

THE REPRESSION AND DENIAL OF THE "FEMININE" IMAGINARY

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Abstract: The study presents some aspects of a feminist analysis of the symbols, and the struggle for individuality and intellectual and spiritual independence for themselves, but also for women of the future. (The background is provided by the black community). The poetry of the "dialogue " with the Divinity through the mixture of personal, familial, social, economic, religious, racial and sexual issues is imposed by a kindle controversy and thus change how people think and feel about themselves, the others or God. Despite contiguities the literary text also talk about the marginal position of women and their struggle for integration.

Keywords: feminism, symbols, black, dialogue, writing

Many things have been said and many can be said about feminism at any time. I tackled with only several aspects concerning the woman's position in our society but I tried to point out the social aspect– the woman's subordination, her dependence on a male relative and all that in a world dominated by man.

The feminist movement is like a resisting pressure of yielding a "feminism without women", mainly a feminist topic without women in the picture. Obvious there were some other perspectives as Adrienne Rich (1973) or Sheila Rowbotham (1998) put it "it is now possible to look back at ourselves through our own cultural creations, our actions, our ideas, our pamphlets, our organizations, our history, our theory".¹

The feminist studies and many theoretical works produced controversy items in fields like science, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, history, psychoanalysis, arts, cinema, literature and even politics. Some of them tried to dismantle or destabilize, silence or even to ignore women. On the other hand they revolutionize the entire way of accepting and knowing them. From this point of view woman seems to be another imagery of the world. One of the most difficult task was to follow the development (evolution) of feminism. In time woman could define itself as an expression for her own thoughts and actions.

For women the repression and denial of the feminine are impossible to reflect on themselves without also questioning the general condition which concerns them all.²

In theory the term "consciousness-raising" was removed, but in practice women have to deal with it for obtaining the truth. The women's voice became personal, subjective, even gendered. Therefore her identity reflects also the social gender, which dismantle the previously assumptions.

Cultural images and feminist representations understand gender as a person with her own needs and desires less or more determined to create social entities, classes. The idea was to integrate the woman's position into a more defined context (all aspects–political, economic, religious– are interconnected).

¹ Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 28 in Odette Caufman-Blumenfeld, *Studies in Feminist Drama*, Polirom, Iași, 1998, p.13

² Odette Caufman-Blumenfeld, *Studies in Feminist Drama*, Polirom, Iași, 1998, p.15

The distinction between the public sphere and private one must be done it. The woman's exclusion from the public sphere, her marginalization was evidently mentioned in different ways (woman as wife, as sexual object). It was also absolutely necessary to compare the situation of the working-class women to that of the middle-class one, or between real, historical beings and the fictional woman, supposedly representative women, "other-than-man"³. Deconstructing woman made woman to think of themselves as passive objects rather than active subjects. Her gender identity and her sexuality were oppressed, muted, marginalized or even unrepresentable in arts, especially in literature (differences not only between the sexes, but also among men and women, differences within the self).⁴ "The world before feminism offers ample evidence that men had more power than women. If we simply listen to folk wisdom or read sacred texts, we learn about the virtues of sons and the lesser value of daughters. A girl is "merely a weed," in a Zulu saying. According to the Old Testament, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Set the value of a male between ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels . . . and if it is a female, set the value at thirty shekels.' " A Dutch proverb declares that "a house full of daughters is like a cellar full of sour beer," while Koreans learn that "a girl lets you down twice, once at birth and the second time when she marries." Even contemporary parents usually prefer male children; a 1983 survey of forty countries found only two with daughter preference and only thirteen with equal preference for boys or girls. Where strong son preferences persist, parents may selectively abort female fetuses and neglect girls, leading to higher mortality rates for female infants in parts of the world, such as India and China."⁵

The feminine identity, often self-contradictory, is a representation of merging gender, race, class, cultures, language, education, knowledges, political environment.

It should be mentioned one important moment in the history of feminism through literature and feminist thinking: the question of silence, from analyses of the exclusion of women's voices and images and of women as active persons, as mothers, very much alike of psychoanalytic thinking, especially based on Sigmund Freud or Jacques Lacan. Women may have been hidden from history and motherhood has been an absent presence, but within the language, voice and images of popular culture, women, especially those who are young, physically attractive and sexualised, seem omnipresent.⁶ We can identify the presence of women masks, the silences of the speaking subject.

On the other hand there are some of the feminist thinkers whose work speaks about the relevance of feminism and in particular of the possibilities of a productive dialogue.

Another writer who was useful in establishing this dialectic was Simone de Beauvoir. Her book *Second Sex* was restricted perhaps because it was considered too subversive and could not be taken out by an undergraduate, it may have seemed even more exciting. There was a time when people still believe that women needed to be protected, a time when studying meant studying men's lives and thoughts, in texts mostly written by men, it was a revelation that women could be the subject of serious critical analysis. Such feminist thought were changed the way of thinking and being in the world. De Beauvoir argued that women did not have a clear identity of their own since they were always viewed as 'the other' in relation to men. She emphasized that the roles and characteristics assigned to women were

³ Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics and Cinema*, p.5

⁴ Odette Cauffman-Blumenfeld, *Studies in Feminist Drama*, Polirom, Iași, 1998, p.19

⁵ Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back. The History Of Feminism And The Future Of Women*, Ballantine Books, New York, 2002, p.31

⁶ Kath Woodward and Sophie Woodward, *Why Feminism Matters. Feminism Lost and Found*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.8-9

socially constructed. She suggested that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’, since a woman’s “destiny is imposed upon her by her teachers and her society”⁷. De Beauvoir did not see herself as writing in a feminist tradition but tried to understand women’s subordination in the context of her broader interest in existentialist philosophy.

Issues like the feminist polemic and writing with a politics of difference, an understanding of patriarchy are key thinkers that works with a particular focus: seeing how ideas and theories from previous feminist moments can be brought together from a strong tradition of understanding how wider power structures operate, to a materialist or psychoanalytical framework: a strong polemic and raises many important issues about the ways in which aspects and the language of feminism have been not seen as necessary. A stronger understanding of patriarchy is one of the ways in which feminism is dismantled, empowerment, which have come through the young women’s voices very strongly.

That “intellectual style”⁸ is produced by a culture which devalued woman. Despite that it seems that the feminist movements sharing values, seems to be a struggle against the existence of power, for a life with no distinctions of sex, class and race. “Portraying a movement as blaming one group (white men) and denying the resilience of another (all women) will keep it unpopular, even though, as I will argue, feminism at its best offers much more complex interpretations of the dynamics of gender, race, and power. For those of us raised in the United States, a related antipathy sometimes operates, since acknowledging any kind of structural inequality challenges the deeply held myth of equal opportunity. The myth professes that in America anybody can succeed, as if there were no obstacles based on gender, class, or race. To raise questions about fairness implicitly asks whether those who have succeeded are in fact the most deserving. Little wonder they are left fearful of feminism.”⁹

In literature the image of calm domesticity was presented in realistic terms but an explanation for that was searched. Even if they had been excluded from public life, some women wanted more than what was offered to them and created some societies and social clubs exclusively for them. Some elements of traditional femininity (beauty, care, and sexiness) are retained while others (passivity, weakness, and dependence) are met with a feminist reimagining active, choice-making voices. This acts of traditional femininity are recoded as empowered: a woman who can use her sexuality as a tool or weapon to social life. Girls understand themselves in girl power culture and live in a patriarchy. The feminist discourses build (narratives of them-selves as female) and recognize the strong, powerful, independent women. At the same time, this feminist vision of their own lives and futures may not aid them in actually achieving power (they confined in their own style, voice, sexuality, and imaginings of the future).

There was also some illnesses and treatments and many prejudices, but the education was regarded and the purposes for which the women were expected to participate in schooling. Their struggle to obtain an education was both a class struggle and a gender one. An interesting aspect was the way from the reluctance towards accepting the idea that woman should be educated to universities. Also marriage and divorce were seen very much like the distinction between “the respectables” and “the roughs”, which was actually a question of attitudes which had also to be pointed out. (the condition of a married woman, her limitations and lack of choice).

⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, p. 315

⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, p.150

⁹ Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back. The History Of Feminism And The Future Of Women*, Ballantine Books, New York, 2002, p.27

“Women may be acceptable as equals, but feminists are often seen as frightening, threatening, or simply unnecessary. This hostility to feminists and feminism cannot be dismissed simply by avoiding the terms, for these harsh stereotypes can always be used to discredit women activists, whether they call themselves feminists or not.”¹⁰

Those feminist ideas continue to shape – and reshape continually reflecting a desire to convey to readers the knowledge. Even women were involved in a range of social and political reform movements and organizations which gave them political skills and established a network of contacts, the restrictions that they experienced, along with the belief that they should use their female values for the good of the community, also provided an impetus towards involvement in feminist politics.¹¹

On the one hand there were well-educated, middle-class women and on the other hand there were the unmarried daughters of low-income clergymen beside the wives of wealthy industrialists. Feminists were not, however, just narrowly focused on equal rights. They also took an interest in the family and in moral issues, including the legal position of married women, marital violence and the double standard of morality between the sexes. Aware of class differences, they took an interest in industrial reform and the position of working-class women as well as a range of equal rights campaigns, including women’s suffrage. Women were often encouraged to take part in nationalist struggles. As mothers, it was assumed that they would educate children in their mother- language trying to develop a sense of national identity. After, woman began to raise their own demands. She established her own interests and aimed to attract support from women of all social classes. Feminists not only had different priorities, but also had different understandings about what was meant by women’s emancipation and how to achieve it. They demanded equal rights in education and employment, sought legislation and supported the demand for votes for women. Woman was disadvantaged by the economic and social dependence on a man. In time, feminism was fractured in multiple ways – national, class, religious and racial differences could all undermine solidarity. feminists also sought to spoke a language of universal sisterhood (transcending differences between women) even feminism has never been a monolithic movement¹² (there have always been many feminisms). Nonetheless, they had their own ideas about the meaning of feminist, about the position of women, in particular, on women’s experiences within the family. The image of the perfect wife and mother was increasingly at odds with the realities of women’s lives.

It is a fact that the model for the development of literary feminism try to ameliorate the painful experience of women in patriarchy. Their cultural dimensions create a brief portrayal of the women. The writers follow many aspects, such as geographical, (the influence of climate on temper and behaviour, the attachment to the land), economical (the specific of economy development, rurality), historical (time, memory), cultural distinctions (ritual, ceremony), social mentalities (social hierarchy), experience (self-experiences), feelings, even loyalties for someone or one region. The presence of women in history and literature takes testimonies from powerful women placed in the shadow of great men such as Lady Macbeth or the biblical Hester, a history that acknowledges their presence, but never gives them a central role. Feminist writers and critics, like Virginia Woolf or Hélène Cixous, underline the fact that the personal experience, one’s personality, one’s body and one’s sex are inscribed in the female texts. The approach of female literary tradition extends from

¹⁰Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back. The History Of Feminism And The Future Of Women*, Ballantine Books, New York, 2002, p.25

¹¹ June Hannam, *Feminism*, Pearson Education Limited 2007, p. 29

¹² June Hannam, *Feminism*, Pearson Education Limited 2007, p. 167

Showalter's concept of literature as a record of female experience, a concept through which they express women's anxiety that they are not given any place in the literary canon.

Woman-as-subject encourages changing the oppression mask, revealing women's active subjectivity in writing, prevailing structures influenced by sexual identification, class and race. Her individual identity cannot be shown within the narrative context. In other words, a feminist vision is made on different strategies focus in feminist analysis of social relations of gender and privileges (material conditions, gender behavior, beliefs, perceptions). The construction of gender (both male and female) identities reflects a tendency of recognizing the differences among and within women. The literary legitimation of female characters, woman's literal becomes a symbolic, ideological body, very well determined, a voice of a future, ideal society opened to possibilities. The portrait of writing feminist minimizes the differences between sexes, individual stereotypes. This type of character lays stress on the fact that both male and female are part of the development of relationship, a metaphoric value of the dominant features of individual/ narrative itself. The "feminine" imaginary relies the progression from rigidity to the rhetoric of freedom and feminist topics. The female character is often reduced to silence and when she does reply, her answers are "barely audible"¹³. Other female narratives bear the scars inflicted by patriarchy as Elin Diamond suggests on his paper *Refussing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras*.¹⁴

According to many feminist theoreticians and critics, the writer's belief in compassion, interaction (emotive connectedness) leading to the construction of a new world with strongly believes in changing rules, cultural pluralism, especially the aesthetical.

Without being an exhaustive study on the position of woman this paper underline the fact that "feminine" imaginary is the language of contradiction, fluidity, illogicality, nonrationality, its gendered quality doesn't make her exclusively for the use of woman (writers).

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¹³ Odette Kaufman-Blumenfeld, *Studies in Feminist Drama*, Polirom, Iași, 1998, p. 73

¹⁴ Elin Diamond, *Refussing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras*, p.105

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