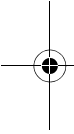# *DiGeSt*
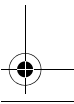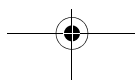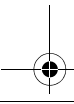# Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies

Birgit Van Puymbroeck (ed.)
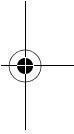
DiGeSt – Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies

The *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* (*DiGeSt*) is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the intersection of diversity and gender studies. It welcomes contributions from a broad array of disciplines in the arts and humanities (such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology, history, arts, and literature) but also from the natural sciences. *DiGeSt* aims to provide a forum for debate on current research regarding gender and diversity in Belgium, yet also has a keen interest in practices and research on other countries and societies. It comments on topical and/or coming trends that affect research in these areas. In highlighting the significance of ongoing research for knowledge, culture and daily life, it aims to appeal to both a specialist and a wide audience.

Table of Contents

Editorial

As this issue goes to press, the effects of the bombings in Brussels on the 22nd of March are still visible. As many opinion-makers have suggested, the attacks are linked to problems both local and global: terrorist networks in the Brussels area, the ongoing conflict in Syria, the rise of IS, and the refugee crisis. Local problems often find their origin in geopolitical forces; borders are simultaneously being crossed and reaffirmed; protest rises as EU policies, including those of gender and racial equality, are being questioned. In light of these and other events, the focus on gender and diversity seems to be more important than ever to our critical thinking, scholarly research, and daily lives. How do we respond to the events happening around us? How do we frame them? What are the implicit and explicit assumptions we make? It is in this context that the *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* (*DiGeSt*) continues to be a forum for scholarly debate and critical reflection on issues relating to gender and diversity, both of the past and the present, in Belgium and abroad.

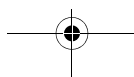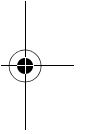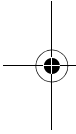In her article "Judith Butler in Belgium: Reflections on Public Grief and Precarity in the Wake of the Paris Attacks", **Holly Brown** comments on Judith Butler's visit to Belgium on 16 November 2015. What was meant to be a celebratory occasion – Butler received an honorary doctorate from the University of Liège – was over-shadowed by the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015. Building on Butler's post-9/11 works *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*, Brown analyses displays of public grief on social media in the wake of the Paris attacks. She highlights the "differential distribution of public mourning", where we mourn the deaths of some but not of others, by closely examining two Facebook features used by thousands of people immediately after the attacks: the "Safety Check" button that alerts Facebook contacts that one is safe and the French tricolor filter applied to profile pictures expressing sympathy or public grief. From a Butlerian perspective, the use of these features illustrates different degrees of "precariousness" or vulnerability, as Brown convincingly demonstrates. Being invoked for Paris and not for Beirut, they signal the division between the West and "the Other".

Continuing the discourse of intersectionality central to the previous double issue of *DiGeSt*, **Anna Safuta** discusses the perceived opposition between materialist and post-structuralist paradigms within feminist theory in her article "Migrant Domestic

Services and the Revival of Marxist Feminisms: Asking the Other 'Other Question' as a New Research Method". Rather than maintaining the dichotomy, she calls for an integrated perspective where we ask materialist *and* post-structuralist questions. One perspective is not better suited than the other to study specific phenomena; what matters is whether and how we include both. As Safuta shows through a case study of female migrant domestic workers in the "care chain" between Belgium, Poland, and the Ukraine, materialist perspectives alert us to the structures of inequality that inform the experiences of women in domestic service, even when these women do not always explicitly draw attention to material factors themselves. They can be included in the course of the research or applied to the results *ex facto*, as in the presented case study. In both cases, they reveal exploitation, where other, post-structuralist discourses only see the "labour of love", that is, voluntary commitment and emotional attachment. "Systematically asking the other (i.e. materialist) other question", according to Safuta, "will ensure that both the 'identity' and 'materialist' aspects of a single phenomenon, experience or narrative are accounted for".

An intersectional method is also adopted by **Wim Peumans** in his contribution "The Moral Breakdown between Religion and Sexuality in Narratives of Muslim Gays, Bisexuals, and Lesbians in Belgium". Through two case studies of LGB Muslim youths in Belgium, he critiques the view that religion and sexuality are always commensurate. Rather than focusing on how Muslims reconcile religion and same-sex sexuality, Peumans highlights the "moral breakdowns" that seem to be part of a gay Muslim identity. As Peumans demonstrates, moral breakdowns are not one-off experiences but are often lived through again and again. They are embodied experiences that do not necessarily lead to a unified self, as is often suggested in the literature on "coming out", but that show a self that continues to be "ambivalent, ambiguous, and sometimes even contradictory and fragmented." Peumans's account extends beyond the specific case study in that the discourse of multiple moral breakdowns can be read as a critique on the notion of the liberal, rational self, central to many studies dealing with gender and diversity.

Jo Tondeur, Sarah Van de Velde, Hans Vermeersch, and **Mieke Van Houtte** examine the correlation between gender and computer attitudes for university students in their article "Gender Differences in the ICT Profile of University Students: A Quantitative Analysis". Through a large-scale quantitative study, they show that there is no significant difference between men and women's computer attitudes in an educational setting. Although men have more positive general computer attitudes, there is no significant difference when computers are used for educational purposes. According to the authors, this is due to the "pragmatic stance" of women who are neither "technophobes" nor "technophiles" but "techno-realists": they become more interested in computers when there is a clear, utilitarian purpose

involved. Just as important as the results of this study are its qualifications that highlight expectations concerning gender roles, contextual differences, and sociocultural practices. For instance, women have a more generally positive attitude towards education, which would explain the difference between general computer attitudes and those used in a specific, educational context.
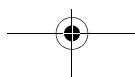
DiGeSt continues its tradition of publishing short notes on recent and classic critical studies on gender and diversity that are of particular significance to a researcher's ongoing project. The contributors to this issue's "What are you reading?" section are **Elien Arckens**, **Warda El-Kaddouri**, **Anaïs Van Ertvelde**, **Nella van den Brandt**, and **Sarah Posman**. These researchers introduce the reader to works that deal with topics as wide as queer sites of trauma, Muslim identities in Germany, "fat studies", *mati work* in the Afro-Surinamese diaspora, and American feminism of the 1970s. They highlight the impact of a specific work on their ongoing research, and discuss its relevance for the wider field in which their research can be situated.

As *DiGeSt* celebrates its third birthday, it undergoes a number of changes. We are glad to welcome six new members to the editorial board: Maaheen Ahmed, Tom Claes, Sander De Ridder, Frederik Dhaenens, Sarah Van de Velde, and Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe. We also want to thank Marianne Van Remoortel and Evi Ceuleers, who are moving on to other projects. Liselotte Vandenbussche and Griet Roets are stepping down as editor-in-chief and editorial assistant and will be replaced by Birgit Van Puymbroeck and Katrien De Graeve respectively. We want to thank Liselotte and Griet for putting *DiGeSt* on the critical map, and are reassured that they will continue to serve on the editorial board. *DiGeSt* continues to be committed to publishing new and innovative research on gender and diversity. In order to better guide the reader, it now also includes abstracts of the main contributions.

The next issue of *DiGeSt* will be a special issue on Silence, Gender, and Diversity, edited by Pieter Verstraete and Josephine Hoegaerts.

Birgit Van Puymbroeck, editor-in-chief
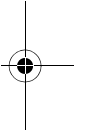
Judith Butler in Belgium:
Reflections on Public Grief and Precarity
in the Wake of the Paris Attacks

Holly Brown

Abstract

Judith Butler's presence in Europe during the Paris attacks provides an opportunity to reflect on the contours of her rich, philosophical legacy. Butler's most recent work can be characterised by way of a shift towards more explicit global and biopolitical concerns, as exemplified in her post 9/11 texts *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009). This paper will explore specific aspects of public discourse in the wake of the Paris massacre through Butler's concept of grievability. Butler contends that the ability to be mourned within the West illustrates which lives are valued or disposable in our contemporary geopolitical context. Examining the way in which certain social media platforms facilitated and circumscribed displays of public grief enables us to contend with the complex relationship between recognition, vulnerability, and the violence of defining "the human".

Keywords: Judith Butler, precarity, biopolitics, grievability, gender

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On the 16th of November 2015 Judith Butler received an honorary doctorate at the University of Liège. Butler, eminent gender theorist and philosopher, was honoured alongside the critical theorist Nancy Fraser and the author Caryl Phillips, bonded intellectually by a common concern about the relationship between representation and recognition within contemporary multicultural societies. While in the opening remarks Butler's diverse oeuvre was celebrated for its sustained examination of subjects that are peripheral to routes of traditional philosophical and political considerations, it is still through the now classic 1990 work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the*

Subversion of Identity that most individuals gain their first encounter with Butler's philosophical approach. In *Gender Trouble* Butler developed the notion that gender is performative; not the externalization of an inner core but rather a practice to be sustained through repetition. In presenting gender as a socially constructed variable that adapts to different historical and cultural contexts, Butler challenged both patriarchal perspectives and feminist political stances that were rooted in stable conceptions of identity. Corresponding perhaps to the continuing resonance of Butler's earlier works about gender, her talk at Liège "Evaluer l'esprit critique" (2015a) was formed around the dissection of diverse groups that reject binary notions of gender.

The tone of the evening was drastically modified by current events, though Butler did not address them within "Evaluer l'esprit critique" directly. The seven coordinated terrorist attacks that killed over 130 people had occurred in Paris only a few days earlier, marking another tragic episode in a turbulent year for the French people following the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting in January and a series of other smaller-scale terrorist incidents (Chrisafis, 2016). Before Butler received her honorary doctorate, the university rector asked us to perform a standardised act of public mourning; to stand, to bow our heads, to offer a moment's silence to those who died in Paris. Butler took this opportunity to make allusions to the wider scale of global terrorism. Massacres in Beirut, Palestine, Ankara were mentioned within the ceremony by Butler herself, but also in her punctual and personal response to the killings which was published on the *Verso* website on November 14th (2015b). In that reflection, "Mourning Becomes the Law", she reflects upon her own experience of being in Paris at the time of the attacks and probes the restriction of grief to the national frame, asking why "the café as target pulls at my heart in ways that other targets cannot" (2015b). While not bound to Paris through nation, Liège enjoys a greater linguistic, geographical, and cultural proximity to the French capital, perhaps, than any of the locations more directly afflicted by the horrors of terrorist violence.[1] The act of public mourning at Liège underlines a tense realization which Butler's meditations stress. Had the other attacks not had the peculiar privilege of temporally coinciding with those in Europe, then those that had died outside of the imagined boundaries of the West would not have been recognised in this public institution in the same manner. Considering this scene at Liège in relation to some of the specific framing of the wider discourse, particularly on social media, around the Paris attacks provides a means through which to examine the contours of Butler's thought from her earliest preoccupations with the consequences of performativity to her more direct engagement with the way in which marginal populations are produced (Watson, 2012, p. 1). Viewing the performance of public grief through a selection of Butler's most recent work allows us to examine the contention that the act of lowering our heads for one group of people but not

others outlines a wider illustration of whose lives are valued or disposable in our current geopolitical context.

Butler's Political Turn: Liveable Lives, Grievable Deaths

From her earlier work on sexual minorities to her more current engagement with refugees, the stateless, and the Black Lives Matter movement, Butler has consistently engaged with bodies that have been marginalised in some way by the current operations of Western democracy. Thus despite a thematic shift from a focus on gender and sexuality in her initial texts such as *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) to her contemporary, yet by no means exclusive, focus on Foucauldian questions of life and death (Watson, 2012, p. 2), Butler's philosophical approach can be unified through its continuing investigation into how the hierarchical distinctions between embodied subjects are maintained and produced within the contemporary public sphere. In acknowledging the power that comes with defining "the human", Butler's oeuvre can be placed alongside biopolitical thinkers such as Achille Mbembe and Giorgio Agamben who focus on the continuing violence of the exclusion of certain historically marked groups from civic and political structures (Campbell & Sitze, 2012, p. 19). Sarah Salih thus characterises one of the driving impulses within Butler's work as the "ethical impetus to extend the norms by which 'humans' are permitted to conduct livable lives in socially recognised spheres" (2004, p. 4).

Intriguingly, Butler's lecture at Liège illuminated two of the specific directions that have characterised this biopolitical turn. In her recently published *The Political Philosophy of Judith Butler*, Birgit Schippers argues that 9/11 provoked a shift in Butler's writing towards a broader engagement with global issues (2014, p. 3). The affective penetration of the terrorist attacks within Paris into the Liège ceremony can thus be seen to echo the adjustment of Butler's perspective in the wake of the Bush administration's invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq to engage with more overt politically international subject matter. This transition is best exemplified by Butler's publications *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009). In her analysis of the verbal and visual rhetoric of the War on Terror, Butler uses her philosophically ambitious approach to call for a more careful analysis of the many interweaving, conflicting strands that constitute our current geopolitical situation (Schippers, 2014, p. 5). Taken together, these texts form the basis for what Janell Watson describes as Butler's own "theory of precarity" (2012, p. 1).

We can perceive the central tenets of this conceptual framework germinating in *Precarious Life*, a series of essays that analyses political discourse in the aftermath of

September 11th. Within this collection, Butler examines the missed opportunity to use the exposure of America's fragility productively, to utilise a temporary dislocation from First World privilege to acknowledge a mutual corporeal vulnerability as a basis for a new interdependent global political community (2004, p. xiii). In *Frames of War*, Butler nuances this perspective by drawing a distinction between "precariousness", a general condition shared by all forms of life due to our physical liability, and "precarity", a politically induced condition which refers to specific populations exposed to state violence or neglect (2009, pp. 25-26). *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War* aim to construct a discourse that at once is able to emphasise our mutual dependency while acknowledging the way in which intersectional racialised and gendered geopolitical forces make some lives more vulnerable than others (Schippers, 2014, p. 3).

While these two texts taken together are certainly wide-ranging in their approach, reflecting upon the role of state-sponsored violence in a range of contexts including Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and Israel, they are undergirded by a central theme that was, again, gestured to in the act of public mourning performed at Liège. The concern over how the affective process of mourning and grief are used as regulatory norms to determine which lives matter is a continuing occupation of Butler's work.[2] Within her post 9/11 texts, Butler illuminates how a differential distribution of public grieving defines the limits of the human. Starting from a localised, universal experience, Butler asks us to consider how in the celebration of the birth of a child there is the implication that if the infant were to die it would be grieved, and that this "future anterior is installed as the condition of its life" (2009, p. 15). Grievability, the ability to be mourned, is therefore a presupposition for a life that matters (Butler, 2009, p. 14). Expanding the frame, Butler then asks us to consider the unmournability of specific lives, particularly Arab peoples', and those who do not inhabit the Western world (2004, p. 32). The lack of obituaries for the war casualties published by the West from the War on Terror demonstrates how public grief is a crucial resource for politics and ethics, for determining a ranking between lives that are valued and those that are not (Lloyd, 2008, p. 94). The differential allocation of grief produced by our cultural frames allows us to think about who counts as a human, exposing a normative violence in who can be mourned and grieved (Butler, 2004, p. 37). Butler thus divides the global, biopolitical line between valued and disposable populations not only through who can and cannot be grieved, but additionally whose lives are considered so sacred that a perceived threat to them can be enough to mobilise war (2004, p. 32). Reading the actions of European governments to conduct airstrikes on Syria in the wake of Paris from a Butlerian perspective, we can perceive how modern warfare is dependent on the aim of maximizing precariousness for specific,

ungrievable groups while (allegedly) minimizing precariousness for others (2009, p. 22).

Sovereignty, the Subject, and Social Media

The aftermath of the Paris massacre, in which outpourings of grief for those killed dominated Western media discourse, provides an opening to discuss the intricacies of Butler's theory of precarity. Within *Frames of War* and *Precarious Life*, Butler places great importance on the intimate connection between the way in which the media framed the War on Terror, and the subsequent conduct of those wars. She contends that the regulation of the visual field, the reliance on embedded reporting by journalists in the Afghanistan and Iraqi conflicts, works to undermine "a sensate democracy, restricting what we can feel, disposing us to feel shock and outrage in the face of one expression of violence and righteous coldness in the face of another" (2009, p. 52). Butler's commentary on the media response to the War on Terror focuses exclusively on traditional photojournalistic and televisual methods. The importance of social media in the way in which the Paris attacks were reported to the public, and indeed subsequently how individuals responded to them allows us to explore Butler's connection between framing and grievability from a new, dynamic perspective. Particularly stimulating for this conversation is the controversy surrounding the selection of new or adapted features that the social media giant Facebook added to their interface following the attacks. One allowed the site's users to place a transparent red, white, and blue French flag over their profile picture. The site also activated the "Safety Check" function for the Paris locality (Barnard, 2015). Examining the response to these Facebook features within the wider discourse around the Paris attacks enables us to reflect on the way in which previously existing social structures of perception circumscribed and shaped these public displays of grief.

The dynamics of what Butler terms the "differential framing of violence" (2009, p. 1) that underpins our affective and ethical dispositions played itself out in remarkable ways with regards to the addition of the "Safety Check" function. A feature normally reserved for natural disasters, "Safety Check" automatically alerts those you are connected to within the site that you are safe once you have logged into Facebook. While Facebook was applauded by mainstream media outlets for providing an accessible and easy means for individuals to check up on their loved ones, other commentators questioned why the "Safety Check" function had not been activated for suicide attacks in Beirut which killed at least 43 people and wounded over 200 the day before Paris (Barnard, 2015). Annia Ciezadlo, a Beirut-based journalist, commented "when something bad happens in Lebanon, the world takes an unspoken attitude that it's no

big deal—that people here are 'far more used to violence than Paris'" (2015).[3] Butler's contention that "the frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated" (2009, p. 1) resonates with Ciezadlo's assessment of the global disparity of the means of registering violence. In terms of standard reporting, the attacks in Beirut were covered by major news outlets. But in not installing the "Safety Check" feature for those that live in Lebanon, we can perceive the operation of a normative frame that "regulate[s] and determine[s] who counts" (Lloyd, 2008, p. 104). As Ciezadlo asserts, the violence experienced by those living in Lebanon is naturalized; the safety of the people living there is positioned as unimportant, outside of our frame of reference. Ciezadlo draws on the media response to the refugee crisis that had dominated the news in previous months. In particular, she highlights the case of Alan Kurdi, the 3-year-old Syrian whose drowning on the crossing to Europe was widely discussed and publicly grieved, vying that had the death occurred in Lebanon then there would have been "no global outpouring of support, no donations from all over the world" (2015). The precariousness, the overwhelming fragility of Alan's existence arguably made his death impossible for the Western media to ignore. But it was the framing of the event, the context of Alan's family attempting to transition from a geographical place of politically induced precarity to the safety of Europe, which can be seen to provoke our sorrow. In contrast to Alan, the deaths of the children in Lebanon vanish in what Butler describes as "the ellipses by which public discourse proceeds" (2004, p. 35). The lack of the "Safety Check" feature for those locations positioned outside of the West can therefore be seen to demonstrate the violence of omission.

In conjunction with the "Safety Check" function, Facebook also implored its users to cover their own image with the French tricolour: "Change your profile picture to support France and the people of Paris" (Chittal, 2015). And thousands, though Facebook will not disclose the full amount to the press, did. This was the first time that the site had used the coloured filter for an act of mourning (Sanders, 2015), its only widely available previous incarnation had been the overlay of a rainbow flag offered in June after the U.S. Supreme Court legalised gay marriage. The disparity in which nations Facebook users were permitted to pledge allegiance or support to were called out, and individuals took to Twitter to ask why there were no filters for Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Pakistan (Mills, 2015).

While this is undoubtedly an important concern, the notion of draping any national flag over a symbol of one's identity bears careful reflection about the way in which sovereignty, representability, and national discourse operated in the wake of the Paris attacks. Let us first explore the concept of nation and nationalism within this context. In her examinations of the U.S.'s War on Terror, Butler positions heightened forms of nationalist discourse as antithetical to a politics based on vulner-

ability (2004, p. xiv). Nationalism creates a kind of transcendence over corporeal destructibility, permitting violent retribution on those who threaten its identity (Butler, 2009, p. 47). The opportunity to apply the national flag to an image of one's self can, therefore, be perceived as a means of emphasising immunity and wholeness, the drawing of divisions between different communities at a time of increased global corporeal vulnerability (Wilcox, 2015, p. 172). Thus even though individuals were astute in calling out the privileged status given to France that permitted Facebook users to visually demonstrate their grief for its people over others, this expression of loyalty to any nation undermines Butler's vision of a politics that is built on a collective precariousness rooted in all human existence.

The way in which Facebook as a private enterprise facilitated specific, nationally-inflected forms of grieving highlights one of the key critiques of Butler's theory of precarity raised by Jodi Dean (2008), namely that Butler's delineation of sovereign power is too simplistic. Butler's post 9/11 writings display consistent alarm about how the suspension of law during the War on Terror has created a new, unwieldy state of sovereignty. This example is made most powerfully through her examination of the convergence of governmentality and sovereignty within the walls of Guanta-namo Bay, where the indefinite detention for many who are held there demonstrates how American government forces can be construed as a sovereign power accountable to no international law (Butler, 2004, p. 68). However, Dean contends that Butler's focus on the law leads to a limited view of how sovereignty works within globalised, communicative capitalism (Dean, 2008, p. 110). Butler's narrow legal perspective ignores the way in which non-governmental economic, corporate, and financial con-cerns determine political policy (Dean, 2008, p. 115). Dean puts forward a more plu-ralistic perspective of the diverse and multiple ways in which sovereignty plays out in the contemporary moment, challenging what she perceives to be Butler's very literal interpretation of arbitrary, exploitative power (2008, p. 110). Drawing from the work of Slavoj Žižek, Dean reasons that domination in our contemporary moment is char-acterised not by obedience to an overwhelming force, but rather through never-ending consumption within a capitalist system, a process that incites us with the promise to endlessly transform and remould ourselves (2008, p. 117). The adoption of the French flag feature on Facebook, itself a commercial platform, can be per-ceived as a way of altering our own consumable, constructed "brand". The commer-cial gain or value of such a feature, described by one commentator as a "performative requirement" (Lee, 2015), is difficult to ascertain. However, it is worth reflecting about the function of this feature in a neoliberal economy, which, as Carolyn Pedwell (2014) argues, places a market value on empathy due to its professed capability to offer a means of effective relation between different groups across national and geo-political boundaries. Butler's request that we turn inwards to examine our own pre-

cariousness and vulnerability is still entangled with a concept of reciprocity that undergirds an empathetic perspective. Strangely absent from both *Frames of War* and *Precarious Life* is a recognition of the way in which the promotion of a shared vulnerability is complicated by its place in an "empathy economy", which figures compassion as a tool that must be possessed by the self-managing and self-enterprising neoliberal individual (Pedwell, 2012, p. 287). Butler's commentary is thus slightly blinkered to how the pressure to perform empathy demonstrates our embroilment within an economic model that demands emotional competency. The impetus to pledge our allegiance to Paris through Facebook is underwritten by a system of governmental, social, and economic forms of power which are perhaps too complex to be incorporated into the version of sovereignty that Butler outlines in the texts under examination.

Speaking to the Present Reality

There are, of course, no simple ways in which to alter the current framing of the artificial divisions between the West and "the Other", a position that Butler confirmed at her talk in Liège. When an audience member asked Butler directly about the course of action that Europe collectively should take after these attacks, she responded that we should create an overwhelming movement that embodies nonviolence. Butler tempered these comments by acknowledging that she knows this is an unrealistic position currently, that her beliefs "don't always speak to the present reality" (Butler, 2015a). Salih's statement that readers of the philosopher's texts should not expect "radical accessibility" can thus be adapted to the statements that she makes in her role as a public intellectual (2004, p. 1). Butler's advocacy of a recognition of our collective precariousness as a means to dismantle precarity has been characterised as a "precarious proposition" in our political climate (Watson, 2012, p. 1). While Butler's perspective is somewhat constrained by its lack of engagement with how economic concerns shape the formations of political power in a neoliberal economy, the utility of her theory of precarity rests in its ability to connect an existential-phenomenological account of liveability to sociopolitical arguments about the ways in which recognition and grievability are distributed unequally along gendered and racialised lines (Schippers, 2014, p. 3). Though social media platforms such as Facebook attempted to circumscribe mourning in specific ways, the reaction to these measures can be seen as a form of resistance to this framing of events. Commentaries such as Ciezadlo's, collated opinion pieces produced by outlets such as *NPR* [National Public Radio] and *The Metro* demonstrate small yet significant critiques of existing norms, which allocate recognition differentially. These disparate voices thus offer a tentative disruption to what writer Teju Cole (2015) has described as the "con-

sensus about mournable bodies [which suggests that] certain violent deaths are more meaningful, and more worthy of commemoration, than others."

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Notes

1. The article was written before the Brussels attacks on 22 March 2016.
2. See *Antigone's Claim: The Kinship of Life and Death* (2000).
3. Ciezadlo quotes David Shariatmadari: "Isis hates Middle Eastern civilisation too", *The Guardian*, 16 November 2015.
4. The text appears to have been taken down from the Verso website.

Migrant Domestic Services and the Revival of Marxist Feminisms: Asking the Other 'Other Question' as a New Research Method

Anna Safuta

Abstract

This contribution revives the materialist approaches which featured prominently in second-wave feminism. The objective is to shed new light on current scholarship on migrant domestic services. The article starts by highlighting the most important materialist contributions to feminist theory. From there, a comprehensive review of the literature on (migrant) domestic services is mobilized in order to show the influence on research results of the inclusion or absence of a materialist perspective. The article then draws on the findings of a project investigating the "care chain" linking Belgium, Poland, and Ukraine. These findings demonstrate that the (implicitly or explicitly) adopted feminist paradigm influences the presence or absence of redistribution in the findings of a research project. In order to avoid such partial results, the contribution proposes an innovative method of feminist data collection and/or analysis. Based on the "asking the other question" method of intersectionality, this new methodology guarantees that issues of importance to materialist and post-structuralist feminisms will be simultaneously and systematically addressed throughout the research process.

Keywords: feminism, domestic workers, reproductive work, care, intersectionality, migration

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The denunciation of the limits of male-centred positivist science, and subsequently of white Western hegemony within feminism resulted, respectively, in the idea that all knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1986, 1992), and in the theoriza-

tion of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1995). When I started research on migrant domestic workers, the arguments raised by those pioneering developments in feminist theory were resonating in my head: what if, blinded by my own social positionality, I was to miss very important parts of the picture? Educated within the French tradition of materialist feminism, I was particularly wary of neglecting questions pertaining to what Nancy Fraser calls "redistribution", that is, questions relating to the social allocation of and access to material resources. Since her seminal exchange with Judith Butler (Butler, 1997; Fraser, 1997), Fraser (2009, 2013, 2015) has been urging feminists to revive the critique of capitalism that featured prominently in second-wave feminism. Indeed, Fraser wants feminisms to re-engage with questions pertaining to redistribution.[1]

Fraser's redistribution/recognition dichotomy has been criticized as simplistic and theoretically unsound (Butler, 1997; Lykke, 2011; Young, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Rather than simply reproducing this dichotomy as an analytical framework in itself, this article redefines it as a difference of paradigms within feminist theory and research. This difference is the often discussed, sometimes conflictual relationship between materialist feminist approaches drawing on Marxism (supposedly focusing primarily on redistributive questions), and those primarily inspired by post-structuralism (which, according to Fraser, often narrow the focus to questions of recognition). As I will show below, the domination of post-structuralist approaches within feminist theory since the 1980s has had important consequences for conceptualizations of "women's work", which in turn has influenced research on domestic services provided by migrants ("migrant domestic services").

In light of Fraser's and several other recent feminist interventions advocating the need to revive the materialist legacy of second-wave feminism,[2] this contribution starts with a discussion of the tension between materialist and post-structuralist paradigms within feminism. In the next section, I highlight the most important materialist contributions to contemporary feminist theory. I then show how the presence or absence of a materialist perspective influences research results through the example of a comprehensive review of studies of domestic services provided by migrant workers. The third section draws from the results of a research project on the "care chain" linking Belgium, Poland, and Ukraine. I show the inconsistent presence of redistributive concerns in the narratives of interviewed migrant domestic workers and the ways in which those concerns are intertwined with issues of recognition. I argue that while not everything is concerned with redistribution and recognition, more often than not, the absence of one of those two aspects in the research results stems from the choice of paradigm, rather than denoting a "merely symbolic" (recognition) or "merely material" (redistribution) phenomenon. Finally, I propose an innovative method of data collection and analysis in feminist research. Based on

intersectionality's "asking the other question", this new method aims to ensure that the concerns of materialist and post-structuralist approaches are simultaneously and systematically addressed throughout the research process. The aim is not to address those two types of questions in a disconnected additive manner but to reflect on their interdependence.

Competing Feminist Paradigms or the Return of 'Old' Materialisms

Since the 1980s, white Western feminist theory has undergone a so-called "post-modern", "linguistic" or "cultural turn" (Barrett, 1992; Ebert, 2005; Fraser, 2009; Hennessy, 1993; Wicke & Ferguson, 1992). This turn is attributed to the rise of post-structuralism in the humanities and social sciences in American academia.[3] As a legacy of (post-)structualist theories of language, postmodern feminisms consider that reality is constituted through language: "what we call the real is a product of language and has its reality only in language" (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, pp. 3-4; see also Frost & Elichaoff, 2013, p. 2; McCall, 2005, p. 1777).

The postmodern turn has been strongly criticized, notably by authors who identify with the materialist tradition in feminist research, be it in France, Germany, the UK, or the US. Marxist, socialist, postcolonial, and some queer theorists have criticized postmodern feminism's quasi-exclusive focus on language, supposedly overlooking the material aspects of heterosexist oppression (Eisenstein, 2009; Epstein, 2010; Hennessy, 1993; Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997; Jackson, 2001; Stabile, 1995, 1997; Turcotte, 1996). Postmodern approaches have also been accused of abandoning anti-capitalist critique (Fraser, 2009, 2013; Jackson, 2001; Turcotte, 1996) and allowing for feminism to be co-opted by neoliberal capitalism (Eisenstein, 2009; Fraser, 2009, 2013).

However, while prominent white feminists such as Fraser protest against the cultural turn, arguing that it allowed for the neoliberal instrumentalization of feminism, other critics have pointed out that black and postcolonial feminisms never ceased to denounce global capitalism (Bhandar & Ferreira de Silva, 2013). Recent theoretical endeavours that plead for a materialist renewal in feminist and queer studies (Camfield, 2014; Crosby et al., 2012; Floyd, 2009; Hennessy, 1995, 2013; Jackson, 2001; Sears, 2005) could thus be described as white Western feminisms rediscovering the importance of a feminist critique of capitalism.

It seems the strongest resistance to the postmodern turn came from feminists in Europe, where materialist approaches have been more firmly implemented. Materialist feminisms[4] are a very diverse constellation of feminist research sharing a common (although) critical identification with the Marxist legacy of historical materialism.[5] Broadly speaking, materialist feminisms have been concerned with demon-

strating that, although often seen as "extra-economic", the subordination of women is in fact founded on a material basis and linked to the political economy of capitalist society. The historical materialist legacy within feminism involves a concern with materiality, understood as the sexual division of labour within capitalism (see Benston, 1969; Dalla Costa & James, 1973; Morton, 1971, and other proponents of the "domestic labour debate"), relations of production between men and women (see Delphy, 2013a, 2013b), or gendered aspects of the social redistribution (allocation) of material resources (see Fraser, 2013).

Since the second half of the previous millennium, another kind of materialism came to the forefront in feminist theory, mainly among feminist philosophers (see Hekman & Alaimo, 2008; Coole & Frost, 2010; Van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2012). Born out of a critique of the radical constructivism of postmodern feminisms, these so-called *new materialisms* interpret materiality as pertaining to matter and the body. Since the 1980s, the interpretation of "materiality" as corporeality began to supersede its initial feminist meaning of labour practices (Malos, 1995, p. 209; see also Colebrook, forthcoming in 2016). This article, however, does not engage with these *new materialisms*, as they situate themselves in opposition to older materialist approaches inspired primarily by Marxism and the socialist feminism of Emma Goldman, Alexandra Kollontai, and Rosa Luxemburg.

In her book on the relationships between Filipino and Indonesian migrant workers and their Taiwanese employers, Pei-Chia Lan remarks that "the opposition between maid and madam wrecks the feminist romance of global sisterhood" (Lan, 2006, p. 241). It seems, however, that feminist theorists representing a postmodern approach have long abandoned the aspiration to an idealized "global sisterhood". Summarizing the critique voiced by black, lesbian, and postcolonial feminists since the 1970s, Butler (2006 [1990]) points out that attempts at constructing "women" as a homogenized political category came with the exclusion and/or invisibilization of most non-white, non-middle class, non-heterosexual, non-cisgender women. In consequence, the invisibilized or excluded groups (Afro-American women, women of colour, Chicanas, lesbians, working-class women, lesbians of colour, Eastern European and postcolonial feminists, transwomen) contested Western feminisms' claim to universal representativeness.

The critique black feminists addressed to (predominantly white) second-wave feminism in the US resulted in the theorization of intersectionality.[6] According to intersectionality theory, gender, race, class, sexuality, and other social positions and identities do not exist independently of each other (one is never "just" black or "only" a woman), nor are they simply additive (Lutz, 2011, p. 30). Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) original conceptualization of intersectionality allows us to simultaneously examine the macro-level structures of inequality and the subjective micro-level expe-

riences of discrimination and identity formation (Lutz, 2014, p. 4). Some scholars have even presented intersectionality as a solution to the tension between materialism and post-structuralism in feminist research (Lykke, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 155), for example, claims that intersectionality can encompass and transcend both redistribution and recognition.

It is, however, important to emphasize that a materialist approach should not be reduced to the "class" dimension of intersectional analysis. Virtually any other dimension of a person's intersectional identity (and the corresponding social structure) has a material/materialist aspect. It has been demonstrated that gender and race (but also (dis)ability and sexual orientation) are not only "moderating variables" of an individual's class position, but that in most societies relations of gender and race are also the bases of divisions of labour, relations of production, or the redistribution of material resources (Anthias, 2001; Delphy, 2013a, 2013b; Federici, 2012).

One of the most important contributions of materialist feminisms is the recognition of care work and housework as activities essential to the reproduction of societies and the functioning of capitalist economies (Benston, 1969; Dalla Costa & James, 1973; Delphy, 2013a, 2013b; Federici, 2012; Gardiner, 1975; Kaluzynska, 1980; Molyneux, 1979; Morton, 1971). Originally focused on unpaid work within the home, materialist feminist theorizations of "domestic labour", "household labour" or "reproductive labour" have been progressively expanded and amended to include paid domestic work (domesticity) and other types of reproductive labour provided outside of the home (see Nakano Glenn, 1992).

Through marginalizing materialist concerns, the postmodern turn had a crucial impact on the way "women's work" was reconceptualised. In the 1980s, earlier materialist feminist approaches of reproductive work made way for new theories of "care", understood as emotional and interpersonal ethics, mental dispositions, and activities (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Cancian & Oliker, 2000; Folbre, 2001; Gilligan, 1983; Tronto, 1993). This shift has moved the focus away from providers and beneficiaries of this labour (which are not only dependent individuals, such as children, the ill, or the elderly, but also able bodied men of working age) to a sometimes essentialized perception of care as an inherently relational, emotional "labour of love", including in its paid forms (Finch & Groves, 1983; Hochschild, 2002). The appearance of this "labour of love" approach of reproductive work corresponded with the emergence of neo-liberal discourses pushing for the reduction of costs in welfare expenditure (Eliasson Lappalainen & Nilsson Montevasel, 1997, p. 193). As shown by Mignon Duffy (2005), conceptualizing women's work within the framework of care rather than as reproductive labour excludes the experiences of many women of colour, poor, and migrant women, disproportionately concentrated in those care jobs which are considered dirty and require the least amount of "relationality".

This contribution thus advocates the use of the term "domestic services" rather than "(paid) care" because the former refers unequivocally to the materialist feminist legacy of studying domestic/household/reproductive labour as the lynchpin of women's domination across time and space (and in particular its impact on the social position of women within capitalist societies). The term "domestic services" is also preferred to the Marxist notion of "reproductive labour", defined as the labour necessary to the daily maintenance and intergenerational reproduction of the labour force. Can we really consider elderly care as part of the reproduction of the labour force, since elderly dependents are no longer productive in the Marxist sense? Similarly, can domestic services that reflect and affirm employers' social status really be considered as reproducing the labour force? Moreover the term "domestic services" clearly refers to work performed within the domestic, household space and to the specificities of such a workplace, in contrast to "care work" and "reproductive labour", which can be performed both in and outside private homes. I use the term "domestic services" to describe housework and care provided within private households by a worker who is not administratively a member of the household(s) they work in.

Materialist Approaches in Research on (Migrant) Domestic Services

This section shows how the perception of a single phenomenon can change according to the degree of the author's engagement with materialist approaches. Domestic services provided by migrant workers have long remained invisible to the sociology of migration. The mainstream (male-centred) perception of work as a paid activity performed outside of the home ensured that migration sociology has long neglected migrant domestics, as their work was not seen as "real" work, not on a par with the mining or industrial jobs performed by male migrants (Lutz, 2010, p. 1649). When it finally noticed domestic workers, US migration sociology focused on white female immigrants from Europe, conceptualizing domesticity as a "bridging occupation"[7] and ignoring the fact that, for racialized women, these jobs were occupational ghettos.[8] The sociology of migrant domestic services was born at the crossroads of the gender perspective in the sociology of migration and the research of American sociologists "of colour" and/or with a migrant background who showed the necessity of analysing domesticity at the intersection of patriarchy, racism, slavery, and (post)colonialism (Romero & Pérez, 2016, pp. 175-178). Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1986), Judith Rollins (1985), and Mary Romero (2002 [1992]), for instance, were pioneers in exploring employment relationships (relationships between employers and employees) in domestic services as structured by race, class, gender, and citizenship relations.

At the same time differences between women have gradually emerged as another central theme in feminism, although it initially focused on women's relationships with men (at inter-individual and macrostructural levels). Feminist theory has progressively steered away from the modernist universalism of "global sisterhood" towards postmodern identity politics. These evolutions render feminist theory well equipped to explore employment relationships in domestic services, described as a confrontation between middle- and upper-class women and their much less privileged counterparts, often with undocumented and/or migrant status, and/or an ethnically/racially/religiously subordinated background.

Most studies of domestic services point to the fact that this occupation is characterized by a high degree of "personalization", defined as the process through which a "strong personal attachment" (Lutz, 2011, p. 95) or "close personal relationship" (Moras, 2013, p. 248) develops between worker and employer. Initially, personalization was explained mainly in materialist terms, as a strategy allowing employers to maximize the quantity and quality of labour extracted from workers, and as a means of labour control (Anderson, 2000; Katzman, 1981; Nakano Glenn, 1992; Parreñas, 2001; Rollins, 1985; Romero, 2002 [1992]).[9] Such a condemnation of personalization was correlated to the conceptualization of domestic services as a class marker, a way of performing higher social status (Anderson, 2000; Rollins, 1985; Yeates, 2009, p. 49). Significantly, the publisher's description of Rollins' pioneering 1985 study explains that "the book reveals how this labour arrangement functions ideologically as well as materially to support the class, gender and racial hierarchies" in the US. Marxist terminology is here clearly visible – both the material and ideological aspects of domestic services are analysed.

Identity functions of personalization, for both parties involved, were also discussed, but mostly in terms of "performing domination". Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007 [2001], p. 184), for example, describes how acting as personal benefactor to a migrant domestic worker (in the framework of what she identifies as a "maternalistic" employment relationship) allows (mostly female) employers to think of themselves as "generous, altruistic, and kind" and receive "personal recognition and appreciation" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007 [2001], p. 187). It has, however, been demonstrated that such "maternalistic" employment relationships are on the decline in contemporary urban contexts across post-industrial economies. It seems that younger professional employers lack the time and energy to personalize the relationship with their cleaners (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007 [2001], pp. 171-209). They do it only in the case of care provision, in an effort to secure a better quality of service (what Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007 [2001, pp. 174-180) describes as "instrumental personalism"). In addition to a lack of time and energy, Lutz (2011, pp. 86-7) provides yet another explanation of

younger employers' reluctance to personalize the relationship with their domestic workers: class guilt.

It seems that a broader appraisal of the functions of personalization came with a reconsideration of domestic workers' agency. "Contrary to the work of researchers who describe the relationship between employers and domestic employees purely in terms of an exploitative relationship or refeudalization?" (Lutz, 2011, p. 16), authors such as Gorbán & Tizziani (2014), Lan (2006), Lutz (2011), and Romero (1988) insist on workers adopting and/or resisting employers' ways, including through personalizing the relationship. It seems that many domestic workers value personalization, because it renders their working and living conditions more bearable. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007 [2001], pp. 194-207) and Ambrosini (2012, p. 8) highlighted the role played by personalization in alleviating the loneliness and isolation from which overworked migrant domestic workers suffer, especially when they are employed as live-in staff. Personalization has also been shown to help domestic workers regain the dignity and respectability of which they feel deprived abroad, especially if migration meant downward occupational mobility (Colen, 1986; Cvajner, 2012; Nakano Glenn, 1986; Romero, 2002 [1992]). The fact that most domestic workers value personalization should not, however, be equated with a denial of the unequal gender, class, and race structures to which these workers are subjected.

Thus it seems that the degree of an author's adherence to the materialist paradigm influences their interpretation of personalization mostly as a smoke screen hiding and enabling exploitation, or rather as a strategy that both employers and employees in domestic services can use (albeit not symmetrically) to pursue material, identity, and emotional goals. The new strategy of feminist research I propose in the conclusion of this contribution aims to ensure that the materialist legacy of systematically uncovering exploitation where other discourses only see "labour of love", voluntary commitment, or emotional attachment will not get lost in the research process.

Materialist Themes in the Narratives of Migrant Domestic Workers

The qualitative data discussed in this section[10] have been collected in the framework of a research project investigating the so-called "care chain" linking Belgium, Poland, and Ukraine. Polish is one of the most recurrent nationalities of migrant domestic workers in Belgium, whereas in Poland, domestic services are increasingly provided by women from Ukraine (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2014; Kindler & Szulecka, 2013). While the linguistic, cultural, and (post)colonial links between Poland and Ukraine are as strong as the geographical proximity of the two countries, the reasons behind the popularity of Belgium as a destination country for Polish migrants since the late 1980s is less obvious. Hence, while the Polish-Ukrainian "care chain" corre-

sponds to other care chains,[11] the links between Belgium and Poland are more unusual.

In order to better understand the working conditions of migrant women who perform housework and provide care in private households across Belgium and Poland, as well as the role their work plays in the care and housework regimes of those two countries, I conducted over 40 in-depth interviews with migrant cleaners and/or caregivers (over 20 in each country). The interviews were conducted between 2012-2016,[12] mainly in the capitals of the two countries, although some respondents in Belgium were living and working in smaller localities in Flanders or Wallonia. Among migrant domestic workers interviewed in Belgium, most of the interviewees were Poles or Filipinos, since I was able to interview them in their respective native languages. In Belgium, I interviewed 10 Polish women and 7 migrants from the Philippines (2 men, 5 women), as well as women from Cameroon, Ecuador, Morocco, Peru, and Rwanda. Data collected in Poland were more homogenous in terms of respondents' origin and place of work: all interviewees were women employed in private houses across Warsaw, 19 originating from Western Ukraine, 2 from Eastern Ukraine, and one was a Russian citizen whose parents migrated to Western Ukraine before 1989.

I was intrigued by the dissimilarity in the ways respondents explained the reasons for migration and the terms they used to describe their working conditions. The reasons for migration are always framed in "objective" and material terms first, often referring to a collective "they" (representing public employers and, by extension, authorities) and a collective "we" (referring to workers of a company or sector, or people from a region or citizens of the country as a whole). The way 57 year-old Olga narrates the situation in Ukraine at the end of the 1990s is an excellent illustration of how most interviewees began answering my questions about what brought them to Belgium or Poland:

> I decided that I had to leave my job in Ukraine because of the transformation of our country being dragged out. It has been going on forever now – in fact there is no transformation, it is getting worse and worse. There was a time in the 1990s when we were still working without getting paid. They were making promises that they would finally pay. […] I didn't have enough [money] to buy even the most basic things, we were going to work on foot because we didn't have money to buy a ticket. This is how things were. (Olga, migrant domestic worker from Ukraine employed in Warsaw, 57 years old)

The reasons for migration that interviewed workers cite first are framed as common to all migrants from their country of origin: the necessity to earn a living and/or pay

for their children's university education. It is only in the course of the interview that other, more personal triggers and brakes for migration emerge, which my respondents link to their personal family situation and related care obligations. The event that Olga describes as the turning point that allowed/forced her to transform her brief working stays in Poland into full-fledged migration was the death of her parents (who needed care) and the entry of her son into adulthood:

> My husband and I, we separated and I stayed with the child – my son had a grandmother, a grandfather and me. As long as my parents were alive, it was okay in a way, my son was cared for, everything was fine. The child was growing up and had to be cared for, there was no… And then my mother died – suddenly. […] [Olga's father had prostate surgery, after which he got very sick] I couldn't leave him alone. Once he died and our financial situation became worse than bad, I left… [Before her father died] I had been to Poland once or twice, for one or two months, to clean or care. But then, I decided that I had to stay in Poland for a longer time, when he [Olga's son] was already twenty years old. I left him alone for one year – that was horrible – without anyone. You know, twenty year-olds are not smart, they are silly. (Olga)

These personal reasons for migration are rarely expressed in material terms, probably (at least in part) because of the fear of sounding greedy. The focus here is clearly on obligations for providing care; when money is discussed, it is mentioned in the context of being a better mother, a better caregiver, or mentioned in passing. For example, in Olga's narrative, it is only when I asked her about the recognition of her Ukrainian midwifery diploma in Poland that she mentioned the debt she was in when she arrived in the country (in order to explain why she could not stop working and follow the additional courses required for the recognition of her Ukrainian diploma in Poland).

By contrast, when asked about their jobs, respondents focus first and foremost on the micro-level of relationships with members of the employing households. They generally start by saying that they are treated "like family members" or explain how lucky they are to have found "such good employers". Later on in the interview, when negative experiences are alluded to or narrated explicitly, very few respondents use the macro, material categories of exploitation or inequality to describe them. The migrant domestic workers I interviewed rather speak of humiliation, lack of respect, de-humanizing invisibility, and objectification. They describe not having one's emotional needs met, and extreme loneliness (the latter is particularly common for caregivers who spend long hours alone or live with the people they are employed to take care of). Stenia is a 64-year old Polish woman who has been working informally as a cleaner in private houses in and around Brussels since 1988. Before recalling a con-

versation that one of her long-term employers had with a neighbour in her presence – an experience she later describes as "humiliating" – Stenia starts by affirming that she has never been treated badly in Belgium:

> I have not been treated badly, you can't say that, they like me here [in Belgium]. Since I have been working for over twenty years in some houses, I will not say that I have been treated badly or whatever. But sometimes I think to myself that when they talk [about me] it's as if they were talking about an object: "Her? She does everything. The [domestic workers employed in formal cleaning services], they don't do everything, but she does." Like that, as if I were an object. I am curious – my friend was wondering – how they see us. Do they think that we are so horribly poor, that for us [cleaning] is a way to make good money? I do not know how they see us, I can never tell. I was trimming roses – I also take care of the garden – and the two of them were talking, despite the fact that I understand [French]. They were judging my case like Pontius Pilate judged Jesus. That me, I do everything: "She does everything, but the ones from the voucher scheme, they don't. They do not clean the windows, they do not do this or that." (Stenia, Polish domestic worker employed in Belgium, 64 years old).

When voiced, difficult experiences are usually described as displays of the employers' insensitiveness, small-mindedness or cruelty, never as expressions of social inequalities. Demonstrations of classism or racism, and labour exploitation are seen as character flaws of individual employers, sometimes as national or ethnic traits, never as manifestations of intersectional systems of domination.

These findings remain in line with earlier research by Bourgeaud-Garciandia & Lautier (2011, pp. 110-1), who explained that, when interviewed, migrant domestic workers do not give priority to the elements that researchers often consider the most important, such as wages or technical aspects of the job. In the narratives, wages are often secondary to the emotional aspects of the job, as can be seen in the interview with Galina, a Ukrainian domestic worker employed in Warsaw since 1994. Asked about her longest work experience, Galina does not complain about the partially paralyzed woman with Alzheimer's she was taking care of, nor about the husband who had hired Galina to take care of his wife, but about their daughter. Galina describes the daughter as a spoiled 28-year old brat who stopped talking to her in order to "get back at her". The daughter was reproaching Galina for telling her father that she had been hired to provide care for his dependent wife, and not to serve his adult daughter. Galina eventually gave up this position when "the atmosphere became too heavy", after she asked to be paid for the extra hours she spent with the woman every time her daughter arrived late to take over from Galina. When she explains what she disliked about this position that she held for over two years, Galina

answers that she could not stand the "disrespectful" attitude of the daughter. The issue of unpaid overtime work, that Galina herself describes as exploitation, comes later in the narrative.

To further complicate the matter, when conveying difficult emotional experiences, some interviewees focus on objects and processes in order to channel emotions. After briefly explaining the circumstances in which one of her long-term employers fell and broke a knee, Stenia switches very quickly to the proud recollection of how she managed to "save" the stained towels with which this elderly employer attempted to wipe away the blood she was losing after the fall:

> She fell, so when I came to clean her home, she was in the hospital. I was thinking to myself "What happened here, God almighty, underpants covered in blood, what did she do that those underpants are completely covered in blood, shirt covered in blood, towel as if you slaughtered a pig!". The wedding band was lying on the floor, the necklace, everything thrown around. God almighty, she got so drunk that when she fell she got an open fracture that they had to operate to put back together. She was trying to stop the bleeding with that towel, but it was streaming down. I soaked it in cold water on Saturday – I got there on Saturday because they asked, I guess the son asked me to come over – I came back on Monday, washed it by hand, later I also put it in the washing machine, it was soaking up the whole Sunday. Blood has to be soaked up in cold water, you know, but quickly, whereas this thing had been lying around for several days. So I was changing the water again and again, until I managed to clean those clothes. And it is then that I slept two weeks at her place – she got an endoprosthesis. (Stenia).

Similarly, earlier in the interview, Stenia mentions knowing the employer of the "rose bushes incident" for so long, that she was the one who ironed the shirt that her employer's husband wore in his casket. In Stenia's narrative, the difficulty of ironing a garment belonging to a long-term employer who died overshadows the fact that she was sometimes taking care of the paralyzed man:

> When I came [to Belgium] for the first time, I went to work for them and I have been working there up to this day. The husband was sick, paralyzed, and I also cared for him, I slept there when it was necessary. […] When I work there, I do as I would do at home – when he died I even ironed the shirt he wore in the casket. And I told her I was sad that I had to do that, and she said, "If you can't, don't do it." It was so painful, he died and I had to iron a shirt for him on top of everything else. (Stenia).

Stenia is not the only respondent who focuses on objects and processes in order to convey difficult emotional or identity-related experiences. However, it is not easy to

gauge the extent to which the long and overly detailed descriptions that many domestic workers give of employers' possessions can also be interpreted as a way of conveying the interviewees' perception of social inequalities. Interviewed workers' enumerations of employers' possessions often exceed what is necessary to describe what and how one cleans, and seem to be driven by more than simply the desire to show oneself in a good light (by implying that, despite being rich enough to hire who-soever to clean their houses, those employers chose the author of the description). When asked about the details of how she cleans the house of one of her employers, Stenia narrates with visible enjoyment:

> Those are such rich houses… I am now replacing a friend in [a town in the Walloon province of Hainaut] – it is not a house, but a palace! There are five floors, but everything is well organized. […] At the beginning I was scared, because I didn't know what was where in the house. You have to take an elevator, because there are five floors. When you leave it, it is clean, and when you come back it is super clean.

> AS: So what do you do there?

> S: What do I do there? Regular stuff, everything in this house is very… There are two people [living] there, doctors. He is an oncologist, she as well, she operates people in [another city in Hainaut]. And me, what do I do? Regular stuff, I do the dusting. There are no knickknacks, everything is very well made, marble and glass. […] A huge, huuuuuuuge house, built in the 1800s. The ceiling is maybe as high as four metres, there are 58 glass parts in a single door – I counted! Because those are doors constructed like this and like this [she demonstrates]. And the little windows in the doors are maybe 30 cm wide and 20 high, and this times 58! I do not clean them, absolutely not. A service comes to clean them because they are made of crystal. […] There are plenty of doors – in the hall, in the staircase… Huuuge doors, they are incredible those doors, made of oak, I don't know how old. But all this is so well taken care of. The lady of the house herself broke in tears once, she said "I am a doctor and I have to work so hard [cleaning the house]. I clean all the time, I constantly run around the house." (Stenia).

More generally, interviewed domestic workers tend to use emotional or identity arguments when narrating incidents that a materialist approach would interpret first and foremost as instances of resistance to material exploitation. For instance, the employer of Polish cleaner Ewa – for whom she had been working for a long time prior to the incident – unexpectedly left her a long list of things to do one day during her usual working hours. Ewa refused and stormed out. The employer in question ended up calling her to apologize and asked her to come back. In Ewa's narrative, this incident is not just a question of refusing that employer's excessive demands with

regards to the quantity of work to be performed in one working day or a question of securing better working conditions. Ewa insists on identity-related aspects of what she seems to perceive as the whim of an idle, privileged woman:

> I told her: "Listen Dominique, how long have I been working for you? And what were you thinking – that I should be done with all this in six hours? Are you crazy or what? First try [to finish] it yourself. […] Listen, since it seems [my way of working] does not suit you, bye!" I took my things and I slammed the door behind me. And of course, you know, she called me later to apologize and so on, bla bla bla. I said "Listen, I will come back, but I do not ever want to see another list. I do whatever I think I should do. And if you consider that I take too long to do it, then please, take someone else, you know, find someone else." […] No, but, you know, when you already know someone well and that person confides in you, sharing the most secret things with you, everything is okay and then suddenly, I don't know why, because she's in a bad mood or just, I don't know, all of a sudden she wants to act […] as a great "lady of the house" and so on… So I thought that, you know, she went a bit too far. We could have sat down… You know, sometimes we would sit down for coffee and tell each other all kinds of stories. She could have sat down for coffee with me and then maybe told me what to do. This I could accept. You know, in fact it depends on the kind of relationship between you and your employer. (Ewa, Polish migrant domestic worker employed in Belgium, 44 years old).

During the interview, Ewa talks of her anger not only as the result of and necessary barrier to the employer's excessive demands in terms of workload (which could be considered as resisting labour exploitation), rather, she insists on the identity-related reasons of her anger, explaining that, especially in the case of long-term, personalized employment relationships, she expects autonomy, trust, and respect.

This section showed that, although money is present in domestic workers' narratives as one of the factors leading to their migration, it is relatively absent from their narratives about work. Many factors conspire to make it difficult for interviewees to talk openly and extensively about money, and to mention the substantial inequalities between them and their employers in terms of access to resources and opportunities. First, some of the interviewed domestic workers perceived me as linked to employers in some way, since I found many of my respondents through contacting their employers. More generally, as a university-educated Pole who grew up in Belgium, to my migrant respondents I am, in many respects, a representative of some unidentified "otherness" – being neither one of them, nor necessarily one of the locals for whom they work. In the eyes of Polish domestic workers in Belgium, I am probably not Belgian, but I am certainly also not "like them". For domestic workers from

Ukraine employed in Poland, I represent a link to current or potential employers, and am seen as belonging to Polish society. As a consequence of my perceived proximity to employers, and since I am, in some respects, a member of the society hosting them, respondents wanted to avoid coming across as greedy or ungrateful. Additionally, the current post-socialist times, characterised by an apparent lack of alternatives to globalized capitalism, might also be extremely unconducive to the expression of any claims of social (in)justice.

Conclusion: Asking the Other 'Other Question' as a New Feminist Method

In the current context of old and new materialisms returning to the forefront in feminist research, this contribution aimed to show the ways in which adopting a materialist approach influences researchers' conclusions and foci in respondents' narratives. This article began by discussing the return of "old materialisms" as a key aspect in contemporary feminist debates. Since the 1980s, under the influence of post-structuralism, white Western feminist theory has undergone a so-called postmodern or cultural turn. This shift has been strongly criticized, notably by authors who identify with the materialist tradition in feminist research. This tradition, inherited from second-wave Marxist and socialist feminisms, understands the materiality of heteropatriarchy in diverse ways, as the sexual division of labour within capitalism, relations of production between men and women, or gendered aspects of the social redistribution of material resources.

One of the most important contributions made by materialists to feminist theory is the recognition of unpaid care-giving and housework as essential to the reproduction of societies and the functioning of capitalist economies. In this respect, the postmodern turn had a crucial impact on conceptualizations of "women's work". In the 1980s, earlier materialist feminist approaches of reproductive work made way for theories of "care". This contribution advocated the use of the term "domestic services" rather than "(paid) care" because of the former's unequivocal link with the materialist feminist legacy of studying domestic labour as the lynchpin of women's domination across time and space.

The second section focused on research on domestic services provided by migrant workers, in order to show how the perception of a single phenomenon (personalization) changes according to the degree of the researcher's engagement with materialist approaches. Indeed, most studies of domestic services point to the fact that this occupation is characterized by a high degree of "personalization", defined as one of the parties seeking an emotional connection with the other or as a bilateral process in which a strong personal attachment develops between worker and employer.

Initially, personalization was explained mainly in materialist terms, as a strategy allowing employers to maximize the quantity and quality of labour extracted from workers. A broader appraisal of the functions of personalization showed that most domestic workers value personalization, because it renders their working and living conditions more bearable. Uncovering this fact should not, however, be equated with a denial of the unequal gender, class, and race structures to which those workers are subjected.

The third part of this article drew from the results of my own research on personalization processes at work in domestic services provided by migrants. The aim of this third and final section was to show the relative absence of issues of importance to materialist feminism in respondents' narratives about employer-employee relations. This relative absence should not, however, lead us to the conclusion that a materialist framework is ill-adapted for the study of individual narratives, and should only be used to study (unfair) social structures from a macro perspective. The presence of "materialist" themes such as money and inequality in narratives about the reasons for migration indicate that these themes are considered more acceptable in some areas than in others.

The materialist legacy in feminist studies consists in uncovering exploitation and structural injustice where other discourses and paradigms see "labour of love", voluntary commitment, personal flaws, or national differences. In order to ensure that materialist concerns are systematically included in a feminist research project, I propose to expand intersectionality's method of "asking the other question" inaugurated by Marta Matsuda (1991) and taken up by many followers since then (see for example Davis, 2014, p. 21). Systematically asking the other (i.e. materialist) other question will ensure that both the emotional/identity and materialist aspects of a single phenomenon, experience or narrative are accounted for. This question can be "asked" ex post, that is, guide the analysis of already collected material, as attempted in the previous section, or it can be directly discussed with participants during the data collection process.

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Notes

1. Fraser claims that the "cultural turn" of the 1980s has resulted in feminism focusing quasi exclusively on "recognition", that is, questions of social allocation of and access to symbolic resources, a shift which allowed neoliberalism to instrumentalise feminist ideas in the pursuit of capitalist goals.

2. In this contribution, I use the term "materialist feminism" coined by French feminist Christine Delphy (1982) to refer to feminist critical engagement with historical materialism, especially in sociological contexts. I do not address the predominantly philosophical interventions within feminist *new materialisms*. See below in the article for more on this distinction.

3. For a detailed study of the rise of post-structuralism in the humanities and social sciences in US academia, see François Cusset's *French Theory*, translated into English in 2008.

4. The term "materialist feminisms" encompasses diverse strands of feminist research, such as Anglo-American socialist feminism (see US authors such as Donna Haraway and Rosemary Hennessy, or British sociologist Stevi Jackson), French materialist feminism (whose key figures are sociologists Christine Delphy, Colette Guillaumin and Danièle Kergoat, as well as anthropologist Nicole-Claude Mathieu), German Marxist-socialist feminism (with scholars such as Ursula Beer, Frigga Haug, and Maria Mies), and the feminist descendants of the Frankfurt School (Regina Becker-Schmidt, and Gudrun Axeli Knapp, to name a few). In France, materialist feminism has been introduced by the journal *Questions Féministes*, which became *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* in 1981 after a conflict within the editorial board, and exists to this day. In the UK, materialist feminist views have been represented by the socialist feminist journal *Feminist Review*.

Many Marxist and socialist arguments have also been made in the pages of the UK-based *New Left Review*.

5.   As defined by Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (1997, p. 4), "historical materialism takes as its starting point real living individuals and what they need in order to produce their means of subsistence, that is, in order to survive. It recognizes that the continual production of life through the satisfaction of human needs is a collective undertaking involving an ensemble or system of connected productive activities. […] Historically, these activities have taken the form of divisions of labour or relations of production, organizations of state and of consciousness or culture. Emancipatory change that aims to eliminate exploitation and oppression within a social system cannot take place by eradicating inequalities only in one sphere of social life – whether it be the economy, state, or culture."

6.   "Intersectional analysis, before it was 'mainstreamed', was carried for many years mainly by black and other racialized women […]" (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 156). Authors such as bell hooks (1981, 1984) or the Combahee River Collective (1983) denounced white feminisms for neglecting the effects of race (and class) on the lives of black women.

7.   "Domestic service was framed as the ideal entry-level occupation to provide European immigrant women from rural areas, and was seen as a protected environment to learn middle-class American values, develop appropriate skills to raise a family, or transfer these skills to the labour market" (Romero & Peréz, 2016, p. 176).

8.   "Work that saw domestic service as an occupational ghetto captured the restricted employment opportunities and the lack of intergenerational mobility women of colour experienced in the occupation" (Romero & Peréz, 2016, p. 176).

9.   On the contrary, Bonnie Thornton Dill (1994) pointed out early on that close employment relationships in domestic services might have an empowering effect, increasing workers' job leverage.

10. All the excerpts from interviews cited in this section have been translated from Polish by the author of this contribution. Names have been changed to preserve the interviewees' anonymity.

11. For instance, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) and Rhacel Parreñas (2001) have shown that "the majority of women working as domestic workers, nannies, and elderly care workers in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Washington DC, and across the United States are from Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands – all countries that have experienced U.S. colonial and neocolonial interventions" (Romero & Peréz, 2016, p. 176).

12. All interviews with women from Ukraine have been conducted before the beginning of *Euromaidan*, the anti-government manifestations which erupted in Kiev in August 2013 and which have been followed by a civil war in Eastern Ukraine.

The Moral Breakdown between Religion and Sexuality in Narratives of Muslim Gays, Bisexuals, and Lesbians in Belgium

Wim Peumans

Abstract

Because of the hegemonic views of monotheistic religions towards same-sex sexuality, LGBTQ individuals are often considered to be indifferent or antagonistic towards religion. Religious piety is seen as contradictory to same-sex sexuality and the agency of LGBTQ people. The question of how religious LGBTQ individuals are able to reconcile faith and sexuality is often central to academic scholarship, whether it involves research on Christians (Gross, 2008), Muslims (Yip, 2003), or Jews (Shneer & Aviv, 2002). Nevertheless, the bulk of the literature focuses on the experiences of Christians. Based on an ethnographic research project on religion, transnationalism, and same-sex sexualities in Belgium, the author discusses two case-studies of a Belgian-Moroccan second generation Muslim gay man and a lesbian woman. Drawing on Zigon's (2008) anthropological theory of morality, he asks how the "moral breakdown" between sexuality and religion plays out in everyday life. Such moments of moral breakdown are fruitful areas of analysis: they show how people attempt to create new moral selves and new local moral worlds.

Keywords: LGBTQ, Islam, morality, Belgium, anthropology

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"Do gay Muslims even exist?"
"That sounds like an oxymoron to me!"
"But I thought it was not allowed – how can they exist then?"
"Over there it must still be difficult for gay people."

These are some of the common responses I have received when talking to people, including academics, about my PhD research. The explanation of my dissertation topic was often met with baffled, puzzled, and stunned looks. The use of "still" in the final quote above presumes that the acceptance of same-sex sexuality in Muslim communities in non-European countries is lagging behind, compared to the situation in North-Western Europe. "There" denotes the countries of origin and implies an assumption that Muslims are not part of Belgian society. The categories of "LGBT" or "queer" and "Muslim" tend to be seen as antagonistic and incompatible, as is evidenced by the statement "how can they exist then?". Indeed, one of the first studies on LGBTQ Muslims literally states: "our research provides evidence that gay Muslims do indeed exist" (Minwalla et al., 2005, p. 130).

Scholars such as Puar (2007), Rahman (2014), Boone (2014), and Massad (2007), critically question the origins of the contemporary and historical (political, academic, media, and public) fascination with same-sex sexualities in the Middle East and North Africa and nowadays in the Muslim communities of Europe and North America. This article highlights the experiences of LGB Muslims: how can you be gay, lesbian, or bisexual and (a practicing) Muslim?[1] Drawing on Jarett Zigon's anthropological theory of moral breakdown, I am interested in how the tension between sexuality and religion plays out in the everyday life of my interlocutors. I argue that in the study of morality, the focus should be on ambivalence. My argument builds on important points raised by other scholars. Katherine Ewing (1990), for example, disputes the "illusion of wholeness": the fallacy that critics present actors' selves as coherent, continuous, and whole. In a critique of recent literature on Islamic piety Magnus Marsden (2005) and Samuli Schielke (2009) note how an analytic emphasis on practices of self-discipline and the implicit view that a coherent self is the endpoint of such practices make it difficult to assess the contrastive ways "in which Muslims are called upon to face, explain and contend with inconsistencies and complexities in their attempts to live virtuous lives" (Marsden, 2005, p. 261). The ambivalences and paradoxes experienced by religious persons have been a growing concern in recent anthropological and more broadly social scientific literature (Chappatte, 2014; Schielke, 2009). The question of how religious LGBTQ individuals are able to reconcile faith and sexuality has often been central to academic scholarship, whether it involves research on Christians (Gross, 2008), Muslims (Yip, 2003) or Jews (Shneer & Aviv, 2002). Nevertheless, the bulk of the literature centres on Christians' experiences.

The article first explains the research methods and theoretical framework. It then presents two selected narratives. These are followed by an analysis that draws on the theory of moral breakdown. I should point out that a focus on two narratives entails a number of disadvantages and risks. It may create the impression that the narratives

of Yalda and Ilias are representative of all LGBTQ Muslims' experiences. This is decidedly not the case, as there are many examples of LGBTQ Muslims who are able to reconcile faith and sexuality successfully or with less struggle and agony (Peumans, 2014). I have selected Yalda's and Ilias' narratives for two reasons. First, at one point or another in their lives, most people I interviewed experienced a moral breakdown due to the tension between their sexual desires and religious beliefs. However, in the narratives of Yalda and Ilias, this moral breakdown seems to have occurred repeatedly. I agree with Zigon (2008) that moments of moral breakdown are fruitful areas of analysis because they show us how people attempt to create new moral selves and new local moral worlds. Second, while all narratives struck a personal chord with me, Yalda's and Ilias' stories left me puzzled: why did they not look for same-sex affirming interpretations of religious texts as other people I met or LGBTQ associations did? Their stories underscore the importance of ambivalence in understanding how people make moral judgements in everyday life.

The article is based on an ethnographic research project on same-sex desire among Muslim men and women in Belgium.[2] I worked with two different groups. The first group consists of 17 sexual migrants (7 women and 10 men). These are persons whose migration to Belgium is fully or partially motivated by their sexuality. The second group consists of 14 second- or third-generation immigrants (7 men and 7 women): the (grand)children of economic migrants, mostly with roots in Morocco or Turkey. The central research method is the ethnographic interview. Ethnographic interviews are understood as open-ended and emergent; they require engaged and deep listening. Participant observation was done in the LGBTQ scene (social evenings, debates, and parties) in Brussels, Antwerp, and Hasselt, with permission of gatekeepers. I also made use of solicited participant diaries. These were used to gain access to those aspects of life that people take for granted and that are not easily put into words during interviews (Alaszewski, 2006, p. 37).

The Anthropology of Moral Breakdown

I draw on anthropologist Jarett Zigon's theory of moral breakdown. According to Zigon (2007, 2008, 2010) morality has always been the vestige of philosophy. Through a discussion of the history of the concept, Zigon argues that anthropologists have not always been clear about what they mean by "morality", often conflating morality with ethics. Implicitly, and using Ruth Benedict's famous turn of phrase, morality was equated with "socially approved habits" (Benedict, 1934). Although I find Zigon's assertion that anthropology has not devoted much attention to the subject an overstatement (think of the bulk of literature on the concepts of "honour" and "shame" in the Mediterranean), I do agree that a renewed interest in morality has

marked anthropological research of the past decade. Didier Fassin (2014), for example, thinks that it is necessary to develop an "anthropology of moralities" or "moral anthropology". In Fassin's opinion, morals are defined as the human capacity and belief to distinguish right from wrong and one's ability to act "in favour of the good and against the evil" (Fassin, 2008, p. 334). The anthropology of morality, understood as a science of morals based on ethnographic fieldwork, questions "how societies ideologically and emotionally found their cultural distinction between good and bad and how social agents concretely work out this separation in everyday life" (Fassin, 2008, p. 334). Another approach is Karen Sykes', who argues that the anthropology of moralities should focus on how people negotiate ambiguity and moral paradoxes in everyday life. Her argument partly overlaps with Zigon's, who also thinks that moments of moral breakdown constitute fruitful areas of analysis.

In his anthropology of moral breakdown, Zigon distinguishes between ethics and morality. Morality consists of three interrelated aspects: (1) institutional moralities, with institutions as "those formal and non-formal social organizations and groups that are a part of all societies and wield varying amounts of power over individual persons" (Zigon, 2010, p. 23); (2) public moral discourses, which are described as "all those public articulations of moral beliefs, conceptions, and hopes that are not *directly* articulated by an institution" (Zigon, 2010, p. 24); (3) embodied moralities, or a series of embodied dispositions. Each person's morality to some degree is based on personal experience. These are, in their turn, limited by socio-cultural and historical circumstances. For the most part of their everyday life, people embody their morality without much reflection or thought. This makes it possible for them to "act in ways that are, for the most part, acceptable to others in their social world seemingly naturally" (Zigon, 2008, p. 164). Ethics, by contrast, involves "a conscious acting on oneself either in isolation or with others so as to make oneself into a more morally appropriate and acceptable social person not only in the eyes of others but also for oneself" (Zigon, 2008, p. 165). A moral breakdown, invoked by a particular encounter or event in one's life, produces these ethical moments (Zigon, 2008, p. 18). After a moral breakdown, people engage in ethical tactics and attempt to create a new moral dispositional self instead of returning to the unreflective and unreflexive disposition of morality.

Yalda – "A Whole New Me"

"I do not know why it is forbidden. It is just not allowed; it is not possible ('*dat kan niet en dat mag niet*'). That is just what people tell you on the Islamic television stations I watch." I am sitting with Yalda, a self-identified lesbian in her twenties, in the library of her university. It is March 2012 and this is the first time we meet. Yalda

studies and lives at the university, financing herself through odd jobs, government study allowances, and money lent from or offered by family. I initially planned an interview with Yalda's girlfriend, Hajar, who identifies as bisexual. Like Yalda, she is in her twenties and her parents are originally from Morocco.

The interview was one of the first occasions Yalda spoke openly to someone about her sexuality and, although she was nervous, she let the interview go on for hours, saying how relieved she felt to finally be able to talk to someone about her experiences. I asked Yalda if and why same-sex sexuality is forbidden in the Islamic tradition, but only after I pressed her on the issue did she vaguely remember the story of Lut [Lut is a prophet of God in the Qur'an. His story is often used to demonstrate Islam's disapproval of rape and homosexuality]. She merely repeated: "I cannot do anything about it. You can have these feelings but you are not allowed to act upon them."

Even though Yalda strongly maintained that same-sex sexuality was not allowed in the Islamic tradition, this did not stop her from practising Islamic rituals. However much her religious practice went through ups and downs in the years I have known her, her belief in God has remained steadfast and unquestioned. "Sometimes Allah[3] feels far away and has to be kept in mind", Yalda notes in the personal diary she gave me. She writes about feeling depressed, alone, and empty inside. When we meet for a second interview in the summer of 2012, a tired and considerably skinnier Yalda tells me: "I have to carry this burden by myself, which makes it difficult. I am in a dark corner I cannot get out of." And yet, precisely in such moments, religion is a source of support and comfort to her: "in negative situations, God helps me to accept whatever happens. I am grateful to God for the positive things that happen to me."

Yalda explicitly uses the term "haram" [a legal term to denote what is forbidden or inviolable under Islamic law] to make clear to me why the Islamic tradition forbids same-sex desire. Yet this does not refrain her from engaging in an intimate relationship with Hajar. She notes how in the beginning of their relationship she felt guilty and spoke about being caught between "two different worlds, two cultures":

> I had feelings for her, but I was too stubborn to admit that. I was extremely afraid of my parents. It was such an incredibly big step for me to kiss a girl and to start a relationship. I always have those Islamic rules in my head. You are stuck between two cultures, two worlds. Even if your parents allow it, you are still stuck in your religion. How will God feel?

Throughout their relationship, religious morality informed the ways the couple dealt with their sexuality in public. Yalda and Hajar decided not to touch each other in public since this would be a transgressive and offensive public act, which according to both is forbidden by God through his condemnation of the people of Lut. As very

few people knew about their relationship, they felt this was a way to diminish their relation's unlawfulness and keep it between them and God. The religious imperative of marriage weighed down on the couple's future relationship. Since Hajar identifies as bisexual, the question of marriage came up several times in their conversations. When Hajar came out to her mother, she promised her she would eventually get married. Hajar also felt that one might live in sin, but that it is best not to die in sin. It was comforting to her to know that certain verses of the Qur'an state that everything which is forbidden in this world will be allowed in the hereafter. Although it did not feel like a great solution, Hajar said she and Yalda made a pact that because of their faith and in order to satisfy God, they would get married. In the summer of 2012 the couple went through a rough patch and they broke up a year later. Yalda told me that Hajar tried to push the issue of marriage further. Identifying as lesbian, Yalda did not want to marry:

> If I have to choose between marrying a boy and being single, well, I would pick the latter. I told her I am not going to get married just to please my parents. It would mean choosing a life that is dishonest and false towards that man.

At first, Yalda was terrified that her parents would find out. When we spoke in March 2012, Hajar had made Yalda come out to a few friends, but not to her family. During the first interview she said: "this would be impossible, they would just kill me. I could just not do that". But during a follow-up interview she figured: "they would say 'okay, you are lesbian, that is fine, but you have to marry.' Then they would do anything to get me married."

The last time we spoke was in January 2014 and Yalda said she had become "a completely different person" and more outspoken to others about her sexuality, but not to her family. "Why would I tell them? There is no need to tell them. Last week I told my mother it is unlikely I will ever get married and my father supported my decision." She resolutely denied being a lesbian and got angry at insinuations about her sexual identity (such as her mother questioning whether her relationship with Hajar was more than just a friendship). I asked Yalda whether perhaps her mother (or other family members) suspected something even if they did not say anything. My other interlocutors' families often used this strategy because it seemed to be the best way to deal with the issue to everyone involved. A friend of Yalda's who sat with us during the interview, nodded her head in agreement: "I believe so too. I am sure they know". Yalda decisively disagreed.

Yalda was raised in a Muslim family and grew up in a rural community in East Belgium. Her father, a hadji [a Muslim who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, as one of the Five Pillars of Islam] and former industrial worker who migrated from

Morocco, is a well-respected man and is often sought out for advice on religious and other matters. Each time I met her, Yalda combined her headscarf – worn in a non-conforming fashion – with an urban/hip-hop style of clothing, such as baggy jeans or drop crotch trousers (also popularly known as "harem trousers"). Although she regards wearing the headscarf as part of her identity, she has also noticed an unexpected benefit: "people, especially Moroccans, will never assume I am lesbian. People think I am a saint or something". When Yalda grew up, her mother, a housewife, would regularly gather her and her siblings around the table to read from the Qu'ran and discuss all kinds of matters, including intimate issues. Yalda joked that this may sound surprising to some people since her family is known as "the Taliban family" because of their piety. When she was a teenager, Yalda would bring friends from all walks of life to her house, just to expand her mother's horizon. Only recently did she talk to her mother about same-sex sexuality:

> She thinks it is a test from God, and I think so too. She says there are two kinds of gay people: first people who are born this way and secondly those who just do it for fun, because it is some kind of hype or something.

Ritual practices, such as prayer and fasting, are a matter of great spiritual importance to Yalda: "rituals make you think, reflect. You are completely devoted to God." Yet, there have been periods when keeping up with the discipline and rigour required by a practicing believer has been difficult. When we last met, Yalda seemed to have given up on praying:

> It is very difficult for me to find an opening in how to live both my sexuality and faith. I feel being gay is a different world than being Muslim. Praying made me feel hypocritical. But I need religion to make me feel whole.

Ilias – "Inside I Feel It Seethe and Boil"

Ilias is in his late twenties and was born and raised in a Flemish city. He identifies as gay. Like Yalda, he grew up in a working-class family. His father came to Belgium in search of employment and like many Moroccans back in the day he worked as a manual labourer in industry while his mother worked at home. When I met him, Ilias already had a job, but he was pursuing another degree and lived with his parents: "living alone is very much frowned upon. I can use my busy life as an excuse not to get married".

The immoral character of same-sex sexuality becomes clear when gay Muslims such as Ilias touch upon the moral contours of heteronormativity: your friends may not understand when you decide to tell them that you are gay or lesbian and they do

not take it well; the imam stresses the importance of marriage in his weekly sermon and condemns same-sex relationships, if they get mentioned at all; relatives in Morocco keep asking when you will marry; everyone seems to ignore the new gay couple in your block; your colleagues make tasteless jokes about LGBTQs and your family does not speak about sexuality, let alone same-sex sexuality.

A moment (or series of moments) of moral breakdown arise(s) during puberty when one becomes aware of one's desires towards persons of the same sex. Ilias explains how he relied on his faith and prayer to find a solution for his desires but eventually realised that this was not something that would just go away. The internal struggles derived from a feeling of being caught between a faith and a sexual orientation that are deemed "incommensurable" (Povinelli, 2001). As Ilias explained to me, "[m]arriage between a man and woman is the only possible lawful relationship. Civil same-sex marriage may exist, but not in Islamic law. God punished the people of Lut because the men had sex with each other."

LGBTQs from different religious backgrounds, including Muslims, increasingly put forward same-sex affirming views of their respective religious beliefs and rituals. They push towards having their voice heard in debates on the inclusion of persons with non-normative sexual desires within their religious traditions. While Ilias was aware of such interpretations of LGBTQ organizations and authors, these did not entirely convince him.[4] This may seem surprising because one is inclined to think that an LGB Muslim struggling to reconcile his/her faith and sexuality would follow such interpretations. However, Ilias did not take such arguments to heart, claiming that most Muslims disagree with the views of these organizations and individuals. He did seek out the advice of a cyber-imam who told him to fight his feelings and not give in to them. That proved difficult. He saw his sexual desires not only as a test of God but also as something that was beyond his control.

A few months before our first interview in early 2012, Ilias had sought the help of a therapist. Although the therapist did his best to take Ilias' Moroccan and religious background into account, he approached the topic from a primarily western perspective:

> I find it very hard to say "I am gay", I will never say this. In therapy I learned to say this out loud: "I am gay, I am gay" ("*ik ben homo, ik ben homo*"). The sessions were very confrontational. I felt I was being pushed into a corner. He intimated that I should make an individualistic choice, without paying attention to my friends and family. But for me this is very selfish behaviour.

In one of his diary excerpts, Ilias writes about his visit to the mosque for the Friday prayer:

Okay, I will reflect upon today. Inside the mind of a criminal. Friday, the day most Muslims go to the mosque. Feels very ambivalent to a Muslim man who is gay. On the one hand, you are expected to go because this is the way things go, but on the other hand, I am afraid to go to the mosque as a Muslim/gay. As on most Fridays, numerous questions usually come up. Will I be able to focus on prayer? Or will there be a handsome man who will lead my mind astray? I control my thoughts, so I will not be distracted. I decide to go. On my way there I say a quick prayer and think "please no good-looking men, no good-looking men". I arrive and open the door. A handsome man bends over and takes off his shoes. I look the other way! I intentionally sit behind an old man. I do my first individual prayer. Then I sit up straight to listen to the sermon. The imam talks about the importance of the Friday sermon and the obligation for each Muslim to weekly attend. Inside, I feel it seethe and boil. I want to come here, but I want clarity. Silently, I let the words of the imam come in and I physically feel that I am growing restless. I want to stand up and shout: "are gays obliged to attend as well? Or do we have to pray at home?" Between thinking and doing there is a world of difference. So many questions, no answers! After the sermon it is time to pray. A beautiful young man sits down at my left side: a nice tan, a gorgeous smile, and wearing a long *lahbaia*. I make sure another old man sits between us. I look at my left and right and I am happy: no men who can excite me. Because I tend to have these thoughts in the mosque too, I am afraid of being hit by lightning. I try not to think of gay stuff. But the more I try not to think about it, the more I do think about it. One is not allowed to pray with closed eyes. I try to focus on the rug so as to avoid distraction. Yet again it was an infernal hour at the mosque, with a lot of stress and inner struggles. I am outside. I feel relieved and proud of myself. I met my obligations.

Ramadan takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, the holy month when the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation. During this period, Muslims abstain from all food, drink, and sexual activity between sunrise and sunset. Values such as solidarity, community spirit, purity, and forgiveness are at the heart of the ritual and the entire month is a time of reflection and spirituality. Even if people do not identify as practicing Muslims they will often still observe the fast or at least participate in the celebration of *Eid al-Fitr* or the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast. Muslims such as Ilias will take the time to contemplate life and the afterlife; they also try to separate themselves from their weaknesses and sins in order to live their life in an Islamic and morally virtuous way. Throughout this month, Illias tries to abstain from his sexual desires. In order to do so, he does not wear glasses when he is out on the street; he does not go to gay bars or meet with gay friends; he refrains from watching gay pornography.

In his diary, Ilias writes about how he once went out to a gay bar and was introduced to a (heterosexually) married Iraqi man. He declined the man's sexual advances and ended up home alone, masturbating. This way, he did not have to feel guilty. Guilt was a feeling that would often come up after being intimate with another man.

> If I have done something I feel really bad because I am still having an internal conflict between giving into it and fighting against my desires. If I give in, I feel guilty. If I fight, I will think afterwards: "why did I let that one pass?" … I will lie awake at night, feel dirty, and wash myself repeatedly under the shower. I will think: why did I do this? It is not allowed. It is not possible. I will never do this again, but then I am caught out again. It is a vicious circle.

Sexuality, Religion, and Transnational Migration

During a workshop on sexuality, gender, and religion in everyday life that I attended in 2011, religious studies scholar Ann Pellegrini defined agency as what we do in the face of what we did not choose to do (Nynäs & Yip, 2012). Another way of phrasing this is seeing the enactment of moral agency as the attempt to live an acceptable and good life (Wolf, 1987). Morality/ethics and personhood are "inextricably bound to a particular socio-historic-cultural world and the range of possibilities available within it" (Zigon 2010, p. 247). The fashioning of moral subjecthood is always a "consequence of a particular socially lived personal trajectory" (Zigon 2010, p. 26).

Looking at the life trajectory of my interlocutors, their moral subjecthood and embodied moralities were informed by multiple institutional moralities and public moral discourses, some of which go beyond national borders: the family, the ethnic and racial minority communities at large, school, work, the (white) LGBTQ communities, Belgium and its society, and the country of origin of the (grand)parents. In a context of transnational migration the family is one of the primary places of moral education and upbringing: "the family is the primary and original locus of social control, redefining and ordering the politics of gender relations linked to women's and men's experiences of heterosexual sex and loving relationships" (González-López, 2005, p. 20). Previous research on LGBTQ Muslims has often not taken into account the transnational aspects of the lives of LGBTQs of ethnic minority backgrounds (Habib, 2010). The experiences of first-generation migrants and persons of second and third generation are frequently lumped together. Yet when you are born in Belgium your experiences of gender and sexuality are very different from someone who settled there as an immigrant. The context of transnational migration is important to understand, for example, the ways in which sexuality is negotiated within family

relationships. It is crucial to examine the differences between sexual migrants and persons of second and third generation in this process of negotiation.

Religious morality plays a great role in the ways LGBs from Muslim backgrounds learn about the rightness or wrongness of particular acts, thoughts, and feelings. When they grow up, Islamic practices, norms, and values become part of their embodied moralities. This was expressed by one of my other interlocutors – who at this point in the interview doubts whether he is still Muslim or not: "my body knows this, my brain knows it, I feel it in my blood, being Muslim." It is equally important to stress how moral upbringing is gendered: different moral expectations and boundaries are created for men and women. In this regard, Oliva Espín correctly claims that in a context of migration, women are seen as the embodiment of "cultural continuity" and guardians of morality (Espín, 1999, pp. 6-7).

Sexuality, especially same-sex sexuality, was not part of the moral discourse in most of my interlocutors' families. In the families of Ilias and others, sexuality, especially same-sex sexuality, was completely absent from daily conversation. Ilias gave the example of how his mother would switch the TV channel if the news anchor was wearing something with a deep neckline. Yalda's narrative, by contrast, shows how her mother would bring her children around the dinner table and discuss all aspects of moral behaviour. Now that Yalda is older she even talks about same-sex sexuality with her mother. The variations in my interlocutors' stories warn us not to homogenize or essentialise ethnic and racial minority communities, as is often the case in public, political, and academic discourse.

In my reading of the personal narratives, the moral breakdown occurs during puberty when some Muslims become aware of their desires for people of the same sex. The interlocutors speak of being caught between "two worlds, two cultures" and express the pains of moral transgression: feeling "hypocritical", "dishonest", guilt-ridden, leading "double lives". Their erotic desires contrast not only with religious morality but also, more broadly speaking, with heteronormative expectations. Muslim LGBs have to take into account not only heteronormative norms and values but also those that circulate within (white, middle-class) LGBTQ communities. Normative models of coming out consider the public and verbal disclosure of one's sexuality as the epitome of what it means to be gay. One is not "a real and proper" LGBTQ person if one does not come out and sexuality is at the core of one's being (El-Tayeb, 2011). This model equals "speaking out" with honesty, truth, and authenticity. In LGBTQ communities, religiosity, especially Muslim piety, is often seen as incompatible with LGBTQ identity and antithetical to the agency of LGBTQs (Puar, 2007, p. 13). This is part of a broad set of discourses on gender and sexual diversity through which debates about Islam in Europe have come to be framed (Rahman, 2010, p. 945). It is an example of what Joan Nagel (2003) calls the

"ethnosexual frontiers" through which sexuality and gender function as ethnic markers to demarcate the boundaries between ethnic and racial groups.

"Same-sex sexuality" and "Islam" have come to be regarded as irreconcilably antagonistic. Islam and same-sex sexuality are usually placed in opposition to each other because of a binary model, which equates the West with freedom and the Middle East (and by extension North Africa) with persecution (Al-Sayyad, 2010, p. 377). In other words, same-sex sexuality is "deployed as a form of Western exceptionalism", and as Momin Rahman argues, "the assumption of mutual exclusivity whereby the identities of 'gay' and 'Muslim' are seen as the product of mutually exclusive 'cultures'" (Rahman, 2014, p. 46).

Bridging the Gap

In the personal narratives discussed above, there are two different strands of arguments that describe why same-sex sexuality was considered haram: (1) the story of the prophet Lut and (2) the fact that within the Islamic legal framework, sexuality is only possible between a man and a woman and within the institutional bonds of religious marriage.

Ilias searched for guidance on such matters: for example, by looking for information on the internet (on websites such as "Cyberimams"), by seeking clues in the Qur'an, and reading books about same-sex sexuality and Islam. In his study on LGBTQ Muslims in the United Kingdom Andrew Yip (2005) dubs the debates of LGBTQ Muslims on their scriptures as the "queering of religious texts": looking for same-sex affirming interpretations through a variety of hermeneutical strategies. Queering has a "de-stabilizing effect, through the transgression and de-construction of naturalized and normalized hermeneutics, which reinforces heteronormativity" (Yip, 2005, p. 51). Yet, because of his focus on religious texts, Yip puts considerable emphasis on intellectual and theological ways of reconciling religion and sexuality. This overlooks the intuitive and embodied knowledge that Muslim LGBTQs rely on as a starting point for commensurating religion and sexuality. Being both Muslim and LGBTQ is something beyond words, it is embodied and lived (see Peumans, 2014). In other studies, the views of Islam on homosexuality are always put first to explain why Muslims think about homosexuality the way they do (Jaspal & Siraj, 2011). This type of mono-consequentialism assumes a direct and causal relationship between what religious texts say (and even this is open to interpretation and contestation) and what everyday believers think and do. As if a whole "culture" can be explained by a single text. While the queering of religious texts allows many Muslims to reconcile faith and sexuality, Ilias and Yalda were not entirely convinced: either because of their own reasoning or because of existing same-sex affirming interpreta-

tions put forward by LGBTQ associations and authors. They adhered to the morality of the majority and invoked its authority. For example, Ilias knew of same-sex affirming interpretations, but he did not follow them because the majority of Muslims did not share them. This, however, did not stop Ilias and Yalda from identifying as Muslim and acting upon their desires. They simply *are* Muslim *and* LGB, with all the messiness, paradoxes, and ambivalence that comes with it.

In her book on religiosity among queer women, Melissa Wilcox (2009) reminds us that not only sexuality but also its intersection with gender, informs the ways LGBTQs experience religious practices and beliefs. One example is the multiple ways in which LGBTQ Muslims conceive of God and the Qu'ran, an understudied research area in the field of queer religiosity (Yip, 2010, p. 47). The interviewees in this study, who identified as Muslim, viewed God as an invisible force, not as a person. While for both men and women God is male (interviewees referred to God as Him), it is more difficult to ascertain whether their sexual and gender positions affected their conception of the divine. In all personal narratives, God appeared as the embodiment of love and justice, yet Ilias' and Yalda's views were more ambivalent. In their stories, having same-sex desires was seen as a test by God. They both feared punishment for engaging in sexual acts: for example, Ilias said he was afraid of being struck by lightning. God and the grand schemes offered by the Islamic tradition gave them strength, a sense of purpose and meaning in life. It allowed them to express existential dilemmas and relate to other people. As Yalda puts it: "I need it to make me feel whole". In this respect, the religious texts were blueprints of moral behaviour. In other narratives of Muslim LGBs – not discussed in this article – those who experienced less of a moral breakdown between religion and sexuality saw the Qu'ran and the *hadiths* as a guide, which could be subject to interpretation. They gave preference to personal experience over religious authority.

Ambivalence in Everyday Life

The moral breakdown between sexuality and religion occurred in everyday life in a variety of ways. Ilias and Yalda have to endure a repetitive moral suffering. Sometimes the need for love and intimacy or mere lust takes precedence over moral verdicts; other times a modus vivendi is sought: "aspects of morality and ethical ways of being in the world are constantly under revision and negotiation" (Zigon, 2010, p. 117).

Prayer is one example of a ritual practice where the paradoxes experienced by Muslim LGBs are most acutely felt. Prayer is often performed individually and it is through prayer that Muslims, such as Ilias and Yalda, try to cultivate a virtuous moral Muslim self: by submitting oneself completely to God and disciplining one's

thoughts, acts, and emotions during the ritual (Mahmood, 2001). For prayers to be effective and valid, it is important for believers that the realization of moral selfhood genuinely "reflects and arises from the will of that very self" (Simon, 2009, p. 266). An excerpt from Ilias' diary on his visit to the mosque illustrated some of the inner struggles of Muslim LGBs when they pray. Ilias has less difficulty praying in the privacy of his home, since there are no distractions that can divert him from prayer. But inside the sacred space of the mosque and in the company of other Muslim men one becomes aware of one's desires as haram. Ilias feels extremely guilty having these thoughts at the mosque and has difficulties giving his full attention to God and the act of prayer, one of the prerequisites to make one's prayer valid and effective.

As mentioned in the introduction, the ambivalences, contradictions and paradoxes experienced by religious persons have been a growing concern in recent anthropological and social scientific literature. This does not only pertain to the religious experiences of people with same-sex desires, but to heterosexual ones as well. One example is Simon's (2009) research on Islamic prayer and subjectivity among the Minangkabau in Indonesia:

> Islamic prayer serves as an arena in which individual actors may engage multiple conceptions of moral selfhood, and the contradictions between them. Although the practice of prayer may thus serve as a vehicle through which such contradictions can be challenged, and sometimes even transcended, it may also be a vehicle through which the intransigence of these contradictions is more directly experienced (Simon, 2009, pp. 258-259).

For Ilias, Yalda, and other Muslims I interviewed, prayer was often very confrontational as the contradictions between one's sexuality and religion became more crystallized. This is why some Muslims give up praying for certain periods of time. Being in the face of God during ritual acts is simply too much to bear. Frictions experienced in everyday life become crystallized during salah [ritual prayer]. Simon writes:

> The ritual offers the possibility of experiencing their resolution—or of being faced with their stubborn endurance. It may push people toward at least momentary transcendence, but the elusiveness of this promised transcendence may also be a source of anxiety and frustration. The moral self that is crystallized in prayer is, ideally, at once both completely integrated and completely autonomous (Simon, 2009, p. 270).

Apart from the ambivalence and contradictory moral demands experienced during prayer, Ilias and Yalda used certain ethical strategies in their everyday life to overcome the moral breakdown caused by engaging in morally transgressive sexual acts and intimate relationships. When they were still in a relationship, Yalda and her girl-

friend Hajar policed each other so as not to touch in public (meaning in the face of God). Ilias sometimes tried to avoid engaging in sexual acts, especially during Ramadan. If he engaged in sexual acts during other times of the year, certain acts (such as anilingus/rimming or sex under the influence of drugs) were out of the question. To paraphrase anthropologist André Chappatte, the ways of being Muslim and gay, lesbian, or bisexual "are handled through strategies of display and discretion" (Chappatte, 2014, p. 540). A Muslim is still a Muslim when he or she is in a same-sex relationship or engaged in same-sex practices "insofar as haram is part of a Muslim's life" (Chappatte, 2014, p. 540). In his research on alcohol consumption among urban Muslim men in Mali, Chappatte links these haram practices to a particular temporality (diurnal/nocturnal): these men go to the mosque and display their piety to other Muslim men. Yet, in the night they drink in the company of other Muslim men in *maquis* [night life establishments]. Analogously, I would like to frame the display/discretion dynamic in Yalda's and Ilias' narratives in a particular space and time. Acting upon one's sexual desires is done in a discrete manner and only in absence of family, while being a good Muslim man or woman is displayed in the company of other Muslim men and women (e.g. at the mosque or during visits to the family).

While the practice of the Second and Third Pillar of Islam (prayer and fasting) went up and down, the First and arguably foremost Pillar (the belief in the One and True God and Muhammad as His messenger) remained steadfast and unquestioned in Yalda's and Ilias' experience. It was not clear to my interlocutors whether they were born or raised gay or lesbian. But they had learned through time, and sometimes to much of their dismay, that such desires would not go away. In Ilias' and Yalda's cases there was a constant to and fro movement between sexuality and religion. If they went deeper into their faith, they felt further away from their sexual desires and the other way round. Submitting oneself to a higher power led not only to the experience of "ambiguity, uncertainty, anxiety", but also to "creative play and contestation" (Schielke & Debevec, 2012, p. 7). In the personal narratives ambivalence emerged as a central theme: ambivalence in their relationship with God, with their religion in general, and its ritual practices, as well as ambivalence in their sexual desires and subjectivities, and in their relationship with the Ummah [community of Muslims] and the LGBTQ communities. Contrary to Zigon, I argue that these narratives show how instead of returning to the unproblematic and unconscious modality of morality, the initial moral breakdown happens over and over again. Yalda and Ilias endure an ongoing uncomfortable and sometimes loudly nagging feeling of ambivalence. Moral selves are better understood as ambivalent, ambiguous, and sometimes even contradictory and fragmented. Within a particular society, the life trajectory of a single person encompasses different modalities of the

self. "To some degree these occur concurrently, to some degree intermittently" (Schielke, 2009, pp. 37-38; Peumans, 2014).

Conclusion

We can conclude that Zigon's theoretical framework of morality needs to be adapted along the following lines. First, the temporality of a moral breakdown is not clear. Does a singular specific event or person in someone's life cause a moral breakdown, as Zigon argues, or is it a process? Judging from my interlocutors' experiences, I would say that the latter is the case. Second, I agree with Didier Fassin (2014, p. 432) who wonders how to empirically separate the ethical from the moral in more common everyday instances. Third, one might ask whether everyone goes through real moral breakdowns every single day. While one could argue that people have a capacity to reflect on moral intuitions and make ethical judgments in their everyday life (Laidlaw, 2014), I found that many of the persons I interviewed for my research project experienced something which can only be adequately grasped as a "moral breakdown". Lastly, in Zigon's framework the importance of moral ambiguity tends to be underplayed. The moral breakdown in the narratives under consideration presented itself as an ongoing condition: people were not always able to return to an unreflexive disposition of morality. After the moral breakdown all one was left with were nagging feelings of uncomfortable unease and ambivalence.
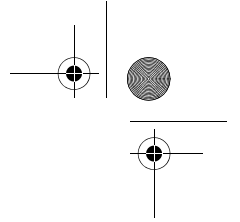
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Notes

1. I have used the term "LGBTQ" as an umbrella term instead of "queer", which is becoming increasingly commonplace in academic research. Using only the term "queer" would do injustice to the specifics of my field. In Belgium the term "LGBT" ("*holebi- en transgender*" in Flemish and "*LGBT – lesbiennes, gays, bi, transgenres*" in French) is used as an umbrella term. "Q" is increasingly yet not consistently added by LGBT organisations and there are only a few that explicitly use queer to define their association. Both in Flemish and French everyday vernacular, "queer" is rarely used as a personal identifier. It may be that many people are unfamiliar with this English word; the English word "gay", however, is sometimes used as an identifier. I have used "LGB" when talking about the people I worked with, as I was unable to find Muslim transgenders.

2. FWO Vlaanderen (Research Foundation Flanders) project number 1126711N (2010 – 2015). The author wishes to thank his supervisors Christiane Stallaert and Johan Leman, Nadia Fadil, Anna Fedele and the anonymous reviewer for their comments on earlier versions of this article. An earlier draft was presented as a paper titled, "Between Piety and Pleasure: Transgressive Sexualities and Religious Agency" at the annual conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions (23-26 August 2012, Stockholm: Södertörn University). I wish to acknowledge the School of Anthropology and Conservation (University of Kent – Canterbury) where I was a visiting trainee fellow in 2014-2015.

3. In our conversation Yalda consistently used the Dutch word "God"; in her diary – written in Dutch – she uses Allah. I use "Allah" whenever Yalda uses the term and God in the rest of the article as a way of not "Othering" the god of Muslims as different from those of Christians and Jews.

4. In Belgium the website of the Brussels-based LGBT organization Merhaba includes testimonies, interviews, articles, videos and an extensive list of books, documentaries, and movies on topics which concern LGBTQ Muslims and LGBTQs from ethnic/racial minority or diasporic backgrounds. An example of a scholar who puts forward same-sex affirming interpretations is Kugle (2010). In the Low Countries the books by Nahas (2001) and El Kaka & Kursun (2005) were often mentioned by my interlocutors as offering an immense source of support for LGB Muslims. Apart from the websites of LGBTQ associations, the issue – as Ilias pointed out – is also a topic of discussion on many websites on Islam in general, both in the Low Countries and beyond. For example, "VraagIslam.nl" (AskIslam.nl) answered the question: "what does Islam say about homosexuality" as follows: "people can have feelings for people of the same sex, but acting upon these feelings (i.e. have sex) is strictly forbidden. This test of Allah can be overcome by marriage, fasting, intensive reading of the Qu'ran and prayer, reading books which strengthen one's faith in Allah" (Anonymous 2014, my translation).

Gender Differences in the ICT Profile
of University Students:
A Quantitative Analysis

Jo Tondeur, Sarah Van de Velde, Hans Vermeersch, Mieke Van Houtte

Abstract

This study responds to a call for research on how gender differences emerge in young generations of computer users. A large-scale survey involving 1138 university students in Flanders, Belgium was conducted to examine the relationship between gender, computer access, attitudes, and uses in both learning and everyday activities of university students. The results show that women have a less positive attitude towards computers in general. However, their attitude towards computers for educational purposes does not differ from men's. In the same way, being female is negatively related to computer use for leisure activities, but no relationship was found between gender and study-related computer use. Based on the results, it could be argued that computer attitudes are context-dependent constructs. When dealing with gender differences, it is essential to take into account the context-specific nature of computer attitudes and uses.

Keywords: computer attitudes, computer use, gender, ICT, path analysis, survey, university students

✧   ✧   ✧

Culture is defining computers as preeminently male machines.
What accounts for this, and what are the consequences?
Marlaine E. Lockheed, 1985, p. 116.

Thirty years after the development of the first personal computer, it is impossible to imagine society without it, as much in our personal lives as in the workplace and in schools (OECD, 2005). According to Tondeur, Sinnaeve, Van Houtte and van
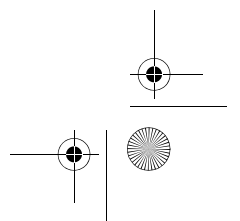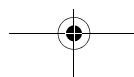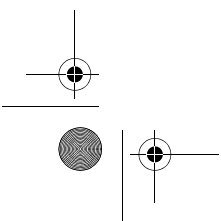
Braak (2011), these changes not only offer further opportunities but also present a number of risks. For instance, the first arrival of computers in the UK created fear among employees because of the assumption that computers would eventually replace people (Garland & Noyes, 2008). This gave rise to the need to measure and review computer attitudes and explore the impact of subsequent problems (cf. Mikkelsen et al., 2002). Researchers have measured computer attitudes in the context of work situations and education (Bovée, Voogt & Meelissen 2007; Sáinz and López-Sáez 2010). Several of these studies build on the assumption that the use of computers is beneficial to learning and that the impact of computers is dependent on the computer attitudes of the students (Kubiatko & Haláková, 2009; Meelissen & Drent, 2008).

In general, the findings confirm that computer attitudes play a crucial role in the acceptance of computers in the context of teaching and learning (e.g. Shapka & Ferrari, 2003; Tondeur, Valcke & van Braak, 2008). Based on a meta-analysis of English and American studies on gender differences and computer attitudes, Whitley (1997) concludes that, in general, females have less positive computer attitudes than males. More recently, in a group of secondary students in Spain, Sáinz and López-Sáez (2010) found more positive computer attitudes in boys than girls. Most of these studies support the idea that our culture is defining computers as pre-eminently male machines (cf. Lockheed, 1985). However, some studies found no gender difference in computer behavior. A Canadian study among teacher candidates, for instance, did not establish a difference in computer attitudes between men and women (Shapka & Ferrari, 2003). As the computer becomes more and more integrated into society and as more people have access to and use computers, the so-called gender gap, if it existed at all, would now be narrowing (Tondeur et al., 2011). But here, too, there is no consensus. This leads us to question the extent to which computer attitudes differ between men and women.

It remains unclear whether gender differences in computer attitudes can be generalized across younger generations of men and women and across countries. Clearly, more research is needed on the relationship between gender and specific computer attitudes and uses in specific contexts such as an educational context (cf. Goode, 2010). Apart from a British study among undergraduate students (Selwyn, 2007), little empirical evidence exists of gender differences in the computer profile of a new generation of undergraduate students, born in the 1990s. In this respect, it is useful to examine whether gender differences in computer attitudes can be found among university students in Flanders, Belgium. At universities, as in other educational settings, ICT applications such as digital learning environments are increasingly present; a suitable use of them is mandatory, or at least highly recommended, to obtain a degree (e.g. Voogt & Pareja Roblin, 2012). For this reason, it is important to

make sure no one gets excluded because of less favorable computer attitudes, eventually resulting in avoiding computer use, a possible risk for women, as shown in the studies cited above.

In 2011 the authors conducted a large-scale empirical survey among Flemish university students. Its main objective was (1) to find out whether there is a gender difference in computer attitudes in general, and in study-related attitudes in particular among students, and (2) to explore the complex relationships between gender, the computer attitude variables, and two computer-use variables: computer use for leisure activities and study-related computer use.

This article first offers an overview of the research about the relationship between gender and computer attitudes. It then describes the adopted development approach. First, a one-way multivariate analysis of a variance model was conducted to test the assumption that there are differences between male and female students in one or more dependent computer profile measures. The analysis built on the results of a survey conducted among 1138 university students enrolled in a Flemish university in 2011. Second, a structural equation modeling technique was applied to model the relationships between gender, the computer attitude variables, and the two computer-use variables. The article concludes with some practical implications and recommendations for further research.

1. Background

The current study can be situated in the tradition of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). TAM emerged from two distinct research theories: the social psychology theories (e.g. Social Cognitive Theory) and sociology with the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2004).[1] The Technology Acceptance Model posits that users' acceptance is determined by two key dimensions, namely "perceived usefulness" and "ease of use" (Venkatesh et al., 2003). These dimensions are included in the computer attitudes scale used in this study.

Following the TAM, Venkatesh et al. (2003) reviewed the existing models and developed the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). Gender was added to UTAUT as an important construct that has received little attention in the context of this field. Given the fact that gender is often missing within technology acceptance theory, we explore the relationship between "gender", "computer attitudes" (including ease of use and usefulness), and two types of computer use. In the next section, we review the empirical literature grounding the importance of this relationship. In particular, we concentrate on studies that link these variables to the role of education.

1.1. Computer attitudes

Attitudes towards computer use may be defined as specific feelings that indicate whether a person likes or dislikes using computers (Simpson et al., 1994). Consequently, measuring computer attitudes can be seen as an evaluation whereby individuals respond favorably or unfavorably to computer use. Researchers developed and validated a considerable number of attitude scales between 1980 and the beginning of 2000, such as the Computer Attitude Scale (Loyd & Gressard, 1984) and the General Computer Attitudes Scale (van Braak, Tondeur & Valcke, 2004). In recent years computers have become more accessible, and computer use is almost universal in Western countries. As a result, attitude scales are often not specific enough to differentiate between individuals. Therefore, a scale is used in this study that includes a broad spectrum of dimensions such as "usefulness", "ease of use", "interest", and "pleasure".

Although each of the available instruments enriches the whole picture, it is important to ascertain their relevance and general applicability. Hence, an attempt is made in this study to address the context-specific nature of computer attitudes and to look for specific types of computer attitudes (cf. Goode, 2010). According to Talja (2005), individual attitudes are context-dependent constructs: contextuality means that individuals can produce different types of computer attitudes in different contexts. Already three decades ago, Hawkins (1985) argued that it would be necessary to examine how gender differences emerge in relation to the functions computers serve. Similarly, Kay (1993) states that it would be best to be as specific as possible about the content of the attitude object, if we expect to be able to predict behavior towards that object. Following Kay (1993), it seems that a scale designed to assess computer attitudes towards education would be expected to provide accurate predictions as to whether students would use computers in education.

1.2. Gender and computer attitudes

Since the 1980s, much research has been done on the relationship between computer attitudes and gender (e.g. Cooper, 2006; Jenson & Rose, 2003). It is generally accepted that girls and women have a less positive attitude towards computers than boys and men (Cooper, 2006). Computers are perceived as belonging to the male domain of mathematics, science, electronics, and machinery (cfr. Jones, 1986). A major concern has been the gender gap in computer attitudes and its implications for the exclusion of women from areas of the workforce (Balka & Smith, 2000; Sáinz & López-Sáez, 2010) and from the benefits available from the use of computers in domestic and leisure settings (Vekiri & Chronaki, 2008).

The findings of several studies confirm the existence of gender differences in computer use (Goode, 2010; Meelissen & Drent, 2008; Sáinz & López-Sáez, 2010; Tondeur, Valcke & van Braak, 2008). Research in a number of countries has found that females still hold less favourable attitudes towards computers than males (e.g. Bovée et al., 2007). Although much of the research has been conducted in the United States, data from other nations show a similar gender divide. Researchers in Sweden and Japan (Makrakis & Sawada, 1996), the Netherlands (Meelissen & Drent, 2008), and Belgium (Tondeur, van Braak & Valcke, 2008) all come to the same conclusion. Cooper (2006) argues that there is little question that a stereotype exists that links the use of computers to gender. As early as 1985, Hawkins argued that the design, development, and repair of technical equipment, have been stereotyped as masculine. In that same year, Hess and Miura (1985) state that "[w]omen have related to these areas of activity as consumers, driving cars they did not repair and using typewriters they did not design" (Hess & Miura, 1985, p. 193).

According to advocates of socialization theory, men and women confront computers in different ways and with different perceptions, based on social expectations from others, including parents and peer groups (Shashaani & Khalili, 2001). The results of the Vekiri and Chronali (2008) study in Greek elementary schools, for instance, confirm the effect of different socialization experiences and gendered social expectations by family and peers on computer attitudes among students. Vekiri and Chronali found that parents' expectations and support in learning about computers emerged as one of the most important determinants of boys' and girls' beliefs about their computer self-efficacy and values.

1.3. Gender and computer attitudes in education

As stated before, several studies build on the assumption that the use of computers is beneficial to learning (Kubiatko & Haláková, 2009; Meelissen & Drent, 2008). For instance, Jonassen (1996) indicates that computer use helps students develop higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills. Other benefits derived from computer use are that it fosters collaborative learning and flexible learning opportunities, independent of time and place (Tondeur, van Braak & Valcke, 2007). As technology has become an integral part of instruction in most Western countries, it is believed that computer attitudes play an influential role in determining the extent to which students accept the computer as a learning tool.

The research findings in this study confirm that computer attitudes also influence the acceptance of computers in the context of teaching and learning (e.g. Ferrer et al., 2011; Vekiri & Chronaski, 2008). Having more negative attitudes towards computers may lead female students to avoid experiences that could help them develop com-

puter competence, and this, in turn, might influence negatively their academic choices and, as stated earlier, limit their future career opportunities in information technology (Vekiri & Chronaki, 2008). Many educators, including female teachers, are not aware of the dangers of perpetuating the female stereotype. In the context of secondary education in the Netherlands, teachers have been reported to play a role in perpetuating gender socialization and in impacting negatively on girls' experiences with computers (Volman & van Eck, 2001).

Abbiss (2009) reports findings derived from qualitative research relating to gender and students' experiences in a naturalistic setting of ICT classrooms in New Zealand. This case study demonstrates how gender socialization can be a force underlying gender inequities relating to ICT and education. The case study of Goode (2010) illustrates how three students, who were given vastly different learning experiences at home and in school, develop different relationships to technology. When each of these three students entered college, they found that university education reinforced their previous relationship with technology. As shown by Goode, daily interactions with technology continually inform and shape how students view themselves as college students. Both case studies highlight how understanding one's nuanced relationship with technology provides a much richer measure for studying multifarious dimensions of the digital inequity in a particular setting (Selwyn, 2007).

It is important to acknowledge that not all studies show consistent results (see Cooper, 2006; Tondeur, Valcke & van Braak, 2008). Shapka and Ferrari (2003), for instance, found no gender difference for computer attitudes in the computer profile of teacher candidates in Canada and argue that gender differences are gradually dissipating. They stipulate that gender differences might still exist in the use of computer applications that are less familiar. Van Braak et al.'s (2004) study shows that in Belgium gender differences gradually disappear as teachers become more acquainted with the educational potential of computers. In this respect, it could be stated that as the computer becomes more and more integrated into society and as more people – both men and women – have access to and use computers, the so-called gender gap is narrowing.

However, according to Selwyn (2007), a more equal use of computers does not automatically mean that the attitudes of men and women are the same. Selwyn argues that the focus of the research must shift: not only does one have to look for gender differences in computer use and attitudes, but also for differences in attitudes towards specific types of use, such as study-related computer attitudes. In this respect, it could be argued that individual attitudes are context-dependent constructs (Talja, 2005). For instance, someone describing the development of an online learning environment might portray him- or herself as a forerunner, but when the same individual

talks about, say, setting up homepages on the Internet, a female might more readily describe herself as someone uninterested in technology.

2. Context of the Study

In the current study we use data from a single country sample, namely Belgium. Among the high human development countries, Belgium ranks at the higher end of both the Gender Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Index (14th and 7th respectively among 70 high human development countries; UNDP 2008). In addition, it has a fairly egalitarian gender ideology (Halman, et al. 2005). The study was carried out at Ghent University, a university in Flanders—the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium—offering academic bachelors and masters in all fields of study, and representative of all Flemish universities. In tertiary education in Flanders a common distinction is made between colleges for higher education, offering professional bachelor's degrees, and universities, offering academic bachelors and master's degrees. Any student with a diploma of secondary education may start at university, and fees are relatively low. In Flanders, there is no distinction between state schools and elite universities such as the "Ivy League" in the US. There are five Flemish universities, all offering alpha, beta, and gamma fields of study.

Ghent University has 11 faculties and 130 departments. It is, with more than 38000 students and 7100 staff, one of the largest universities in Flanders and the Netherlands. Since the academic year 1999-2000 female students have been the majority in bachelor's studies. In 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, the proportion of female students was 55% and 56% respectively. This evolution follows the international trend (Gerber and Cheung 2008). Male and female students are not equally divided across fields of study. A distinction can be made between "masculine" fields of study, in which a majority of male students are enrolled, and "feminine" fields of study, in which a majority of female students are enrolled. The masculine fields of study coincide with the STEM-fields, namely Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Typically feminine fields of study are educational studies and pedagogy, languages and arts, and a number of health-related and bio sciences (Gerber and Cheung 2008). At Ghent University, the most feminine field of study – that is, the field with the highest proportion of women enrolled – is "language therapy and audiology" (97% female students), followed by "psychology and pedagogical sciences" (79%). At the other end of the continuum "engineering" is the most masculine field (85% male students).

3. Purpose

Considering this background, it is useful to examine whether the stated gender difference in computer attitudes can still be found in a specific context, such as an educational context. The first aim of this study is to determine whether there is a gender difference in computer attitudes in general and in study-related computer attitudes in particular. Study-related computer attitudes refer to students' attitudes towards the effects of adopting computers in education. The second aim is to explore the complex relationships between gender, the computer attitudes variables, and two computer-use variables: "computer use for leisure activities" and "study-related computer use".

4. Method

4.1. Procedure and sample

A large-scale online survey was conducted, involving 1138 first-year undergraduate university students at Ghent University. The Student Barometer is an annual survey among students (bachelor, master and postgraduate, excluding PhD students and incoming guest and exchange students) at Ghent University. In 2011, students were invited to participate by a personalized email sent to their email-account (see Appendix A). The survey was described as a questionnaire that addresses general topics related to student life and academic activities. After completing the questionnaire, students (if they provided a valid email address) could win a laptop or a voucher at a local shop. The survey was voluntary and anonymous.

In total, 1138 students participated (response-rate 24.13%). All students with a study delay of two years or more were excluded to ensure the sample was limited to young undergraduates. In total, 78.5% of the students were 18 years old, 2.0% were 17 and 19.5% were 19 (M=18.83; SD=0.43). The sample included 811 female students (71.3%) and 327 male (28.7%) students. The students represented a variety of disciplines within the humanities (38.2% law and criminology, 26.1% psychology, 14.1% pedagogy, 7.5% economy, 7.5% sociology and political sciences, 6.1% communication, and 0.6% moral sciences). More demographic information is included in Table 1.

Most of the students reported having their own computer (95.7%), and 94.2% of the respondents had their own computer with Internet access. On average, university students in this sample report using the computer for 17.76 hours (SD=15.60) a week, mostly for leisure activities (M=11.65 hours; SD=12.83) and to a lesser extent for educational use (M=6.10 hours; SD=6.52). Only 0.32% of the sample reported

Table 1. Breakdown of age and ethnic origin in the sample

	Overall	Female Students	Male Students
Total, %	1138	811 (71.3 %)	327, 28.7 %
Age	18.82	18.86	18.73
SD	(0.43)	(0.41)	(0.46)
Ethnic origin			
Belgium	1063 (93.4 %)	759 (93.6 %)	304 (93.0 %)
Other European country	27 (2.4 %)	20 (2.5 %)	7 (2.1 %)
Outside Europe	44 (3.9 %)	31 (3.8 %)	13 (4.0 %)
Unidentified	4 (0.4 %)	1 (0.1 %)	3 (0.9 %)

ANOVA revealed that age did differ by gender (F(1,1136) = 19.59, p < .000) with ηp_2 (partial eta squared)= .017. Ethnic origin was measured through the place of birth of the grandmother. Chi-square test revealed that ethnic origin did not vary by gender (χ^2 = 4.31, df = 3, p = .230).

never using computers for educational purposes, compared to 1.60% never using computers for leisure. A gender difference in computer ownership is not identified (χ^2 = 0.45; p = 792). More information on the computer profile of the sample is presented in Table 2.

4.2. Instruments

The first instrument employed in this study is the General Attitudes toward Computers Scale, an eight-item scale designed and described by Evers et al. (2009). It comprises items relating to interest (e.g. "I want to know more about computers"), pleasure (e.g. "I like to talk about computers to others"), usefulness (e.g. "The use of a computer is useful to me"), ease of use (e.g. "I feel comfortable when I use computers"). All items followed a five-point Likert response format (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree/disagree, agree, strongly agree). The scale showed a high internal consistency, with Cronbach's α =.82.

The second instrument assesses attitudes toward the use of computers in education. The Attitudes toward Computers in Education Scale measures students' attitudes toward the effects of adopting computers in education, including the same spectrum of dimensions: "interest", "ease of use", "pleasure", and "usefulness" (Evers et al. 2009). The Attitudes toward Computers in Education Scale includes items such as "The computer is an important tool for my studies" (relevance), "I have confidence in my abilities to use the computer for my studies" (confidence), or "I always want to learn more about how I can use computers for my studies" (interest). The instrument contains eight Likert-items that showed a high internal consistency (a = .80). To measure the two types of computer use, respondents were asked to indicate how many hours a week they use a computer (1) for school-related activities and (2) for leisure-related activities. The responses on both scales were averaged, so that

higher scores indicated more positive attitudes. The descriptive statistics on the computer use measures and gender comparisons are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on the computer profile measures and gender comparisons

	Overall (n=1138)		Male (n=327)		Female (n=811)		*F*	*d*	*p*
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**			
Study-related computer use	6.03	6.59	5.97	7.88	6.06	6.00	0.04	-0.01	.842
Computer use for leisure activities	11.73	12.86	17.27	17.60	9.51	9.50	89.01	0.55	.000
Study-related computer attitudes	3.61	0.64	3.66	0.65	3.58	0.57	3.31	0.13	.069
General computer attitudes	2.60	0.90	3.00	0.97	2.44	0.82	95.21	0.62	.000

Theoretical ranges for the independent variables were study-related CU (0.00-108.00) CU leisure activities (0.00-140.00), study-related CA (1.00-5.00), general CA (1.00-5.00).

4.3. Data analysis

In addition to the bivariate correlation analysis, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) model was used to test the assumption that there are differences between male and female students in one or more dependent computer profile measures. A structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was applied, using AMOS 21 (Arbuckle 2011). This is a methodology for representing, estimating, and testing a network of relationships between variables.[2] In this study, SEM was used to assess the differences between male and female students; the path model made it possible to see the differential effects gender predictors of the two types of computer attitudes ("computer attitudes in general" and "study-related computer attitudes") had on the two types of computer use ("computer use for leisure activities" and "study-related computer use"). Relationships among variables were calculated as correlation coefficients (*r*) and direct effects on endogenous variables as standardized beta-weight (path coefficients or *b's*).

5. Results

5.1. Correlations

In Table 3 an overview of the bivariate correlation coefficients among the four computer profile measures is presented. Only the two attitude measures are strongly correlated (*r*=.68, p<.001); the other measures are moderately correlated with each other.

Table 3. Pearson Correlations associated with the computer profile measures

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) computer use for leisure activities	1.00	.18**	.10*	.23**	.00
(2) study-related computer use	.29**	1.00	.24**	.14	-.02
(3) general computer attitudes	.09	.10	1.00	.70**	-.03
(4) study-related computer attitudes	.23**	.01	.68**	1.00	.00
(5) age	-.11*	-.10	.02	.03	1.00

Upper diagonal indicates correlations for female students; lower diagonal indicates correlations for male students
* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed) ** Correlation is significant at the .001 level (2-tailed).

5.2. Multivariate analysis of variance

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the attitude and use measures. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) model was used to test the assumption that there are differences between male and female students in one or more dependent computer profile measures. The results of the MANOVA test showed that men and women differ significantly in computer usage and attitudes: $F(4, 1103) = 43.23$, p<.001, Wilk's λ =.864. Post-hoc ANOVA tests showed gender differences in two of the four computer profile measures: computer use for leisure activities and general computer attitudes. The largest difference between male and female students was found on the general computer attitude measure: $F(1,1106) = 95.21$, p<.001), males, M=3.00, SD=0.97 versus females, M=2.44, SD=0.82. The Cohen's d coefficient was 0.62, indicating a medium-effect size. Male students (M=17.27, SD=17.60) also reported spending about 80% more time on computers for leisure activities compared to female students (M=9.51, SD=9.50), a difference which is statistically significant: $F(1,1106)=89.01$, p<.001) with a medium-effect size (Cohen's d=0.55).

No significant differences were found between male (M=3.66, SD=0.65) and female students (M=3.58, SD=0.57) in relation to study-related computer attitudes: $F(1,1106)=3.31$, p=.069, Cohen's d=.13. Female students on average reported using the computer more frequently for study-related activities (M=6.06, SD= 6.00) compared to male students (M=5.97, SD=7.88), but again, the differences were not statistically significant: $F(1,1106)=0.04$, p=.842.

5.3. Path modeling

A first goal was to estimate the predictive power of the model. Cut-off criteria for fit indexes recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999) were used: (1) the χ^2 statistic and corresponding *p*-value; the *p*-value should not be significant; (2) the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) should be at least 0.9; (3) the Comparative Fit Index (CFI)

should be close to 0.95; and (4) the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) should have a value of 0.05 or less. All the goodness-of-fit indices are in line with recommended benchmarks for acceptable fit: χ^2=26.189 (*df*=3; *p*=.000), CFI=.977, AGFI=.954, RMSEA=.084. Secondly, the strength of the direct and indirect effects was assessed.

The full path model is depicted in Figure 1. More specifically, this figure includes a visual representation of the direct effects on the two types of computer use reported. It also provides additional information on the indirect effects and the interactions among "gender" and the two attitude scales. "Gender" is associated with different ICT-related variables. The results confirm that women have a less positive "attitude towards computers in general" than men (ß=.-24). The relationship between "gender" and "study-related computer attitudes" is different (ß=.12): female students possess more favorable "study-related computer attitudes" when controlled for "general computer attitudes".
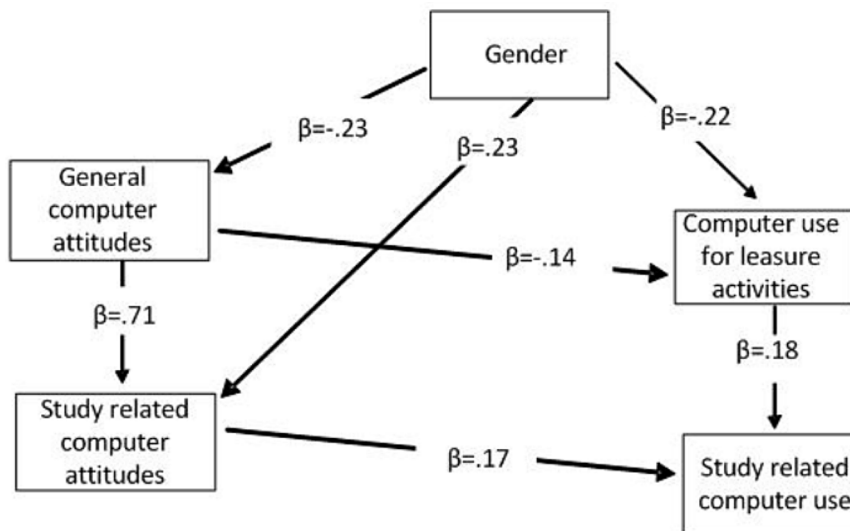

Figure 1

Furthermore, the results of the path analyses indicate that "gender" has a significant direct effect on "computer use for leisure activities": males report more intensive use of computers. No significant direct relationship was found between "gender" and "study-related computer use". The model also reveals that "general computer attitudes" contribute significantly to the explanation of "computer use for leisure activities" (ß=.-22). Finally, an effect was found of "study-related computer attitudes" on "study-related computer use" (ß=.16).

6. Discussion

Research in a number of countries has shown that females hold less favourable attitudes towards computers than males (e.g. Volman & van Eck, 2001). However, it remains unclear whether there are certain circumstances in which females develop more positive attitudes towards computer use. As it has been suggested that once females become convinced of the usefulness of computers they are more inclined to make use of them (Abbiss, 2008; Selwyn, 2007), it is interesting to examine whether gender differences in computer attitudes can be found in specific contexts such as an educational context. Several studies argue that the use of computers will be directed toward students' attainment of 21st-century goals, such as creativity, critical thinking, productivity, and problem-solving (Voogt & Pareja Roblin, 2012).

The findings of this study confirm that women have less positive general computer attitudes than men (cf. Cooper, 2006; Sáinz & López-Sáez, 2010), but no gender differences were found in study-related computer attitudes. In the same way, being female seems negatively related to computer use for leisure activities, but no relationship was found between gender and study-related computer use. Based on these results, it cannot be concluded that, even though female university students in Flanders have less positive general computer attitudes than male students, their attitudes towards computers are negative. The results of the current study are consistent with the study of Vekiri and Chronaki (2008). They show that, although computers were less important in girls' everyday activities, there was no difference between female and male students' use of computers for schoolwork in elementary schools in Greece.

The differences between male and female students' computer attitudes could signify that they differ in their motivations and interests in considering the utility of computers. Additionally, there may be a difference in the role computers play in female students' lives (cf. Sáinz & López-Sáez, 2010; Volman et al., 2005). Selwyn (2007) argues that the utility and perceived usefulness of the different aspects of technology are at the heart of much of the gendered nature of the data: what is useful for men and what is useful for women is often seen as very different. Similarly, Ferrer et al. (2011) note that boys and girls in public schools in the region of Aragón (Spain) use ICT differently. They evaluate the relationship between ICT knowledge and the labor market differently. Based on the results of this study, it could be suggested that females take a more pragmatic stance towards computer use, meaning that they are likely to develop positive attitudes towards forms of computer use that they deem useful. Abbiss (2008) describes females as "task-oriented users" who focus on utilitarian functions of computers and on the end product. By contrast, males are described as "power users" who are machine-oriented and for whom the computer is a toy to be manipulated for its own sake.

According to Selwyn (2007), the alignment of females with purposeful applications of technology was apparent throughout the results of his British study among undergraduate students, as was the alignment of masculinity and more technological, perhaps less useful, applications. According to this scholar, young women appeared not to be technophobes or technophiles but techno-realists: they reported on everyday experiences of how computers are used in contemporary society. Female students in this study might be more critical towards computers. This, however, does not mean that they dislike or reject computers. If computer use has proven to be useful to obtain a certain objective – such as schoolwork – women's attitudes toward computers are not altogether different from those of men. On the contrary, females score more positively than males on study-related computer attitudes. The observed gender differences seem to occur as a result of "[males' and females'] different interests and not as a consequence of a lesser education of one of the two groups" (OECD 2005, p. 221).

It should be kept in mind that these more positive study-related computer attitudes might also be related to the difference in general school attitudes between males and females. Various studies have shown that males are less motivated than females and have less positive attitudes towards school (e.g. van Braak et al., 2004; Francis, 2000). In general, females were found to spend more time doing homework, to display less disturbing behavior in the classroom, and to be truant less often. Females have higher expectations of themselves and are more enthusiastic about continuing their studies. Males work less hard and are distracted more quickly (e.g. Warrington et al., 2000). Warrington et al. (2000) found that more males than females consider educational achievement as not "cool", which might explain their less positive study-related computer attitudes in comparison with females (cf. Francis, 2000). It is important for educators and policy-makers to understand how various factors interact with student characteristics to influence teaching and learning processes that make use of computers (Teo & Noyes, 2008).

An important question is whether female students report less favorable computer attitudes because of expectations guided by gender roles and whether these differences affect proper functioning in an educational setting and a knowledge-based society. Sáinz and López-Sáez (2010), for instance, argue that stereotypical beliefs regarding females' limited technical talents also have an influence on parental expectations about female performance and achievement, which further lowers girls' self-esteem and their final performance, and influences their academic choices (cf. Eccles, 2007). It seems that gender stereotypes are further emphasized through formal schooling where boys are thought to be more competent in masculine subject matter than girls (Cooper, 2006). Furthermore, the majority of software and Internet-based utilities that enhance learning productivity in daily lives are designed by a male dom-

inated industry (e.g. Ahuja, 2002). According to Huang, Hood and Yoo (2013), these factors inevitably construct an Internet world that is unwelcoming to female users. It is here that research can document the broader implications of gender differences in computer attitudes and use (cfr. Tondeur et al., 2011).

7. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

Although the present study has provided more insight in the relationship between gender and specific types of computer attitudes and uses, it also has some shortcomings. In the current study, we use data from a single country sample, namely Belgium, which raises the question whether the results can be generalized to populations outside of Belgium. Gender differences determined by this study might be expected to be more disparate in less egalitarian countries. As common in quantitative large-scale research, gender is seen as a binary feature, distinguishing between men and women, while neglecting the variance present in each category. This limitation is due to the fact that we are building on traditional research into the gender gap in ICT-use, which focuses on differences between genders, not within. However, it would be interesting to explicitly take into account intrasexual variances, for example by applying gender identity theory (cf. Vantieghem, Vermeersch & Van Houtte, 2014).

A concern for internal validity rests in the nature of a self-reported survey. Only one measure was used to collect data on the research variables. Apart from the added value of seeking an evaluation of the "gender gap" in other fields of study, at other educational levels, and outside Flanders, responses to this study were voluntary and thus inevitably subject to self-selection biases. To remedy this, future research efforts should test the proposed model using a random sampling approach. There is also the question of the independence of students as units of analysis. In their computer profile, students are influenced not only by individual factors but also by the (school) context (see Tondeur, Devos, Van Houtte, van Braak, & Valcke 2009).

Additionally, it should be noted that the model presented in this study was based on a snapshot research approach. First, not all possible variables from the technology acceptance theory were studied. We, for instance, did not focus on variables such as "subjective norms" (cf. Pynoo & van Braak 2014) or "social influence" (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Future research should include a systematic evaluation of other aspects of TAM and adopt an iterative approach in developing the model. In addition, interpretative research is required to explore the reasons why gender differences exist in different contexts. Few studies have examined systematically the implications of the unique uses that individuals make of computers and other technological devices such as mobile phones or tablet PCs. The study by Kennedy et al. (2003) illustrates gender

differences in terms of types of ICT use: women use the Internet more for social reasons, while men use it more for instrumental and solo recreational reasons.

Contextual characteristics that surround the emergence of a technology in a society have been mostly left out of studies on technology acceptance (Lin, 2003, Baaren et al. 2009). These studies reveal that research on the relationship between gender and technology also requires a holistic and qualitative approach that takes into account how computer use is mediated by a complex set of socio-cultural beliefs and practices. Webb and Young (2005) suggest an approach that enables the researcher to explore the perspective of the research participant; they offer some insight into the declining gender balance in the field of technology use. Collecting more narratives and expanding technology identity would be a useful exercise across a variety of educational and social contexts (cf. Goode 2010).

8. Conclusion

Given that in educational settings such as universities, computer applications and digital learning environments are increasingly present and that the use of digital technology is required to obtain a degree, it is important to make sure no one is excluded because of less favorable computer attitudes resulting in avoiding computer use. This study shows that women, although they have less positive attitudes towards computers in general than men, are not likely to be disadvantaged in educational settings, since their attitude towards computer use for educational purposes does not differ from men's. We might conclude from this study that the more pragmatic stance of women regarding computer use benefits them in an educational setting.

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Notes

1. For an overview, see Pynoo, 2012.
2. For more information, see Kline, 2011.

Appendix A

Dear Student,

Why do students actually study? What are they doing in their leisure time? What could be improved at UGent? Is student housing too expensive?

These are questions that matter to us and probably to you. That's why we ask you to fill out the 'Student Barometer'. The 'Student Barometer' is a research project, organized every year for UGent students, which aims to get answers to questions like the ones above.

If you complete the questionnaire, you have the chance to win one of our prizes: a laptop or vouchers for FNAC or the cinema.

You may find our questionnaire by clicking on the link below.

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix B

General Attitudes toward Computers Scale (Evers et al., 2009)

Ik gebruik graag een computer.
I like using computers.

Ik vind het leuk om met anderen over computers te praten.
I like to talk about computers to others.

Ik wil graag veel over computers weten.
I want to know more about computers.

Het werken met computers interesseert me enorm.
I am very interested in using computers.

Ik voel me op mijn gemak als ik een computer gebruik.
I feel comfortable using computers.

Als ik een computer gebruik, heb ik schrik iets verkeerd te doen.
When using computers, I'm afraid of doing something wrong.

Het gebruik van een computer is nuttig voor mij.
Computers are useful to me.

Ik vind het belangrijk om computers te kunnen gebruiken.
I find it important to be able to use a computer.

Attitudes toward Computers in Education Scale (Evers et al., 2009)

Ik wil steeds meer weten over de mogelijkheden van computers voor mijn studies.
I always want to learn more about how I can use computers for my studies.

Computers interesseren me weinig in het kader van mijn opleiding.
I am not interested in using computers for my studies.

Ik zie mezelf in staat de mogelijkheden van een computer te betrekken op mijn studies.
I have confidence in my abilities to use the computer for my studies.

Ik studeer beter dank zij de hulp van computers.
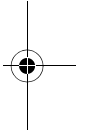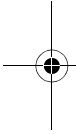Computers improve my ability to study.

Ik vind computers onmisbaar in het kader van mijn opleiding.
Computers are indispensable for my studies.

De computer is een belangrijke tool bij mijn studies.
The computer is an important tool for my studies.
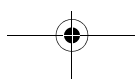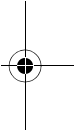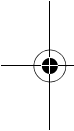
What Are You Reading?

Cvetkovich, A. (2003). *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures.* **Durham: Duke University Press.**

Ann Cvetkovich delves into a wide range of queer sexual traumas: from incest to transnational and emigrational diasporic trauma to the 1990s AIDS crisis. Cvetkovich develops a highly theoretical argument that challenges our understandings of especially lesbian trauma, and explores how the memory of trauma gives rise to new forms of cultural expression and testimonial documentation. She examines how the affective, idiosyncratic, and quotidian side of (post-)traumatic experience can provide for new public cultures, and discusses the promising possibilities of its queer testimonial archives. Not devaluing national and other more customary sites of trauma such as the Holocaust, the Vietnam War or slavery, Cvetkovich is mostly interested in the affective, ephemeral life of queer trauma. She does not necessarily argue for the inclusion of queer sites of trauma within trauma studies or national public archives, but explores how these queer sites challenge our common understanding of trauma and its archival testimonies.

It is this concept of hers, that is, of the queer archive, that forms the central theoretical concern of my doctoral research. As a scholar interested in feminist and queer studies as well as in collage poetics and the art of collecting in American Cold War modernist poetry, Cvetkovich's theoretical study allows me to link the experimental, archival collage poetics of queer writers such as Marianne Moore and John Ashbery to the traumatic experience of a paranoid and homophobic Cold War culture. Even though incest, AIDS, and lesbian public cultures are not directly relevant to my doctoral research, Cvetkovich succeeds in offering a theoretical framework that is not limited to its case studies. The reason for this is that she herself remains rather open about what exactly the definition of a queer archive is or should be. As such, her focus lies on, but is not restricted to, actually existing, institutional archives that are, according to her, "composed of material practices that challenge traditional conceptions of history and understand the quest for history as a psychic need rather than a science" (Cvetkovich 268). My research uses this definition to explore experimental, American collage poetry that represents a literary variant of Cvetkovich's queer

archive in which poets can collect, preserve, as well as distort quotidian and possibly traumatic experiences. This inclusion of the excluded in the poetic archive, as collections always simultaneously refer to what is not included, allows the studied poets to question dominant correlations or to form new sets of relations.

Both in sexuality and trauma theory, Cvetkovich has opened up new perspectives and laid out the path for future research. She reaches beyond the customary feminist discourse on trauma by studying how lesbian subcultures, as often ignored by feminism, allow for discussions about sexual trauma in the public sphere. Within trauma theory, she hopes to depathologise the current trauma discourse in order to focus on the cultural responses to trauma, from which she can explore new models of affective public archiving. As such, Cvetkovich positions herself at the beginning of a new development within queer theory that takes interest in affective experience and public archiving practices of, possibly traumatic, queer lives and literatures.

ELIEN ARCKENS

✧   ✧   ✧

Navid Kermani. *Wer ist wir? Deutschland und seine Muslime.* München: Beck, 2009.

My research project investigates narrative constructions of religious identities in a number of fictional works by Iraqi- and Iranian-German writers. One of them is the academic, journalist, and novelist Navid Kermani, born in 1967 in Siegen from Iranian parents. He is considered to be one of the main intellectual voices addressing the Islam and Muslim question in Germany. In June 2015 he received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, an international award for intellectuals promoting understanding and peace. In September 2015, I read Kermani's political essay *Wer ist wir? Deutschland und seine Muslime*. Although my research focuses on the author's fictional work, I chose to also study his academic and journalistic work related to the topic of religious identities in order to obtain a better understanding of Kermani's perspectives on intercultural and interreligious societies.

The title of Kermani's essay indicates a tense relationship between Germany's secular society and its Muslim communities. By questioning the use of the pronoun "wir", Kermani questions the implied process of "othering" in which Islam serves as a "counter-identification" of the West; Islam allegedly represents everything the Christian or secular West is not. The writer criticizes the "Homogenisierungswahn" (140) and resists any reductionist interpretation of what it means to be a Muslim: "Ich bin Muslime, ja – aber ich bin auch vieles andere" (19). Yes, Kermani is

Muslim, but next to that, he is also many other things. The self-proclaimed cosmo-politan prefers to embrace the ambiguity and inherent contradictions existing within individuals. The chapter "Ist der Islam integrierbar?", which tackles the prejudice that Islam is not reconcilable with Western modernity, takes a similar standpoint in emphasizing the diversity of both Islam and modernity. Kermani retorts: "Which Islam? Which modernity?" Like the Indian philosopher Amartya Sen, he celebrates the plurality of identities: "In einen inneren Konflikt geriete ich nicht, wenn ich mich zwischen zwei Identitäten bewegte […], sondern wenn ich mich auf eine Identität festzulegen hätte" (130). According to Kermani, not the moving between two identi-ties, but the choice for a single one is what causes inner conflicts. Against the back-ground of an increasing popularity of right-wing political parties in Europe that are feeding nationalist sympathies and using xenophobic discourse, we often hear that a dialogue with Muslims is necessary. However, Kermani points out that a "Dialog der Kulturen […] bestätigt […] sein Gegenmodell, Kampf der Kulturen" (122). A dia-logue between cultures ironically confirms that there is a clash between cultures. What is needed, Kermani notes, is an uncoupling of religion and culture in the public debate. His philosophy is often described as "Verfassungspatriotismus". This means that belonging to a community should not be determined by place of birth, ethnicity, culture, or religion, but rather by a collective set of rules to which individuals agree, such as a constitution.

Wer ist wir? is a nuanced and self-critical essay about German society interwoven with academic theories drawn from postcolonial studies as well as philosophical con-cepts from the tradition of German Enlightenment thought. Kermani writes in a clear language, which makes his work accessible to a wider public without slipping into popular discourse.

WARDA EL-KADDOURI

✧ ✧ ✧

Rothblum, E. & Solovay, S. (Eds.). (2009). *The Fat Studies Reader.* **New York/ London: University of New York Press.**

It was my work in feminist activism that brought me into contact with the dynamic field of fat activism and its academic cousin fat studies. The history of western fat activism can be traced back to the US of the 1960s and is intricately connected to the emerging women's liberation, civil rights, and lesbian movements. *The Fat Studies Reader* is the first academic anthology to undertake a mapping of this relatively recent field of study. One that, as far as I'm aware of, has yet to garner interest from Belgian

researchers. And it should. For as Marilyn Wann notes in the foreword to *The Fat Studies Reader*: "Whenever members of a society have recourse to only one opinion on a basic human experience, that is precisely the discourse and the experience that should attract intellectual curiosity" (x).

Fat studies can be understood as the critical study of the role of body weight and body size in society. It examines widespread discourses, underlying assumptions and prejudices, and vies for political change and social justice. The *Reader* manages to tackle fat studies in all its pluridisciplinarity with parts devoted to historical perspectives, health and medicine, social inequalities, literature and culture, and affect and embodiment. Editors Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay succeed in emphasizing how crucial intersectional thinking is to the field of fat studies. Articles such as "Neo-liberalism and the Constitution of Contemporary Bodies" by Julie Guthman, "The Fat of the (Border)land: Food, Flesh, and Hispanic Masculinity in Willa Cather's 'Death comes for the Archbishop'" by Julia McCrossin, and "Fattening Queer History" by Elena Levy-Navarro demonstrate how socio-economic class, dis/ability, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality play a pivotal role in the politics of body size, shape, and weight.

The Fat Studies Reader has impregnated my own research interests, which can be situated at the junction of gender history and disability history, by highlighting some remarkable parallels between disability and fatness in discourses as well as in lived experiences. I was not able to grasp these similarities before since my own thinking on body weight, like that of so many others, was mainly informed by the classical feminist publications on the topic, especially Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California 1993) and Susie Orbach's bestseller *Fat is a Feminist Issue* I and II (London: Arrow Books, 1978 and 1982). Both accounts undoubtedly have a lot to offer but still rely on the (psycho-)pathologization of bodies that do not fit a preconceived mould. *The Fat Studies Reader* offers the impetus for a more intersectional awareness of the social, medical, and economic frameworks that underpin our current thinking – feminist and other – on body weight and body size.

ANAÏS VAN ERTVELDE

✧ ✧ ✧

Wekker, G. (2006). *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora.* **New York: Colombia University Press.**

Although I grew up, academically speaking, in anthropology and gender studies at Utrecht University with Gloria Wekker as one of my most inspiring critical teachers and graduated in 2010, I never made it to reading her book *The Politics of Passion*, published in 2006. It was only after I finished my PhD research on religion, the secular, women's emancipation, and activism at Ghent University in 2014, that I bought the book and finally started reading it. In March 2015 I was asked by the Dutch *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* to contribute to a special issue on sexuality and social movements. So far, I was used to research women's organisations and interview feminist activists of various religious and ethnic backgrounds. Extending my experience to LGBTQI organisations of ethnic minorities was a welcome new challenge. I took it up together with a Dutch colleague Rahil Roodsaz, who interviewed an organisation in Amsterdam, while I interviewed one in Brussels. Both organisations catered for the needs of LGBTQI's belonging to ethnic-cultural minorities. It was the idea of emancipation at the intersection of sexual and ethnic-cultural diversity that prompted me to read *The Politics of Passion.* I started reading, and did not stop until I soon finished the book.

Wekker's goal is to contribute to contemporary ethnography of what is called *mati work*, a term that refers to working-class Afro-Surinamese women's sexual lives and practices. The book is an admirable example of writing thick descriptions of women's sexual lives. Wekker takes these descriptions as a starting point to critically reflect on academic theories and dominant public understandings of female (homo)sexuality, globalization, and the modernity/tradition opposition. Moreover, the author is always present in the text. Throughout the book, she reflects on the way in which she developed her research, her own role in the settings she studied, and her changing understandings of *mati work, winti* religion, and continuities and transformations of women's lives in a diaspora context. As Wekker puts it, her central aim in writing is to address issues of power. She points out that power is negotiated in romantic relationships and sexual cultures, – "there is a politics to passion" (p. 67). The author employs a perspective that enables her to reveal the functioning of power not only in public, national, and global arenas but also in the private sphere, that is, in the building of kinship networks and sexual subjectivities. The result is a complex ethnographic narrative that criticizes power inequalities based on nationality, social class, gender, and sexuality in the Afro-Surinamese diaspora. At the same time, Wekker romanticizes neither *mati work* as a sexual culture nor the experiences of women who are part of it. Instead, she emphasizes that *mati work* provides an interesting starting point to open up discussions and rethink the assumptions held by

many Western academic researchers and LGBTQI movements about the "nature" of sexuality.

It is for these reasons that *The Politics of Passion* inspires me in my current thinking and writing on LGBTQI movements of colour in West-European contexts. It helps me to approach the stories and activities of organisations and individual actors as discourses that are affected by national and regional policy-making and public debates about LGBTQI rights and inclusion; transnational and diaspora settings; and dominant understandings within local ethnic-cultural minorities about sexuality. It helps me to see that sexual cultures are constructed within this multilayered context, and to look at the politics of these constructions, or in other words, the negotiation of power relationships within sexual cultures and their position in society at large. In short, *The Politics of Passion* inspires me to pursue my own passionate politics, as I aim to describe and understand dominant and minority constructions of gender and sexuality, and reveal the interplay of both.

NELLA VAN DEN BRANDT

✧   ✧   ✧

Firestone, S. (1970). *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution.* New York, NY: William Morrow.

With *The Dialectic of Sex* Shulamith Firestone wanted to change the world. The book, written in only a couple of months, is a condensed and angry project that aims to convince its readers to abolish the family unit and install new forms of collective living. Firestone launches many ideas, some of which, such as her interest in cybernetics, have proven prescient. In the book's opening pages she urges the new feminist movement of the late 1960s not to forget about the history of feminism. She dedicates her book to Simone de Beauvoir "who endured" and offers her interpretation of the history of American feminism. The book, a controversial classic of feminist theory, was published in the same year as Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and galvanized feminist thought in the early 1970s. Its publication, however, also coincided with the dissolution of the feminist communities as Firestone had co-established them (e.g. the New York Radical Women, the Redstockings, and the New York Radical Feminists).

Firestone died in 2012, after years of struggling with schizophrenia. Newspapers and magazines worldwide published obituaries, highlighting the fervor of her feminist commitment and her tragic life story. Her death, however, appears to have triggered only a modest renewed academic interest in her work. Although some articles

were published in feminist journals, *The Dialectic of Sex* was not re-issued. One essay collection dedicated to her work was published two years before her death: *Further Adventures of the Dialectic of Sex* (eds. Many Merck and Stella Sanford, Palgrave 2010). The new feminists of the 21st century, it appears, have largely forgotten about Firestone. I have chosen to draw attention to *The Dialectic of Sex* because I share one of its central arguments: insight into the history of feminist theory should be at the basis of our continued attempts to conceptualize new modes of collective living.

The Dialectic of Sex borrows its historical perspective, as well as its methodological framework from Marxism. Firestone asks us to think about gender inequality using Marx' and Engels' historical materialism, which she applauds for its dynamic approach to history and for its attempt to understand cultural change not as an idealist process but in relation to the "real", material basis of history (12). "By understanding the mechanics of history," Firestone writes about Marx and Engels, "they hoped to show men how to master it" (13). That is also her ambition, be it that she emphatically does not write for men only. For Engels the suppression of women was an economic suppression. In the family unit as economic structure, the husband functions as the owner, the wife as the means of production, and the children as labor (14). Firestone modifies this interpretation by looking beyond or "beneath" economics to sex (15). What she attempts is a materialist view of history based on sex. What keeps the hierarchical family unit in place, by her account, are the psychosexual basics of human reproduction: women bear children; infants are dependent on adults (which means that the adults taking care of infants are dependent on other adults); there is a basic mother/child interdependency that ensures that infants are taken care of (by, primarily, mothers). This situation has created the basic division of labor between men and women and has led to gender inequality. To overcome this situation and "master history", according to Firestone, we have to challenge this biological reality.

Neither Firestone's rhetoric (she calls pregnancy "barbaric" (188)) nor her solutions (the total mastery of nature and a fully developed technological system of human reproduction) can be said to be grounded in a fine-grained analysis. The radical separation between the biological and the social that is central to her story, furthermore, is exactly what present-day feminists tend to criticize.[1] The relevance of *The Dialectic of Sex* is not to be found in its "biophobia." But neither should that aspect keep us from engaging with it. The text matters because it asks us to critically historicize and to vigorously reconfigure patriarchal power regimes. This is important now as much as it was in the early seventies. The contemporary appeal of *The Dialectic of Sex* lies in its anger at an all-encompassing patriarchal system in which different kinds of oppression are entangled. Projects promoting individual female agency alone will fail, Firestone shows decades before Sheryl Sandberg's popular

Lean In, because change can only be effectuated on a collective level. When I read how Firestone outlines to what extent the culture industry is invested in reproducing a patriarchal femininity through romantic love, eroticism, sex, and the beauty ideal, I want my students, who tend to think that the feminist fight has been won for them, to engage with her book. Firestone's ideology critique is still relevant for an analysis of the dominant narratives by which our societies construct love, sex, and gender. Firestone's angry and fiercely utopian story has changed lives by telling its readers that "Boy-Image meets Girl-Image and consummates Image-Romance" does not have to be their story (145). What *The Dialectic of Sex* has done for me, and what I hope it will continue to do for others, is remind me that the stories I read and work on as a literary scholar, help me to understand who gets to live which lives, what love is taken to mean and how desire is allowed to function. A return to Firestone's fight with ideology will help us see through our supposedly post-ideological time and make it possible for feminist theory to endure.

SARAH POSMAN

Notes

1. See for example: Ahmed, S. (2008). Open forum imaginary prohibitions: Some preliminary remarks on the founding gestures of the "new materialism", *European Journal of Women's Studies 15(1),* 23-39; Davis, N. (2009). A Response to Sara Ahmed. *European Journal of Women's Studies 16(1),* 67-80.

About the Authors

Elien Arckens is a student-researcher at Ghent University. Her academic interests range from (post-)modern American poetry, especially that of Marianne Moore, to gender and queer theory. She is currently a Master's student at the faculty of economics.

Holly Brown is currently reading for a PhD in literature at Ghent University. Her project explores the recurring trope of the ill male subject in contemporary American fiction, tying literary representations of physical fragmentation to contemporary biopolitical contexts and effects.

Warda El-Kaddouri is a fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO Vlaanderen) at the Department of Literary Studies at Ghent University. Her PhD-project investigates the narrative construction of religious identities in contemporary German literature of Iranian and Iraqi diaspora. Her research interests cover *interkulturelle Germanistik*, contemporary German literature, and postcolonial literature.

Wim Peumans is a postdoctoral research fellow at the African Centre for Migration and Society at University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. He is part of the Andrew Mellon funded project "Governing Morality: Sexuality, Gender and Asylum in South Africa". As a fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO Vlaanderen), he obtained his PhD in social and cultural anthropology at IMMRC, KULeuven in 2015. He was a visiting trainee fellow at the School of Anthropology and Conservation (University of Kent, Canterbury) in 2014-2015. His study on sexual migration to Belgium won the Marguerite Lefèvre Award for Genderstudies and was published as a book (*Seks en stigma over grenzen heen*. Leuven: Acco, 2011).

Sarah Posman is a postdoctoral researcher of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO Vlaanderen) at Ghent University's Department of Literary Studies. She has co-edited *The Aesthetics of Matter: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and Material Exchange* (De Gruyter 2013) and *Gertrude Stein in Europe: Reconfigurations Across*

Media, Disciplines and Traditions (Bloomsbury 2015), and has published essays on American poetry and literary theory.

Anna Safuta is Research Fellow at the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research, where she is currently finishing a PhD dissertation under the joint supervision of Professor Florence Degavre (Université catholique de Louvain) and Professor Helma Lutz (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main). Her research focuses on the cleaning and care work provided by migrant women in private houses in Belgium and Poland. Anna's research interests include feminist theory, migration, social policy, and the thought of Karl Polanyi.

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Sarah Van de Velde is assistant professor (tenure track) at the Department of Sociology at the University of Antwerp and member of the Centre for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies (CLLS). Her research focuses on cross-national variation in depression and the gender gap in depression within Europe. In her research, specific attention is paid to macro-structural sources of gender inequality, with attention directed to how welfare state policies and services act as a force in ordering how paid work and care are reconciled.

Nella van den Brandt holds a BA in Cultural Anthropology and Sociology of Non-Western Societies (2006), a BA in Arab Languages and Cultures (2008), and a Master in Comparative Women's Studies in Culture and Politics (2010) from Utrecht University. In December 2014, she defended her PhD thesis in Comparative Sciences of Cultures at Ghent University. Her dissertation was entitled *Religion, Secularity and Feminism in a West-European Context: A Qualitative Study of Organisations and Activism in Flanders*. She is assistant-editor of the online academic peer-reviewed journal *Religion and Gender*. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Social Movement Studies*, *Women's Studies International Forum*, and *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*.
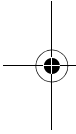
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Anaïs Van Ertvelde is a PhD student at Leiden University. She is part of the research project "Rethinking Disability: the Global Impact of the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981) in Historical Perspective." She holds an MA in History (Ghent University) and an MA in Gender Studies (Utrecht University). Her research interests include history of the body, history of social movements, heritage and historical representations, gender history, and disability history.

Mieke Van Houtte is full professor and head of the research team CuDOS at the Department of Sociology at Ghent University (Belgium). Her research interests cover diverse topics within the sociology of education, particularly the effects of structural and compositional school features on several outcomes for students and teachers, with a focus on equal opportunities. In addition, she supervises research on sexual minorities. In both research lines, gender takes an important place. She has published in journals such as *Sociology of Education*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *Acta Sociologica*, *Sex Roles*.

Hans Vermeersch has a Phd in Sociology. His research interests include the nature-nurture debate with respect to sex differences in adolescent behaviour and mental health, youth and youth work initiatives within the Flemish context, and the use of new technologies with respect to crime, security, and privacy. He currently works at the Centre of Social Innovation at VIVES University College.
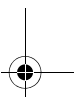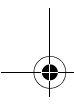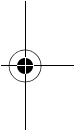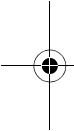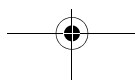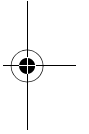
SCOPE AND GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

SCOPE

DiGeSt wants to explore the ways in which the rich tradition of research on sexual difference, with its established critical frameworks and methodologies, can both further and build on research that, in many different domains, tackles the question "what is diversity?". In order for the power systems and the mechanisms of exclusion – in our societies and environments at large as well as in our everyday lives, our thinking, our beliefs and (cultural) production – to be brought to light we need to map the ways in which gender inequality relates to other processes that select, structure and set standards. We are especially interested in contributions that deal with the hurdles modern societies need to cross so as to be the "open" and just society they claim or want to be. Societal openness is defined as the condition in which individual life chances or the formation of social boundaries are not determined by social categories such as sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, "race", class, age, disability, (chronic) illness, …

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SUBMISSIONS

DiGeSt solicits articles that problematize gender or/and focus on issues dealing with diversity in all its manifestations and which address the problems described above. It seeks original contributions written in English that present the results of new research, reflect on methodological challenges, engage with new theories or work across disciplines. In addition to full essays (approximately 6.000 words), *DiGeSt* is interested in round table contributions, consisting of shorter notes (2.000-4.000 words) by different scholars addressing a topical issue, and progress reports of ongoing research (1.000 words). All of these contributions will be peer-reviewed. The "What are your reading?" section invites (early-career) researchers to report on works that are deemed relevant to the field and that are of particular significance to the author's ongoing research (300 words).

DiGeSt welcomes suggestions for guest-edited special issues and invites potential guest editors to send their proposal, with suggested contributors, to the editorial assistant (digest@ugent.be).