

Woman, Home, and the Question of Identity: A Critical Review of Feminist Literature¹

Kadın, Ev ve Kimliğin Sorgulanması: Feminist Yayına Eleştirel Bakış

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Abstract

Much ink has been spilled over the association of women with the material and imaginary geographies of the home. In this paper, I will discuss this association with reference to the feminist literature on the home, which, in the second half of the last century, produced a fascinating critique of the home as part of a larger debate on the connection between space and place and the construction of gender relations and ideologies. I will focus particularly on how the problem of the home in feminism has been defined as one of identity, referring to some key works in feminist literature that have put forward notions of the home as a place that women have to leave behind if they are to find their identities beyond those imposed upon them by society at large. In doing this, I will also give voice to criticisms that have been raised from within feminism itself against a totally negative depiction of the home, and discuss whether it is possible to envisage a more positive image of the home in feminism in relation to women's identities.

Keywords: *Feminism, home, the feminist critique of home, woman, place, identity.*

Introduction

Much ink has been spilled over the link between women and geographies of the home. Women have been the focus of much research on the gendered structure underlying the use of home spaces and the ways in which the spatial configuration

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of houses and housing layouts reflect normative gender relationships particular to given socio-cultural and historical contexts (Hayden, 1982; Heynen & Baydar, 2005; MATRIX, 1984). Scholars seeking to clarify the significance of the family as regards the meaning of the home have focused on women due to their central role in the maintenance of the family as a functional social unit (Allan & Crow, 1989; Hunt, 1989). Furthermore, reflections on the link between women and the home have invariably become a significant part of recent discussions on the meaning of home in the contexts of transnational migration and diasporic resettlement. This has been the case not only because the lived experiences of migrants and diasporic subjects revolve around their experiences of past and present homes, the creation of which is most generally the responsibility of women, but also because women are generally seen as the symbols and maintainers of the culture of the imaginary geographies of home like the homeland and the nation (Domosh & Seager, 1998, 2001; Spitzer et.al., 2003; Walter, 2001; Yeoh & Huang, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997). It has become apparent that the link between women and the home is a specific one – that women are almost universally associated with the home both as a material place and a normative imaginary one (Blunt, 2005; Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Mallett, 2004).

In this paper I will discuss this association with reference to feminist literature, which, in the second half of the last century, has developed a fascinating critique of the home as part of a larger debate on the connection between space and place and the construction of gender relations and ideologies. I will focus particularly on how the problem of the home in feminism has been defined as a problem of identity, and discuss this with reference to some key works that set up notions of the home as a place that women have to leave behind if they are to find their identities beyond those imposed upon them by society at large. In doing this, I will also give voice to the criticisms that have been raised from within feminism itself against a totally negative depiction of the home, and discuss whether it is possible to envisage a more positive idea of the home in feminism in relation to women's identities.

Against a Divided World

The feminist critique of the home is part of a larger debate in feminist scholarship on the connection between space and place and the construction of gender relations and ideologies. As Massey (1994a) argues, this connection works on two levels: first, through the actual construction of material geographies (MATRIX, 1984; Madigan & Munro, 1990) and the constitution of culturally specific definitions of gender; and second, in the very construction of space,

place and gender as culturally specific notions, that is, 'in terms of both of the conceptual nature of that construction and of its substantive content – and in the overlapping and the interplaying of the sets of characteristics and connotations with which each is associated' (Massey, 1994a: 2). In other words, particular ways of thinking about space and place are linked, both directly and indirectly, with particular ways of constructing gender relations and ideologies. This implies that challenging the ways in which space and place are conceptualised means also challenging dominant forms of gender relations and ideologies (Massey, 1994; Rose 1993). The critique of the home should be understood in this framework, as a central theme in the ongoing feminist challenge to the patriarchal social order.

As stated elsewhere (McDowell, 1999; Rose, 1993), one of the earliest discussions on the ways in which patriarchal gender roles and ideologies were translated into the social structuration of space and spatial behaviour can be found in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* – a collection of essays brought together by Shirley Ardener in 1981 (1993). Ardener, drawing on the earlier studies of Mary Douglas (1966) and Erving Goffman (1979), argued that societies generated their own 'culturally determined' rules for defining 'boundaries on the ground', and thereby divided the social world into distinct territories. Drawing attention to how divisions of space were intimately associated with what she called 'social maps' (such as social ranking patterns and kinship), Ardener focused on the difference between the genders and argued that the social map of patriarchy created its own 'ground rules' for men and women, defining some spaces as 'feminine' and others as 'masculine', and thus designating certain kinds of gendered activities to certain spaces. The essays in the book, together with Ardener's introduction, outlined the most basic premise of the feminist debate: that gender difference was marked in spatial difference (Blunt and Rose, 1994; Massey, 1994a; Rose, 1993).

Feminist discussions on the power relations inscribed in this gendered spatial difference have focused mainly on the distinction between public and private spheres. Michelle Rosaldo (1974), for instance, argued that this distinction was fundamental to the universal oppression of women. In her introductory essay to *Woman, Culture and Society* (1974) Rosaldo began her argument by stating that despite the great deal of cross-cultural variability in women's and men's roles, there was a 'universal asymmetry' between the sexes that arose out of the fact that 'male, as opposed to female, activities are always recognised as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men' (1974: 19). Rosaldo discussed this asymmetry in terms of a dichotomy, and argued that women were associated with a 'domestic

orientation', i.e. with 'those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organised immediately around one or more mothers and their children' while men were primarily associated with extra domestic, political, and military spheres of activity. The 'public orientation' of men meant that 'men have no single commitment as enduring, time-consuming, and emotionally compelling – as close to seeming necessary and natural – as the relation of a woman to her infant child; and so men are free to form those broader associations that we call 'society', universalistic systems of order, meaning, and commitment that link particular mother-child groups' (1974: 24). Concurring with Ortner (1974) and Chodorow (1974) whose essays are also included in the book, Rosaldo emphasised that the association of women with the domestic sphere and the activities therein was not simply related with their role in reproduction, but was rather structurally and culturally constructed. She argued that these two spheres were defined by two different modes of sociality: while women's domestic sociality was interpersonal/relational and particularistic due to their roles as mothers and daughters and as nurturers of the family and the domestic home, men's public social orientation was rather concerned with the continuation and preservation of the larger economic, cultural, and political systems. This meant that women's domestic sociality was inevitably subsumed by the larger, public sociality of men, and this was why, according to Rosaldo, men's control of the public realm made them 'the locus of cultural value' relegating women into a lower cultural and social position. Hence, Rosaldo concluded that 'insofar as woman is universally defined in terms of a largely maternal and domestic role, we can account for her universal subordination' (1974: 7)².

As Rose (1993) also suggests, Rosaldo's argument was based on the idea that would be later put forward by Harvey as follows: 'the assignment of place within a socio-spatial structure indicates distinctive roles, capacities for action, and access to power within the social order' (1990: 419). Even though recent anthropological work on the relationship between gender and space has suggested that the gendering of spaces should be understood less as an imposition of patriarchal power structures, and more in terms of a social and cultural process of 'symbolic decoding and encoding' that produces 'a series of homologies between the spatial, symbolic and social orders' (Moore in Blunt & Rose, 1994: 3)³, many of the struggles of feminist scholarship in the latter half of the twentieth century have been shaped by this idea. Since the 1960s, feminist scholars have tried to unearth the ways in which the patriarchal social order produces, and, in turn, is reproduced through the gendered division of space, and argued that the division of space into public and private spheres and the association of women with the sphere of domesticity and the home serves to

structure the limits of women's everyday activities, thereby forcing them to shape their lives according to cultural norms and social expectations (Rose, 1993: 17). As such, challenging the gendered division of space has been central to the feminist agenda, which Pateman has emphasised by defining feminism as a kind of 'spatial politics' (Rose, 1993: 18).

Feminist scholars have traced the emergence of this division in the Western world in the form of an ideology of 'separate spheres' (Davidoff & Hall, 1987) from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. For instance, in their well-known study on domesticity in mid-eighteenth- to mid-nineteenth century England, Davidoff and Hall (1987) discussed how the middle classes excluded women from many public roles and places while defining the domestic sphere with reference to feminine virtues, and assigning women as the guardians of the home. According to them, assumptions about womanhood such as innocence, purity, and emotionality, in other words, qualities that were assumed to make them unfit for work, were transposed into the construction of the private sphere as the only place where authentic feelings could be displayed, the place of honesty and love, and the place where virtue was to be cultivated (Davidoff & Hall, 1987). In the words of Mrs. Ellis, a nineteenth century ideologue referred to by the authors, women did not need the public world of business and politics, since the 'moral world' was already theirs: 'Women could find the true meaning of their lives in the family which was a woman's profession, the love that she would find there would answer her needs' (Davidoff & Hall, 1987: 183). Readings of John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* by feminist scholars such as Hall (1992), Millet (1977), and Wolff (1990) have also shown how Victorian sexual politics mapped out separate worlds for men and women on the basis of the supposed naturalness of their roles and selfhood. Wolff, for instance, discusses how Ruskin depicted the home as the place in which women belong, as opposed to the public world the challenges of which could be faced only by men. Man was 'the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender', while woman was 'passive, virtuous, and in need to be protected' (Wolff, 1990: 16). Hall, in a similar vein, claims that, for Ruskin, it was the existence of a woman in the home that made it a space endowed with special qualities, a place of virtues and emotions, a place of love away from the dangers of the outside world, and 'the place of peace' (Ruskin, 1992: 61).

It goes without saying that although gender roles have changed considerably since the nineteenth century and women today have a much more established and socially recognised place in the public world, the 'ideology which requires of home life the presence of a wife (and, ideally, mother)' still today remains a powerful one (Allan & Crow, 1989: 2). And it would be hard to argue that changes in

gender ideologies have put an end to the 'split between the lives of women as the centre (pivot) of home life and as the periphery (margin) of social (outside) life' (Greenbaum, 1989: 62). Similarly, Ruskin's idea of the home as the ultimate place of peace and a secure retreat from the public world seems to have become an established imaginary which we encounter in much contemporary theorising about this place. For instance, Dovey defines the home as 'a place of security within an insecure world, a place of certainty within doubt, a familiar place in a strange world, a sacred place in a profane world' (1985: 46). Similarly, for Heller, home is 'a fixed point in space, a firm position from which we "proceed" [...] and to which we return in due course' (1984: 239). According to her, the meaning of home as familiarity, as protection and warmth, is central to feelings of security: "Going home" should mean: returning to that firm position which we know, to which we are accustomed, where we feel safe, and where our emotional relationships are at their most intense' (1984: 239).

Unveiling the assumptions underlying such well-established ideas of home was the aim of some of the early work in feminist literature in which the focus was on what women had to sacrifice in order to create and maintain the homeplace. Davidoff, L'Esperance and Newby (1976: 173), for example, criticised the common imagery of the 'home as haven', and called for recognition that the cosy domesticity associated with the home was built upon long and unrewarding hours of women's labour. In a similar vein, McDowell drew attention to how the idea of home as separate from the sphere of work was essentially a male perspective: 'Women clean, prepare food, mend clothes and generally put things in order for their husbands and children for whom the home is more normally regarded as a place of rest and respite from work' (1983: 142). Other scholars wrote about the confining and isolating nature of the home and domestic labour, and questioned the established meaning of the home as a place of safety and care, discussing themes like domestic violence and sexual abuse (Boys *et al.*, 1984; Hayden, 1982; MacKenzie & Rose, 1983; Goldsack, 1999; Wardhaugh, 1999). The common denominator in all these arguments was the idea that the comfort and peace associated with the domestic home was only achieved at the expense of women, and that home, for women, was essentially a place of confinement and oppression.

Identity is Elsewhere

This critique of the home as a site of women's oppression was a dominant theme in the early years of Second-wave Feminism, which seem to have paved the way for much contemporary theorising about the link between woman and the home.

The focus of this critique was the figure of the housewife, that is, women whose lives and work were confined to the domestic home and labour⁴. Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, in her well-known *The Second Sex* (1952 [1949]) – a landmark book that inspired much of what was written about the home in feminist scholarship particularly during the 1960s and 1970s – used the figure of the housewife to explain everything that she saw that was wrong in the lives of women (Johnson & Lloyd, 2004), defining her as ‘the manic housekeeper’ who, wearing herself out through the endless repetition of domestic chores and the fight against the dirt and mess of life, ‘is doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home’ (1952: 449, 471). De Beauvoir believed that women’s activities in the home prevented them from pursuing self-actualisation, change, and progress, and doomed them to ‘immanence’, while men’s existence in both the public and private spheres enabled a synthesis of immanence and ‘transcendence’:

The fact is that every human existence involves transcendence and immanence at the same time; to go forward, each existence must be maintained, for it to expand toward to future it must integrate the past, and while intercommunicating with others it would find self-confirmation. [...] In his occupation and in his political life [man] encounters change and progress, he senses his extension through time and the universe; and when he is tired of such roaming; he gets himself a home, where his wife takes care of his furnishings and children and guards the things of the past that she keeps in store. But she has no other job than to maintain and provide for life in pure unvarying generality; she perpetuates the species without change, she ensures the even rhythm of the days and the continuity of the home, seeing to it that the doors are locked (1952: 430).

As Young (2001) discusses, in de Beauvoir's scheme ‘transcendence’ manifested the expression of individuality, which could only be realised by taking on future oriented projects that would contribute both to the development of the individual and to society at large. ‘Immanence’, on the other hand, expressed the activities of sustaining life, which helped only to ‘perpetuate the present’ without a future orientation or the need for self expression, or fulfilment. Therefore, ‘if a person’s existence consists entirely or largely of activities of sustaining life, then she or he cannot be an individual subject’ (Young, 2001: 268). From de Beauvoir’s perspective, the duty of women to maintain the home life, upon which men and children build their lives and individualities, limited their role in society and prevented them from becoming individuals themselves.

This hostile attitude towards the home and the housewife was carried into the early 1970s by Germaine Greer and Ann Oakley, who both saw the life of the full-time housewife as one of absolute servitude and oppression. They asserted, in a vein similar to de Beauvoir's argument, that housework was a duty which was 'directly opposed to the possibility of human self-actualisation' (Oakley, 1974: 222). Yet it was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which seems to have had the most profound impact on establishing the critique of the home and housewife as a central theme for Second-wave Feminism. Friedan argued that the home was a place in which women were identified only as wives and mothers, rather than as individuals. 'The material details of life, the daily burden of cooking and cleaning, of taking care of the physical needs of the husband and children', she claimed, were impediments for a woman to become 'a person in her own right, an individual free to develop her own potential' (1963: 67-68). Referring to a change in the popular consciousness in the United States between the 1930s and 1950s, she argued that the educated and working 'women heroines' of the 1930s had been replaced by 'the happy housewife heroines' in the 1950s. By the 1950s, she claimed, 'career woman' had become a 'dirty word', and that women had begun to accept the traditional role of the housewife as a happy alternative, confining themselves to this single role and accepting the identities that were defined for them by others. Friedan wanted to know the reason why women chose to 'go home again' – why she accepted the image of the housewife 'which insists she is not a person but a "woman", by definition barred from the freedom of human existence and a voice in human destiny' (1963: 68). She suggested that the core of the problem was not sexual, but rather a crisis of identity perpetuated by the 'feminine mystique': 'It is my thesis that as the Victorian culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual needs, our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role' (1963: 77). As a solution to this crisis, Friedan advised women to refuse to be trapped by the role of the housewife, and to develop life plans for themselves – plans which would reach 'beyond biology, beyond the narrow walls of home, to help shape the future'. Only through such personal commitment to their own plans, she claimed, could women truly find fulfilment as 'separate human beings' (1963: 337).

What we see in Friedan's account on the home and the housewife, as well as those of Greer, Oakley and de Beauvoir, is a problematisation of women's identity in relation to their association with the home, and an argument for the necessity for women to leave the home in order to be able to define their own identities beyond the identities imposed upon them. Second-wave Feminists

regarded the home as a place where women were responsible for hard labour, for caring for and nurturing others, which, in effect, isolated them, stripped them of their own selfhood, and confined their roles in society to wifehood and motherhood. The solution, therefore, was to leave the home. Women needed to break the links that tied them to the home, escape the secure and familiar sphere that entrapped them, and embrace risk and insecurity elsewhere in order to take control of the meaning of their lives and become full individuals. They needed to set themselves free from the relationships of dependence that anchored them to the home if they were to be able to define who *they* wanted to be. Hence women who chose to stay at home were devoid of an identity of their own.

Identity, in this feminist framework, was understood in terms of individual freedom and autonomy, in terms of a notion of a separate selfhood and an independent and self-determining individuality that could only be attained by leaving home. Not all feminist scholars, however, were happy with this conception of identity, and the most powerful critique against it was developed from within feminism itself in the 1980s. The most prominent work in this sense is Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982). Gilligan argued that the notion of separate selfhood had become a normative model in theories of human development in the twentieth century, which posited the idea that the process of identity formation required an individual's separation from relationships of dependence – like those of childhood, parental authority, and the family – to define an identity for oneself. She claimed that this model emerged largely from studies of men, and thus was not able to illuminate women's lives that were spent in 'intimate and generative relationships' (Gilligan, 1982: 151). For women, Gilligan stressed, the concepts of self and identity expanded to include 'the experience of interconnection' and a sense of morality that was intensified with the addition of 'responsibility and care in relationships'. According to her, an image of self in relationships, a self that is immersed in the connections built with others, and an ethic of nurturance, care, and responsibility was central to how women defined themselves and their orientation to the world (1982: 173). Therefore, the notions of self and identity that could only be attained by breaking the links that tied them to others and by giving up the ethic of care and responsibility were just not suitable for women.

Although Gilligan's work was later criticised for making normative claims about authentic womanhood (Johnson, 1996), it was important in drawing attention to the ideological basis of the emancipatory narratives of identity put forward by Second-wave Feminism. A significant discussion that builds on a reassessment of such narratives in relation to the feminist critique of the home is put forward by Lesley Johnson. In her article '*As housewives we are worms*'

(1996), Johnson argues that the rendering of the notion of home in feminism reflects the pervasiveness of dichotomies such as 'home/voyage, stasis/movement, private/public, tradition/modernity, connectedness/autonomy' characteristic of the definition of the modern subject and its incommensurability with other forms of subjectivity. Referring to Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts in the Air* (1982), Johnson points out that the uniqueness of the modern subject entails leaving the past behind – a past that is imagined as a world of habit and tradition, of order and security, associated with the sphere of the childhood where the identities of individuals are defined for them by others (1996: 451). For the individual to become the independent and self-defining subject of modernity, she states, it is necessary to embrace and celebrate the lack of security and order peculiar to contemporary social existence. Johnson argues that it was this kind of subjecthood and identity that was advocated by Second-wave Feminists in their call to women to leave the home, not only because the home, standing for stability, tradition, habit, and connectedness, symbolised all that modernism was against, but also because the association of woman with the home rendered her 'modernity's other' (1996: 449)⁵. Hence, according to Johnson, when Friedan and others called on women to reject the traditional roles of the housewife and mother that tied them to the domestic world of the home, they were trying to place feminism firmly within a modernist framework, as a project which, in Friedan's terms, aimed to 'awaken women to the freedom and responsibilities of being modern individuals' (1996: 451).

Johnson suggests that it is possible to envision another form of female subjectivity and identity, one that does not negate women's ties with the domestic home. Drawing on Benhabib's (1992) work which re-examines the notions of the individual and personhood, she argues that 'the individual, unrestrained by private or domestic responsibilities, possessing a rational mind liberated from the distorting effects of the emotions and the needs of the body' represents the characteristics historically associated with the modern male subject (1996: 452). This subject is imagined to become what he chooses to be by 'breaking all ties, freeing "himself" from the social relationships and influences of childhood, putting aside all emotional ties and the bodily restraints of domestic existence and entering the public world of men as a fully formed individual' (Johnson, 1996: 453). According to Benhabib, this 'disembedded, disembodied subject is an illusion', in that it does not take into account the multiplicity of social determinations that makes us 'who we are' (1992: 5). Instead, Benhabib argues for the recognition of a 'situated self' – a self that can only develop within the social relationships into which it is born. 'The self becomes an individual in that it becomes a "social" being capable of language, interaction and cognition. The

identity of the self is constituted by a narrative unity, which integrates what "I" can do, have done and will accomplish with what you expect of "me", interpret my acts and intentions to mean, wish for me in the future, etc.' (1992: 5). As such, the self, as defined by Benhabib, lives in 'a world of which she is not only the author but the actor as well' (1992: 5); hence it is inseparable from social and cultural associations, from the expectations of others, and from the social relationships that shape it, including the everyday relationships of domesticity and the home. As Johnson argues 'this self does not have to imagine itself as "leaving home" to become a self' (1996: 453).

It is clear then that the narrative of the independent subjecthood achieved by leaving home was productive in the formation of the 'feminist subject' of the 1960s and 1970s, a subject that was to resolve the tension between domestic responsibilities and public achievement by leaving the former behind, and defining the ordinary woman – the housewife – as the other of itself (Johnson & Lloyd, 2004: 17). Yet the critique of home as a place that entraps women within a domestic, and hence a conventional and regressive identity, reaches beyond the emancipatory narratives of Second-wave Feminism. The idea that women need to leave home to pursue a fully developed subjecthood and a progressive identity is also a theme that has surfaced in more recent feminist accounts. In *The Sphinx in the City*, for instance, Wilson, while attempting to resolve the distinction between the private and public spheres in modernity by focusing on women's participation in urban life, argues that the sense of displacement at the heart of the urban life, however full of difficulties and dangers, is supportive of the potential emancipation of women in contrast with the dull, ordinary world of domestic existence (1991: 10). More recently, feminist scholars have claimed that woman's subjecthood and identity is constrained not only by the material realities of the home and the relationships of dependence built in and around the circle of the family, but also by the very notion of the home itself – that home is not only a spatial, but also a conceptual cage. Feminist geographers, for instance, have criticised established phenomenological conceptions of the home that rely on an emphasis on the definition of boundaries, on notions of stasis, rootedness, and an unconscious sense of belonging to a particular place as conceptions that support the association of women with the home (Massey, 1994a, 1994b; Rose, 1993).⁶ Rose (1993) questions such conceptions of the home on the basis of their implicit reliance on feminine characteristics such as the emotional and the bodily while asserting that the home is the absolute place of belonging. For her, the insistence on the pre-consciousness of the experience of place, i.e. the idea that such an experience is based on 'sensuality, physicality, and habits, but not thought', manifests a 'masculine nostalgia' for the

'first and ultimate dwelling place', that is, 'the (lost) Mother' (1993:60). What is at stake in such conceptualisations, according to her, is the construction of the home as that ideal 'Woman' which in turn entraps womanhood within the ascribed role of motherhood, and leaves no room for another, independent subjecthood. In a similar vein, Massey (1992) claims that in much contemporary writing on the home the identities of the woman and of the home have become entangled: 'home is where the heart is (if you happen to have the spatial mobility to have left) and where the woman (mother, lover-to-whom-you-will-one-day-return) is also'. It is a place built upon the image of 'Mum'; yet 'not as herself a living person [...] but [as] a stable symbolic centre - functioning as an anchor for others' (Massey, 1992: 11).

I have so far discussed the feminist critique of the home together with the voices that have emerged from within feminism itself, reacting to a totally negative conception of the home. It is important to note here that the feminist critique of the home has led to a paradigm shift in conceptualising the very notions of home and place, particularly with the contributions of feminist geographers. Doreen Massey, for instance, argues that home and place could be conceptualised in terms of 'the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location', meaning that places called home may be understood as open and changing rather than bounded and stable, and that their identities derive precisely from this openness and change (1991; 1992; 1993). If, in Massey's terms, the identity of the home is in essence constructed out of movement, communication, and social relations which always stretch beyond its boundaries (Massey, 1992: 13), the feminist critique of the home as a bounded and stable place that imposes limits on what women can become loses its foundational premise. Nevertheless, the argument that women need to leave home in search for more progressive identities has continued to be voiced in the last two decades. In the next section, I will discuss this more recent critique of the home and the conception of identity on which it is built.

Against the Home and Essentialist Identities: The Critique of the Home as a Celebration of Difference

Parallel to the discussions in feminist geography that I summarised above, the feminist critique of the home is seen to have taken a rather different direction, merging with a critique of feminism itself as a movement that conceals differences and inequalities among women. Just as the earlier critique portrayed the home as a peaceful refuge for men, in this second line of the critique of home, women from

different sections of society (women of colour, working-class women and lesbian women, among others) have criticised 'the home of feminism' – the idea that it is a unified movement of women – seeing it more as a 'fantasy of white, middle-class, heterosexual feminists, one that veiled power relations among women' (Pratt 1999: 157). What is common between these two critiques is the idea that it is necessary to leave home to facilitate the emergence of the feminist subject. However, the notion of leaving home, in the latter critique, is conceptualised more as a form of 'self-displacement' in order for the feminist subject to be able to understand and be critical of herself and her location in relation to others and thereby reach a sense of self-awareness and personal responsibility (de Lauretis, 1990). Displacement from the home is thus used in the sense of giving up a desire for the home as a safe place, and rejecting home as a concept that expresses a bounded, stable, and apolitical identity. Only through such a displacement, it is argued, will feminists be able to see a multi-layered reality and be open to understanding themselves along with different experiences of being a woman, particularly the experiences of women who do not belong to the Western, white, and heterosexual sections of society (Pratt, 1999).

One well-known essay that contributed to this critique is Minnie Bruce Pratt's *'Identity: Skin Blood Heart'* (1984). In this autobiographical narrative of self-discovery, Pratt examines the desire to be and feel at home in light of the conditions within which the comfort and safety of home is achieved. Remembering her childhood and the communities in which she lived as a white young American woman, she deconstructs the conditions in which she felt at home, with a particular focus on the exclusion of people of different colour. She claims that home is a matter of privilege and power, the attainment of which is based on 'omission, exclusion, or violence' and on one's 'submitting to the limits of that place' (Pratt, 1984: 25-26). This awakening is realised through her transgression of the heterosexual culture into which she was born, and her present position as a lesbian who finds herself constantly threatened by sexism and homophobia away from her original home-place. The location from where she writes her narrative is her present residential location – an African American neighbourhood in Washington DC, where exclusion and suppression are a part of everyday life. This residential choice – the choice of displacement, of moving away from the boundaries of the safe home – is central to her description of a change in consciousness, 'a way of looking at the world': 'One gain for me as I change: I learn a way of looking at the world that is more accurate, complex, multi-layered, multi-dimensioned, more truthful [...] I am compelled by my own life to strive for a different place than the one we have lived in' (1984: 17, 48-49). For Pratt, this moving away from the home is necessary if one is to be able to dismantle the conditions of social privilege and power. And the move she

argues for is not a temporary condition, since it is not the destination but rather the process of moving away from the known and the familiar that is critical.

Pratt's choice of movement and displacement, rather than a search for a secure and comfortable place to belong, has been taken up as a feminist model in a series of essays all of which suggest that feminists should reject any positive valuation of the home. Martin and Mohanty (1986), in their reading of Pratt's essay, claim that home is a familiar and safe place where one lives within protected boundaries, and that only when one leaves the home can one realise that the safety and coherence that is provided by this place is 'an illusion [...] based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences, even within oneself' (1986: 196). Honig (1994), in a similar vein, sees the home as an apolitical space built on a fantasy of unity and coherence. For her, the dream of home is dangerous in that it is a dream of a retreat into a unitary and solidified identity at the expense of the exclusion of differences, of those defined as 'others'. She argues that 'to take difference seriously' it is necessary to give up on the dream of a place called home, 'a place free of power, conflict, and struggle, a place – an identity, a private realm, a form of life, a group vision – unmarked or unruined by difference' (1994: 567). Similarly, de Lauretis (1990), in an attempt to define 'the eccentric subject' of feminism in her essay, which follows up on Martin and Mohanty's insights, continues with the theme of the home as a place of stable, bounded and apolitical identities, and asserts that feminism as a consciousness-raising project, and the formation of the feminist subject, depends on the displacement from the home. If feminism is to make a 'shift in historical consciousness', she states, home has to be left behind 'physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically - for another place that is unknown and risky' (1990:138).

There are clear parallels to be drawn between this line of feminist critique of the home and the recent theorisations of identity which privilege movement and displacement over attachment to a particular place, standing in radical opposition to the conventional conception of the home and its attendant connotations of stability, continuity, and a desire for a fixed and permanent existence⁷. As McDowell suggests, the move to understand identities in relation to movement and its connotations of instability, fluidity, and transformation has been welcome by feminism which is 'used to challenging fixity and essentialist, unchanging notions of what it means to be a woman' (1999: 206). Yet in their attempts to de-essentialise identities and in calling for an openness to understanding different experiences of being a woman, the advocates of this line of critique of home end up excluding one particular experience of womanhood – the experience of staying at home, which was condemned by de Beauvoir,

Friedan and others. As Johnson (1996) argues, de Lauretis's definition of the 'eccentric subject' of feminism who has to leave home constitutes an 'other' – the woman 'bound down by tradition, embedded in the mundanities of everyday life, trapped in the private domain, [...] the figure of (the ordinary) woman' – and sets up 'a normative definition of womanhood in which desires for home as comfort, intimacy and everydayness appear to be what "we" [...] ought to be leaving behind' (1996: 453-454). Drawing parallels between this more recent critique of the home in feminism and earlier critiques, Johnson maintains that in attempting to 'destabilise normative definitions' of womanhood, feminists need to avoid setting up their own normative definitions in which a desire for the home is considered as 'inappropriate, even perhaps shameful, something that we hope to move "beyond"' (1996: 454).

In terms of the conceptualisation of home, what we have in this line of critique is an overvaluation of mobility and the constitution of home as an antithesis of mobility and displacement. The fluidity of identity and the virtues of movement and displacement are emphasised against a homely existence in order to situate and then displace identity and difference. Yet, a major problem is that although constructed on the basis of an actual, material experience of movement and displacement, this line of critique falls short of an understanding of a grounded experience of place and home. Pratt (1984) talks about how her movement through particular places has increased her awareness of difference in terms of gender, race, and class, and describes how her current residential location has played a crucial role in her awakening. In a similar vein, de Lauretis (1990) mentions that migrating from Italy to the United States was critical for her understanding of ethnic difference. Yet this overvaluation of mobility and displacement leads both Pratt and de Lauretis away from a careful consideration of the processes in which identities are constructed through the grounded experience of places called home. In other words, the notion of home that they construe throughout their essays remains mostly in the realm of the abstract. This is a point that has been raised again in feminist academic circles, particularly by feminist geographers. Pratt and Hanson, for instance, remind that 'places are more than vantage points that veil or disclose one's social location; they partially constitute social location', and point out that geographies of home are more than mere backgrounds that reflect who we are, in that they play a critical role in shaping our identities, making us become who we are (1994: 8). Hence, even though movement and displacement may lead to a transformation of identities and a certain sense of self-awareness with regard to our previous locations, there can never be an absolute displacement in the sense that leaving our familiar milieus of home also means leaving our former selves behind.

A Positive Revaluation of Home

Along with reactions to the ways in which the home and identity have been conceptualised in feminism, it has been feminist scholarship again from which a positive revaluation of the link between women and the home has flourished in the last two decades. In this section, I will discuss two major texts that provide a counter-argument to the feminist critique of home. The first is Iris Marion Young's (2001) essay 'House and Home: Feminist variations on a theme'; and the second is bell hooks' 'Homeplace: A site of resistance' (1990). I will argue that both texts, along with positing a more positive idea of home in feminism, also construct a framework within which the relationship between home, women, and identity may be discussed without recourse to binary oppositions like movement vs. stability, or essentialist vs. progressive identities, but rather with reference to the grounded practices of home and home-making and the voices of women who identify themselves with certain places.

Young begins her essay with a discussion of Heidegger's conceptualisation of 'being' in relation to 'dwelling', which, as Heidegger asserts in his well-known essay 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' (1971), is based on two aspects of 'building': preservation and construction. Preservation entails 'cherishing, protecting, preserving and caring for', in Heidegger's terms; it is 'to be set at peace', 'to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature' (Heidegger in Young, 2001: 255). Young argues that despite his claim that both aspects are important, Heidegger leaves preservation behind and focuses on construction, 'the heroic moment of place through creative activity that gathers the environment into a meaningful presence' (Heidegger in Young, 2001: 255). For Young, this privileging of construction is male-biased, since the building of houses and other structures still remain largely a male activity. She states, 'If building [...] is basic to the emergence of subjectivity, to dwelling in the world with identity and history, then it would appear that only men are subjects. On the whole, women do not build' (2001: 255).

Yet Young maintains that building is not the only way to dwell in the world as a subject. She draws attention to the other aspect of being and dwelling, to 'preservation', the activity of protecting, cherishing, and caring for things, which Heidegger abandons when pursuing his ontological claims. She argues that preservation is a historical and a quintessentially feminine activity which is central to 'home-making', and that it bears as much critical human value as building. Yet preservation, she states, is not only traditionally ignored in Western conceptions of identity and history, but is also devalued by the feminist understanding of the home, which, according to her, due to its constant reliance

on the dichotomy of transcendence and immanence in conceptualisations of women's oppression, misses the silenced meanings women give to their work in the private domestic sphere. This work, Young explains with particular reference to de Beauvoir, is not only about 'the bare acts of cleaning bathrooms, sweeping floors, and changing diapers, [which] are merely instrumental', and, although necessary, 'cannot be invested with creativity or individuality', but also involves the arrangement and preservation of things in a space so that that space becomes marked with individual and familial meaning. She maintains that this intrinsically valuable and unique aspect of home-making entails creating 'a specific mode of subjectivity and historicity that is distinct both from the creative-destructive idea of transcendence and from the ahistorical repetition of immanence' (2001: 269).

In elaborating her discussion on preservation, Young accentuates the personal and local, domestic experiences of home and home-making. She argues that a home is personal in a 'visible, spatial sense' since, no matter how small it is, it 'displays the things among which a person lives, that support his or her life activities and reflect in matter the events and values of his or her life' (2001: 270). Identity, she suggests, is materialised in the home through a process which works on two levels. Firstly, a person's belongings are arranged in space as an extension of, and as support for, bodily habits and routines; and secondly, many of the things displayed in the home, as well as the space itself, carry personal meaning and transmit and sustain a personal narrative. For Young, home-making imbues things with meaning. Material things and spaces acquire personal value as the inscribers of events and relationships that construct the narrative of a person or group: 'The things among which I live acquired their meaning through events and travels of my life, layered through stories, and the wordless memories of smells, rhythms, and interactions. Their value is priceless [...]' (2001: 271).

Young argues that home-making consists of these activities of bestowing things with meaning, of placing them in space to provide a milieu for the facilitation of the everyday activities of those to whom they belong, and preserving them together with their meanings. Most importantly, she points out that it is woman who does most of this work. It is woman who furnishes and decorates the houses; and most of the time, a home reflects a woman's taste and emotions, and the style, image, and identity she chooses to project of herself and her family (2001: 272). It is she who protects the meaningful things that embody the spirit of a person or a people from disorganisation, from neglect, and oblivion: she cleans, dusts, repairs, and restores, and she also tells and retells their meanings, interprets and reinterprets them so that those meanings are

transmitted to the future. Young explains that woman's work of preservation also involves teaching children the meanings of things among which they dwell, and the practices that keep those particular meanings alive. Preservation as such 'gives people a context for their lives, individuates their histories, gives them items to use in making new projects, and makes them comfortable' (2001: 274).

Although home-making can be understood as an activity the main goal of which is to stabilise identities in order to create a safe niche to dwell in the world, Young warns that this is not the case, arguing that it would be a mistake to consider the identity sustained through the preservation of things and their meanings as fixed. She states that there are no such fixed identities, since events, interactions, and changes in the materials and the environment make lives fluid and shifting. The significance of activities of preservation lies in the sense of continuity they provide the individual in the midst of change: '[they] give some sense of enclosing fabric to [the] ever-changing subject by knitting together today and yesterday, integrating the new events and relationships into the narrative of a life, the biography of a person, a family, a people' (2001: 274). Young continues by positing that preservation should also be distinguished from nostalgia and a desire for a lost home in that it entails remembrance, which is essentially different from nostalgia. While, 'nostalgic longing is always for an elsewhere', remembrance, through 'knitting a steady confidence' in who we are from 'the pains and joys of the past retained in the things among which [we dwell]' helps us to affirm 'what brought us here' (2001: 275). She also cautions that preservation should not be romanticised, since it can be either conservative or reinterpretive. For her, in interpreting the activities of preservation, it is important to understand that 'the narratives of the history of what brought us here are not fixed, and part of the creative and moral task of preservation is to reconstruct the connection of the past to the present in light of new events, relationships, and political understandings' (2001: 275). As such, home-making through preservation supports the identities of individuals by making it possible for them to place themselves in a continuous narrative rather than fixing and stabilising their identities: 'Home as the materialisation of identity does not fix identity, but anchors it in physical being that makes a continuity between past and present. Without such anchoring of ourselves in things, we are, literally, lost' (Young, 2001: 271-72).

Young's essay is important in that it conceptualises an alternative and more positive idea of the home in feminism. As I have stated above, she agrees with feminists that part of women's work in the home falls into de Beauvoir's category of 'immanence', yet she tries to show that home-making is not all about that. She argues that the value of the home is ambiguous, and that feminists should

disengage a positive meaning of the home from the oppressive aspects of women's engagement with it. While pointing out that 'if women are expected to confine themselves to the house and serve as selfless nurturers, then house and home remain oppressive patriarchal values' (2001: 277), she claims that the values of home-making that underlie the affirmation and sustenance of personal and cultural identity cannot be dismissed from a feminist perspective, and that recognising these values entails also recognising the value of the often unnoticed work that many women do. As such, Young shows that the negative aspects of the home in women's lives do not justify a wholesale rejection of the idea of the home in feminism.

Young's understanding of the home is based on her personal experience of the difficulties and potentials of home-making for women, which she narrates with reference to her childhood which was shaped by repeated separations from her home at the behest of the state as the result of her mother's failure to satisfy the normative ideals of home-making as a single woman living in an American suburb. Her attempt to balance the exploitative aspects of the home with the positive values of home-making should be situated within this experience of separations from her home and her mother. It is no coincidence that another essay dwelling on the significance of those positive values is also grounded on personal experience. bell hooks' (1990) essay on the importance of the domestic milieu of the home for African Americans shows how those values constitute a ground for the conscious construction of a political identity. hooks maintains that for African Americans, for whom a safe and decent existence in the public sphere is not possible, the home, as a space beyond the reach of the oppressive social structures of a racist society, becomes a place where more humane social relations, and a resistance to domination and exploitation, can be built. Most important of all, it is African American mothers and grandmothers who build this resistance by preserving their history and culture in their homes. For hooks, African Americans should respect and honour these women who, through stories, songs, and artefacts, recreated a home-place – a place where they could 'recover' themselves against the destructive forces of society (1990: 43). Hence for hooks, like for Martin and Mohanty, de Lauretis, and others, home is a place of security and identity; yet, unlike them, she ascribes a positive meaning to these aspects of the home. For her, the possession of a home place – the 'privilege' of having one – is what makes the conditions for politics and resistance possible.

Hooks' (1990) essay is important not only as another positive approach to home from within feminism, but also as a strong example showing that home is a question of context – 'what home is, and what home means, depends to a

large extent on who you are and where you are' (Blunt & Dowling: 253). Home cannot be discussed independently from the identities and geographies in question. As Geraldine Pratt (1999) argues, 'assessments about identities and places cannot be made in the abstract, and [...] suspicion about essentialised identities does not flow unproblematically into assessments of place. [...] [I]t is unhelpful to designate homes in general as "good" or "bad"' (1999: 159-160). Drawing on the experiences of a Filipina domestic worker in Canada, Pratt shows the importance of a place of one's own for those who have 'a fragile claim to home' – even if that means a single room in some strangers' house. The meaning and value of the home, then, depends on circumstances and the position of people within the larger society. 'It is easier', as Pratt asserts with reference to the negative valuation of home in feminism, 'to criticise home from the position of having a secure one' (1999: 157)⁸.

Young's and hooks' essays are also important in that they demonstrate that there is a need to think about the link between women and home beyond binary oppositions like stasis/movement, tradition/modernity, stability/change, and private/public. As Morris states, home can be thought of as a way of drawing a boundary around an 'unfixed identity' and as 'a place from which to venture' (Morris, 1996). Johnson's study on the meanings women attached to their homes during the modernisation process in Australia after the Second World War is significant in that it shows that such a revaluation of the home is possible. Johnson writes that for many Australian women 'home was not a place separate from the contingencies of the modern world to withdraw into [...] a bounded space where [...] processes of modernisation could be excluded', but a place 'to be created' as part of their active participation 'in the life of the nation and in building modern life in Australia' (1996: 460-461). She suggests that the responsibility of creating a comfortable domestic existence in new suburban houses with modern appliances and planned gardens was what modernity meant for these women:

The modern, for them, did not mean undertaking heroic voyages or making great scientific discoveries in a world from which the traveller could then return to existing security, to home as tradition. No such place existed for them. Home was not a bounded space, a fortress into which the individual could withdraw and from which all others could be excluded. Their modernity was about actively creating a place called home, securing a future for their children and an everyday life in which personal and intimate bodily relations could be properly looked after (1996: 461).

As in the case of these Australian women, home-making may entail plans and visions for the future. In other words, women do not need to leave the home to

be able to take their part in shaping the future, as Friedan advised. Johnson's study shows also that home may be a locus of transformation in a context of change – its identity, like those who inhabit it, cannot be shaped independently from the processes beyond its boundaries. It can never be fixed, because, as Massey (1992) reminds, the identity of the place called home stems from the very fact that it is always open, constructed out of movement, communication, and the social relations that stretch beyond it.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that feminist literature on the link between women and the home deserves a much broader discussion than the limits of this paper permit. A thorough understanding of the discourses that I discussed above requires a detailed and critical investigation of the theories and ideas about the relationship between space, place, and identity, and the role of space and place in the social production and reproduction of power relations that have been developed in the disciplines of social science in the second half of the last century.

Still, it is possible to conclude this paper by reiterating Pratt's argument that 'assessments about identities and places cannot be made in the abstract' and that 'it is unhelpful to designate homes in general as "good" or "bad"' (1999: 159-160). Although feminist scholars are right to argue that patriarchal values are mostly displayed in the domestic milieu and thus restrict women's engagement with the larger society by limiting their movement outside this sphere, the home cannot be reduced to a site of oppression and domination, or to a place that women need to leave behind. The positioning of women within places called home and the meanings of this positioning can only be understood by a thorough understanding of the practices through which women draw the boundaries of home and what those boundaries mean to them in specific social and cultural conditions. These practices, which Young refers to as 'preservation,' are mundane practices of home-making, an analysis of which may provide us with a rich variety of meanings that are inseparable from the formation and negotiation of identities. Such practices may show that while the home may be a site of oppression and domination, it may also be a place where identities are reconstructed against the dominating forces of the society outside, as bell hooks tells us. The future of feminist thought on the connections between women, home, and identity will certainly be drawn by grounded research that aims to listen to the voices of women from different sections of society, from which an understanding of how they actively invest meaning into their home-places may be garnered.

Notes

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² See Lamphere (1993) for a review and a broader discussion.

³ See Moore (1988) for a broad discussion on the ways in which different cultures constitute gender (and the idea of 'woman') and how such constitutions relate to the gendering of spaces.

⁴ For a recent critical review of this literature, see Johnson and Lloyd (2004).

⁵ For a broader discussion on gender and modernity in relation to architecture and domesticity, see Heynen and Baydar (2005).

⁶ Examples of such phenomenological accounts can be found in Relph (1976) and Casey (1993).

⁷ See Chambers (1994) and Rapport and Dawson (1998) for recent theorisations of identity in relation to movement and displacement. See Kaplan (1987) for an early discussion on the appropriation of notions of 'deterritorialisation' as a feminist strategy to understand differences among women.

⁸ For a discussion on the meanings of home-making for refugee women, see Kılıçkiran (2003).

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Kadın, Ev ve Kimliğin Sorgulanması: Feminist Yayına Eleştirel Bakış

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Öz

Kadının 'ev' ile ilişkisi yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısında feminizmin toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve ideolojileri ile mekân arasındaki bağları çözümlenmek üzere ürettiği tartışmalarda önemli bir alt başlık olagelmıştır. Batılı feminist yazarlar ev mekânını kadının ezildiği, kimliğinin toplum tarafından onun için tanımlanan kimliklerle sınırlandırıldığı bir yer olarak görmüş, kadının kendi kimliğini bulabilmesi için evi ve ev ile ilişkili rollerini terk etmesi gerektiğini savunmuşlardır.

Bu yazıda, feminist yazında 'ev'e karşı geliştirilen bu olumsuz tutum feminizmin kadının kimliğini yeniden kurma çabası üzerinden çözümlenmektedir. Yazı, yine feminizmin içinden yükselen karşı seslere referansla, feminizmde kadın ve ev arasındaki ilişki üzerine kadının kimliği açısından daha olumlu bir kavramsallaştırmanın mümkün olup olmadığını tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Feminizm, ev, feminizmde 'ev'e yönelik eleştiriler, kadın, yer, kimlik.*