greece is yet another country where partial criminalisation means street-based sex work is illegal and therefore the

underground or invisible nature of the activity creates increased risks for sex workers (Jahnsen and Wagenaar, 2019; Law 2734/1999, 1999).

Zeroing in on Greece, the identities that sex workers bear seem to be as related to the frame of commonly assumed sex work as international research has shown in other countries. Trans identity has been shown to limit sex workers in street-based sex work and leave them vulnerable to violence and discrimination (Galanou, 2022). Additionally, Greek Nationality and off-street sex work seem to be operating as protective factors against the worsening mental and physical health of sex workers in the country, especially during the prolonged economic recession (Drydakis, 2022). As mentioned above, not only identities but also precarity factors relevant to work conditions can affect sex workers' mental health. A Greek study on female sex workers has recently revealed that poor mental health, along with perceived discrimination, is related to non-consensual condom removal (stealthing) which seems to be a quite common danger to sex workers (Apostolidou *et al.*, 2023).

THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

The concept of intersectionality is essential to understanding the intersecting identities and experiences of sex workers. It recognises that individuals embody diverse identities across various social, legal, and cultural dimensions, such as gender identity, ethnicity, and migration status, which intersect to shape their experiences, and enhance marginalisation and vulnerabilities (Altay *et al.*, 2021). In the case of sex workers, the intersection of identities often exacerbates individuals' exposure to discrimination, violence, and economic exploitation (Boonzaier, 2019; Rosenberg and Bakomeza, 2017). Full decriminalisation, encompassing street-based sex work, as explored in the feminist context, can be seen as a response to these structural vulnerabilities, recognising that punitive laws often contribute to sex workers' victimisation and lack of agency (Balfour, 2021; Benoit *et al.*, 2021; Brooks-Gordon *et al.*, 2021).

The interplay of sex work and feminism highlights the divergent perspectives within feminist movements. Decriminalisation advocates view it as a means to empower sex workers by affording them legal rights, agency, and the ability to negotiate safer working conditions (Flanigan, 2019). On the other hand, some feminists critique this approach, fearing that it may perpetuate exploitative industries (Comte, 2014). An intersectional approach is pivotal in challenging the stigma surrounding sex work. By acknowledging the unique experiences of marginalised sex workers, street or brothel-based, when it comes to either the identities they carry or the precarity factors they endure, it becomes evident that policy and advocacy must address the specific vulnerabilities and discrimination faced by these individuals (Altay *et al.*, 2021; Benoit *et al.*, 2021). Policy discussions should be informed by the nuanced experiences and perspectives of sex workers themselves, emphasising their agency and autonomy (Urada *et al.*, 2014).

DATA GATHERING

Procedure and Participants

A retrospective study was conducted using data that had been collected at Red Umbrella Centre in Athens. The centre operated under the scientific supervision of the Clinical Research Laboratory: Subjectivity and Social Bond of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. The present participant research and paper involve a collaborative effort between academics and researchers of the laboratory as well as employees and volunteers of the centre (Stavroula Triantafyllidou, Paraskevi Siamitrou, Evangelia Ntinopoulou, Anna Apostolidou, Anna Kouroupou, Sofia Kotsia, Anna Papadaki, Giorgos Papadopetrakis, Konstantina Papastefanaki, Aggeliki Sougle, Vaggelis Tsiaras) who are also members of the communities represented in the sample, i.e. sex workers, migrants, substance users, LGBTQ+ individuals etc. In accordance with standard authorship contribution guidelines we delineate each author's role in this paper. Dr Lissy Canellopoulos and Dr Antonios Poulios provided oversight for both the research endeavour and the writing process of the paper. Stavroula Triantafyllidou, Paraskevi Siamitrou, Evangelia Ntinopoulou, and Anna Papadaki conducted data analysis, drafted the initial manuscript, and contributed to subsequent revisions. Anna Apostolidou, Anna Kouroupou, and Sofia Kotsia managed data curation, while Giorgos Papadopetrakis, Konstantina Papastefanaki, Aggeliki Sougle, and Vaggelis Tsiaras coordinated project management tasks.

The data was collected by a trained member of the staff, a sex worker herself, from July 2021 to December 2022, as part of the initial interview conducted with every new visitor to the day centre. This interview was conducted using the icon-based, culture-free precarity index (**Figure 1**), which will be further explained in the next section. No reimbursement was given to the visitors for the interview, which was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were asked to give their informed consent to use the data for research purposes.

	Condom use
	Perceived problematic substance use
	Perceived problematic alcohol use
	Domestic violence
	Homelessness
	Medical issues
	Identification papers issues
	Client violence
	Police issues
	Lack of social network

Figure 1. Precarity index (Source: Red Umbrella Athens).

Notes.

Condom use refers to problems with clients refusing to use condom, negotiating its removal or removing it during the encounter without consent.

Perceived problematic substance use refers to problems with substances interfering with other parts of their lives and an increased level of dependence.

Perceived problematic alcohol use refers to problems with alcohol consumption interfering with other parts of their lives and an increased level of dependence.

Domestic violence refers to a pattern of abusive behaviors used by a person in a close relationship to gain power and control over them.

Homelessness refers to trouble finding or maintaining stable and safe housing, often resulting in them living on the streets, in shelters, or in temporary accommodations like hotels.

Medical issues refer to the inability of a person to access medical care, preventive measures, and a healthy lifestyle.

Identification papers issues refer to problems obtaining or renewing identification cards, passports, driver's licenses, birth certificates, or other essential documents with implications for access to various services, travel, employment, and legal matters.

Client violence refers to various forms of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse, aggression, or harm from their clients.

Police issues refer to troubles related to hostile, unjust actions and abuse of power, wrongful arrests, fines and pending formal charges or allegations of a crime or legal violation.

Lack of social network refers to limited or minimal connections or relationships with other people, such as friends, family members, or acquaintances whether they know about their profession or not.

Table 1. Descriptives of demographics (N = 264)

	n **(%[1]) or** ***M*****(*****SD*****)**
Gender identity	
Cis	210 (87.5)
Trans	30 (12.5)
Age	36.7 (10.70)
Motherhood	
Yes	171 (68.7)
No	78 (31.3)
Migration status	
Immigrants	161 (61.9)
Refugees	27 (10.4)
Local born	72 (27.7)
Greek language	
Understand/ Talk	170 (66.2)
Read/ Write	43 (16.7)
None	44 (17.1)
Ethnicity	
Greek	72 (27.4)
Balkan	74 (28.1)
Russian or East European	81 (30.8)
Middle Eastern & South Asian	17 (6.5)
Other[2]	19 (7.2)
Native language	
Greek	71 (27.4)
Russian/ Slavic	150 (57.9)
Spanish/ Portuguese	6 (2.3)
Arabic/ Persian	3 (1.2)
English/ French	8 (3.1)
Bengali/ Urdu	15 (5.8)
Other	6 (2.3)

Notes. [1]Of the observed responses. [2]Latin American, North African, sub-Saharan and West European.

It is essential to acknowledge that the present study has not been approved by an ethics committee. The absence of ethics approval does not signify a lack of commitment to ethical considerations but rather underscores the complex dynamics and impediments encountered during the approval process. In Greece, ethics committee approval is not mandatory for retrospective observational studies if the organisation conducting it has had general approval for such studies (De Sanctis *et al.*, 2022). However, factors such as the absence of a single national ethics review committee for research in Greece and the legal restrictions preventing the community organisation in question from establishing an ethics committee (Hellenic Parliament, 2018), contribute to the unattained ethical clearance. Not to mention the intricate nature of retrospective studies, analysing pre-existing data with no control over data collection methods and the committees' requirement for informed consent that is often an issue in community-based research (Kwan and Walsh, 2018). Despite these challenges, we remain dedicated to upholding ethical standards, ensuring the well-being and rights of the individuals and communities involved by carrying out the study following the ethical guidelines of the Helsinki Declaration on medical research involving human subjects.

In total, a number of 264 cis and trans female sex workers consented to participate and provided valid answers. Regarding gender identity, 87.5% were cis (n = 210) and 12.5% trans (n = 30) women, with an average age of 36.7 (SD = 10.7), as you can see in **Table 1**. Most of the participants were mothers (68.7%, n = 171). The sample consisted of 61.9% migrants (n = 161), 27.7% (n = 72) locally born and 10.4% refugees (n = 27). In total, 27.7% (n = 72) of the participants were from Greece, 28.1% (n = 74) were from the Balkans, specifically Romania, Albania and Bulgaria, 30.8% (n = 81) were from Russia and Eastern Europe, specifically Ukraine, Moldova, Hungary, Poland and Kazakhstan, 7.2% (n = 19) were Latin American, North African, sub-Saharan African and West European, and the remaining 6.5% (n = 17) were Middle Eastern and South Asian, from Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh. **Table 1** presents the participants' demographics.

Instruments

The icon-based, culture-free precarity index (**Figure 1**) used in the present study was developed by Red Umbrella Athens based on the early research feedback the community centre received in 2016 from sex workers themselves. Rooted in a genuine community-based research approach, the insights and perspectives shaping the index are exclusively derived from the lived experiences and reflections of sex workers themselves. More

Table 2. Descriptives of sex work information (N = 264)

	All participants ***n*** **(%[1]) or** ***M*****(*****SD*****)**
Type of sexwork	
Brothel	114 (43.2)
Street	150 (56.8)
Years of sexwork experience	6 (7.6)
Starting age	30.9 (11.2)
Other income	34 (24.5)
Part-time	43 (28.1)

Note. [1]Of the observed responses.

specifically, during their initial interviews, sex workers were asked to identify precarity factors in open-ended questions (What are the most frequent challenges you encounter on a regular basis?). The most commonly identified in their responses shaped the precarity factors index used in the present study. The index includes the following precarity factors: perceived problematic substance use, perceived problematic alcohol use, both in terms of interference with other parts of their lives and level of dependence, condom use, homelessness, lack of social network, medical issues, domestic violence, client violence, identification papers issues and police issues. The interviewees respond to dichotomous (yes/ no) questions whether they identify the above factors (e.g., Do you face problems with homelessness/ lack of social network, etc.). The internal consistency of the index was measured using Cronbach's alpha, which was calculated to be $\alpha = 0.646$, indicating an acceptable internal consistency. Perceived problematic alcohol use and domestic violence were omitted in the present study due to the high number of missing values.

A questionnaire designed by the researchers with demographic and sex work related questions was also used for data collection. In regard to demographics, the questions included age, gender identity, migration status and ethnicity. Sex work related information like the type of sex work, years of experience, starting age in the industry, other sources of income and part-time work status were also collected.

Statistical Analyses

We estimated absolute and relevant frequencies of the demographic and sex work related variables for the total sample (Field, 2017). The missing values identified were not systematically related to the data, as determined by chi-square tests, indicating that the missing data is random and not associated with the type of sex work, gender identity and migration status (Graham, 2009). Additionally, we assessed statistically significant relationships between demographic variables and the type of sex work (brothel or street-based) using *chi-square* tests. Finally, we examined statistically significant associations between the type of sex work (brothel or street-based) and the precarity factors reported by the participants using *chi-square* tests and effect sizes using Phi test when the degree of freedom was 1 and Cramer's V test when it was more than 1 (Roussos and Tsaousis, 2020). We decided not to use multivariate regression as the assumption of multicollinearity was not met, namely the independent variables were highly correlated with each other.

Statistical significance was set at 0.05 and the analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics software, version 25.

RESULTS

Sex Work and Demographics

As shown in **Table 2**, our sample represented adequately the main sex work types as 43.2% (n = 114) worked in brothels and 56.8% (n = 150) worked in the streets. The average age was 36.7 years, ranging from 18 to 71 (Mdn = 34, SD = 10.7), the average years of work in the sex work industry were 6, ranging from 0 to 40 (Mdn = 3, SD = 7.6), and the average entry age in sex work was 31.1, ranging from 13 to 61, (Mdn = 28.4, SD = 11.1). Having other sources of income was reported by 24.5% (n = 34) and 28.1% (n = 43) reported part-time sex work.

Concerning gender identity (**Table 3**), trans women were more frequently street-based (96.7%, n = 29) rather than brothel-based (3.3%, n = 1), $\chi^2(1) = 21.52$, $p = .000$ with medium effect size (Phi = -0.30). Additionally, migration status was related to the type of sex work $\chi^2(1) = 58.22$, $p = .000$. More specifically, migrant sex workers were more likely to work in brothels (60.9%, n = 98), while refugee sex workers and local-born were more likely street-based (70.4%, n = 19 and 91.7%, n = 66 respectively), with a large effect size ($Cramer's\ V$ = 0.47). Motherhood was not significantly associated with the type of sex work $\chi^2(1) = 3.55$, $p = .060$.

Table 3. Demographics and their association with the type of sex work (N = 264)

	Brothel SW (n = 114) n (%[1])	Street SW (n = 150) n (%[1])	Chi-square value	Phi/ Cramer's V	p
Gender identity					
Cis	101 (48.1)	109 (51.9)	21.52	-0.30	0.000
Trans	1 (3.3)	29 (96.7)			
Motherhood					
Yes	81 (47.4)	90 (52.6)	3.55	0.12	0.060
No	27 (34.6)	51 (65.4)			
Migration status					
Migrants	98 (60.9)	63 (39.1)	58.22	0.47	0.000
Refugees	8 (29.6)	19 (70.4)			
Local-born	6 (8.3)	66 (91.7)			

Note. [1]Of the observed responses.

Table 4. Precarity factors and their association with the type of sex work (N = 264)

Precarity Factors	Street SW (n = 114) n (%[1])	Brothel SW (n = 150) n (%[1])	Chi-square value	Phi	p
Perceived problematic substance use					
No	97 (46.6)	111 (53.4)	41.45	-0.40	0.000
Yes	53 (94.6)	3 (5.4)			
Condom use					
No	116 (56.3)	90 (43.7)	0.10	-0.02	0.754
Yes	34 (58.6)	24 (41.4)			
Homelessness					
No	105 (50.7)	102 (49.3)	14.51	-0.23	0.000
Yes	45 (78.9)	12 (21.1)			
Social network					
No	71 (51.4)	67 (48.6)	3.40	-0.11	0.065
Yes	79 (62.7)	47 (37.3)			
Health issues					
No	86 (50.6)	84 (49.4)	7.55	-0.17	0.006
Yes	64 (68.1)	30 (31.9)			
Client violence					
No	119 (52.9)	106 (47.1)	9.58	-0.19	0.002
Yes	31 (79.5)	8 (20.5)			
Police issues					
No	80 (45.5)	96 (54.5)	27.79	-0.32	0.000
Yes	70 (79.5)	18 (20.5)			
Identification papers issues					
No	112 (53.8)	96 (46.2)	3.53	-0.12	0.060
Yes	38 (67.9)	18 (32.1)			

Note. [1]Of the observed responses

Precarity Factors and Type of Sex Work

As shown in **Table 4**, the majority of women facing perceived problematic substance use (94.6%, n = 53) were street-based $\chi^2(1) = 41.45$, $p = .000$, with a medium effect size (Phi = -0.40). Women facing housing problems were also more frequently street-based (78.9%, n = 45), $\chi^2(1) = 14.51$, $p = .000$ with a small effect size (Phi = -0.23). Of those reporting medical issues the majority (68.1%, n = 64) were working on the street $\chi^2(1) = 7.55$, $p = .006$, with a small effect size (Phi = -0.17). Client violence was also more common among street-based sex work (79.5%, n = 31), $\chi^2(1) = 9.58$, $p = .002$, with a small effect size (Phi = -0.19), and trouble with the police (79.5%, n = 70), $\chi^2(1) = 27.79$, $p = .000$ with a medium effect size (Phi = -0.32).

There were no significant associations between the type of sex work and the existence of a social network $\chi^2(1) = 3.40$, $p = .065$, condom use $\chi^2(1) = 0.10$, $p = .764$, or problems with legal identification papers $\chi^2(1) = 3.53$, $p = .060$.

DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that sex workers in Athens report severe precarity factors, they report multifactorial identities that bring about unique and complex challenges (Boonzaier, 2019). Moreover, street-based sex workers in particular were found to be in an even more precarious position, as street-based sex work was more commonly related to perceived problematic substance use, homelessness, health issues, client violence and problems with the police, as well as trans identity and refugee status.

In line with previous findings (Galanou, 2022; Wickersham *et al.*, 2017; Zangger, 2015), trans sex workers in Athens, in our study, seem to work almost exclusively on the street. This finding should be regarded through an intersectional lens, as trans women already face disproportionate levels of employment discrimination (Grant *et al.*, 2011). The fact that they are forced into the sex work industry (Nadal *et al.*, 2014) due to widespread transphobia from within all sectors of society (Blewett and Law, 2018; GNSWP, 2022; Logie *et al.*, 2017; Zangger, 2015) makes their further marginalisation within the industry even more dangerous. A similar intersectional view is needed for the findings related to refugees being excluded from the industry's managed sector, mostly due to not having identification papers (Jamil *et al.*, 2012). This finding, compounded with limitations in accessing employment and, even more crucially, legal protection, lack of legal status and increased risk of deportation constructs unique experiences of marginalisation and disadvantage (Boonzaier, 2019; Rosenberg and Bakomeza, 2017).

Motherhood, on the other hand, was not related to a specific type of sex work (Minescu *et al.*, 2022), possibly because the majority of our sample were people on the move, who often report leaving their children in their country of origin in order to be able to work long hours and provide for them (Karandikar *et al.*, 2022). Unfortunately, we have no such measures and data collected. Nonetheless, it is shown that many female sex workers in Athens as well are indeed mothers, like in many other cities (Blanchard *et al.*, 2018; Duff *et al.*, 2015; Minescu *et al.*, 2022; Renshaw *et al.*, 2015), despite popular detachment myths (Azhar *et al.*, 2020; Poulios, 2018). Stigma related to said myths, as well as criminalisation and other marginalising factors set obstacles to sex workers' maternal capacity and challenge their and their children's health, safety, well-being and human rights (Ma *et al.*, 2018).

In line with Drydakis' (2022) study, health issues were associated with street-based sex work in the present study. In general, the fact that street-based sex work is associated with perceived problematic substance use, homelessness, health issues, client violence and police issues paints a vivid picture of the current situation in street-based sex work in Athens, and the criminalisation of street-based sex work is highly problematic and impactful on their lives. Perceived illegal substance use associated with street sex work (Aidala and Sumartojo, 2007; Duff *et al.*, 2015; Minescu *et al.*, 2022), for instance, may be attributed to coping with stressors existing within the criminalised sector of the industry (Burnes *et al.*, 2012; Minescu *et al.*, 2022). Criminalisation also leads to health disparities, as street-based sex workers often limit their negotiation time and work in unsafe corners to avoid trouble with the police (Goldenberg *et al.*, 2017). The more commonly reported client violence and troubles with the police, as well as the health disparities, were related to the partial criminalisation legal model, which criminalises street-based sex work in most of the countries that implement it, including Greece (Jahnsen and Wagenaar, 2019; Weitzer, 2017). Client violence and police issues being reported more frequently by street-based sex workers show that indeed even partial criminalisation leads to unsafety (Blanchard *et al.*, 2018; GNSWP, 2022; Logie *et al.*, 2017; Platt *et al.*, 2018; Tomko *et al.*, 2021; Weitzer, 2017; Wirtz *et al.*, 2015; Zangger, 2015).

LIMITATIONS

The generalisability of the study's results is limited as the sample was collected in one location, in a sex workers' day centre in Athens, Greece. Therefore, sex workers from other urban or rural areas of Greece, or those that are unlikely to visit a sex workers' community centre are not represented here. Additionally, although motherhood was measured, child caregiving was omitted, which is important information in children stay-behind migration contexts. Finally, we were unable to control for confounding variables that may have affected the relationship between street-based sex work and specific identities and precarity factors, such as socio-economic status. Therefore, we present this research as specific to these empirical factors, although inferences can be drawn in terms of relevance to other cities.

CONCLUSIONS

This piece of local community research has identified how intersectional and diverse factors influence the lives of sex workers in a major European city. Welfare and care interventions designed for street-based sex workers should incorporate harm reduction practices, by offering safer injection kits or referrals to supervised consumption

sites (Lew *et al.*, 2022) and gender-affirmative care (Aldridge *et al.*, 2021), as well as multilingual and multicultural interpretation (Lifland *et al.*, 2022), housing and legal support (Minescu *et al.*, 2022).

Full decriminalisation of sex work is recommended in order to reduce exploitation, violence, and abuse in the current criminalised framework, and the harms and risks associated with street-based sex work in particular and all other forms in general (Benoit *et al.*, 2021; Brooks-Gordon *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the need for service provision for sex-working mothers and their children is linked to the development of inclusive policies and legislative frameworks (Dodsworth, 2012). Especially considering that the current Greek law forces sex workers to be single (Jahnsen and Wagenaar, 2019; Law 2734/1999, 1999), which constitutes marital status discrimination and can be interpreted as a violation of human rights and labour laws.

Last but not least, it should also be stressed that all these precarity factors are interrelated. The lack of safe accommodation, for instance, is linked to more risky behaviours for street sex workers, intensifying violence and a sense of insecurity, substance use, trouble with the police and health problems (Aidala and Sumartojo, 2007; Armstrong, 2017; Duff *et al.*, 2011; Goldenberg *et al.*, 2020; Logie *et al.*, 2017; Minescu *et al.*, 2022; Shannon *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, interventions designed for street-based sex workers should make plans that take account of the multiple, intersecting factors at play that form interactive elements of a distinct experience (Boonzaier, 2019). Furthermore, by fostering cooperation between civil society organisations, a comprehensive and holistic approach can be developed to address the unique marginalisation faced by trans and refugee sex workers (Ciccia and Roggeband, 2021).

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Book Review

Feminist Institutionalism in South Africa: Designing for Gender Equality

Narnia Bohler-Muller [1]*

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This is a book that should be read by anyone interested in the health of South Africa's democracy. Although a gender lens is used, Amanda Gouws' edited volume *Feminist Institutionalism in South Africa: Designing for Gender Equality* (2022) provides a disturbing narrative of the closing down of activism within the state, which has become a general trend. Gouws, a Distinguished Professor of Political Science and the National Research Foundation (NRF) funded SARChI Chair in Gender Politics in the Department of Political Science at Stellenbosch University, has produced a book that tells a powerful story about the rise and fall of state feminism and gender design in South Africa within a matter of two decades. Writing from the perspective of a former Gender Commissioner (2012 - 2014) at the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), an academic, vocal feminist and gender equality activist, Gouws has travelled this journey personally along with the other chapter authors, including four other former Commissioners (Cathi Albertyn, Sheila Meintjes, Gertrude Fester and Janine Hicks). Hassim notes that the CGE entered the discussions at the 1991 Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA)[1] as 'part of a political trade-off with the establishment of a forum for traditional leaders' (Hassim at 36).

This book, however, does not focus solely on the CGE, but stretches across the period from the time of the constitution-making process in the early 1990s when the diverse Women's National Coalition (WNC) pushed a feminist agenda that influenced the outcome of the negotiations giving birth to a new democracy up to the establishment of the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities (DWPD) – which moved in and out of the Presidency after its establishment in May 2009 - and beyond. It ends with a powerful and hopeful account of the success of feminist campaigns that culminated in the adoption of the 2020 National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide by using 'direct action as a method of protest and political engagement' (Dlakavu at 247).

The main question of the edited volume is posed upfront: 'Can institutions be designed in such a way that they can ensure innovative measures for and institutionalise a feminist vision of gender equality?' (Gouws, p. 1). Upon reading the book, it becomes clear that state feminism is currently weak, if not non-existent and that the attempt at feminist institutional design has failed because of political interference.

[1] See Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/convention-democratic-south-africa-codesa. (Accessed 5 October 2023).

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From the outset, it became clear that the CGE was not a well-performing Chapter 9 constitutional institution, and as a result, late Minister Kader Asmal recommended that the CGE be merged with the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) as far back as 2007.[2] This suggestion failed, however, because feminists and gender activists pushed back. After several reviews of the performance of the CGE, serious concerns remain despite the fact that there are some scattered indications of success which are addressed in Part 2 of the volume. As is clear from each chapter in this edited volume, the unfortunate fact remains that there is an anti-feminist politics often enacted by women themselves in state institutions, and this has led to a regression of sorts, undoing many of the gains of the WNC and fragmenting the South African women's movement.

Hassim notes that within 20 years, the experiment in feminist institutional design in South Africa fell into 'tatters', and the consequences for women were severe (Hassim at 42). She points out that women continue to be amongst the poorest citizens living in daily fear of violence, working in precarious conditions and bearing the brunt of the state's failure to provide adequate services (Hassim p. 42). This is a story of both hope and decline related in a conceptually coherent and clear manner throughout the book by authors who are well-known women's rights activists in their own right. They lament that such anti-feminist ideology has led to the National Gender Machinery (NGM) failing those it is meant to serve. At the beginning of the Institution-making process feminists wanted a 'package of structures' at all levels of the state that would facilitate relations and networks with feminist activists and women's movements who would then work with state feminism to drive transformation. This did not happen. Instead, the worst fear of feminists was realised when a single ministry of women was created by former President Jacob Zuma in 2009.

Unfortunately, as noted by Gouws (2022, 89) racial tension has marked the NGM and CGE since its inception. Feminism is perceived by some as an import from the West linked to essentialised gender identities. This tension led to imposed silence and inaction on the part of white Gender Commissioners who felt that they did not want to impose an unwelcome ideology. In addition, due to party political capital, Commissioners loyal to the ANC were introduced into a space that was meant to be independent. Lisa Vetten describes this as a system of cadre deployment (Vetten pp. 98–99) whereby party loyalists from the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) in particular had nestled within the NGM and the CGE and focused on remaining loyal to the ANC whilst putting gender equality on the back burner.

The book is divided into four parts that work together to provide an account of the narrative of institutional design, decline and dysphoria. Section 1 utilises a historical lens and is comprised of four chapters. Chapter 1, entitled 'Imagining a New World', is authored by Shireen Hassim, a veteran of the women's movement. Her contribution focuses on the vibrant feminist activism based on solidarity in the 1990s, which did not last. Sheila Meintjes writes in chapter 2 about governmentality – and poor governance – within the CGE from 1997 to 2016, which is followed by Gouws' chapter on CGEs structural problems and her personal experience of being straight-jacketed as a feminist Commissioner. Lisa Vetten wraps up this part of the book with an honest assessment of how the CGE and the rest of the NGM were 'undone'.

Part 2 contains two chapters written by former gender commissioners focusing on some pockets of success, with Cathi Albertyn analysing the Commission's legal interventions. She points out that the CGE usually joins in other cases as *amicus curiae* (friends of the court) and does not always advance substantive equality in its arguments, sticking to the more 'neutral' understanding of formal equality that is not transformative at its core. The biggest success of the CGE is documented by Janine Hicks in Chapter 6 in which she illustrates how like-minded Commissioners within the CGE worked with unions, NGOs and feminists inside and outside the formal system through a strategic use of alliances to ensure that legal provision was made to provide maternal benefits to informal workers.

Part 3 of the book returns to the challenges inherent in the design of the NGM. In Chapter 7, Fester writes about the complex and often uncomfortable interactions between the parliamentary committee (PC) to which the CGE reports and the CGE itself. In chapter 8, Phlile Ntuli critically analyses the challenges that arose as a result of the creation of a single ministry to deal with 'women's issues', which led to fragmentation more than it did cohesion. In the following chapter, Joy Watson draws our attention to the importance of gender-sensitive budgeting and points out that this has not occurred in South Africa despite the need, for instance, to ensure that serious societal problems like gender-based violence (GBV) are properly budgeted for. In chapter 10, Adams-Jack looks at problem representations and the NGM in South Africa and argues that it is comprised of 'meaning in motion'. In other words, changes continue to occur depending on context and there is a need to ensure that these changes are for the positive and that woman benefit from them. This concept of motion provides a glimmer of hope.

Part 4, entitled 'In Abeyance of the State', contains one very powerful chapter written by Simamkele Dlakavu, a well-known young black feminist activist. Her chapter focuses on the possibility of impactful African feminist

[2] Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2007). *Report of the ad hoc Committee on the Review of Chapter 9 and Associated Institutions. A report to the National Assembly of the Parliament of South Africa.* Cape Town, South Africa.

protest – including silent protest. She explains her own experiences of African feminist action and protest, which includes the powerful 'One in Nine' campaign, the #RUReferenceList and the #totalshutdown movements. The chapter ends on a promising note as Dlakavu notes that feminist activists and leaders in the past two decades have been shifting to civil society and academia and therefore there is more of a possibility of change being driven from outside the state.

Ultimately, the chapters when read together weave a story of the success of the 'broad church' of the NWM which was established to influence the constitution-making process as the main negotiators were mostly men. The equality clause (section 9 of the Bill of Rights) and the institutionalisation of the CGE as a Chapter 9 institution which is meant to be independent and protective of South Africa's hard-won democracy were seen as major successes by a group of like-minded women concerned with the feminist agenda and women's rights. But after this, there was a turn to politization, causing the racial and ideological polarisation of the women's movement, driven mostly by the ANCWL. This is by no means unique to South Africa.

A powerful example of the damage this polarisation causes can be illustrated by a famous example from the United States. More than thirty years ago, Anita Hill testified in front of the United States Senate Judiciary Committee that Clarence Thomas sexually harassed her. Most people recognised that it looked bad, a black woman explaining her very real experience in front of a group of white men, one of whom was the current President of the United States, Joe Biden. Yet, as Kimberlé Crenshaw notes, what was more difficult to acknowledge was the central tragedy – "the false tension between feminist and antiracist movements".[3]

Clarence Thomas and his supporters used race as an argument to trump gender by intimating that Anita Hill was damaging the black cause by wanting to block his appointment as a Supreme Court judge. Her experience as a (black) woman was less important that his experience as a black man. Thomas has proven to be a highly conservative Supreme Court judge who has been accused of unethical conduct by accepting and not declaring 'gifts' of holidays and other luxuries from far-right members of the United States oligarchy. On the other hand, Hill serves her community as a dedicated women's rights lawyer.

Chronologically, the National Gender Machinery (NGM) developed over time. This was by design and meant to ensure that women exert influence both inside and outside the structures of the state. The first push was to develop a kind of matrix or 'package' model that allowed pockets of state feminism to grow. What was feared the most occurred three years after Jacob Zuma's rape trial with his establishment of a Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities (DWCPD) staffed mainly by political deployees and controlled to a large extent by the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) who were allies of the former President. This led to ideological conflicts about the role of women and their rights in South Africa, based on a false dichotomy. Within this environment patriarchy thrived, buttressed by women.

Much of what led to the decline of state feminism is centred around the Zuma rape trial *State v Zuma* 2006 SA (WLD) and the consequences of it. In her hard-hitting book *The Kanga and the Kangaroo Court* (2007) Mmatshilo Motsei exposed the patriarchal discourse of the court and the dire consequences of the judgment on women who choose to report rape as Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo (also known as Khwezi) who passed away in 2016[4] had done. Khwezi was shamed, interrogated about her sexual history and blamed for wearing a 'Kanga'[5] in Zuma's home. Of great concern was the response of the ANCWL, whose leader at the time responded to criticisms of the former President by vowing to 'protect him with our buttocks'.[6]

Fester argues that race and class issues prevented camaraderie amongst women in the women's movement (Fester p. 74). Throughout the 1980s, there was solidarity amongst women with a common cause, but self-censorship became prevalent post-1994. As a result, leadership remained predominantly male despite quotas being introduced in political leadership. The women inside the system placed party loyalty before the feminist struggle. Fester calls this the 'hierarchy of oppression' where there is framing of race as the *main source* of oppression, causing tension between a nationalist approach and a feminist approach to attaining gender equality and women's rights.

State feminism failed and the package came undone because of anti-feminist sentiments becoming the norm within the state machinery. Most of the chapters in this edited volume ask the question of whether the interests of

[3] Crenshaw, K. W. (2019). We still have not learned from Anita Hill's testimony. *UCLA Women's Law Journal*, 26, 17-20. https://doi.org/10.5070/L3261044346

[4] TMG Digital (Sowetan). (2016). Who was Khwezi? Here's what we learnt during the Zuma rape trial. Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/who-was-khwezi-heres-what-we-learnt-during-zuma-rape-trial-tmg-digital-sowetan-10-october. (Accessed 5 October 2023).

[5] Pather, R. (2016). The kanga, womanhood and how Zuma's 2006 rape trial changed the meaning of the fabric. Available at: https://mg.co.za/article/2016-08-10-the-khanga-womanhood-and-how-zumas-2006-rape-trial-changed-its-meaning/. (Accessed 5 October 2023).

[6] News 24. (2014). We will defend Zuma with our buttocks – Nomvula Mokonyane. Available at: https://www.news24.com/news24/we-will-defend-zuma-with-our-buttocks-nomvula-mokonyane-20150429. (Accessed 5 October 2023).

women are prioritised or whether party politics trump the importance of women's rights. Adams-Jack illustrates how political choices have shaped the gender discourse in South Africa for many years, particularly since 2009 (Adams-Jack p. 202).

Dlakavu begins chapter 11 with a powerful quote: 'I don't want to die with my hands up or my legs open' (Putuma, 2017, p. 75). This is a sad reflection of the way in which women live in fear, particularly of GBV. She bemoans the fact that the anti-feminist nature of the ANCWL's career politicians affiliated with the ANC took up space within state machinery to displace state feminism, which resulted in the disappearance of feminist consciousness in state institutions such as Parliament (Dlakavu p. 265). As other chapter authors have also pointed out, feminist activists and leaders have begun shifting to civil society and this is where the changes are more likely to occur in future.

The edited volume ends with a significant 'postscript', a copy of a letter sent to the Speaker of Parliament at that time, Lechesa Tsenoli, in 2021 requesting an independent enquiry into the poor functioning of the CGE. The letter was signed by several institutions supporting gender equality as well as a long list of subject experts and activists. To date, there is no evidence that such an enquiry has even been considered. The story thus continues to unfold, making this book even more relevant.

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Book Review

Navigating Womanhood in Contemporary Botswana

Nombulelo Tholithemba Shange [1]*

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Stephanie S. Starling's book is a timely, significant contribution to academic and social discourse, especially given how Covid and 'post-Covid' society has sharpened the contradictions between various socio-political binaries, be it right wing versus left wing, elite versus poor, indigenous people versus colonial/ neo-colonial invasions, capitalists versus workers and so on. Starling's book shows the contradictions embedded in different local and global efforts that claim to be working towards empowering women. While her work focuses on Botswana and, to some extent, the African continent as a whole, she is still able at times to show the continued colonial, Western influence of the challenges and experiences faced by African women. The Covid and 'post-Covid' world has revealed the profound social, racial and gender inequalities that characterise our society. It has shown that the pre-Covid ideals around equality have been, at best, a crumbling, failing façade or, at worst, a manipulation and conjured up by the world's powerful, a lie they could not be bothered to continue when the world was hit by the Covid-19 global pandemic. The ruse died a quick death during this period; this is evident in South Africa's increase in violence and abuse against women and children, which overwhelmed the police and the already burdened hospitals and society as a whole during the pandemic. President Cyril Ramaphosa labelled gender-based violence, South Africa's second pandemic (Shota, 2020). In the USA, it was the 2022 overturning of Roe versus Wade, a Supreme Court ruling which gave women autonomy over their bodies and granted them the right to have an abortion. The overturned judgement has had devastating impacts on women and their ability to access adequate healthcare; it will continue to have a long-lasting impact on the socioeconomic challenges faced by individuals and groups (Levinson-King, 2023). Similarly, Starling explores the various ways women are underrepresented and their rights ignored or made secondary in diverse social spaces in Botswana, from the home to places of work, leadership, healthcare, education, legal and traditional systems and many others. She adds:

> The women's movement was at its height in Botswana in the 1980s and 1990s (Bauer, 2011), but as it began to weaken the proportion of women MPs fell from 17 per cent in 2000 to 8 per cent in 2009 (World Bank, 2022). By 2019 this had risen again to 11 per cent. (2023: 133).

These figures, and the global general disregard for women is a confusing and scary reality, given that so many of the world's problems are experienced by women, who every day find ways to survive poverty, violence, inequality, unemployment, and climate change. Such problems are often created by patriarchy and other intersecting systems like racism; despite women's resilience and ability to survive these harsh realities, patriarchy still keeps them out of

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any meaningful strategic development or leadership roles. This is presented in the second important aspect of this book. The author, in the care she takes in narrating these women's stories, also illustrates how they find ways to survive, even in circumstances that were built to push them to complete erasure, they still survive. It is motivational text that still maintains its academic rigours and is an important feminist reminder of our different challenges across the globe, it shows the ways these challenges connect us and is a reminder of our strength and resilience as women.

This book is separated into six different chapters. In Chapter 1, the reader is introduced to the general topic of the book, womanhood in Botswana. The inequalities between men and women are made clear very early on. Women's perceived inferiority to men is evident in the name of the introductory chapter; "'That's how it is here. Men do what they want": Women in Botswana'. This chapter also introduces us to contemporary Botswana and its challenges, especially in relation to education, law, healthcare and poverty. Throughout the discussion, one can see a constant tension between African traditions and modernity, mostly brought on by Western culture and the history of colonialism. It would have been important for the author to have this discussion more explicitly, given Africa's history with colonialism and neo-colonialisms and the tensions and crippling effects this system has in almost every dimension of African social life. Starling tries to have a similar discussion in part, when she looks at the law, which exists in a binary of traditional customary law and Common law of the Roman-Dutch tradition. In this discussion, Starling sets the tone for the constant double patriarchy African women are faced with, by illustrating that both systems fail to protect women adequately.

Chapter 2 deals with research methodology and ethics. Starling details her research journey and how her past experiences as a volunteer for over a year in Botswana were meaningful in her ability to conduct this research. She interviewed a diverse pool of 30 Batswana women, ranging from highly educated, career-driven women to women who have not gone through much formal Western education and are most primarily from rural areas. They were also diverse in age, with the youngest being 25 and the eldest being 45. Some were mothers, whereas others were not; some were married, others were single. Starling also brought up very important challenges to doing research and the ethical challenges and even dangers they bring up. She does this by narrating some of her own sexual harassment experiences and how these can be better navigated or avoided by giving researchers greater access to funding. She also spent some time discussing the ethical difficulties of being an outsider, particularly, being a white British woman documenting the experiences of black women. While Starling had some understanding of her positionality and privilege as a white woman and researcher, she at times undermined its depth and what it might mean for her participants. This was especially clear in her discussion where she suggests some of the women she encountered might have been trying to exploit her for money and other favours. In contrast, it is the research we do as scholars that is inherently exploitative in its nature, praxis and history. Regardless of the important ethical lengths we go through to ensure it is less exploitative, it still remains deeply exploitative.

Chapter 3 starts to get into the real nub of the discussion where the women start to really get into what womanhood really means to them. For most of the participants, it revolves around marriage, motherhood and the maintenance of cultural traditions and harmful patriarchal norms. Many of the women have experienced varying levels of abuse or know others who have been abused, all in an effort to maintain the patriarchal illusion that men are dominant and superior. It is only if they are able to hold onto these ideals that society and their families see them as worthy women. Some missing level of personhood, in many ways, is only reserved for men, but it is slowly instilled in women when they are able to reach these milestones or are wives or mothers.

Chapter 4 looks at how very few other achievements or contributions to society are considered when it comes to the construction of womanhood. These realities are far worse for rural women, but this is not to say these kinds of views cannot be found in the city or urban areas. Many women in Botswana straddle modern-day city life with traditional rural life. Some work in more urban areas but are from rural areas. This is the reality for much of Sub-Saharan Africa. The patriarchal norms from their rural homes follow them to the cities, where they are met with more western/ modern-based patriarchies, that create overwhelming and stifling experiences for African women. They juggle both patriarchies, sometimes in sync, often creating a double burden. Other times these patriarchies can be contradicting, creating tension and confusion. African women figure out how to climb career ladders needed to improve their social mobility and their family's quality of life. Family here often includes the extended family, sisters, aunts, parents, nephews, in laws, people they left behind in the rule areas etc. They must figure out how to do all of this while still being dutiful wives and mothers who cook, clean, raise children, please their husbands sexually, all while overlooking how little many of their partners contribute to the household labour or finances.

Chapter 5 shows the paradoxes of womanhood, where on some level, women's experiences in contemporary society, as chapter 5 also shows, they have relatively more ease entering public life and places of work, meaning they can improve theirs, their family's and but extension, their community's lives. But there are also other contradictions, like women struggling to access educational structures, making their fight against unemployment and poverty even harder. The double patriarchy sets women back instead of propelling them forward. Yet, families still insist on pushing harmful traditions, even when they cause harm not only to the women, but to the family at large. This is illustrated in many of the stories in the book. Still, one that comes to mind is a family that refuses to

have one of the participants help her unemployed partner start a business because the act of doing so is too masculine. This is one of the illustrations that patriarchy hurts everyone, even the men who, at times, fight to defend it. In this story, everyone loses; the family cannot increase their income in the long run through the potential of a successful business endeavour. The man loses because he stays emasculated, unemployed, and unable to take care of his immediate and extended family. And the woman loses because she is not able to marry her partner, something she may so deeply want, because they cannot afford the wedding and other cultural practices linked to marriage. A toxic combination of colonial disruption of the African family and crisis of masculinity has made men become more threatened by women who thrive both in the public and private sphere, has led to rising abuse, a growing number of single mothers and many other challenges. Starling (2023: 134) adds:

> Though reliable historic data are hard to come by, data from recent years show an increase in the proportion of children born to single mothers from 76 per cent in 2011 (Statistics Botswana, 2014) to 84 per cent in 2019 (Statistics Botswana, 2021).

Chapter 6 is a brief Epilogue that sums up the whole discussion. Starling pulls briefly from Bessie Head's literature and life in illustrating African women's colonial and patriarchal subjugation. Head is a South African anti-apartheid activist who was exiled to Botswana and would have experienced varying levels of racism and sexism. These are also themes she frequently explores in her literature and that, in part, inspired Starling as she embarked on her journey to learn from Batswana women and their experiences.

Starling's analysis is essential and is, in many ways, true, but it shows a bleak one-dimensional side of womanhood in Botswana. Engaging a bit deeper in three aspects of African life and experiences would have been important for a more holistic and reflective picture. The three aspects are cultural traditions, colonialism and African feminism. While Starling engages with colonialism and African cultural traditions (in this case Tswana culture), she often does so in passing. These remain significant reasons why contemporary African societies organise and function the way they do and why women might construct so much of their identity around motherhood. The impact of colonialism on the African family cannot be glossed over, even in countries like Botswana, which got their independence early on, in 1966 and through more peaceful means. Colonialism gained many of its successes through the total destruction of the African family structure through slavery, land dispossession and the migrant labour system that normalised the crisis of absent fathers that so many face today. This brings me to the third aspect, which is African feminism and the desire to rebuild the family, which is an important feminist act, one that got many communities through the most brutal and violent parts of colonialism. If it were not for these actions and focus on the family by African women, then and now, the African family structure would exist only as irredeemable chaos and trauma or would not exist at all. Through motherism, African feminists, mothers and women revolutionaries created a safe space for men to feel safe enough to share in the pain of racism and emasculation and slowly start to challenge it (Shange, 2017: 61). Motherism is an African feminist theory that fights for the rights of women through pulling from African cultural ideas. Many African ideals also call for the protection and honouring of women in different ways and frequently place women in positions of importance and leadership and honours some of the precolonial (and in some cases post-colonial) matriarchies that could be found in Khoi, and San groups, which can be found across Sub Saharan Africa or the Balobedu people found in Limpopo, South Africa and many others. Motherism is not only intended for biological mothers. Instead, it is more a way of being that emphasises the importance of family, sustainability, and African philosophies around humanism. All this in an effort to rebuild, heal and grow the community and individuals who are both in service of the community while also drawing from its strength (Acholonu, 2002; Alemayehu, 2020: 63). It is true that this role taken on by women in the community and family can be extremely challenging, and men, through a combination of patriarchy and ongoing colonial traumas, have neglected their roles and fail to support women. But the sad yet empowering reality still exists; without this valuable contribution from women, African families, cultures, and futures would surely perish.

This text is a meaningful text for anyone interested in feminism or the experiences of women, especially scholars and students. It is straightforwardly written in style, which is an important feminist attribute that ensures that those who are not deeply familiar with feminist discourse can still read and understand the text. Starling avoids veiling these stories in deep, complex feminist academic jargon that would potentially exclude the kind of reader she acquired this knowledge from. This was a very important consideration given that Starling worked a lot with women with varying levels of western education, meaning that many who at least understand English would understand this text with minimal difficulty. Rural women in Botswana and the African continent are an important audience for this book, given that these are their stories, and to have them engage with this text would be an important way of carrying on the African tradition of healing, growing, resistance and knowledge production through storytelling. Policymakers and Botswana leaders, in particular, would also be an important audience, given that it is not every day they get to engage with their constituents and their realities. It is an important book for disrupting the growing, false view that gender equity is being met. It shows the weaknesses of this view by engaging

various local and global statistics and historical and contemporary experiences that, in some instances, show regressions or bittersweet wins. Leaders, at varying levels and in different contexts, must engage text like this as a way of taking stock of whether their efforts are being felt by the most marginalised members of society.

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Book Review

Muslim Women in Britain, 1850-1950: 100 Years of Hidden History

Samia Rahman [1]*

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Book's Editors: Sariyah Cheruvallil-Contractor and Jamie Gilham

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INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on British Muslim women has experienced a renaissance in recent years. This comes after decades of primarily orientalist and patriarchal literature which reduced Muslim women to homogenous subjects of scrutiny by well-meaning Western feminists and/or self-appointed white saviours. Muslim feminist scholar of Islam, Leila Ahmed, notably outlines feminism's role as a vehicle of colonialism, in her seminal book *Women and Gender in Islam* (Ahmed, 1992). Her argument focuses on the assertion of universal validity that centres white, heterosexual, middle-class, Western feminist experience. Colonial and postcolonial obsession with, for example, 'the discourse of the veil', lends itself to a paternalistic notion that Muslim women can be regarded as disempowered or empowered merely by the way they dress. Structures of colonial violence are rendered invisible in the oppression of Muslim women, their autonomy conveniently hinging entirely on the practise of religious traditions. Palestinian-American anthropologist Lila Abu-Loghod and Kecia Ali, also a feminist scholar of Islam, who wrote the preface to Ahmed's republished work (Ahmed, 2021), both reference the justification for the post-9/11 'war on terror' and its mantra of 'saving Muslim women' (Abu-Lughod, 2013). This popular trend for viewing Muslim women through the lens of oppression is ingrained, but finally this meta-narrative is faltering. In fact, academic and trade publications that subvert the rhetoric of victimhood have begun to proliferate. Bestsellers at the forefront of this sea change include Mariam Khan's *It's Not About the Burqa* (Khan, 2019) and Rafia Zakaria's *Against White Feminism* (Zakaria, 2021). Through publications such as these, Muslim women are speaking for themselves. They are tired of incessantly being opined about in ways that negate their agency, and ability to carve out their own paths to female empowerment. Muslim women are challenging the narrow definition of what it means to live a feminist life, a definition created by white feminism, and from which they have felt excluded. As Sara Ahmed (2000) writes: 'black feminist critiques of white feminism are not simply about disputing the terms of analysis of white feminist theory, but about critiquing the very forms of political organization and work which marginalized black women and their experiences.' While a glut of books exploring the lives of the contemporary British Muslim experience is to be welcomed, the voices of women from the earliest British Muslim communities remain unarticulated. Until now. In *Muslim Women in Britain, 1850-1950: 100 Years of Hidden History*, Sariyah Cheruvallil-Contractor and Jamie Gilham combine historical scholarship and sociological frameworks to bring the lives of Muslim women in

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Victorian Britain into focus. The women featured, all lived during the period up until just after the end of the Second World War and the simultaneous crumbling of the British Empire.

CONTRIBUTORS

Sariyah Cheruvallil-Contractor is Professor in the Sociology of Islam at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry, UK. As a 'feminist sociologist of religion'[1] her previous work aspires to give voice to marginalised communities who rarely have the opportunity to speak for themselves. Her commitment to the collaborative potential of knowledge production is evident in the intersectional approach to depicting the lives of Victorian-era Muslim women. Consideration is given to the class privileges as well as the racialised and gendered experiences of British Muslim converts to Islam as Muslim women from Muslim lands, who find themselves in the UK during that era. Much has been written about Muslim women, British Muslims, and convert communities from a postcolonial and white feminist lens. Jamie Gilham, an independent biographer and historian of Western Islam, has redressed this with his published works on Victorian-era converts in British Muslim communities. The editors combined expertise offers an opportunity to aid understanding of the development of British Muslim communities during a period of global upheaval. Other contributors are drawn from academia, and education and include the great-grandson of Noor Inayat Khan – whose face was displayed on a British stamp in order to commemorate her courage and sacrifice in the fight against Nazi Germany in the Second World War. It is interesting to note that although four of the ten editors and contributors are female, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor remains the only female Muslim contributor to the anthology. This speaks to the under-representation of Muslim women in postgraduate research. The findings of a 2023 report by the Aziz Foundation, 'underline how rarely Muslim women are able to see themselves represented across academia' (Samatar and Sardar, 2023). Although there are no exact figures on the number of female Muslim academics working in the UK, a 2020 Higher Education Statistics Agency Report revealed less than 1% of UK professors are black and out of a total of 21,000 professors, around 1,300 are Asian (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2024). This underscores why the anthology is particularly important as an example of both historical and contemporary scholarship led by Muslim women, about Muslim women, and the communities to which they belong.

METHODOLOGY

Using feminist historical approaches, the book comprises nine essays by scholars of British Muslim history, which are grouped into four sections. Each essay is written by specialists in their field and elaborates specific themes. The first section sets the premise of the book and asks why Muslim women's histories should be of interest and so ripe for research. This is followed by an explanation of the role of women in Britain's first mosques. The third section explores British Muslim women in public life; the book ends with a snapshot of the lives of Muslim women who travelled to Britain and how they settled in this land that was so foreign to them. Research has, until this book, concentrated on contemporary experiences of British Muslim women in the context of post-1960s immigration and the 9/11 generation (Ahmad, 2017).

Each essay is centred around a protagonist, and the writer takes the reader on a biographical journey of the love lives, careers and escapades of formidable British Muslim women. Drawn from all strata of British society, the women brought to life on these pages include members of the British aristocracy, as well as working class British women of decidedly humble origins. The vignettes are serious scholarly studies which are peppered with intriguing biographical, and rather gossipy asides. These tantalising details are obtained from primary sources such as personal diaries, media reports and third-party accounts, as well as academic texts and writings. Determined investigative work to uncover primary sources has built up a holistic picture of the lives of Muslim women in Victorian Britain. This is evidenced by a comprehensive notes section and selected bibliography to signpost further reading. What is more, the editors of the book connect the experiences of the women they document, to the experiences of British Muslim today, as we learn that the same issues and debates that dominate discourse in British Muslim communities at the time of writing, were topics of discussion back then.

MUSLIM WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

The narratives are located at important historical and geopolitical moments which are directly linked to the trajectory that introduced Muslim communities to Britain. Through individual stories, the reader comes to understand how social, religious, and cultural mores came to be formed. Against a backdrop of colonialism, war,

[1] https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/persons/sariya-cheruvallil-contractor

the carving out of trade routes and the aftermath of a dying Ottoman Empire, the book reveals not just how the first British Muslim communities organised and established themselves, but, crucially, the prominent role played by women.

This comprehensive undertaking builds a picture of the emergence of Muslim communities and the spaces they have carved into the fabric of British society. Diverse stories of triumph over adversity, tragedy and courage, render the hitherto invisible lived realities of the mostly British women converts to Islam, visible. The reader learns about Fatima Elizabeth Cates, Bertha Cave, and Gladys Milton Brooke, among others, in their own words. How they were viewed by fellow members of the Muslim communities informs our understanding of the convert experience to this day. Their challenges were multi-fold, with an alarmed and disapproving British establishment regarding Muslim convert women in particular with deep suspicion, alarm, and disapproval. Convert women's experiences were shaped by assumptions about gender roles, social status and patriarchal values of the times. By making radical and independent decisions about faith and choosing how they wished to live their lives, convert women, and Muslim women from Muslim lands, disrupted patriarchal norms and navigated the consequences of such bold independence. Striding out on their own to embrace Islam, by no means guaranteed emancipation; it is telling that many of the women were mistreated by the men in their lives, and the book clearly illustrates the insidious impact of misogyny on the lives of women whether they are living in the West, in Muslim lands, converts, born Muslims, or non-Muslim.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

As with any anthology, the range of perspectives, style and tone is enlivening. There is the inevitable variation in rigours of scholarship. Some essays intensely detail specific periods in the life histories of our protagonists, with scant insight into the rest. This may, however, be due to the sources available. The wealth of tantalising tittle-tattle makes the anthology a deliciously entertaining read. Some speculation appears to creep in, however, when it is apparent sources cannot confirm a fact. For example, on page 25, we never quite learn why Olive converted to Islam; a juicy context is only alluded to. Such incomplete pictures are enjoyable but suggest an attempt to stretch a life story a little far to fit into a theoretical framework. In some chapters, it seems as if the women are peripheral to the men's stories. The chapter on Nafeesah M T Keep and female Muslims in Victorian Liverpool, begins with an elaborate scene-setting introduction to the historical life and influence of William Henry Abdullah Quilliam (p. 57). It could be argued there is an over-representation of Quilliam in this anthology, although this likely reflects Quilliam's central role in British Muslim history during the period of concern. What is interesting is that the iterations throughout the essays in the descriptions of his character and, in particular, his treatment of women speak to his contested significance. In Turkey he is regarded as the father of Fatma's children, which the writer of the chapter on Fatma insists could not be possible (p. 103). The breadth of detective-work involved in any historical inquiry, and the selective nature of the sources that a historian chooses to amplify or disregard is in full display. This after, all, is how patriarchal understanding of history has come to dominate historical tomes – through the erasure of female voices and the amplification of male perspectives. While reading the fascinating story of Sultan Jahan, I wondered for a moment whether her story was tangential to that of the Woking Muslim Mission. But the attempt to centre Sultan Jahan is perhaps a creative effort to contextualise women's lives and certainly illustrates the influence of a historian as co-editor.

The introduction by Cheruvallil-Contractor, in particular, is a triumph. She lays bare the complexity and nuance in any definition of what it means to be a British Muslim woman since 1850. There is a conscious attempt to acknowledge power dynamics and intersectionality, not just during the era in question. Issues arising from the contested arena of Muslim feminism are just as pertinent in the debates of the time, as they preoccupy Muslim women now. It is eye-opening that the lack of facilities in mosques for female worshippers, misogynistic attitudes and the upholding of patriarchal structures, are all contemporary themes familiar to women now, and troubled Muslim women since the earliest days of the emergence of Muslim communities. To find that little has changed is a little dispiriting.

IMPACT ON THE FIELD

Muslim Women in Britain, 1850-1950 is a valuable resource for historians and social scientists seeking to understand how the earliest British Muslim communities established a postcolonial presence in the heart of the empire. The accessible and narrative-led writing will appeal beyond academia, to non-fiction enthusiasts seeking to understand how convert and diaspora Muslim women negotiated identity and a sense of belonging that is proving pertinent now, as much as it was in the Victorian era. By uncovering the hidden stories of prominent female architects of the formation of early British Muslim society, the anthology fills a gap in our understanding

of the foundations laid before post-war immigration and the emergence of a multicultural British society that Muslims became part of.

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Book Review

She's in CTRL: How Women Can Take Back Tech

Alice Ashcroft [1]*

Published: September 1, 2024

Book's Author: Anne-Marie Imafidon

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'She's in CTRL' opens up the conversation about women in tech in an honest but accessible way. It is a book which is not only directed toward, and to be read by, feminists who wish to understand more about tech but is also an eye-opener for any individual working in tech who may wish to learn more about the societal issues faced by women in the industry. Whilst the content of this book is not new, by reading this book, anybody could gain a greater understanding and appreciation of women in the tech industry, and therefore should be read by feminist scholars and those within computing alike.

The book begins with the author's journey with technology, taking a VHS player apart and making PowerPoint presentations for her father as a child. Their fascination with tech grows further, and they learn to dissect websites and build their own. The motivation for these behaviours remains consistent throughout this journey: curiosity. Without using so many words, Imafidon highlights the importance of a growth mindset in tech. This is supported by a body of existing work spearheaded by Dweck (2017), whereby gender differences can be found in growth and fixed mindsets as a result of the differing ways children are taught to accept and embrace, or not, challenges that they might encounter. Namely, young girls are often taught to accept the *status quo*, whereas young boys are taught to question and challenge their surroundings (Yu, McLellan and Winter, 2021). Imafidon also highlights the importance of imagination throughout this book, with one of this author's favourite examples being that of casting a woman as *The Doctor* in the BBC television programme, *Doctor Who*. While imagination is a critical part of the development of this programme, as 'a fictional series, set in a made-up world', the main character whose actor changes every few seasons, was not cast as a woman for decades. The importance of this is perfectly captured within this quote:

> Do not restrict your imagination, do not put a cap on your dreams. It only limits the dreams and creations of others, and fails to serve the needs of the underprivileged and excluded.

In Chapter 5 of the book, Imafidon dives into the challenges faced by women and girls in STEM subjects, often drawing on inspiration from Laura Bates's work in The Everyday Sexism Project. Bates, known for her insightful books such as *Men Who Hate Women* (2021) and *Fix the System, Not the Women* (2022), provides a backdrop for Imafidon's exploration of how girls often encounter dismissive attitudes towards their interests in STEM, beginning during their schooling. In a poignant observation, Imafidon notes that 'girls aren't expected to survive the computer science term.' The innate sexism which still exists throughout the education system is therefore not

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only preventing girls from progressing in STEM, but actively sending out the message; that if they try, they are expected to fail (Franklin, 2013; Langhout and Mitchell, 2008). The author therefore underscores the needs to fix the system in which women are currently being failed, rather than placing the burden of change on women themselves.

Throughout the book, Imafidon also addresses a number of systemic issues which contribute to gender disparities in the tech industry, particularly in the context of caregiving responsibilities. Drawing on the stark reality that women are frequently tasked with caring and childcare duties in addition to their working lives, they emphasise how the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated these imbalances due to the additional expectation placed on women of homeschooling their children, as well as remote working; a reality highlighted by Vincent-Lamarre in 2020. The author argues that this imbalance in time and responsibility reflects the societal norms which are ingrained into the system, and from which they advocate for a systemic overhaul to allow for a reduction in future gender disparities. In this context, Imafidon also introduces the idea of utilising technology to reclaim control, aptly stating that we can use technology as a tool for taking back 'CTRL' in the face of these systemic challenges. This insightful exploration of how women can use the systems which have previously held them back as a method for reclaiming the balance within the system perfectly aligns with the broader theme of the book, and as such, urges readers to consider technology as a powerful force for reshaping our current societal norms to empower women in traditionally male-dominated fields like the tech industry.

On the progression of tech, Imafidon urges women to be included in this conversation as equal voices. The importance of this is supported by research in the HCI (Human Computer Interaction) space by Ashcroft (2022), which focused specifically on how gendered language may impact design decisions when there is diverse gender representation in the room. The impact of gendered language on technology is also explored in this book. The author recalls specific examples of their own journey into the tech field being referred to by relatives as "little techie things", which is reminiscent of the writing in 'Unlocking the Clubhouse' (Margolis and Fisher, 2002), a cornerstone of literature in this field. The idea of this 'locked clubhouse' for which women are restricted from entering is yet another example of 'gatekeeping', which Imafidon explores further in their third Chapter. Gaming is presented as a good example of this 'gatekeeping', with the inherent misogyny which is still ever-present within the gaming world is highlighted in this book. This is supported by recent emerging publications which empirically demonstrate the negative experiences often faced by women gamers (Buono *et al.*, 2020; Kelly *et al.*, 2023; Wohn, Ratan and Cherchiglia, 2020). Even 'technology' and being 'technical' are often gatekept terms (Margolis and Fisher, 2002), and Imafidon concludes this succinctly by stating that 'many women don't consider themselves "technical", but women are problem-solvers and technology is nothing more than a tool'. This could be argued to be true of any person, regardless of gender, but what Imafidon acutely acknowledges is that it is women who are often the hardest hit by the problems of society, e.g. 'from poverty to violence', and therefore using any tools overcome these problems may benefit women more.

Imafidon highlights the importance of visible role models as a route of inspiration for young girls to enter into the world of tech, sharing examples of experiences she had with her parents of going to museums about inventing, and having conversations about actively 'going against the grain', through to the example of Jenny Griffiths in Chapter 3. Griffiths emerged out of university as the CEO of her own fashion recognition application, and the technology developed out of this business could have potential applications in airport security, for example. Real-world examples of inventions made by women and their scale of impact are peppered throughout this book, with each one packing a punch. This reinforces Imafidon's passion for ensuring girls and women are not left out of the design and development processes, with existing research telling us that role models and their visibility are key to encouraging more women into STEM (Widdicks *et al.*, 2021). Importantly Imafidon acknowledges the importance of the 'pipeline', as well as the need for continuous support in the industry itself, quoting a conversation with Mar Hicks, 'on the other side, as a continuation there has to be a lot of other people pushing on the policy level for things like equal pay, and better treatment of workers of all genders'. This is supported by the research carried out by Holtzblatt and Marsden (2018), who interviewed women who had exited STEM to uncover their reasons for leaving the field and found that a lack of support was one of them. The author, therefore, highlights the importance of choosing to engage when shaping technology, stating that 'the full extent of taking CTRL involves getting active, creating, shaping and influencing technology.'

We have 'no option to opt out' of the evolution of technology, although Imafidon also acknowledges the technology gap, and that not everyone has access to technology. However, they then bring in an interesting conversation about education, and how each topic is currently taught seemingly independently from the other, highlighting the importance of STEAM rather than STEM. This is a consistent pedogeological conflict and is explored in previous work by Widdicks *et al.* (2021), which has shown the importance of including project themes for computing education, i.e., not coding for the sake of it, coding with a purpose, and how this is likely to engage more girls and women in computing.

Overall, this is a brilliantly informative and thoughtful book which does an excellent job of outlining several high-level problems faced by women in STEAM, particularly those in tech. Not only does it provide the reader with a real insight into the issues currently being faced in the field, Imafidon also includes a number of actionable steps for those interested in pursuing equity and representation across the fields. A must-read for anybody wishing to understand more about tech, or the societal issues currently faced by women.

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