'Mama let me be': Space, Place and Gender in the Post-War American Metropolis

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Abstract: *Women's traditional gender roles delineated not only women's domain, but also their place, as men had been in charge of ruling the main power structures of the society: religion, politics and the army. Women's new occupations after the Second World War and their active social and professional lives opposed the traditional family and deconstructed it. This paper focuses on how gendered spaces are also challenged and restructured through women's emancipation and the rise of the LGBTQ community during the post-war time and how the intersections of gender, power and space influence the discourse on sexuality, ownership and autonomy in the American metropolis.*

Keywords: *woman, space, place, gender, post-war*

Introduction

The idea that space and place are gendered has been the focus of several studies starting with the Second World War. Women had to replace men at work while they were away on the front, which served as a shift in paradigm in what concerns "woman's place." In his *Spatiality* (2012), Robert Tally affirms that the fields of geography and space have been male dominated throughout history and this is one of the reasons why many spaces are analyzed and understood through man's perspective [Tally, 2013: 132]. Gillian Rose, a feminist geographer of the twentieth century, confirms this theory in her *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993), by stating that "geography holds a series of unstated assumptions about what men and women do, and that the discipline concentrates on the spaces, places, and landscapes that it sees as men's" [Rose, 2007: 2]. Therefore, a new understanding of places is needed, in order to diminish the gender-based character of space and place. This paper is concerned with the intersections of space, place, sex and gender in the American metropolis and reveals a number of challenges that the urban society was facing during the post-war period.

Gender and the Metropolis

A new understanding of space and place may be required more in certain locations where the patriarchal society has been more dominant than others. Doreen Massey emphasizes this aspect in her book, *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), noting that "the demonstration of geographical variation adds yet another element to the range of arguments that these things are in fact socially constructed" [Massey, 1994: 178]. Gender relations can vary in different places and cultures and thus, gender identity is strongly influenced by the geographical and cultural reality of a place. Moreover, space can be seen as a tool that was used to discriminate against women: "The limitation of women's mobility, in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination" [Massey, 1994: 179]. Women's interdiction to travel, to have an education or even to be allowed in certain spaces was a way of indicating women's inferiority on the social scale. Also, the public and the private spheres were spaces that once again, showed the distinction between men and women. Women were characterized by the private space while men were represented by the public space. These gendered spaces affected women's opportunities to develop a cultural or social identity and were limited to domestic life and to the traditional gender roles.

While gendered spaces can refer to physical places, Judith Butler notices in her *Gender Trouble* (1990) that one has to take into consideration also the spaces of one's masculinity or femininity when raising the question of sex and gender: "one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose something of one's sense of place in gender" [Butler, 2006: xi]. People's gender determines the physical perimeter where one is located. However, when individuals go through confusion regarding their gender or when one is transitioning to the other gender, both physical and metaphorical spaces are deconstructed. They gradually lose their sense of space as they lose their heterosexuality. This transition doesn't only imply one's feeling as feminine or masculine but also their relationship with the world and with the spaces assigned to each gender. The gendered space is also challenged and restructured through women's emancipation throughout time. As Butler further notes, "for that masculine subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency, of a female "object" who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position" [Butler, 2006: xxvii]. With the development of women's equal rights in society, the border between the spaces of women and men became less and less evident and has been pushed further by women into men's spaces toward equality. This sudden change provoked great confusion regarding the role of women and men in society. Women started to be less passive in their endeavors and relationships with men. Space becomes a paradox when seen through the lens of Gender Studies, firstly, by changing women's place when

compared to the traditional delineation of spaces in relation to gender roles and secondly, by the increasingly more vocal homosexual society who strolls in the "in-betweenness" of male and female spaces. In this respect, place is in a continuous transition based on people's perception of themselves and also of the places to which they belong. Judith Butler further states that discourse and visibility of women and gay experience is vital to the achievement of gender equality in the society: "the complexity of gender requires an interdisciplinary and post disciplinary set of discourses in order to resist the domestication of gender studies or women studies" [Butler, 2006: xxxii]. Butler confirms the necessity of writing as activism for gender equality and states that it is writing from various perspectives and through a cross-sectorial approach that such issues can be tackled.

Judith Butler further affirms that "a generally shared conception of 'women', the corollary to that framework, has been much more difficult to displace" [Butler, 2006: 7]. Her statement reinforces the idea that women's intrusion into men's space in society has been a pathway filled with obstacles and hardship, as "woman" was positioned in and associated with the domestic space. The stigma and the stereotypes created around the idea that women cannot replace men or take the same roles as them, have been taken as part of common knowledge and with time, they have been transformed into culture. To break such a deep-rooted patriarchal heritage, it took the social work and the dedication of generations of empowered women. Butler proposes a radical measure to fully combat gender discrimination: "The possibilities of re-signifying heterosexuality itself are refused precisely because heterosexuality is understood as a total system that requires a thoroughgoing displacement" [Butler, 2006: 154]. By "displacement," one can understand that women remove themselves from the traditional gender roles and the spaces associated with domestic life. In order to fully achieve a state of freedom and equality, when compared to men, Butler proposes that heterosexuality, as an institution with rules, authority, norms and power, should be deconstructed through the adoption of homosexuality. She believes that heterosexuality is a repetitive tradition, which passes from generation to generation and builds the norm of one's sexuality. Moreover, the "institution" that Butler analyzes imposes a set of rules of behavior and roles for each gender, fact that reinforces the principles of the patriarchal society and empowers its beliefs. Through homosexuality, Butler considers that these norms will become more and more blurred and thus, social behavior will no longer have "gender" as the primary determiner.

Butler reinforces the discourse of Adrienne Rich on women's status in the American society. In her essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), Rich argues that the experience of women had been closely shaped and monitored by man's interest and agenda:

> This double-life-this apparent acquiescence to an institution founded on male interest and prerogative-has been characteristic of female experience: in motherhood, and in many kinds of heterosexual behavior, including the rituals of courtship; the pretense of asexuality by the nineteenth-century wife; the simulation of orgasm by the prostitute, the courtesan, the twentieth century „sexually liberated" woman. [Rich, 1980: 654]

All these roles that women took along centuries have been dictated by a patriarchal power structure that defined what woman is and how she should act in society. The very principle of Social Darwinism, that the physically powerful can rule over the weaker ones, had been the case of female oppression over time and had led to a deeply rooted tradition of patriarchy, which became the social norm in terms of gender dynamics, through its repetitive implementation world-wide. Even though female experience has changed radically over time, as Rich notes, from an asexual nineteenth century wife to a twentieth century sexually liberated woman, it was still the patriarchal voice that dictated such changes and manipulated mainstream women into believing that they can be socially autonomous. The double life that Rich describes, emphasizes two sides of women's experience. One refers to the interaction between woman-man, which is characterized by the submission, tolerance and servitude of women toward men, while the other one refers to the interaction woman-woman, which is distinguished from the first through sisterhood, affection and care. The emergence of women into society had been severed by patriarchal power, through an ideology that claimed dominance and force, as requirements of power-positions in society. Rich notices that the double life that women undergo has negative effects not only on society and future generations of oppressed women, but also on the level of energy spent in assuming a role that most women do not resonate with. While the lives of women may differ, depending on their situation and background, their limitation in terms of truly discovering themselves is evident: "women will remain dependent upon the chance or luck of particular relationships and will have no collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives" [Rich, 1980: 659]. While sexuality had been defined broadly by patriarchal values for all women, irrespective of each individual's needs, personality and background, women had been respecting these roles and trends dictated by society and had obeyed various values and norms at the expense of their happiness, sexual fulfillment and psychological and physical health. Rich draws her conclusions on the importance of sisterhood and visibility of positive relationships among women, romantic or otherwise, as societies have been misled by an untrue and unfounded idea of women as rivals. The collective efforts of women into showing their true worth and intentions is what drove toward development in terms of women's rights today and it is still one of the solutions for further achievements in social equality.

As Suzanne Mackenzie notes in "Building Women, Building Cities: Method and Prospects" (1988), once the First Wave Feminism had developed, women started experiencing new territories and new opportunities and they "were leaving their own families to organize for voting rights, higher education, and professional career" [Mackenzie: 1988: 19]. This new type of woman was no longer interested only in marriage and motherhood, and since the "family" was an important and needed institution, it had "to be supported, restructured, and improved" [Mackenzie: 1988: 19]. This new issue in the urban life led to a social conflict, some people considering that "the city has destroyed the home" [Mackenzie: 1988: 20]. The modifications that occur both in the urban and family life, have a common cause, the new kind of woman. This is also what triggered the idea of the suburb and that of the housewife. Therefore, the women that stuck with the city became wage workers and they had a notable impact upon it, by modifying the old working models and by bringing new perspectives to a man-oriented urban reality. Mackenzie further states that "understanding women and cities therefore requires not only a new set of concepts structured around the relations of production and reproduction but also a new methodology which permits one to examine how daily activities alter and adapt these analytic constructions" [Mackenzie: 1988: 24]. Along with revolutionizing the city, a new understanding of places and also new theoretical support was necessary in order for the urban environment to function properly. This new "methodology" was essential as it provides an up-to-date portrayal of the city in terms of welfare. As cities change continuously, time and space are significant markers when analyzing a city. They can be considered the elements that "give form and substance to human action" [Mackenzie: 1988: 25], because they are the determiners of the way in which people act and they also trigger patterns in people's lifestyles. This perspective on the importance of cities in the development of trends and people's mentality is also supported by Simon Parker in his *Urban Theory and The Urban Experience: Encountering the City* (2003): "Cities are both the locus and the focus of civilization – they allow society to reach its greatest potential and concentrate its greatest contradictions. At the same time, cities are 'mirrors of modernity,' they allow us to engage in self-reflection both as individual subjects and as members of discrete groups and tribes" [Parker, 2004: 139]. Therefore, cities are vital in encouraging people to think about themselves as individuals but also about their role in the society, as a whole and in its subdivisions. Moreover, a city can be seen as a process that undergoes continuous transformations and also as the main factor that triggers evolution. In Parker's view the city is the "ecosystem" of progress and transformation in terms of identity and culture: "Urbanity is the laboratory for the configurations and significations of modernity, and the study of the urban condition therefore affords myriad opportunities for exploring the ways in which the city operates as a site of representation, contestation and

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identification" [Parker, 2004: 149]. One may achieve urbanity by being referred to as "citified," that is adopting a city-specific lifestyle which opposes living in small towns or rural areas. Urbanity refers to the refinement of manners and fashionable and modern traits among the inhabitants of the city.

Urbanity may also refer to all modifications that the clash of various cultures produces. Change is inevitable, and its role is crucial in maintaining a well-balanced relation between people, time and spaces. In their study "Gender-Specific Approaches to Theory and Method," Caroline Andrew and Beth Moore Milroy define "change" as the action of "physically rearranging the phenomena in our environment and the processes carried on there; to altering the concepts, methods, theories, and languages we use to investigate the world and ourselves" [Moore and Andrew, 1988: 1]. While Mackenzie states that space is the element that influences human action, here, it is understood that people are the influencers on space and on all the other values and patterns it comprises. Furthermore, in the same essay, it is stated that "understanding and changing, then, as themes in feminist research embrace the desire to change values and world views rather than simply to make the existing male world accessible to women" [Moore and Andrew, 1988: 1]. Thus, from a feminist perspective, women can change the environment into an equal ground for men and women, rather than just finding ways to see into men's world. One way of doing so is writing about women's experiences and promoting these writings, in order for the issues and concerns of women to be raised in society.

Gender and Power

Series of factors. In *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Michael Foucault argues that freedom is not complete at a political level if it is not achieved as well at individual level: "freedom in classical Greek thought was not considered simply as the independence of the city as a whole, while the citizens themselves would be only constituent elements, devoid of individuality or interiority" [Foucault, 1990: 78]. This idea reinforces the fact that nowadays, although policies are being implemented to install equality of chances in society, there are still important, unresolved issues that affect the American society, as the members of minorities haven't found individual freedom entirely. While Foucault describes true freedom from the perspective of classical Greek thought, pointing out that "the mastery they were capable of exercising over themselves, was indispensable to the entire state" [Foucault, 1990: 79], which implies that the self-discipline of people and the empowerment to control oneself are key-elements in achieving a group's freedom, which lays not in the strictness or the manner of leadership but in "the form of supremacy he maintained over himself [which was] a contributing element to the well-being and good order of the city" [Foucault, 1990: 79]. Foucault draws on the different ways of understanding "freedom" in relation to "self-discipline," as it may mean

both, freedom from pleasures or depriving oneself of the desired amount of pleasure. An important aspect in establishing the status of citizens as free or oppressed is that of acknowledging the socio-cultural background of that place. Social norms and values can instill a sense of "normality" to different ways of living which will define one's behavior as disciplined or not. While each person's endeavors are triggered by and compared to the norm of each social group, it is difficult to determine the unbiased meaning of "free individual."

In part V, "Right of Death and Power over Life," Foucault describes the shift from a direct ruling of structures of power over groups of people to an indirect one, where economy is a key-factor in the quest for freedom: "This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes" [Foucault, 1990: 141]. The recent ways of controlling masses by the power structures are emphasized by their influence over demography, institutions, politics and economy. As people achieved the freedom and the right to live, due to development, emancipation and policies, the white-patriarchal power installed a different kind of authority that manages to regulate and influence people's lives. Similar to agriculture, industrial and technological development provided more freedom in one's endeavors and comfort while enslaving and controlling other categories of people. Another effect of technological development is the control over pandemics and life quality, which ensured longevity and thus, overcrowding. A new type of order was necessary for the power structures to adapt to the situation where people were learning to live more comfortably and longer: "it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death that gave power its access even to the body" [Foucault, 1990: 143]. "Bio-power," as Foucault coined it, serves as a model of modern control over individuals, by embedding a strict culture of rules and expectations among people. Another aspect of the power-relations discussed by Foucault is the impact of power over knowledge and vice versa. "Power-knowledge," as he coins it, refers to the influence that knowledge and power have over one another and the effects imposed on society by these two forces. Foucault notes that "bio-power [..] made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life [Foucault, 1990: 143], as it instructs the citizens on what the social norms and values are. Through religious practices, the discourse on sexuality has been mirroring a patriarchal ideology which defines the role and meaning of femininity as submissiveness, while masculinity has been portrayed as dominance. The "knowledge-power" manipulates the system of values that citizens follow as free individuals, which allows the institutions of power to have control over life. "Knowledge-power" may be the cause of the "repressive hypothesis," coined by Michel Foucault, as it is the social norms and the mainstream mindset that led to the concealing of sexuality and toward biased transformation of discourse.

A new vocabulary of sexuality was developed in order to control the way people express themselves in regard to it. Another way of controlling sexuality referred to imposing civil and religious norms, which citizens had to respond to, in front of the church and the government. By limiting intercourse and romantic relationships to the married woman and man only, homosexuality was labeled as sinful and forbidden, together with other immoral sexual practices, such as sodomy, adultery, incest and pedophilia: "It [homosexuality] was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature" [Foucault, 1990: 41]. Even though homosexuality has been written about since the antiquity, it is with the rise of the bourgeoisie that it became understood as a different species of people rather than people with a different sexual orientation. This separation of the "normal" from the "other," as defined by the institutions in power, has led to social unbalance and dysfunctionality and, at the same time, has led at a better control of the masses by the power structures. This limitation between the socially accepted and the unaccepted has not only been expressed at social level, but also at the spatial one, through clear delimitations between class, race, age and gender.

In his *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) Manuel Castells writes about this relationship between space and its inhabitants in connection to social movements: "here lies the most important role of urban social movements, their very *raison d'etre* as a distinctive actor: they are the collective actions consciously aimed at fundamentally modifying the city's role in society, or redefining the historical meaning of 'urban'„ [Castells, 1983: 71]. Although cities are stratified social structures, when imbalances between people and places appear, social movements are born. Because of the technological evolution, tradition, lifestyle and beliefs have to transform and thus, space needs to be restructured and remodeled to meet the new needs of people. In the case of cities, urban regeneration is strongly related to social movements and thus, to activism. When beliefs and social norms change with time, a city needs to make space for the new activities of people or repurpose its places. Churches, castles, citadels, caves and city squares are a few of the type of places that needed to adapt to the transition of customs. Although space has been clearly delimitated between women and men, women's considerably smaller share of space has led to social movements which demanded the expansion of their space. Castells describes this inequity:

> Throughout history male domination has resulted in a concentration and hierarchy of social tasks: production, war, and political and religious power - the backbone of social organization - have been reserved for men. All the rest, that is, the immense variety of human experience, from the bringing-up of children and domestic work to sensual pleasure and human

communication, have been the women's domain. Men took on the state and left the care of civil society to women. [Castells, 1983: 68]

The development of Women's Rights is an example of the evolution of the people-space conjunction that triggered change both in the use of places and in people's understanding of them.

In her book, *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life* (2002), Nan Johnson emphasizes the importance of rhetoric in society and the fact that women did not have access to it by the time of the emergence of the First Wave Feminism. She states that "at the start of the nineteenth century, the arts of rhetoric were the undisputed province of the male professional classes" [Johnson, 2002: 3]. Thus, women were kept away from this art and from any profession that would involve such knowledge and skills. While men worked in leadership positions that allowed them great influence over people, such as priests, lawyers, politicians or writers, women were taught to be decent, quiet and good wives and mothers. Johnson further states that "more importantly, they were chastised or worse for trying" [Johnson, 2002: 3], which shows the forbidding attitude of men toward women, in regard to space. As Karlyn Campbell notes in her *Man Cannot Speak for Her* (1989), "femininity and rhetorical action were seen as mutually exclusive, no 'true woman' could be a public persuader" [Campbell, 1989: 9], thus, power and influence were seen only as man's attributes and definitely not as feminine characteristics. Furthermore, if a woman did break the barrier between men and women's spaces, she was treated sacrilegiously and thus, "entered the public sphere and thereby lost their claim to purity and piety" [Campbell, 1989: 9]. The mentality at the time was influenced by certain convictions and views imposed by the patriarchal society, therefore, only a woman that was obeying her father or husband and who was committed to the traditional gender roles could be pure and worthy of appreciation.

Starting with the Second Wave Feminism in the post-war era, changes in the American sexual thought had a significant impact on the way women were viewed. Women's experience came to finally be understood as more complex than that of motherhood and wifehood. Aspects of life such as professional life, freedom of expression and sexual pleasure, that were previously considered normal parts of a men's life, were now taken into consideration as women's experience as well. According to Jane Gerhard's *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought* (2001), a Kinsey report from 1953 reveals the paradox of the American society during the Cold War in what concerns women's status: "society that promised individuals the right to 'the pursuit of pleasure' at the same time it anxiously constricted such freedoms in the name of family stability" [Gerhard, 2002: 54]. This dissonance between the different roles expected from women may have been caused by the effects of the Second World War, as women had to fill in the roles of both

men and women in family and in society: "Dr. Irene Josselyn of the Chicago Institute of Psychoanalysis was warning that the country was drifting toward a social structure made up of he-women and she-men" [Wilson[1] quoted in Gerhard, 2002: 15]. Postmodernity was a time of revolutionary changes in the after-war era, especially since many women had to replace men's working places, as a large number of men died or were injured in the war. The reorganization of social roles triggered a sense of disruption and debate on what was going to happen to the American society, and thus labels such as "he-women" and "she-men" were brought up as statements against the deconstruction of the traditional gender roles.

After the confusion created by the new status of women in society, the issue of homosexuality started to be explained as a psychological condition: "normalizing heterosexuality as the only healthy form of sexual behavior and to explaining male homosexuality as either a sign of immaturity or the result of failed gender roles at home such as a domineering mother or weak father" [Gerhard, 2002: 54]. The patriarchal society was threatened by all changes that the 1950s and 1960s brought to the metropolis. The restructuring of the family into new shapes and forms, different from what people had known until then was a sensitive issue for those following a traditional lifestyle. Categorizing homosexuality as a psychological problem and blaming bad parenting and failure to achieve traditional roles was a way of the patriarchal society to impose boundaries that were aimed at preserving the family. Moreover, besides gender roles, the patriarchy also aimed at keeping the society in order: "Freudian psychoanalysts helped to cultivate fear in many average American men that any sign of gender nonconformity indicated their repressed or latent homosexuality" [Gerhard, 2002: 54]. Therefore, any uncommon kind of behavior could label people as homosexual, which at that time of social restraint meant lowering one's social status. Fear, tradition and patriarchal values kept the society submissive and obedient and losing them meant losing power.

Conclusion

The metropolis represents the nexus of both tradition and change. The city-life of the post-war era in large American metropolises seems to be marked by two opposing trends in regard to gender and sexuality: women's liberation and the patriarchal society's struggle to preserve the traditional family. Women's new occupations and their active social and professional lives challenged the traditional family and deconstructed it. In the same time, the 1950s are marked by social resistance and control as well as very strict policies and norms that are trying to suppress and discourage any form of unconventionality. Awareness is one of the most important stages in social

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[1] Elizabeth Wilson, "The Context of 'Between Pleasure and Danger': The Barnard Conference on Sexuality," Feminist Review 13 (Spring 1983), 35–52.

change movements, which is why creative actions and initiatives are vital to the development of places. Space has been constantly modified in the context of the people-place symbiosis. People reshape a place's purpose, appearance and value while place draws on all these traits through its resources, geographical position and landscape. Both the location and the inhabitant can only transform together, which is why cities, as human settlements, determine how people live their lives, while people determine the role of the city in their endeavors.

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