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**Judith Butler's Concept of Performative Gender and the Rebellion Against
Normativity: Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories***

(Teorie performativního genderu Judith Butlerové a vzdor proti normativitě v povídkách
ze sbírky *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* Sandry Cisneros)

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Ráda bych tímto poděkovala prof. PhDr. Martinu Procházkovi, CSc. za trpělivé a poctivé vedení mé bakalářské práce a své rodině i přátelům za podporu v době, kdy tato práce vznikala.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením práce ke studijním účelům.

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to give an account of Judith Butler's theory of performative gender in order to analyse Sandra Cisneros's short stories. The primary sources include Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, and Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Short Stories*. The thesis also provides interpretation of other complementary primary sources; *Discipline and Punish* by Michel Foucault, *Antigone's Claim* by Judith Butler, "Signature Event Context" by Jacques Derrida, and *Borderlands* by Gloria Anzaldúa. The variety of primary sources hints on the interdisciplinary nature of the methodical approach of this thesis; from feminist theories, philosophy of language, and criticism of discursive power to literary analysis. The necessity to look at the question of performative gender from various perspectives stems from a wide scope of Butler's complex argumentation. The primary sources draw attention to different aspects of this thesis. *Gender Trouble* allows for deeper understanding of gender from Butler's point of view and enables us to observe the deconstruction of the sex/gender dichotomy, a basis for her disapproval of the supposed naturalness of the division of sexes. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler further develops the concept of performative gender while she draws her argument from the aforementioned works of Foucault and Derrida to stress the power to represent and produce, and the investment of bodies in maintaining the prevailing power relations through the regulatory techniques of reiterative sets of acts that are disguised as stable cultural norms and values.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler also emphasizes the notion of a political agency from the perspective of marginalized groups or individuals. She clearly focuses on the abjection of queer bodies, however, her theory is more than appropriate for the analysis of Sandra Cisneros's characters. Sandra Cisneros portrays marginalized characters - Chicanas; Mexican-American women that are brought up within the culturally specific kinship ties with clear rules to compel them to assume the given role of a selfless mother who suffers for love and tolerates any abuse from the part of her husband whom she depends on. Gender is not considered to be a parallel to race. On the contrary, these two social burdens are explored on the basis of intersectionality. The analysis of the means of facilitating the normative ideals is stressed throughout the whole interpretative chapter. Subsequently, possible liberalization of the protagonists

is focused on in relation to the movement of Chicana feminists, who have subverted the traditional imagery, and hence acquired political agency. Inasmuch as Cisneros's work relies chiefly on the specific context, the explanation of culturally specific myths and traditions is provided through Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and other secondary sources.

Key words: gender, performativity, Chicana feminism, power, discourse, agency, kinship

Abstrakt

Záměr této bakalářské práce je dvojitý – jednak vyložit teorii performativního genderu tak, jak ji formuluje Judith Butlerová, jednak na jejím základě analyzovat povídky Sandry Cisnerosové. Primárními zdroji jsou *Gender Trouble* a *Bodies That Matter* od Butlerové a *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* od Cisnerosové. Mezi doplňující primární zdroje se řadí *Dohlížet a trestat* od Michela Foucaulta, „Signatura událost kontext“ od Jacquese Derridy, *Antigone's Claim* od Butlerové a *Borderlands* od Glorie Anzaldúy. Už samostatný výběr zdrojů poukazuje na interdisciplinární charakter metodického aparátu. V práci se střetávají feministické teorie, filosofie jazyka, kritika diskurzivní moci a literární analýza, což pramení ze širokého záběru, který volí sama Butlerová. Jednotlivé primární zdroje tedy posouvají práci různými směry. V *Gender Trouble* se Butlerová zevrubně zabývá obecně tím, co je gender a dekonstruuje dichotomii genderu a pohlaví. Tento argument je stěžejní ve chvíli, kdy Butlerová odmítá platnost tvrzení, že klasifikace na bázi pohlaví je čistě biologicky daná. V *Bodies That Matter*, kde Butler navazuje na výše zmíněná díla od Foucaulta a Derridy, se přesvědčivěji rýsuje pojetí performativního genderu, Butlerová totiž zdůrazňuje, že reprezentace je také produktivní a že diskurzivní moc operuje a působí na těla a skrze těla. Butlerová tedy poodhaluje mechanismy zachovávání mocenských struktur jako opakované soubory způsobů jednání, které vystupují pod maskou reprezentace stabilních kulturních norem či hodnot.

V *Bodies That Matter* se Butlerová také věnuje schopnosti jednat politicky z postavení na okraji společnosti. Konkrétně se soustředí na skupiny a jednotlivce spadající pod označení „queer,“ na obecnější rovině je však její argumentace založená právě na společenské hierarchii a z ní pramenícího útlaku těch, kteří se pohybují na okrajích nebo za hranicemi normativních ideálů. A právě tato charakteristika je společná všem postavám v povídkách Cisnerosové. V interpretační části je také využit intersekční přístup, který zdůrazňuje nutnost vykládat gender i rasu v bodě, kde se protínají, tj. jako dvě břemena působící náraz, ne jako paralely. Chicanas - Američanky mexického původu – vyrůstají v rodinách, které jsou jako takové ve znevýhodněné pozici z důvodů rasy, chudoby a nedostatečného vzdělání. Problematické je ale i jejich postavení v rodině, vyrůstají totiž v kultuře, která schvaluje

násilí na ženách a zároveň po ženách vyžaduje, aby nebyly ničím jiným než matkami bez vlastních tužeb a názorů. Tyto normativní ideály jsou zkoumány především ve světle toho, jak přispívají jednotlivé mechanismy k jejich vzniku a udržení. Vzhledem k tomu, že jde o velmi specifické kulturní odkazy (náboženské ikony, popkulturní reference), je důležité některé mýty a tradice přiblížit. Z tohoto důvodu se pozornost často upírá k *Borderlands* od Glorie Anzaldúy a k některým sekundárním zdrojům. Druhá část interpretační kapitoly se pak zabývá možnou liberalizací, obzvláště pak ve vztahu k celému hnutí chicanských feministek, které se zasloužily o subverzi rolí tradičně přijímaných ve společnosti negativně a svými hlasy jednaly politicky.

Klíčová slova: gender, performativita, chicanské feministky, moc, diskurz

Contents

0. Preliminaries.....	10
1. Introduction.....	10
2. Sex/Gender Distinction Deconstructed	14
2.1 Representation Versus Production	14
2.2 The Duality of Body and Soul	17
2.3 Bodies and Power	18
3. Gender as Performance	27
3.1 How to Do Things With Words	27
3.2 Iterability, Mark, Rupture.....	30
3.3 Performative and the Categories of Sex	33
3.4 Political Agency.....	36
4. Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories.....	41
4.1 Childhood of the “Mericans”	42
4.2 Chicana’s Sexuality Within Kinship Ties	46
4.3 Hollering.....	51
5. Conclusion.....	62
6. Bibliography.....	67
6.1 Primary literature.....	67
6.2 Secondary literature.....	67

0. Preliminaries

This thesis follows the MLA with footnotes guidelines for documentation and parenthetical citation. In accordance with that, the cited passages of prose longer than three lines are indented. All quotes in Spanish except those from primary literature and from Gloria Anzaldúa's text are translated into English by the author. The following is a list of abbreviations for the repeatedly referenced works of the primary or secondary literature.

BTM – Bodies That Matter

DP – Discipline and Punish

GT – Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity

HS – The History of Sexuality, Vol.I

WHC – Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories

1. Introduction

Judith Butler's theory offers a comprehensive notion of the correlation of gender, the oppression based on it, performative utterances, queerness, otherness, and agency. Her work, in a large way, allude to various critical works regarding discourse, psychoanalysis, feminism, and philosophy of language, and her interpretation of such works forwards the formulation of her own theory. Yet this theory of performative gender is rather general in a sense that Butler does not engage in the problems of racial otherness and the oppression of those who are disadvantaged and marginalized on the basis of both race and gender. This thesis does not treat race and gender as parallels; instead, it focuses on the correlation of the two of these in the physical and ideological landscape of Sandra Cisneros's literary work.

There are logical steps that have to be taken in order to accurately appropriate Judith Butler's theory to the aforementioned context. The deconstruction

of the sex/gender distinction is first and foremost. It allows us to reveal the potentiality of discourse and its disguise as pure representation. The main argument is that the difference between sex and gender cannot be maintained since both sex and gender are discursively constructed. Butler relates gender inequality to heteronormativity when saying that assuming “sexed positions [occurs] at the price of homosexuality or, rather, through the abjection of homosexuality”¹ Rethinking biological determinism also appertains to Butler’s affiliation with Foucault’s works. Thus, the second argument discloses the power of discourse that is invested in bodies through its normative tendencies. However, “construction not only takes place in time, but is itself temporal process which operates through reiteration of norms. Sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration.”² At this juncture, it is vital to explore the possibilities of reiteration and citation, the origin of which traces back to Austin’s concept of performative utterances. Austin and Searle provided an impulse for Derrida to underestimate the felicity of performatives and the possibility of a total context of any utterance, and to establish iterability as a structural characteristic of any mark. Through this potential iterability, even the presupposedly “unhappy” performative is a mere instance of a breaking force. Accordingly, what was originally considered a failure in terms of the effect of performative utterances is, for Butler and Derrida, that which destabilizes. Ultimately, recurring performed acts that are learnt lead to legible gender acts. Inasmuch as gender can be a basis for oppression, destabilizing gender through performance means destabilizing the prevailing power. “The iterability of performativity is a theory of agency, one that cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility.” (*GT* xxv)

We can summarize accordingly by saying that gender can be reduced to the expression of gender; ergo, gender identity “is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results,” (*GT* 34) and consequently, identities cannot be perceived in the established categories of gender or race. Therefore, the precondition for any agency is the oppression itself. The voice that comes from

¹ Judith P. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 74.

² Judith P. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011) xviii

the margins and antagonizes the centre is capable of transforming the relations of power and demonstrate that “there need not be a ‘doer behind the deed,’ but that the ‘doer is variably constructed in and through the deed.’” (GT 142) In her interpretation of Antigone’s acts and speeches, Butler clearly infers that the ability to transform the relations of power resides in voices coming from the margins that deliberately antagonize the centre.

This very assumption is central to the focus on Cisneros’ characters. The protagonists of the short stories included in *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* undergo a ubiquitous life journey from childhood to adulthood, from learning and internalizing a position in the margins to voicing out and acting on the opposition to the centre. The centre is defined as white male Anglo culture, while the margins the characters live in are formed by Mexican culture based on machismo. Theoretically, Chicana women have to live in the categories ascribed to them; the categories are given by Mexican cultural archetypes of La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, and La Llorona. The significance of these three is described in detail in the fourth chapter. Practically, it means that there are rigid roles women have to fulfill unless they are willing to be exiled in their own culture by becoming “a bad woman.” The last chapter offers a close-reading interpretation of the way various characters recognize their position and, subsequently, liberalize themselves from the oppression. The symbols for liberalizing are shouting, hollering, and laughter. That is why Cisneros employ the three archetypes of Mexican imagery. Whereas in more traditional Mexican fiction they work as role models, in the works of various Chicana feminists, the Virgin of Guadalupe is questioned, La Malinche is being identified with, and La Llorona is treated with understanding and respect.

Cisneros creates stories in which archetypes and their function are not just questioned and re-examined, but subverted, hence they work to destabilize the power relations, to the extent that the definition of a woman is formed by a set of normative rules in order for the patriarchal discursive power to prevail. The subverted imaginary, however, demystifies the enigmatic image of a “bad” liberated woman. This decoding also functions as the deciphering of taboos, such as the mystery of sexual experience and taking pleasure from it, which is very impossible and assumed wrong in the traditional

Mexican culture, yet Cisneros demonstrates how the repression of sexuality worked as a tool for justification of abuse in a patriarchal society, a premise that feminists such as de Beauvoir and Irigaray would have agreed with. The culturally and historically distinctive sets of relations, that Butler considers to be gender, shift in the course of Cisneros' collection of short stories from stable to unstable, from rigid to flexible. In other words, Butler, who focuses on the abjection of homosexual bodies, reveals the possibility of subversion of "queer" through reiterative performative acts and their potential to destabilize. On the other hand, Cisneros aims to destabilize the norms imposed on mestiza bodies, and she does so in subverting the image of La Malinche and La Llorona.

2. Sex/Gender Distinction Deconstructed

The term ‘gender’ has been discussed in feminist theories for a long time. Many theorists have been struggling to grasp this term, especially in relation to the term ‘sex.’ The distinction was made between these two terms by saying that sex is biologically given, whereas gender is socially constructed. This chapter approaches the deconstruction of this distinction that Judith Butler made, including the works of other theorists whom she found most influential and whom she gives an account for in order to articulate her own theory – Simone de Beauvoir, Gayle Rubin, Luce Irigaray, Adrienne Rich, Monique Wittig, and, finally, Michel Foucault. I will not pay attention to the biological aspects, as, for instance, Anne Fausto Sterling does in “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough.” Instead, I will argue that sex is socially constructed as well, inasmuch as it is formed by discourse and regimes of power.

2.1 Representation Versus Production

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir explores what it means to be a woman, and to what extent this mode of existence corresponds to femininity through scientific misconceptions and myths that penetrate our perception of reality. She provides an extensive analysis of myths and concludes that “each of the myths built up around the subject of woman is intended to sum her up *in toto*.”¹ The reasoning behind this assumption is that the myth of woman is unchallengeable for “it is endowed with absolute truth.”² When an actual woman stands in opposition to a prevailing assumption, she is considered not feminine. Moreover, any “conscious being (...) wishes to be essential”³ in order for the relation between such beings to function for they confirm one another’s freedom, one is recognized by the other. The reason why the myth of woman came into being as absolute truth is the male dominance, “Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him”⁴ This referentiality only has one direction; man is not defined with reference to woman. “She is defined and differentiated

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. (New York: Vintage, 1974), 286.

² de Beauvoir 286.

³ de Beauvoir 286.

⁴ de Beauvoir xviii.

with reference to man and not with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.”⁵ Butler arrives at a similar conclusion in her criticism of production that is, according to her, often disguised as representation. Power, according to Butler, has a dual function, it “produces what it claims to represent.” (GT 3) However, are women always defined as to what they lack in comparison to men?

In the chapter “The Formative Years,” Beauvoir writes what Butler, among others, finds the most inspiring: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”⁶ One way to interpret this sentence, as Butler suggests, is to go beyond the claim that Beauvoir clearly considers gender as socially constructed. Butler adds that “implied in [Beauvoir’s] formulation is an agent, who (...) could, in principle, take on some other gender.” (GT 11) Thus, there is a possible modification of the term “construction” – a cultural compulsion to become a particular gender. However, this cultural compulsion is not derived from sex. Hence, Butler draws her argument from Beauvoir, who claims that “body is a situation,”⁷ which is a step towards sex/gender distinction deconstruction, since “sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, (...) has been gender all along.” (GT 11) Thus, there is no pregendered person, “a bearer of various essential or nonessential attributes.” (GT 14) Rather, gender should be viewed in its relations and contexts, by which it is determined, “as a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations.” (GT 14)

There is quite a contradictory opinion on the question of the representation of the relations between masculine and feminine. Luce Irigaray claims that it is rather the structure of representation that lacks something. Irigaray concludes that the sexual imaginary is only made to represent men due to the existing economy, where woman’s “pleasure is denied by a civilization that privileges phallogormorphism.”⁸ Therefore,

⁵ de Beauvoir xix.

⁶ de Beauvoir 301.

⁷ de Beauvoir 38.

⁸ Luce Irigaray, “The Sex Which Is Not One,” In: *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 251.

Irigaray finds the patriarchy oppressive in its exclusion of the feminine. She aims to criticize many aspects or tendencies of our culture, such as the predominance of the visual, in which woman's "sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*,"⁹ the repressed female imaginary, in which "the other sex (...) is only the indispensable complement to the only sex,"¹⁰ "the linearity of a project," "the goal-object of a desire," "the polarization toward a single pleasure," and "the fidelity to a single discourse."¹¹ Thus, as Irigaray points out, it is not possible to represent the relations between masculine and feminine. The signifying economy makes it impossible, inasmuch as "the masculine constitutes the closed circle of signifier and signified" (*GT* 15). Hence, what has to be taken into account is gender asymmetry, within which the subject is always masculine.

The problem is, then, is the duality of women and men maintained by essentialists truly valid? Is there any feminine specificity regardless of what gender intersects with? As Butler mentions, the problem with what Irigaray and de Beauvoir establish as representation is the notion that sex is a substance, an identification of oneself. Hence, these views merge representation and existence together through what Butler calls "a performative twist of language and/or discourse." (*GT* 140) Accordingly, first there is a gender identity of women, then there are political interests of the group that represents itself as such. The existential theories of the self deny the discursive power, the productive power of representation; they claim that subjects are not constituted by discourse. In his analysis of representation, Mitchell points out that "if something stands for something it does so by the virtue of social agreement."¹² Moreover, Mitchell concludes that even aesthetic representation demonstrates restrictions that are produced by society. Hence, representation "can never be completely divorced from political and ideological questions."¹³ Representation is neither a mirroring of identity nor substance. On the contrary, it is a performance that reflects social codes (as well as actors are tied to the script).

⁹ Irigaray 250.

¹⁰ Irigaray 252.

¹¹ Irigaray 253.

¹² W.J.T. Mitchell, "Representation." In: *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, eds. Frank Lentricchia, Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13.

¹³ Mitchell 15.

2.2 *The Duality of Body and Soul*

In order to complete the argument that sex is also socially constructed, it is vital to consider the investment of the body as such. “Construction” has been debated upon in relation to a passive body which is usually a medium that adopts the cultural inscriptions. Butler mentions two terms often related to passive bodies – medium or instrument. This view allows for the argument that there is a certain incorporeal gender that invigorates the passive material instrument. However, Butler rejects what de Beauvoir maintains – the duality of body and soul. Butler asks, “how are we to find the body which pre-exists its cultural interpretation? If gender is the corporealization of choice, and the acculturation of the corporeal, then what is left of nature?”¹⁴ The answer can be found in Butler’s interpretation of *Being and Nothingness*, where Sartre says: “My body is a point of departure which I am and which at the same time I surpass.”¹⁵ Even though it makes an explicit distinction between body and self, and in various parts Sartre emphasizes the instrumentality of bodies, Butler interprets this step as a “subversive paradox [that] consists in the fact that the body itself is a surpassing.”¹⁶ As a result, gender is something one can become in order to “exist one’s body in culturally concrete terms.”¹⁷

To retain the mind/body dualism means to preserve the sex and gender dichotomy as well and thus to think gender as merely superimposed on sex; however, sex cannot exist or be thought of outside the discourse. Henceforth, sex too is located within discourse, and is yet another effect of discourse produced by gender. Does this leave corporeality solely in the realm of discourse? When taking into account Foucaultian notion of power, highlighted hereinbelow, that which is materialized is necessarily invested with power. “Materiality (...) is power in its formative or constituting effects” (*BTM* 9). When Foucault elucidates on what soul and other terms similar to it, such as psyche, subjectivity, personality, etc. are, he claims that “the soul is the effect and

¹⁴ Judith P. Butler, “Variations on Sex and Gender: Beauvoir, Wittig, and Foucault” In: *Praxis International*. January 5, 1986, No. 4, pp. 505-516. p. 505.

¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 350

¹⁶ Butler (1986) 507.

¹⁷ Butler (1986) 507.

instrument of a political anatomy” (*DP* 30). Materiality and soul are operative mechanisms of power and discourse. Body purports language while language is “not the blank slate or a passive medium upon which the psyche acts, but, rather, the constitutive demand that mobilizes psychic actions from the start.” (*BTM* 37) Accordingly, when Butler asks “are bodies purely discursive?” (*BTM* 37) she claims that body is inescapably representational:

every effort to refer to materiality takes place through a signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material. In this sense, then, language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified. (*BTM* 37-38)

This claim is groundbreaking in a sense that it breaks the feminist ties with biological determinism, since it rethinks the corporeal body as an effect of representation and, in so doing, renders materiality the quality of a transformative activity.

Butler also declares that the above mentioned Cartesian view of the self has facilitated (gender) hierarchy and psychic subordination for many reasons. Firstly, throughout history, women have been associated with bodies, whereas men have been associated with mind. In *Bodies That Matter* Butler elucidates this further by saying that femininity has been associated with materiality because “when not explicitly associated with reproduction, matter is generalized as a principle of origination and causality.” (*BTM* 7) Secondly, women’s bodies are either marked negatively (or by a lack), or marked off (as Irigaray would suggest).

2.3 Bodies and Power

How exactly the duality of body and soul facilitates a gender hierarchy and how we explain the binary oppositions of genders/sexes can be demonstrated in

Michel Foucault's concept of docile bodies. Firstly, Foucault analyses gender hierarchy in terms of exercising the power and its binary organization. He also rejects that sex be based on natural predisposition and claims that "the deployment of sexuality (...) established the notion of sex."¹⁸ He does believe that there is an innate liberated part of our sexuality, however, this *eros* is suffused with the power dictate. This idea of culturally and politically constrained choice is similar to the above mentioned cultural compulsion. Moreover, Foucault claims that

the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together (...) anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning (...). Sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified.
(*HS* 154)

On that account, bodies are invested in creating social hierarchy and problems that arise from the non-conformity of the prescribed manhood or womanhood.

2.3.1 Gender and Sexuality

Secondly, Foucault makes a clear connection between sex/gender system and sexuality. We can see how the compulsory heterosexuality and the binary oppositions of gender are tied together even in Monique Wittig's, Adrienne Rich's, and Gayle Rubin's writings. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault unravels the power of discourse in terms of sexuality. It is the discourse that has the power of normativity. Qualification of perversion that brought about the sense of pleasure and power reveals itself for instance in establishing a new category of perverts in the 19th century medical discourse – homosexuals. However, it is the establishment of the category of sex and its

¹⁸ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality, Vol.I.: The Will to Knowledge*. (London: Penguin, 1998), 154.

politicization that utilizes the exercising of power, power being a set of relations that exists wherever an individual is placed in the midst of social relations, and wherever desire is claimed to be the drive. Therefore, what we perceive as innate is always already constricted by social relations. This is also the claim of Adrienne Rich in “The Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” that focuses on a ‘woman-identified experience.’ She calls for (in Foucauldian words) a genealogy of a lesbian continuum and vouches for not only revaluing what we perceive as our desire, but also for the revolution in gender hierarchy through lesbianism. Thus, the subversion of heterosexuality would, according to Rich, dissolve the gender oppression on women. In sum, heterosexuality is naturalized through the production of gender power relations, and in effect it imposes cultural constraints on our sexuality and allows for the trafficking of women.

Compulsory heterosexuality, or in the term that Butler uses – “heterosexual matrix,” has its parallel in Wittig’s “heterosexual contract,” a practice of heterosexuality that facilitates binary oppositions of sexes and a stable distinction between sex and gender. Wittig is another theorist opposed to feminist essentialist doctrine. She claims that “we have been compelled in our bodies and our minds to correspond feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us.”¹⁹ Wittig offers a parallel myth of the naturalness of sex and its implications – the racial immediate given:

Race, exactly like sex, is taken as an ‘immediate given,’ ‘a sensible given,’ ‘physical features,’ ‘belonging to a natural order’. But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an ‘imaginary formation,’ which reinterprets physical features through the network of relationships in which they are perceived.²⁰

¹⁹ Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born a Woman” In: *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 309.

²⁰ Wittig 311.

She also claims that this natural order is in other words a ‘heterosexual contract’; when renouncing being heterosexual, one is also asked to refuse being a man or a woman. Particularly for lesbians, Wittig continues, this means the loss of one’s political purpose in the prevalent patriarchy. Hence, both Rich and Wittig envision the overthrowing of heterosexuality as a norm in order for both sexual liberation and gender equality. However, Wittig aims further – “to destroy woman.”²¹ Nonetheless, she vouches for destroying the cluster of social relations and language that marks woman as servitude to a man, and for getting rid of “woman” as a political signifier.

2.3.2 Kinship and Sexuality

Another explanation of the creation of gender is offered in Gayle Rubin’s “Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex”. She often alludes to Claude Lévi-Strauss and the notion of kinship. The very essence of kinship lies in the exchange of women between men. What establishes this exchange is the whole concept of gift-giving among men, which creates debts on the other side. Hence, marriage is an acquisition of women in exchange for political alliance. As a result, an asymmetric power-relationship is established, in which men are givers and women represent gifts. Consequently, children are engraved with the conventions of sex and gender, they associate certain social values with a certain gender – girls, for instance, thus internalize the realization of lower social status allied to the female existence. This internalization results in passivity. Altogether, this creates a vicious circle of male dominance. However, there would be no kinship if the Oedipal phase that divides sexes did not take place. Thus, Rubin envisions the kinship structure that subjugates women to be overthrown. Moreover, the kinship system’s byproduct is compulsory heterosexuality. However, what she emphasizes is that the locus of the oppression of women and sexual minorities itself lies in the established sex/gender system. The sex gender system is where the biological sexuality is culturalized, it is “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed

²¹ Wittig 310.

sexual needs are satisfied.”²² Such a transformation happens through social forces rather than the biological ones. She also points out that the problem of psychoanalytical studies of the sex/gender system lies in the fact that they observe already enculturated subjects.

In the “Preface” to *Gender Trouble* Butler says that “the idea that sexual practice has the power to destabilize gender emerged from [her] reading of Gayle Rubin’s *The Traffic in Women*.” (GT xi) She elaborates by assuming that “one is a woman (...) to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual *frame*.” (GT xi) This claim is fundamental for any further discussions since it introduces the performativity of gender. The above mentioned functioning embraces both the acts of gender and an idea of gender, by which the society interprets the acts of individuals and classifies them into a gender role. The crucial statement that develops this theory is that “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time.”²³ Butler suggests rewriting Rubin’s essay “within a Foucaultian frame,” (GT 98) which implies a historically situated analysis of gender oppression that takes into account the instability of relations. Even though in *The History of Sexuality* Foucault too assumes that relations of sex were systematized into kinship ties, he points out that such mechanism was substituted, or rather extended since the relations it is based on are subject to change. Foucault calls this systematization of relations of sex *the deployment of alliance*, an apparatus that is based on stable oppositions of what is and what is not permitted and in modern state was replaced with a more fluid *deployment of sexuality*. Both of these political mechanisms involve the connection to sexual partners. Foucault distinguishes between these two systems as follows:

The deployment of alliance is built around a system of rules defining the permitted and the forbidden, the licit and the illicit, whereas the deployment of sexuality operates according to mobile,

²² Rubin, Gayle, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." In: *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review, 1975) 159.

²³ Judith P. Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” In: *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 406.

polymorphous, and contingent techniques of power. The deployment of alliance has as one of its chief objectives to reproduce the interplay of relations and maintain the law that governs them; the deployment of sexuality, on the other hand, engenders a continual extension of areas and forms of control. (HS 106)

The difference can be also made quite clearly by distinguishing the focus; the deployment of alliance relates to social bodies and its main focus is procreation, whilst the deployment of sexuality is clearly focused on the corporeal bodies.

2.3.3 Bio-power

Foucault makes a further argument regarding body and sexuality as the direct locus of social control. The supposedly “natural” disguises the productivity of power in relation to sexuality. This is a claim that Butler explicitly supports in her analysis of productive representation. However, the question is, what maintains these phenomena of compulsory heterosexuality and gender hierarchy. This is further explained in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault traces the beginnings of the discursive power to the 17th century, when modern tendencies of investing social bodies politically gave rise to a juridico-medical apparatus of the state. Foucault introduces an influential term “bio-power”, the management of social bodies, of lives of individuals existing in a group. Bio-power is an essential feature of capitalism representing a power over life. The first pole that forms this power is “centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility.” (HS 139) In other words, the basis of bio-power lies in the discipline. The second pole is, according to Foucault, the focus on “the body infused with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes.” (HS 139) Nevertheless, the crucial feature of these two poles is that they are supervised, intervened and regulated. In sum, bio-power is arranged properly due to both discipline of the body and regulations of the population. Another step to the assimilation of these two principles was institutionalization of discipline (schools, armies).

One of the most important arrangements of the coordination of power “that would go to make up the great technology of power in the 19th century [was therefore] the deployment of sexuality.” (HS 140) Subsequently, capitalism is based on “the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment (...) to economic processes.” (HS 141) Thus, political existence considers the biological and knowledge takes control over them while power intervenes. What also arises from the emergence of bio-power is “the action of the norm.” (HS 144) As Foucault claims, when power needs to be in charge over life, regulatory and corrective mechanisms over materialized bodies are required. Thus, the discursive norms are facilitated through the discipline, through the docile bodies. Anybody can control and can be controlled at the same time.

2.3.4 Docile Bodies

In his work *Discipline and Punish* Michel Foucault analyses the creation of “an individuality that is endowed with four characteristics: it is cellular (by the play of spatial distribution), it is organic (by the coding of activities), it is genetic (by the accumulation of time), it is combinatory (by the composition of forces)”²⁴ through discipline. Regular interventions are imposed on bodies;

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures and its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. (*DP* 138)

Hence, docile bodies are forced to become parts of the mechanism of power of modern state. Exercising of the power that will be a significant notion in the course of this thesis is later defined as

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage, 1977), 167.

that technique by which one imposes on the body tasks that are both repetitive and different, but always graduated (...); [it] makes possible a perpetual characterization of the individual either in relation to this term, in relation to other individuals, or in relation to a type of itinerary. (*DP* 161)

Foucault also makes quite clear that individuals are forced to become elements in society that are, however, easily replaceable and hardly recognizable. Each one of these elements within a disciplined society “is defined by the place it occupies in a series, and by the gap that separates it from the others.” (*DP* 145)

This notion of docile bodies was later adopted by Sarah Lee Bartky in her analysis of contemporary gender oppression mediated by the pressure on and thus compulsion of women’s bodies to express what we see as feminine. Docility, body’s “integration into systems of efficient and economic controls,” (*HS* 139) is a vital part of disciplined bodies that has the control over their emanation in space. In her study “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” Sarah Lee Bartky discusses the strategy of beauty-related advertising and its relation to the contemporary construction of a feminine body. Bartky observes features, such as the requirement to “exhibit a certain eroticism restrained by modesty,”²⁵ that are presented as ideal to femininity and also represent women as “docile and compliant companions of men.”²⁶ Bartky elaborates on the feminine motility and bodily acts; as a result of docile compliance, “women are trained to smile more than men.”²⁷ This particular bodily act reveals itself even in places such as a workplace since “many typical women’s jobs (...) require the worker to fix a smile on her face.”²⁸ Moreover, this can also be taken as a sign of a social hierarchy due to the observed fact that “higher-status individuals

²⁵ Sarah Lee Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” In: *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 135.

²⁶ Bartky 143.

²⁷ Bartky 135.

²⁸ Bartky 135.

(...) are smiled at by their inferiors more than they are observed to smile in return.”²⁹ In terms of motility, women’s and men’s ideal spacial disposition is also striking. Not only is there a distasteful reaction to female bodies larger than the normative size, but there are restriction as to the extension of one’s body into space. Woman’s “space is not a field (...) but an enclosure,”³⁰“the ‘loose woman’ violates the norms [of being positioned].”³¹ Once a woman conforms to these norms, it is viewed as an achievement. However, violation of these norms results in social restrictions and loss of social benefits. The docility and discipline lies in the internalization of the “patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability.”³² Therefore, when bodies do not conform, they are neither hurt nor imprisoned; the minds are changed through internalization of norms. As Bartky mentions, we are reminded of Panopticon, where the gaze is internalized, and thus the possibility of being observed leads the potentially observed to police themselves.

This is a particularly interesting moment for Butler. What we see as expressing feminine or masculine can be commented upon in terms of discursive practices that are internalized. At the same time, this internalization and self-policing diminishes the possibilities for the choice of gender. Thus, what is left of identity is an effect rather than a foundation. First, there are social norms such as heterosexual restrictions, binary gender oppositions and gender ideas working under the regimes of power (the management of lives). Consequently, the process of identity formation is always already determined by these.

²⁹ Bartky 141.

³⁰ Bartky 134.

³¹ Bartky 134.

³² Bartky 145.

3. Gender as Performance

Butler's vital contribution to feminism and queer studies is based on proclaiming that gender is a performative act. In order to explain this theory, we have to trace the theory of performative utterances back to its origin, to J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things With Words*. As means to grasp Butler's theory it is necessary to foreshadow the concept of iterativity through the work of Jacques Derrida. Derrida's criticism of Austin leads to apprehending Butler's theory, especially when understood in connection with Althusserian notion of interpellation.

3.1 *How to Do Things With Words*

Austin's lectures do not establish any complex theory. Yet, the importance lies in the assumption that a 'statement' can do more than just describe or state. Austin goes against the traditional division of statements, according to which statements can only be true or false. For the conventional statements, Austin proposes the word 'constatives.' On the contrary, utterances that do not merely describe or state, but for which it is possible that by saying something we are doing something, are called illocutionary acts. In order to not confuse the act of saying something with the act in saying something, Austin distinguishes between locutionary and illocutionary acts, illocutionary acts being the target of his lectures, locutionary act being almost equal to what is traditionally called "meaning," that is "uttering certain sentence with a certain sense and reference."¹ As opposed to that, "illocutionary act is a conventional act: an act done as conforming to a convention."² The third type of speech acts are perlocutionary acts, which is "what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something."³

Performatives, then, form a specific type of illocutionary acts. Austin describes

¹ J. L. Austin. *How to Do Things With Words*. Ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975) 108.

² Austin 105.

³ Austin 108.

the conditions of performatives such that “the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something.”⁴ In short, to utter a sentence is to do it. Austin then elaborates and emphasizes that performative utterance is almost never the sole thing necessary to perform an act since appropriate circumstances are essential for a performative to succeed.

This is related to what Austin calls “happy functioning of a performative.”⁵ Since performatives cannot be valued on the basis of their truthfulness, he makes a distinction between happy/felicitous and unhappy/infelicitous performatives as established in the so-called the doctrine of Infelicities. Nonetheless, the very first condition a performative has to fulfill to bring the action is that “there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect.”⁶ This conventionality has to be supported by “the particular people and circumstances in a given case.”⁷ If one of the aforementioned requirements is not met, the performative is nothing but a *Misinvoation*. Unless “the procedure [is] executed by its participants both correctly and completely,”⁸ the term for it is *Misexecution*. This also includes the fact that the act has to be accepted by its addressee, it has to be unilateral. It is also possible that performatives are not happy because one of the participants, or the speaker, was not sincere in his or her intentions, which means that the act was professed, but carries no meaning, or that the intentions themselves were not put into effect. Austin calls such utterances *Abuses*, the only cases of inner failure, thus infelicity of a performative. Contrariwise, externally unhappy performatives can generally be called *Misfires*. In the frequent example of a wedding ceremony, Austin demonstrates that circumstances altogether with the speaker’s intention can deprecate a performative into a parasitic utterance, such as for instance when the wedding is staged, after which the actors are not wedded. Accordingly, performatives in fiction or literature in general are hollow too, they are etiolated, unless the context is absolutely proper. Searle makes a slightly different notion of parasites determined, rather, by intentions. No matter what the context

⁴ Austin 5

⁵ Austin 14.

⁶ Austin 14.

⁷ Austin 15.

⁸ Austin 15.

is, the utterance which is not meant seriously is parasitic. The notion of parasitic utterances and their context are crucial points of Derrida's interpretation and criticism. Notwithstanding, it is vital to briefly mention Searle's appropriation of speech acts.

In "Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language, Searle claims that speech acts "are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication,"⁹ for it is a "production or issuance of a sentence token under certain conditions,"¹⁰ not a symbol, word or sentence or the token of any of it itself. According to Searle, there is an illocutionary force that determines any illocutionary act. Its indicators are devices such as word order, stress, or intonation. "Often, in actual speech, the context will make it clear what the illocutionary force of the utterance is, without its being necessary to invoke the appropriate explicit illocutionary force indicator."¹¹ The illocutionary force can include certain intentions, which is on what Searle builds up his theory. We can only understand speaker's utterance when we recognize his intentions. Consequently, if I am a speaker, I "achieve the intended effect on the hearer by getting him to recognize my intention to achieve that effect"¹² When this logical step is transposed on the illocutionary acts, "we succeed in doing what we are trying to do by getting our audience to recognize what we are trying to do."¹³ The question of the insincere promise, that Austin would call an *Abuse*, makes the whole act insincere for the speaker does not take responsibility for having the intention. A sentence has to have a meaning based on the aforementioned recognition. Yet, it must respect language rules and conventions.

Additionally, when performing an illocutionary act, there are rules that either "regulate a pre-existing activity, an activity whose existence is logically independent of the rules,"¹⁴ (regulative rules, which can be summarized as imperatives) or "constitute (and also regulate) an activity the existence of which is logically dependent on the rules."¹⁵ The latter type, constitutive rules, specify behaviour. As it follows, Searle

⁹ Searle, John. "Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language." (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 16.

¹⁰ Searle 16.

¹¹ Searle 30.

¹² Searle 43.

¹³ Searle 47.

¹⁴ Searle 34.

¹⁵ Searle 34.

deduces that

the semantic structure of a language may be regarded as a conventional realization of a series of sets of underlying constitutive rules, and ... speech acts are acts characteristically performed by uttering expressions in accordance with these sets of constitutive rules.¹⁶

This set of rules includes sincerity of the utterance, a commitment to the truth, and generally the belief in the truth, the evidence of which can be provided by the speaker, however, the truth cannot be obvious to both participants of the communication.

3.2 *Iterability, Mark, Rupture*

Derrida complicates the notion of context that is put forward by both Austin and Searle for “a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated.”¹⁷ Moreover, Derrida assumes that up to an infinite number of new contexts can arise owing to the potential of every sign to be cited, duplicated, to be reiterated. There is a limitless number of contexts for citing a word. If we consider writing, characterized by the absence of any addressee, we have to recognize the fact that “representation supplants presence,”¹⁸

A written sign ... is a mark that subsists, one which does not exhaust itself in the moment of its inscription and which can give rise to an iteration in the absence and beyond the presence

¹⁶ Searle 37.

¹⁷ Derrida, Jacques. “Signature Event Context.” *Limited Inc.* Ed. Gerald Graff. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 3.

¹⁸ Derrida 5.

of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it.¹⁹

Signs have their signifying form because they are iterable, because a mark carries a force that allows it to break with its context²⁰, which is tied to spacing, which distinguishes the sign from the rest by isolating it from the other signs. And thus, writing becomes the representation of representation, yet the representative structure, which indicates the relation idea/sign, is not transformed. Yet, “[t]he possibility of repeating and thus of identifying the marks is implicit in every code, making it into a network that is communicable, transmittable, decipherable, iterable.”²¹ In other words, marks can be cited in an infinite number of settings. The inherent iterability establishes the unity of the signifying form. Every mark can be separated from its referent/signified. By this separation, “the nonpresent *remainder* of a differential mark [is] cut off from its putative ‘production’ or origin.”²²

Derrida then calls to attention the redundancy of the dichotomy of normal/abnormal function of a mark. He points out that the iterability of a mark is never abnormal, because it is a function without which there would be no supposedly normal function, while there is no meaning of any utterance that can be established as primary. This brings him to the difference between perlocution, locution, and illocution as established by Austin. He assumes that speech acts are approached as acts of communication, but not through the transference of a thought-content. Speech acts appear to be “the communication of an original movement, (...) an operation and the production of an effect.”²³ According to Derrida, utterance that is performative “does not have its referent (...) outside of itself or, in any event, before or in front of itself. It does not describe something that exists outside of language and prior to it. It produces or transforms a situation, it effects.”²⁴ Thus, Derrida sees the main difference between a performative and a constative utterance in the possibility to constitute its

¹⁹ Derrida 9.

²⁰ Also mentioned as “breaking force” or “a force of rupture”

²¹ Derrida 8.

²² Derrida 10.

²³ Derrida 13.

²⁴ Derrida 13.

internal structure, performative is an utterance and an event at the same time.

Additionally, he questions the necessity of proper circumstance and sincerity in a specific example given by Austin, in which we are to understand any utterance. As it can be shown in the above mentioned example, even though actors are not wedded by the actor, who plays the priest, the characters are. Thus, the performative is not parasitic. Derrida arrives to a conclusion that we cannot possibly distinguish successful and parasitic performatives, or supposedly ordinary speech from the parasitic. “What Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, ‘non-serious,’ citation (on stage, in a poem, soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a ‘successful’ performative.”²⁵ It is inevitable that performatives are repeated since iterability is its structural characteristic. However, the total context that Austin examined is what Derrida remarks to be an unescapable unity of meaning, with all the speakers, their intentions, grammatical aspects, etc. Thus, an infelicity of a performative is a structural possibility of a language.

Derrida also takes into account Austin’s and Searle’s concept of parasitic utterances that is based almost entirely on author’s intention. He clarifies that, in their concept, intention organizes the centre of performatives, however the absence or presence of intentions is hard to determine in texts or utterances, consequently, it can hardly be taken as an indicator of parasitism.

Derrida argues that the binding power that Austin attributes to the speaker’s intention in such illocutionary acts is more properly attributable to a citational force of the speaking, the iterability that establishes the authority of the speech act, but which establishes the non-singular character of that act. In this sense, every ‘act’ is an echo or citational chain, and it is its citationality that constitutes its performative force. (*BTM* 214)

²⁵ Derrida 17.

In sum, citationality is excluded in Austin's concept of performatives, yet it is a structural sign of a performative utterance, for, as Austin claims, it must conform to a convention. However, he only observes conventions in form of circumstances, its context. Yet, as it was mentioned earlier, a context is innumerable and does not form a centre of communication.

The opposition of success/failure in illocution and in perlocution thus seems quite insufficient and extremely secondary. It presupposes a general and systematic elaboration of the structure of locution that would avoid an endless alternation of an essence and accident.²⁶

3.3 Performative and the Categories of Sex

Butler speaks of Austin's concept of performative utterances in terms of the difference between instrumental and transitive, she opposes the distinction that Austin establishes, that the words are not the acts themselves.

According to the perlocutionary view, words are instrumental to the accomplishment of actions, but they are not themselves the actions which they help to accomplish. This form of the performative suggests that the words and the things done are in no sense the same. But according to [Austin's] view of the illocutionary speech act, the name performs *itself*, and in the course of that performing becomes a thing done; the pronouncement is the act of speech at the same time it is the speaking of an act.²⁷

²⁶ Derrida 15.

²⁷ Judith Butler, "Burning Acts: Injurious Speech." In: eds. A. Parker, E. Kosofsky/Sedgwick: *Performativity and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 197-227, 198.

Butler's theory – derived rather from Derrida's interpretation of Austin than Austin's lectures – is based on performativity as “not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.” (*GT* xv) The naturalization has already been discussed in the previous chapter; Butler states that the supposed naturalness is “constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex.” (*GT* xxxi) The effects on bodies altogether with the regulatory practices, as described in the previous chapter by the power of discourse to represent and produce demonstrate how power is invested in and exercised upon bodies:

Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish* that the ‘soul’ becomes a normative and normalizing ideal according to which the body is trained, shaped, cultivated, and invested; it is an historically specific imaginary ideal under which the body is effectively materialized.
(*BTM* 9)

Therefore, when we say that gender is performative, what we mean is saying firstly, that gender is the effect of acting, the implication or reiterative utterances materialized in bodies, “every act is itself a recitation, the citing of a prior chain of acts which are implied in a present act and which perpetually drain any ‘present’ act of its presentness,” (*BTM* 187) and secondly, that there is no “normal gender” as opposed to drags, for the number of contexts for gender acting is limitless, and the idea of the primary gender as a primary meaning is unattainable. The latter assumption is the reason why Butler preoccupies herself extensively with drag, which in terms of performative utterances can be considered as the etiolated, hollow performative. In their “Introduction” to *Performativity and Performance*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker gather all the definitions of “etiolation” available in Merriam-Webster dictionary, for the term abounds in Austin's lectures. Their conclusion is as follows:

What is so surprising, in a thinker otherwise strongly resistant to moralism, is to discover the pervasiveness with which the excluded theatrical is hereby linked with the perverted, the artificial, the unnatural, the abnormal, the decadent, the effete, the diseased.(...) [The] performative has thus been from its inception already infected with queerness.²⁸

In terms of performativity, Butler also transcends Austin's concept of performatives by enriching it with the concept of social repressions that stems from Althusserian concept of interpellation and reprimand. "The reprimand does not merely repress or control the subject, but forms a crucial part of the juridical and social *formation* of the subject," (*BTM* 81-82) says Butler when commenting upon Althusser's notion of interpellation on the example of hailing – the call initiated by police, which "is formative, if not performative, precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject." (*BTM* 82) The connection of speech acts with repressive interpellations enables Butler to describe a gendered body as a subject for that body has already been exposed and acknowledged in the social realm for such a constitution of a subject is a ritual, it is a constantly repeated phenomenon that functions as interpellation. Thus, there is no pre-gendered body, or rather a pre-discursive substance of no cultural inscriptions, body is always a determined subject. "There is no gender identity behind expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." (*GT* 34) When we say that gender is performative, we are also saying that it constitutes the identity it seeks to signify. "The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body." (*GT* xv) There are acts and gestures and cultural practices that are performative because they create an identity, a gendered body.

²⁸ E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, Andrew Parker: *Performativity and Performance*. Essays from the English Institute. (London:Routledge, 1995), 5.

The two chapters allow us to define gender as a performance and thus tackle the idea of disobedience or rebellion. “Merleau-Ponty maintains not only that the body is an historical idea but a set of possibilities to be continually realized. In claiming that the body is an historical idea, Merleau-Ponty means that it gains its meaning through a concrete and historically mediated expression in the world.”²⁹ The historicity of a body in relation to gender is necessary to mention. If gender is a performance, then we cannot think it as a stable set of gestures and acts. On the contrary, these gestures and acts are subject to change in order to be understood as expected within a specific scope of intelligibility³⁰, “the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative.” (GT 34)

3.4 Political Agency

What remains to be discussed is the question of political agency. A performative gender is based on a premise that it arises from and epitomizes a power regime, a prevailing discourse. Agency is “located within the possibility of a variation on (...) repetition.” (GT 199). Can one ever fully intentionally originate one’s gender? If there is a self out of the system of compulsory heterosexuality, for instance, how can it assert its own self in a language that does not enable its possibility? Butler claims that “the power of language to work on bodies is both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond that oppression.” (GT 158)

The answer can again be found in the fact that a subject is historically situated. Firstly, we can consider power and norms as being similar to what de Beauvoir claims to be the absolute truth, the myth of woman. “‘In the domain of sentiments,’ writes Gide, ‘the real is not distinguished from the imaginary.’ (...) Discrimination between

²⁹ Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-31. JSTOR. Web. 30 May 2013. <<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0192-2882%28198812%2940%3A4%3C519%3APAAGCA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C>>. p.521.

³⁰ Butler elaborates on this by saying that “the historicity of discourse implies the way in which history is constitutive of discourse itself. It is not simply that discourses are located *in* histories, but that they have their own constitutive historical character. Historicity is a term which directly implies the constitutive character of history in discursive practice, that is, a condition in which it is produced and becomes legible.” (BTM 214)

imaginary and the real can be made only through behaviour.”³¹ Secondly, any given context implies social norms. Norms and conventions are iterative, and through an iterative agency, it is possible to achieve subversion. “If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility”³² Body is not a given, it is produced by a discourse. Thus, the understanding of the effect of norms on oneself, can bring about their transformation. Such a struggle and rebellion against the norms concern both ideology and body in a particular historical context.

However, social transformation through discourse could be rather problematic. At one point, Butler resorts to Irigaray’s account of political economy when Foucault’s concept of discursive power is not sufficient. She asks,

does Foucault’s effort to work the notions of discourse and materiality through one another fail to account for not only what is *excluded* from the economies of discursive intelligibility that he describes, but what *has to be excluded* for those economies to function as self-sustaining systems? (*BTM* 10)

Put differently, what if the desired not only stands out of the domain of intelligibility, but is in fact so incompatible with the prevailing economy that it is excluded, thus unthinkable?

As it was mentioned earlier, the body is not a given, but, rather a transformative activity. “Construction not only takes place in time, but is itself temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms. Sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration.” (*BTM* 9) The temporal movement can be done when stepping out of the field of intelligibility, and then act against power, discourse, and law. Nonetheless, exiting the domain of what is thinkable and intelligible does not mean

³¹ de Beauvoir 291.

³² Judith P. Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge 2004), 3.

liberating oneself from social persecution, as can be demonstrated in first, the Antigone's character Butler elaborates on, and second, the heroines of Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*.

In *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*, Butler preoccupies intensely with agency and its effects, and it is precisely this analysis that couples kinship ties and performativity with political agency. She approaches *Antigone* with regards to the previous interpretations of Hegel's, Lacan's, and Irigaray's. The attention is drawn to upsetting "the vocabulary of kinship that is the precondition of the human."³³ In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler has already established that "power operates successfully by constituting an object domain, a field of intelligibility" (10). Antigone, who stands on the margins in the first place as the daughter of Oedipus due to an unintelligible set of kinship ties and her sex, demonstrates how the vocabulary of kinship and the vocabulary of gender are interrelated. "She can hardly be representing the living and intact family, and it is unclear what structures of kinship she represents"³⁴ The very first questions arise. What is Antigone's claim? How does Antigone subvert her and Creon's gender roles through performance, and what are the implications of that act? What does her death mean?

In relation to gender and performance, Butler assumes that "in speaking to him [Creon] she becomes manly; in being spoken to, he is unmanned, and so neither maintains their position within gender and the disturbance of kinship appears to destabilize gender throughout the play."³⁵ Creon's self-assertion is threatened following Antigone's speech, whereas Antigone is empowered. Antigone is in full control of her defiant speech. In so doing, the act of rebellion shifts the position of the one, who was burdened with kinship ties and gender roles, hence on the margins, to the centre of the plot.

With respect to kinship, what seems to bear the utmost importance in Hegel's and Lacan's interpretation is that it is not social, but a natural pristine state. The supposed naturalness is "constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex." (*GT xxxi*) The premise that

³³ Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) p.82.

³⁴ Butler 2000, 89.

³⁵ Butler 2000, 10.

kinship ties are certain and incontestable makes Antigone very unintelligible, if not unthinkable. This obscurity is also supported by her gender ambivalence. She acts like a man and “in her loyalty [to Oedipus] is referred to as a ‘man’ (*aner*).”³⁶ Her claim seems to be equally enigmatic, especially for the way she admits burying her brother despite Creon’s decree. Antigone first acts by disobeying Creon’s law, subsequently she repeats her defiance in the speech. In both ways she actively dares Creon’s supreme power and asserts her self-governance. She contests

“the power of his [Creon’s] edict, which is delivered as an imperative, one that has the power to do what it says, explicitly forbidding anyone to bury that body. Antigone thus marks the illocutionary failure of Creon’s utterance, and her contestation takes the verbal form of a reassertion of sovereignty.”³⁷

All things considered, Antigone, for Irigaray, is a symbol for a feminist champion, who represents the way feminist politics should be asserted. As for Hegel, Antigone stands “for the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal role, but also for the principle of kinship,”³⁸ and her death is thus inevitable. Lacan assumes a similar position concerning Antigone’s death. Butler, however, sees Antigone as the one who confounds kinship and baffles intelligibility, ergo discloses the possibility of social transformation that would destabilize the normative accounts of kinship, inasmuch as such normative accounts marginalize those who do not fit the classification properly, and propels the way for gender oppression.

This will be particular helpful in the following chapters that demonstrate how various characters and their bodies embody their gender roles within a specific context, that is determined by kinship ties and gender oppression, and what are the implications of such turns in identity within a social framework in the stories of Sandra Cisneros. As Butler mentions in *Antigone’s Claim*, she analyzes *Antigone* and the previous

³⁶ Butler 2000, 74.

³⁷ Butler 2000, 8.

³⁸ Butler 2000, 1.

interpretation in the very end of the twentieth century,

during a time in which the family is at once idealized in nostalgic ways within various cultural forms, a time in which the Vatican protests against homosexuality not only as an assault on the family but also on the notion of the human, where to become human, for some, requires participation in the family in its normative sense.³⁹

³⁹ Butler 2000, 22.

4. Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories

In the previous chapter, Butler's affiliation with performativity, Althusserian interpellation, and Foucaultian discursive power was discussed. Power, for Butler, is at least partially discursive, and "the performative is one domain in which power acts *as* discourse" (BTM 171) and power constitutes subjects through interpellation, and an " 'I' comes into being through being called, named, interpellated." (BTM 171) Gender is what one performs, the materialization of norms through iterative mechanisms. This thesis also seeks to embrace an intersectional approach towards gender in order to grasp the experience of disenfranchised or marginalized groups or individuals. This theory was first articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who claims that a "focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination."¹ This opens up further possibilities for the elaboration and appropriation of Butler's theory. Butler herself expressed a wish not to take race and gender as analogies, but rather observe the theory of performative gender in relation to race.² In the beginning of this chapter, I will identify the context and the normative tendencies of gender ideas in relation to race and class. Following this clarification, the attention will be drawn to the way these normative ideals are facilitated. Then I will analyse the forms of oppression that are presented in the short stories. Finally, I will discuss gender rebellions or various other ways of struggling against the prevailing subordination.

The stories presented in Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* explore the subordination of women on the Mexico-US border. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* takes interest in this particular area as well, even though according to her

¹ Crenshaw, Kimberle. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, 1989. In: University of Chicago Legal Forum 139-67 (1989) 140.

² "The question of whether or not the theory of performativity can be transposed onto matters of race has been explored by several scholars. I would note here not only that racial presumptions invariably underwrite the discourse on gender in ways that need to be made explicit, but that race and gender ought not to be treated as simple analogies. I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race." (GT xvi)

the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.³

4.1 Childhood of the “Mericans”

Reading Sandra Cisneros’s stories resembles following a path of various female characters from childhood to adulthood between the two cultures – the Mexican and the dominant white American – whose identities are confronted in many aspects with the cultural ideas. The first section, “My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn,” establishes the means of upbringing within kinship ties, while the characters have to face the interaction with the dominant white culture, hence struggle in both positions to preserve one’s own multiple identities. “The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta*⁴ where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.”⁵

The eponymous opening story of the first section, “My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn,” is written in a generally frolicsome tone, describing the friendship of two Hispanic friends growing up in Texas, yet the gist of the story lies in the inevitably oppressive racial otherness and disadvantageous social status. The narrator’s friend, Lucy Anguiano, has a Hispanic surname defining her ancestry contrasting with the white American name. They eat dog food and somersault “even though [their] *chones*⁶ show.” (*WHC* 5) The friends have the same flip flops purchased in KMart for a low price. They eat M&M’s and split Popsicles. The narrator wishes to spend her days sunbathing “so [her] skin can get so dark it’s blue where it bends like Lucy’s.” (*WHC* 3) The underlying issues explored in this story are the discrepancies between the ancestry and the exile, demonstrated in the consumer practices through KMart, Popsicles, and

³ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007) 19.

⁴ is an open wound

⁵ Anzaldúa 25.

⁶ underpants

M&M's, between what is considered unacceptable or embarrassing, growing up in a poverty-stricken family (the narrator's grandmother implies that the household is dirty, the sisters wear each other's clothes and sleep in bed together, mother uses the wringer washer). The narrator mentions how she would desire to live like Lucy and be like Lucy.

Regardless, the cheerful appreciation turns sour when reading the following story "Eleven." There, the character cannot explicitly articulate what it is that causes her distress. However, she sees the way others treat her unfairly on the basis of her social and racial background and is unable to voice it. The story that takes place at school on the protagonist's eleventh birthday is a matter of an ugly sweater. Rachel, the narrator, is ridiculed because everybody assumes that the sweater nobody wants is hers because it appears to be "all raggedy and old," (*WHC* 7) thus classifying her as the Other, whom they despise. Sylvia Saldívar, her classmate who pronounces the judgement is of a Hispanic origin as well. Thus, an elusive analogy with Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* arises, where Pecola, as the most marginalized character in the novel, appears to be burdened mostly in her community that treats her as a scapegoat. Sylvia, then, embodies the part of Maureen Peel, a light-skinned black girl from a wealthy family, who burdens the ones more marginalized. The school setting also introduces Mrs. Price, whose authority and judgement is imposed on Rachel, who is caught off guard, and her only reaction is silence, the inability to defend herself, the lack of voice that she regrets later that day. Mrs. Price later orders her to put the sweater on, the sweater that stands for what others assume of her and what is embarrassing. Wearing the sweater is then a physical and a psychological burden, and she gives up any effort. When the erroneous act was revealed, "Mrs. Price pretends like everything's okay." (*WHC* 9) There is no satisfaction for what was wrongly assumed of her social status. Where Antigone speaks and defends herself, Rachel is silent and wants to cry. In the beginning, she offers a reasoning for a passive and submissive attitude, according to the protagonist, it is the ambivalence of age. Being older gives one more strength, but "when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one." (*WHC* 6) Age is one of the factors all the protagonists throughout the book attributes strength and voice to. When Mrs. Price insists on the possession

of the sweater, Rachel apprehends it with words “because she’s older and the teacher, she’s right and I’m wrong.” (*WHC* 7-8) Thus, the age and the authority are in play for the authoritative speech act “Of course it’s yours.” (*WHC* 7) As Beltrán-Vocal points out, “this story shows the moment in which a girl/a woman starts losing her childhood innocence when confronted with a negative image that signifies being her / being Hispanic.”⁷ The reasons for dominance and for oppression converge here in a simple fact that Rachel’s gender, age, race, and social status come into play when she does not have the power to act. “And maybe one day when you’re all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you’re three, and that’s okay. That’s what I tell my Mama when she’s sad and needs to cry.” (*WHC* 6) Silent suffering mother is a perennial symbol in Mexican myth, as it will be discussed later, and Rachel adopts that myth, it is legible for her

This story is followed with “Salvador Late or Early,” which highlights and deepens the gravity of the lack of voice. Salvador is a clumsy boy of destitute appearance, whom the teacher, the authority, barely recognizes, he lives in an impoverished neighbourhood and he has to take care of his younger siblings. The narrator of this story describes his speech as an apology, his throat “must apologize each time [he] speaks.” (*WHC* 10) Salvador stands for the invisible, for the burdened, his scars incorporate the “history of hurts,” (*WHC* 10) as Salvador walks away with his brothers, he is dissolving, escaping the narrator’s context, “disappearing like a memory of kites.” (*WHC* 11) What Salvador’s and Rachel’s story have in common is the inability to speak, the lack of agency.

Both Cisneros’s and Anzaldúa’s writings indicate how suppressed the non-whites generally are in this localized border. “The only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites.”⁸ This legitimacy is examined in the short story “Mericans,” where grandmother is a very religious and conservative person, who stands next to the Virgin in terms of affecting the life of the main heroine. “Like La Virgen de Guadalupe, the awful grandmother intercedes

⁷ “Este cuento muestra el momento en que la niña/mujer comienza a perder su inocencia infantil al ser enfrentada con una imagen negativa de lo que significa ser ella/ser hispana.” In: Beltrán-Vocal, María A., “La Problemática de la Chicana en dos Obras de Sandra Cisneros: ‘*The House on Mango Street*’ and ‘*Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*’.” In: *Letras Femeninas* 21. 1-2 (1995): 139-151. *JSTOR*. Web. 19 May 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23021725>> 141.

⁸ Anzaldúa 25-26.

on their [the husband, the sons, and the only daughter, who never attend mass] behalf.” (*WHC* 18). At the same time, the grandmother here represents a continuity of her own culture; both through customs and linguistically. Yet the children are separated from the Mexican culture; “Micaela, who is, as well as her little brothers, influenced by television programmes in English, has already forgotten a part of her linguistic and cultural identity. This can be observed in her rejection of her grandmother’s culture and the use of Spanish”⁹ This might also be an attempt to align themselves with the culture they live in, with the power. However, in this little summer trip to grandmother’s place, the children are mistaken for being Mexicans by the white American tourists despite having lived in the US for most of their lives. Thus, the image they have created of themselves is not recognized by others, their identity is not confirmed.

Apart from M&M’s and popsicles, more pop-cultural and consumerist phenomena that facilitate the normative feminine ideals are presented in the story “Barbie-Q.” This story explicitly exposes the cultural inscriptions on enculturated bodies, not just through commonly criticized notion of unrealistic bodily features. More importantly, the dolls stand for yet another imposition of the white culture in terms of appearance and fashion; one of the Barbies is having a Jackie Kennedy pillbox hat.

Every time the same story. Your Barbie is roommates with my Barbie, and my Barbie’s boyfriend comes over and your Barbie steals him, okay? Kiss kiss kiss. Then the two Barbies fight. You dumbbell! He’s mine. Oh no he’s not, you stinky! Only Ken’s invisible, right? (*WHC* 14)

This excerpt that describes the game the children are playing demonstrates many aspects that are later intensified. First, the plot of this social role game is the male’s infidelity, the reaction to which is a fight between the two girls. Secondly, it shows how even

⁹ “Micaela, igual que sus hermanitos, influida por la television anglosajona, ha perdido ya parte de esa identidad lingüística y cultural. Esto lo podemos observar en su rechazo a la cultura de la abuela y el uso del español.” In: Beltrán-Vocal, María A 141.

heteronormativity can be maintained in such social roles games. Finally, it portrays a talkative female stereotype, as for instance can be found in many Westerns as a contrast to quiet enigmatic, austere men.

4.2 Chicana's Sexuality Within Kinship Ties

If the first section provides a reader with a fictionalized upbringing of the Hispanic Americans and the way they seek to confirm their identities throughout childhood development, the second section, "One Holy Night," goes further, inasmuch as the adolescence and young adulthood bring more constraints to lives of the protagonists. "One Holy Night" and "My *Tocaya*" focus on the point in which cultural restrictions imposed on individuals through their families. Characters presented in these two stories are old enough to have responsibilities for a family honour in the way it is imagined in Mexican culture, yet they are neither old enough nor sufficiently aware of the delimiting nature of their upbringing in order to be able to act as individuals. The repression of sexuality is largely significant in the notion of virginity of young unmarried girls within the Mexican culture.

In "One Holy Night", the protagonist gets pregnant without being married. She calls it "going bad", "taking the crooked walk" and "doing devil things." Her grandmother, who takes care of her, has her sent back to Mexico after many a sleepless night. Her case is discussed without her and everything is decided without her, even responsibility for the deed is blamed on "the man of the family" and the deviant life led in the US. The loss of virginity comes not only with the prize of pregnancy, but also of identity.

"Similarly to Spanish colonial times and Middle Ages, the family honour depends on the woman's behaviour no matter whether she is a wife or a daughter. However, it is vital to notice that in Cisneros's work, virginity does not serve solely to demonstrate the sexual repression on women, its purpose is also to serve

as a medium for identity (...) By losing her virginity without a family consent, she is, in society's view, turned into a bad woman"¹⁰

The woman is openly dishonoured, yet the reason remains a taboo. The examples of cultural censorship abound in the story. It is mentioned that nobody talks about it, except for her little cousins back in Mexico who "are too young to know *not* to ask." (*WHC* 34) As a result, sexual experience is also mystified. It is the domain of the unknown. The whole story seems to bear quite a clear message; however, the character's consciousness complicates the implications when Ixchel refuses to feel ashamed or guilty, yet still does everything she is told to do. The demystification of the mysterious seems to have brought forth certain lucidity in her mind, she realizes that the act itself is arbitrarily linked with honour, because she does not feel any different than before, thus she resents society's marks: "I know I was supposed to feel ashamed, but I wasn't ashamed. I wanted to stand on top of the highest building, the top-top floor, and yell, I *know*." (*WHC* 30) Ixchel has become a part of a chain of bad women, who stand on the margins, who stand outside of legible kinship ties as well as Antigone does. Yelling, in Cisneros's stories, generally symbolizes political agency. However, it was not just her who was silenced; it was her story that was pushed into a secret zone. Instead of following the desire for her own agency, she is shut completely after finding out the truth about her lover, and is bound to become a despised woman who once refuted the validity of society's imposed judgement, all because taking another step into the centre, accepting that she does not have to be the one who is dependant, was too much, perhaps even unthinkable.

When Cisneros has her narrator repeating phrases such as "going bad", it is vital to recognize the potential of these words. "One Holy Night" section introduces fully the role models and icons that have been emphasized in Mexican culture through history

¹⁰ "Como en la época colonial y la Edad Media española, el honor de la familia depende del compartamiento de la mujer, ya sea la esposa o la hija. Sin embargo, es importante notar que, en la obra de Cisneros, la virginidad no sirve únicamente para mostrar la represión sexual femenina sino que también tiene el propósito de ser un medio de identidad, desde el punto de vista de la mujer hispana de hoy." In: Beltrán-Vocal, María A., 146.

and religious traditions. Giving a birth without being in matrimony is immediately recognized a feature of La Malinche, a bad woman. This figure is based on the accounts of Malinalli Tenpal, a woman from Spanish colonial times, who gave birth to the first mestizo; however, the image has many varieties and seems to be a highly multifaceted archetype, which is due to many reproductions and references in multiple sources, including works of art as one of the biggest promoters. “The image we have of La Malinche has been produced largely through fiction and therefore can be studied as a literary construct.”¹¹ There used to be two major interpretations of this icon; the Mexican one is socio-political from the very beginning.

To the Spaniards, La Malinche was a symbol of the primitive new world to be conquered and civilized. She was the body that connected the Spanish to the Amerindian, linguistically through interpretation and physically through bearing mestizo children (...), the Mexican people rejected the Spanish symbol of La Malinche and reinterpreted it as a way of declaring their political independence and thus required a construction of the signs that would serve as a new signal of the new socio-political agenda.(...) La Malinche’s image has been altered and abused to suit the needs of the Mexican schema.¹²

Thus, in Mexican culture, La Malinche has been regarded a treacherous mistress. Subsequently, the figure of La Malinche has embodied the female selfish, the female wrongdoing. The archetype of La Malinche is also one of those that are supposed to function as role models, as normative ideals that are expected to ensure culturally appropriate behaviour. It also allows for easy categorization of women that are stuck in the structure as either good or bad. Only bad women are the ones who take pleasure in sexual encounters. The orientation on sexual pleasure serves as the most powerful

¹¹ Sandra Messinger Cypess: *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000) 2.

¹² Laura Paz: “ ‘Nobody’s Mother and Nobody’s Wife’: Reconstructing Archetypes and Sexuality in Sandra Cisneros’ ‘Never Marry a Mexican’”. In: *Human Architecture* 6.4 (2008): 11-27. ProQuest. Web. 19 May 2013

facet of all what is considered bad of women in patriarchal societies. The repression of sexuality, otherness, and submission are interrelated. This aspect has been mentioned earlier in this thesis; Luce Irigaray focuses on pleasure as no other feminist writer; de Beauvoir claims that “refusing to grant to woman any right to sexual pleasure, by making her work like a beast of burden“¹³ have been one of the mechanisms of control of women, of making their position more burdened.

Chicana feminists in particular are largely influenced by La Malinche in terms of sexuality and race, they accept what was initially viewed as negative, and subvert this image of La Malinche in order to redefine both the image and themselves as women of colour living on the margins of society. Cisneros is one of those writers who have contributed to this by showing that the convergence of race and gender have different connotations in different cultures and interpretation of acts as well as of the image is determined by the cultural inscriptions. La Malinche is also the very first active positive image.

[La Malinche’s] participation in the deeds of the conquest as an active and vital figure needs to be understood as a way of rejecting the destructive implications of previous interpretations and recovering the ambiguities and possibilities inherent in the figure that a changing feminist perspective brings forth.¹⁴

At the same time, this subversion, as well as Mexican appropriation of the Spanish interpretation of La Malinche, demonstrates the actual nature of this archetype as something that can be transformed, something that does not have a necessarily stable, rigid meaning, but can be changed discursively. The proximity of Chicana feminist was also observed on their linguistic abilities, since Malinche was able to master the language of those who oppressed her people, the same with Chicana feminist,

¹³ Beauvoir, 288-289

¹⁴ Cypess, Sandra Messinger: *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000) 142

who switch codes of the oppressors as they go.

La Malinche is also a treacherous woman for her alleged historical affiliation with Spaniards. Cypess mentions that “Chicanas in particular are likened to [La Malinche] by males who see them consorting with Anglos or accepting Anglo cultural patterns.”¹⁵ This aspect of La Malinche is revelatory in “My *Tocaya*,” the only story in which the narrator stands for the judgement of the society. She assumes that Trisha is a lost case because she goes by English version of her name; Trish instead of Patricia, and she uses British accent: “Invented herself a phony English accent (...) I mean, whoever heard of a Mexican with British accent? Know what I mean? The girl had problems.” (*WHC* 37) Basically, the narrator condemns her for aligning with white culture and rejecting her own. She also connects a cultural and linguistic betrayal with other features, such as proneness to promiscuity; “A girl who wore rhinestone earrings and glitter high heels to school was destined for trouble that nobody – not God or correctional institutions – could mend.” (*WHC* 36) Trish is otherwise described as hard-working, for her father runs a Taco fast food restaurant and makes her work there. She runs from home and is mistakenly taken for dead when her parents misidentify a different body to be hers.

“My *Tocaya*” also introduces another role model that commonly stands in stark contrast to La Malinche and works, on the contrary, as praising purity and selflessness. She is mentioned in the name of a theology class “The Blessed Virgin: Role Model for Today’s Young Women” (*WHC* 38), La Virgen de Guadalupe. The Virgin of Guadalupe conveys the subservient ideal of women, “once she has sex, she dies, serving as a lesson for young women to keep their virginity”¹⁶. This image has shifted its meaning throughout the years; however, what is also emphasized for women is the idea of sacrifice for men. Gender hierarchy thus stems from Mexican cultural ideas and traditions. Anzaldúa says that

The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church

¹⁵ Cypess 138.

¹⁶ Paz 3.

insist that women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala*¹⁷. If a woman doesn't renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish. If a woman remains a *virgen* until she marries, she is a good woman. For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons.¹⁸

4.3 *Hollering*

Next to the Virgin and La Malinche, there is an additional extension to the role model imaginary. A third image is also negative and is introduced by the title itself. "Woman Hollering Creek" functions here on many levels. First, it introduces the actual creek and generally the localized borders in Texas. Secondly, it refers to a morality story connected with the name of the creek. The loose translation of La Llorona thus brings another legend into the play. The story tells of a woman, who drowns her child, from either revenge to the father, or from despair, or from a desire for a different man. The story varies widely in the aspect of the motivation for the drowning, however, what is clear is that the father abandoned the mother, but it is clearly her faulty attitude to motherhood that is to blame. Thus, the third image epitomizes a bad mother. These feminine archetypes are the only choices a woman has, out of which only one role is positive and expected from a woman. "Cisneros considers Mexican icons of femininity to be intimately bound up with individual Chicanas' and Mexican women's self-images and self-esteem."¹⁹ Therefore, all the female characters struggle to negotiate between identifying themselves with the image of La Virgen or becoming the outcast in their milieu. Anzaldúa elaborates on this phenomenon by saying that "culture (read males) professes to protect women. Actually it keeps women in rigidly defined roles"²⁰

¹⁷ A bad woman

¹⁸ Anzaldúa 39.

¹⁹ Wyatt 244.

²⁰ Anzaldúa 39.

Moreover, this is a sign of a prevailing hierarchy. “Women are at the bottom of the ladder one rung above the deviants. The Chicano, *mexicano*, and some Indian cultures have no tolerance for deviance. Deviance is condemned by the community. Most societies try to get rid of their deviants.”²¹ To deviate from a culture means becoming an outcast with no continuity of one’s own values and since there is not much flexibility in the women’s roles, the categorization into a deviant is very easily reachable.

This dominant paradigm, however, does not affect only femininity. As opposed to passive femininity as an ideal, masculinity is often portrayed as macho, aggressive and violent. This is expressed by yet another icon, a “chingón.” “Men who do not exhibit this exaggerated masculinity, or machismo, are also criticized by society for failing to fulfill their role as men.”²² Anzaldúa, too, points out this impact of culture on both genders: “The ability to serve, claim the males, is our highest virtue. I abhor how my culture makes *macho* caricatures of its men.”²³

There are two main ways of how to preserve the cultural gender ideas described in *Woman’s Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. The first one has already been described hereinabove; it is connected with religion and traditions – the icons according to which women are perceived and judged. Mothers and grandmothers, who are often in the position of both a power and a role model, influence lives of their grandchildren. In the aforementioned story, “Little Miracles, Kept Promises,” Rosario describes how she has always blamed the Virgin “for all the pain my mother and her mother and all our mothers’ mothers have put up with in the name of God.” (*WHC* 127) In this particular story, Rosario comes to terms with the icon of the Virgin in order to understand the suffering of her female predecessors. In this way, mothers and grandmothers are the closest female role models who connect the family and individuals with a higher entity and deceive by giving purpose to the oppressive gender idea.

Apart from family, religious and traditional figures, however, Cisneros’s stories give us an account of pop-cultural tendencies that reinforce the religious ones. The most

²¹ Anzaldúa 40.

²² Paz 2-3.

²³ Anzaldúa 43.

accentuated of these examples are the *telenovelas* in “Woman Hollering Creek,” where Cleófilas admires the main heroine for her self-less sacrificing love for one man. When the narrator tells of Cleófilas’s childhood, she says she would go to “the girlfriend’s house to watch the latest *telenovela* episode and try to copy the way women comb their hair, wear their makeup.” (WHC 44) The soap operas would always give Cleófilas the sense of excitement, as it is said in the story, she was always waiting for “passion in its purest crystalline essence. The kind the books and songs and *telenovelas* describe when one finds, finally, the great love of one’s life, and does whatever one can, must do, at whatever cost.” (WHC 44) Cleófilas would admire the main actress and identify her with her character. She would also highly regard the suffering this character has to go through. “The beautiful Lucía Méndez having to put up with all kinds of hardships of the heart, separation and betrayal, and loving, always loving no matter what, because *that* is the most important thing.” (WHC 44) At that point, Cleófilas idolizes love and the necessity to suffer in order for the catharsis of a happy end to come. “Somehow one ought to live one’s life like that, don’t you think? You or no one. Because to suffer for love is good. The pain all sweet somehow. In the end.” (WHC 45)

Wyatt offers a psychoanalytic perspective on this situation in order to find out what makes a woman want to embody society’s definition of a woman. She draws her interpretation from Lacan’s mirror stage identification.

The young child’s identification with the image in the mirror, which provides the basis for the ego, institutes an aptitude for identification with visual images as well as a desire to be one with the whole and perfect image presented to him or her on a visual surface: hence the subject’s susceptibility to the cultural ideals embodied in human figures on the movie or television screen.²⁴

Thus, the identification with the heroines in *telenovelas* as portrayed in the short story

²⁴ Jean Wyatt: *Risking Difference: Identification, Race, and Community in Contemporary Fiction and Feminism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 120

causes the acceptance of the representation of women in Mexican culture as the Virgin, the one who is suffering for love.

Cleófilas and her girlfriends watch *telenovelas* that repeat the same feminine qualities, embodied in variations of the same female figure. And that repetition produces a single-minded desire in the young spectators to imitate them (...) The idealized figure is on a screen similar to the mirror, and like the mirror image she seems to embody wholeness, plenitude (i.e., the *telenovela* heroine has everything). As once before the mirror, so now before the television screen, the viewer is seduced by the idealized properties of the specular image into a misrecognition of the self in the external image. As once she put on alterity as the core of the ego, so now she puts on the culture's representation of woman.²⁵

The story then continues by Cleófilas and Juan Pedro getting married with no romantic wedding as she would have expected. What follows is an account of abuse. "The first time she had been so surprised she didn't cry out or try to defend herself. She had always said she would strike back if a man, any man, were to strike her." (*WHC* 47) Cleófilas then silently accepts more and more abuse from her husband, as she was taught to suffer in silence in order to achieve a happy end. Anzaldúa calls this an ability to respond, which is "what is meant by responsibility, yet our cultures take away our ability to act – shackle us in the name of protection."²⁶

Cleófilas then confronts the discrepancy between the *telenovelas* and their tendency to romanticize love affairs and marriage whilst seeing the man, whom she was waiting for her whole life, who "farts and belches and snores as well as laughs and kisses and holds her," (*WHC* 49) all the while doing all of the housework. The events following this in the story are then straightforward – a doctor tells her she has to leave her husband

²⁵ Wyatt (2004) 122-123.

²⁶ Anzaldúa 42.

when with another child, for she would not be able to stand more abuse. Even at that point Cleófilas thinks she might be exaggerating, as Juan Pedro always tells her she is.

Cleófilas has been taught in the *telenovelas* that suffering for love is empowering (even the title of one of the *telenovelas* is “The Rich Also Cry”), and it made her accept the role of an abused wife, who ends up comforting a weeping husband after he beats her. She repeats all the gestures of the heroines, which gives power to the interpellation, the interpellation that dictates silence and suffering.“ Moreover, the fact that one identified on that first occasion with the gestalt of a body that is similar to one’s own helps to explain gender interpellation: one is prepared to identify with the ‘self-same body’—with a body that looks like one’s own.”²⁷

“Woman Hollering Creek” is the book’s climax, it stages characters in both previous stages of life and continues to follow them to the adulthood. Even by this, it empowers them with age and maturity. I will examine three main characters that offer their own ways of negotiating the icons. First, Cleófilas, whose development suggests that embracing the cultural ideas of a woman leads to self-sacrifice for a man that, however, does not bring her any happiness in the end. Thus, motivated by Felice, becomes a hollering woman, who is running away with her son from her husband. Felice is inspirational on many possible levels. Firstly, she is the one rescuing Cleófilas. Secondly, she owns a car, a simple fact that makes her independent and powerful both economically and mentally.

Everything about this woman, this Felice, amazed Cleófilas. The fact that she drove a pickup. A pickup, mind you, but when Cleófilas asked if it was her husband’s, she said she didn’t have a husband. The pickup was hers. She herself has chosen it. She herself was paying for it.
(*WHC* 55)

Owning a car might be a symbol for agency. It gives one a possibility to move on one’s

²⁷ Wyatt (2004) 123.

own. Moreover, this car was owned, paid, chosen by a woman, which was impossible to imagine for Cleófilas. Felice provided herself with the car, she empowered herself. This new model for Cleófilas suggests the knowledge of new possibilities. As a sign of this, Cleófilas breaks her silent resistance. Felice explains her hollering as an admiration to a creek named by a woman.

Every time I cross that bridge I do that. Because of the name, you know. Woman hollering. *Pues*. I holler ... Did you ever notice, Felice continued, how nothing around here is named after a woman? Really. Unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're a virgin. She was laughing again. (*WHC* 55)

This makes Cleófilas realize the a priori sad nature of roles assumed for women and the way it is culturally dictated to be one. Even at the doctor's she was worried of how people in her father's village would think of her. Yet Felice laughs, which seems to be almost unknown for women as Cleófilas, whose primary purpose is to suffer. What, then, happens to the word "woman?" It loses its stability that was ascribed to it by the Mexican cultural paradigm. In other words, the transition to the other side (*el otro lado*) is the transition of gender paradigms, too. "Felice interprets the creek's sound – its 'hollering' – as a 'Tarzan hoot,' and so gives both the word 'Hollering' and the concept 'Woman' a new definition."²⁸ Cleófilas admires Felice. When she gets to Mexico, she tells stories of her as if she was a crazy person, yet she identifies with her: "Then Felice began laughing again, but it wasn't Felice laughing. It was gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water." (*WHC* 56) Thus, even though Cleófilas appears to be in Mexico, a territory symbolically ruled by the Mexican paradigm, the possibility of something else that she has witnessed, the possibility of a liberated, independent woman gives her the possibility to identify with it, something that was not possible to learn about in the U.S. for her husband and her education were

²⁸ Jean Wyatt. "On Not Being La Malinche: Border Negotiations of Gender in Sandra Cisneros's "Never Marry a Mexican" and "Woman Hollering Creek." In: *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 14.2 (1995): 243-71. *JSTOR*. University of Tulsa. 245.

determined by the Mexican cultural archetypes. Felice, with whom she identifies, is a Chicana too, and she “refused to perpetuate the discourse of a unitary gender identity [which] effectively deconstructs the ‘natural’ category of exclusive femininity, and thus the feminine/masculine binary.”²⁹ The result of this disidentification is freedom, it is a freedom given by the parody of the hollering woman, La Llorona, a parody that suggests a “perpetual displacement [that] constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests openness to resignification and recontextualization” (*GT* 188). Laughter is not accounted for in the institutionalized means of protest. “Like la Llorona, the Indian woman’s only means of protest was wailing.”³⁰ Thus, when Cleófilas cites Felices laughter, she frees herself from the strictly given roles.

Another example of disidentification is more radical and is presented in the story of Clemencia, “Never Marry a Mexican.” Clemencia disidentifies herself with her own mother and cultural and religious icons. She tries to live as the exact opposite. She refuses the only positions available to women, which are either a virgin, or a mother and a wife. In the very beginning of the story, she promises to never marry. Marriage is still a ritual highly influenced by all the traditions and she recognizes and despises the racial and class differences as she saw in her own family, when her father “married down.” “If he had married a white woman from *el otro lado*, that would have been different. That would’ve been marrying up, even if the white girl was poor.” (*WHC* 69) She has observed many wrong-doings by men on one hand, and women’s suffering on the other hand. This makes her identify with extreme masculine ideas. “I am guilty of having caused deliberate pain to other women. I’m vindictive and cruel and I’m capable of anything.” (*WHC* 69) She is showing a lot of disrespect for motherhood in general, especially because any desire to protect or nurture would align her with the pole of open, vulnerable mother. Thus, she especially likes sleeping with men, whose wives are giving birth or are pregnant.

And it’s not the last time I’ve slept with a man the night his wife is birthing a baby. Why do I do that, I wonder? Sleep with a man when

²⁹ Wyatt (1995) 261.

³⁰ Anzaldúa 43.

his wife is giving life, being suckled by a thing with its eyes still shut. Why do that? It's always given me a bit of crazy joy to be able to kill those women like that, without their knowing it. To know I've had their husbands when they were anchored in blue hospital rooms, their guts yanked inside out, the baby sucking their breasts while their husband sucked mine. All this while their ass stitches were still hurting. (WHC 76-77)

The contempt for motherhood is intertwined with her satisfaction similar to rape, the sexual devastation of women's bodies. This seems like an obsession with motherhood, however, she does not seem to be fully conscious of such an obsession. The images of hurt mothers and their bodies are interrupted, much like a Freudian slip. It can be said that Clemencia is cursing the teachings that stem from the three historical mothers.

La gente Chicana tiene tres madres. All three are mediators: *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada* (*Malinche*), the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the two. Ambiguity surrounds the symbols of these three 'Our Mothers.' *Guadalupe* has been used by the Church to mete out institutionalized oppression ... In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted – *Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the *virgen/puta* (whore) dichotomy.³¹

Thus, Clemencia tries to put herself always on the other than the prescribed side – the masculine whore instead of the mother – in order to prevent the acceptance

³¹ Anzaldúa 52-53.

of the assumed identity, be it a weeping or left mother.

“I leapt inside you and split you like an apple. Opened for the other to look and not give back.” (*WHC* 78) Here, Clemencia assumes the man’s part, the aggressive and violent nature of penetrating somebody by force. This stands in contrast to the passive female sexuality that is rather defenceless. She posits herself as a violator. She is trying to subvert the traditional defencelessness of a woman. However, if we consider the gender stereotypes, it is clear that she is trying to epitomize the typical masculine *chingón*, who is aggressive and violent towards women. Clemencia still accepts the gender stereotypes and derives her knowledge of these binary oppositions of gender from the mythic figures. As a result, she imprisons herself in a rigid sex role, as if the reversal had not taken place.

These two examples have shown us the impossibility to simply deviate, to step out of the ordered roles without supporting the gender ideas. Both Clemencia and Cleófilas internalized these roles in the past. Clemencia’s iterative behaviour helps her transcend the stereotypes only to the extent that she is not the stereotype that her body should represent. Wyatt claims that Clemencia’s example

throws into question the efficacy of acts and speech acts to shake the hold of gender on the individual consciousness. Clemencia embraces the performance of an alternative gender identity on every level: in gesture and speech act, in mental act too, she performs the *chingón*. Yet she remains caught in a cultural construction of gender, split between performing the male part and acting like a woman.³²

Nevertheless, we might argue that Clemencia’s performance as *chingón* went unnoticed and silenced, or rather it was noticed by men, who could not speak of it. On the contrary, Felice’s acts are seen through Cleofilas’s eyes and point of view, and similarly to what

³² Wyatt (1995) 262.

was written earlier, the act of interpellation is missing in Clemencia's story. Moreover, Clemencia's case is rather pathological in a sense, which is suggested by the narrative style that oscillates between calm, diabolic, verbose, abundant and restless, interrupted. Clemencia's performance stays unnoticed and outcast. Felice's laughter suggests contentedness, similarly to Rosario.

Rosario, whom we know from a letter to the Virgin of Guadalupe, is a female artist, who has recently cut her hair, and whose family and friends do not approve of her lifestyle. A female artist is seen to be selfish for not following the path determined for her; motherhood. "I don't want to be a mother. I wouldn't mind being a father. At least a father could still be artist, could love *something* instead of *someone*, and no one would call that selfish." (*WHC* 127) She admits she had always hated the Virgin for she would always associate her with the suffering of her mother and grandmother as a reaction to men's wrongdoings.

I couldn't see you without seeing my ma each time my father came home drunk and yelling, blaming everything that ever went wrong in his life on her. I couldn't look at your folded hands without seeing my *abuela* mumbling, 'My son, my son, my son...' Couldn't look at you without blaming you for all the pain my mother and her mother and all our mothers' mothers have put up with in the name of God. (*WHC* 127)

Then Rosario describes how she was despised in her community for being a selfish *Malinche* and through pondering upon historical events and her mother's and grandmother's strength, she realized that the Virgin is what gives people strength and watches over them in all possible transcendental and inner facets. This realization helps her not only to come to terms with her ancestry and oppression, but to love herself and respect herself for anything she is. "I could love you, and, finally, learn to love me." (*WHC* 128) This peaceful resistance, in which the institutionalized icon is one with a female transcending her body and its implications, is a way in which

the dichotomy is broken. Rosario's account in the book is very brief, however, her distrust in a single aspect of a woman leads to the multiplicity, or the capacity or it, she finds firstly in the Virgin and later in herself.

5. Conclusion

The premise for Butler's theory of performative gender is that sexual difference is fabricated through discursive practices. She draws this argument on the basis of Foucaultian notion of materialization that presupposes the investment of bodies in forming and maintaining the power relations. Butler claims that “the category of ‘sex’ is, from the start, normative, it only functions as a norm, but is a part of regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs,” (*BTM* xi) which implies that there is a regulatory force due to which a hierarchy based on the categories of sex is maintained by coercing bodies to materialize the regulatory ideal. This is a particularly interesting moment for the interpretative chapter of this thesis, because Cisneros' heroines are always somehow compelled to embody the ideal feminine. Cisneros, however, advocates for destabilizing different sorts of normative ideals than Butler. Butler, as a queer proponent, focuses on the fact that sexual difference is materialized in order to maintain the heterosexual matrix. As for Cisneros, the prevailing economy she seeks to demean is twofold for the burden of Chicana women are twofold as well. In *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, Cisneros draws attention to what the two burdens of race and gender means. She explores how categories of sex uphold the violence and abuse of women through various ideological constructs. Moreover, she examines how the white dominance perseveres through racial difference. And finally, she reflects this in the convergence of these two. The more direct links between Butler's theory and Cisneros' fictionalized testimony were explicated in the manner Cisneros chose to represent the protagonists' lives in the given landscape – from childhood to adulthood.

Cisneros' neologism “Mericans” describe the position of the characters amid two cultures. They are neither Americans, nor Mexicans; they are both and much more. Yet, this multiplicity is neither recognized nor welcome in the normative structure, where one has to tick one answer in questionnaires asking for one's sex, nationality, etc. They are compelled to choose one category that would distinguish them from all the other categories. As a result, Cisneros' “Mericans” feel either alienated, if not abject, or swayed to choose at the expense of the multiple meanings. Being Chicano signifies

being on the margins because being a “Merican” is not an option. According to Butler, margins are the “uninhabitable” zones, whose residents are discursively demarcated.

The adolescent age is particularly problematic for Chicanas. Their sexuality is repressed as a result of a structure that holds the roles (meaning a stable set of acts one ought to choose from) individuals assume determined by sexual categories. Instead of making sure Chicanas get proper education, thus entrusting them with the power of knowledge and self-reliance, their sexuality is a taboo and their heterosexuality a given.

As adults, the agency of Chicanas is formed by years of constraints that held them in the domain of the intelligible. They are portrayed as more aware of the fact that they have desires that do not correspond with what they should be like according to the submissive, suffering, selfless mother normative ideal. They are presented with a choice that does not reveal itself clearly. They can either suppress such desires and believe that they ought to suffer this way, or they can act upon them and provoke the domain of the normative. The normative structure tends to exclude the latter case. Liberation does indeed come at a prize; as Butler shows.

This difficult position of Chicana women resembles that of Antigone discussed by Butler. Antigone’s insistence on her demand, the parody of Creon’s authoritative speech, has cost her life. However, even when dying, she refuses to fully embrace the fall, she refuses to be buried alive and commits suicide instead. She could have married Haemon and be a part of the centre, she could have exchanged her situation as a condemned being linked with incestuous, wrong kinship ties for a more privileged life. But Antigone cannot just go and get married, she would have supported everything she had stood against, she would have undermined everything she believed she was. The same is valid for Cleófilas and Rosario, they could not just leave everything the way it was and carry on being complacent with the suffering roles. Despite becoming unintelligible for their families and community, they decide to embrace a different direction. They do crawl at the bottom of their kinship ties hierarchy, yet they think, speak, act, laugh, and holler against it, which is enough for being outcasted, but it is also enough to strive for multiplicity of their subjecthood, for the multiplicity that cannot be summarized by the word Chicana, or by what mother, virgin or bad woman signify.

When we first look at *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, we are presented with the vicious circle of male dominance that Gayle Rubin denounces, in which women are passive and men are powerful and children learn and internalize the structure within kinship ties. There are set of acts that define role for women and role for men to assume. Women are supposed to be good, submissive, selfless mothers with no sexual lust nor any ambition to be more than that. They ought to suffer; putting up with pain makes them very close to the only appreciated role model, the Virgin of Guadalupe. This objectifying set of normative rules defines the set of acts women have to embody. However, the Virgin is not the only role model, which opens up possibilities for breaking the vicious circle. This happens in these stories when woman's desires for her own identity and independence reach a point in which she is heard. Cisneros' heroines win when they laugh, when they holler and when they sexually liberate themselves, because they refuse to play by rules formed in the patriarchal culture; they refuse to play the ultimately suffering and silent part in celibate. They refuse that this should be what they are when they are contextualized simply as Mexican women.

The nature of identity as an ideological cultural construct has revealed the potential to be a politically powerful agenda. Thanks to this, Chicana feminists have altered the contemporary imaginary and made themselves heard as Las Malinches; they are mestizas, they have started from the marginalized positions. They accept the fact that they will enter the domain of what is despised or what is unintelligible once they try to keep their multifaceted identities. Liberation is not a happy ending, yet it is not a destruction. It means that they are what they do, they are what they act upon, there does not have to be a label that would summarize every single one of their acts; to quote Butler's profound sentence again, the 'doer is variably constructed in and through the deed'." (GT 142) This opposition to normative structures is what Butler means by political agency. To perform is to be something, and if that something is recognized by others as La Malinche or La Llorona, then through parody, through subversion everything can become multifaceted, because the structure is not, and cannot be, entirely stable. The political gesture of Chicana feminists, including Cisneros, managed to add layers to the contemporary imaginary, especially to La Malinche and La Llorona. After

all, no utterance possesses a total context, therefore, La Malinche can also be good, which functions as Antigone, as the “impossible.” In Butler's words,

what happens when the perverse or the impossible emerges in the language of the law and makes its claims precisely there in the sphere of legitimate kinship that depends on its exclusion or pathologization?¹

Chicana feminists do not exactly rebel against a system, they reflect on the fact that the prevailing language structure does not take them into account, that they do not fit into the domain of regulatory ideals.

Similarly to Chicana feminists and to some Cisneros' characters, Antigone is heard and she problematizes and challenges the language structure which was formed not to allow her to do that. They are all heard within their kinship ties, they are all heard in the margins, and they are all heard in the centre despite their individual initial discouragement that stems from the disadvantageous position in all these three landscapes. They all promote, as part of their political agency, that there is nothing as a sole identity, nothing that would be summarized by a word (or hyphenated words). Even if there was, it would not have compelled them to act one way or the other. It is the diversity that they believe in, both collective and individual. This is the reason why they escape a single definition, the purpose of which is to repress them in order to invest and norm their bodies in the mechanisms of power, make them docile. Yet, the agency is not voluntary, it comes as the effect of being oppressed. The only character that undermines this is Clemencia, who is liberated to a certain extent; she parodies the chingón, one of the rigid gender roles established in the cultural structure. She does question social normativity, yet she does so by detaching herself completely from her cultural background, and she does so cruelly and radically. She rejects the single assumed role for her, yet she just becomes the abuser, she dismantles nothing but herself, and she does so merely destructively.

¹ Butler (2000) 68.

In sum, Chicana women are envisioned as docile bodies functioning solely in servitude to men. The theory of performative gender, however, enables us to look at the representation of the identity of Chicana women in the point of emergence of political claims that refute normative definitions included in the word “Chicana” in terms of its gender, racial, and political demarcations. Moreover, such a theory allows for inscriptions that are disguised as cultural values, such as popular tales of La Malinche and La Llorona, to be perceived as historically stylized repetition of acts. The normative reiteration of those acts is a technique through which the patriarchal framework of intelligibility has been maintained. Hence, it reveals the potential for changing the definition of a woman without renouncing the indigenous origin of Chicana women. Additionally, Butler argues that the traditional feminist search for the singular definition of women only maintains the seeming dichotomy of society and nature. She refutes feminism that engages in metaphysical discourse since gender and sex are equally constructed within and by political limits. Accepting gender as performative offers a way for Chicana women to battle the white feminism that neglects them, thus to politicize their desires without reductions and simplifications on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality all at once, not separately.

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