
WOMEN'S VOICES AND VULNERABILITY: INVISIBLE AND VISIBLE OBSTACLES

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Introduction

The paper brings together perceptions and concerns about the practical consequences of the concept of women's vulnerability and the question of negative gender stereotype of women as passive listeners. Through the body, we are exposed, opened onto the world and to others, even as for others we are the ones to whom they are exposed and vulnerable. In this sense, vulnerability is universal, an inevitable part of embodiment. The root of the word vulnerability is the Latin *vulna*, which means "wound." The term is used in a variety of ways: economic, geopolitical, emotional. On one side it describes the fragility of our bodies, and the terror, confusion and fellow-feeling that can come from our perception of our shared embodiment. As Sarah Hagelin refers "both to the physical fact that a thin layer of skin separates the inside of our bodies from the outside world and also as complex structures of feeling in this case those that define our sense of ourselves as vulnerable."¹

Kate Brown summarizes three distinct but interrelated concerns about the practical consequences of the concept of vulnerability: (1.) vulnerability is a patronizing, paternalistic, and oppressive concept; (2.) vulnerability becomes a premise for an instrument of social control; and (3.) vulnerability has stigmatizing and exclusionary consequences.²

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¹ Sarah Hagelin, *Real Vulnerability: Power, Pain, and Gender in Contemporary American Film and Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 13.

² Kate Brown, "Vulnerability: Handle with Care," *Ethics and Social Welfare* 5, no. 3 (2011): 316.

vulnerable. In this sense, vulnerability is universal, an inevitable part of embodiment. Or with the words of Judith Butler: “(...) the body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency an instrument of all these as well.”³ The theme of vulnerability is implicit in all Butler’s work, yet it is treated most directly in *Precarious Life*. Butler’s idea of precarity, which is politically conditioned and precariousness as “the condition of being conditioned” is definitive of life itself and reveals “life as a conditioned process.”⁴ Precariousness is akin to an existential sense of finitude in that it emphasizes the fragility of existence, but it serves a different purpose. Precariousness calls our attention to the way any of us might be substituted for another. Understood in this way, precariousness is an ungrounded ground for “positive social obligations.”⁵ To the extent that I am vulnerable and my life is precarious, it is also because I am bound to others. Social bonds condition my existence.

Vulnerability in this sense usually means a system of beliefs, images and narratives that imply a capacity to be harmed (either physically or emotionally). Generally, the word has also implied a powerlessness or victimization that spring from our understanding of the term, especially in regard to images of the female body. Or as E. C. Gilson stated, “female vulnerability is manifest in the way women are portrayed as submissive, powerless objects that are acted upon and often harmed by men.”⁶

From the perspective of feminist critique, there is always something both risky and true in claiming that women are especially vulnerable. The claim can mean that women have an unchanging and defining vulnerability, and that kind of argument makes the case for paternalistic protection. And yet, there are good reasons to argue for the differential vulnerability of women; they suffer disproportionately from poverty

³ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 26.

⁴ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006), 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶ Erinn C. Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability: A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 157.

and literacy, two very important dimensions of any global analysis of women's condition. Women disproportionately suffer also the impacts of disasters, severe weather events and climate change because of cultural norms and the inequitable distribution of roles, resources, and power, especially in developing countries.

In some ways, vulnerability has been regarded as a value in feminist theory and politics. This means neither that women are more vulnerable than men nor that women value vulnerability more than men do. Rather, certain kinds of gender-defining attributes, like vulnerability and invulnerability, are distributed unequally, and for purposes of showing up certain regimes of power women are subordinated by that.

The modern progressive conception and understanding of gender order is certainly rather significantly related to the issue of socio-cultural paradigm of power and power distribution. The present paper also results from the progressive view that the roles of men and women were mainly shaped by influences arising from the history, culture and society, and, therefore, change as the society itself changes.

Religion (Christianity) has been one of the patriarchal structures that have objectified women and denigrated their bodies. At this point, we should briefly examine perceptions and concerns about the practical consequences of perceiving women's bodies as the seed of carnal wickedness and seductive wilderness, imprinted negative stereotype by Church Fathers and perpetuated throughout church history.

Women's Body: Prejudice of "Carnal Wickedness" and "Seductive Wilderness"

Women and femininity have found themselves in a unique moment in history, marked by a high appreciation of the body, corporeality and at the same time of the humanity and likeness to God in both sexes. Our era is that of images, imagination. A corporeality expressing concreteness has become the central element of society, lending a new meaning to sexuality or the concrete, corporeal expressiveness of man and woman in terms of the importance of embodiment and embodied experience.

The body is, thus, of fundamental importance in the determination and formation of an individual's identity. Women and men are standing at a turning point in terms of flexibility and definition of their roles and concepts. In the process of globalisation, women and men are more and more intensely faced with numerous media and social influences, which at times inflict on them images of corporeality as well as new definitions of masculinity and femininity. Due to the mass of influences forcing on human being various images and notions, human is befogged or blinded by the search for the ideal representation, corporeality and image. At the same time, he / she is blinded by many stereotypical gender-related images which hinder our freedom of expressivity. The weight of negative stereotypes and prejudices thus represents a burden for the modern man / woman, who is looking for and re-creating both his / her image and his / her attitude towards the other. Although much has changed with regard to prejudices that in the past used to define and restrict women and men in their activities even more severely, it is possible even today, although women receive the same kind of education as men and have, at least theoretically, equal opportunities in employment and participation in the public sphere of life, to recognise a covert influence on interpersonal relations and the views of masculinity and femininity and the conceptions of women's bodies.

The most powerful component of negative gender stereotypes, however, refers to personality traits in close connection with the so-called nature of the body. Also, in today's increasingly media-defined society, which is perhaps already obsessed with the body and appearance, identifying negative gender stereotypes should not be overlooked either.

Throughout history, in fact, negative representations of women have been piling up and have created an image that does not suit today's (wo)men. Or, better, in the course of history, the exclusively unilateral interpretations of Biblical texts and the accentuation of the wrong elements of determining Christian truths have allowed certain negative stereotypical views of gender roles to form, especially the stereotypes about women and their "bodily carnal wickedness."

The emphasising of the following Biblical text, for instance: "And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman,

and brought her unto the man,”⁷ led to extremely patriarchal patterns of women’s roles. The woman was for this reason marked as a second-class being, made from man and as such completely obedient and subordinate to him. This prejudice was further consolidated by Aristotle’s idea that the female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities and that we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness. In relation to this, Thomas Aquinas proclaimed the woman to be *homo manque* – an imperfect man. The negative connotation of the woman’s position was further strengthened by the representation of woman as a temptress, which had, in the history of Christianity, a crucial influence on the views and oppression of women. For this reason, the disdain for women was especially present in the ascetic lives of monks. All carnal things in fact had the seal of the Kingdom of Darkness. St. Augustine, for instance, connected original sin to the sex drive, and together with St. Ambrose placed evil-bearing Eve in opposition to Mary, the bearer of life and salvation. St. Augustine respected Mary as the Mother of God, his own mother St. Monica, and Mary Magdalene, who announced the resurrection to the apostles, but he considered all other women were a symbol of weakness and inclination to sin.⁸ On the other hand, the accentuation of the unattainable ideal of the Virgin Mary only underlined Eve’s lack of chastity and the sinful nature of average women. The more patriarchal society and the Church became, the more stress was laid on the weak nature of women. Sentences taken out of context, such as “She should be submissive,” and “Wives, be in subjection to your own husbands,” strengthened the patriarchal perspective of male supremacy and female subordination.

Excessive emphasis on the exclusively familiar role of women, of woman as a mother, substantiated and justified the division of labour myth and kept the woman in the private, domestic sphere. The stress on the importance of her ability to give birth made many feminists accuse the Church of confining and reducing women to the merely reproductive role.

⁷ Gen 2:22.

⁸ Nadja Furlan Štante, *Women, Nature, and Religion: Eco-feminist Perception* (Koper: Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2014), 34–35.

Throughout history, each period separately borrowed from Christianity what suited it most. The image of women was marked by the negative power of prejudices and second-class rank, which was reflected in the unimportance and, in places, utter absence of the female element in the Bible as well as in the life of the Church. On the other hand, the image of Mary set before women an ideal that reminded them of their power and the noble female nature branded with carnality and weakness.

On the other hand, the prejudice of the impurity of women's body is also concerned with early Christian discourse on menstrual practices, its implications for women as embodied subjects in early Christianity and the creation of taboos and negative stereotypical religion-determined pattern of femininity, women's impurity and inferiority and stigmatization of woman's body is of a great importance as well. Early Christian male writers propagated and perpetuated an inherent androcentrism rooted in ancient Greco-Roman perceptions of the female somatic experience. Ancient medicine always equated the female somatic experience with inferiority. Hereforth, patriarchal culture demeans and denies the elemental power of the female body. So the taboo of impurity and inferiority of women's body, dangerous and impure in ritual is stigmatized and pathologized. Menstruation is regarded, not only by physiologists and many doctors, but also by some feminists, as a sickness, a blank spot, a non-event that the women must endure and would be better without, an evil time.

So the insight into the marginalization of woman's body her menstrual purity / impurity in the view of early Church Fathers is of a great importance because it is still inherent in contemporary gender religious policy. And it needs a healing deconstruction and new formations of embodied experience of the positive aspect of female body.⁹

The institutionalised Church became patriarchal in its mentality, as well as structure. Under Constantine, the Church adopted the patriarchal form of rule and order of the Roman culture of the time, and

⁹ Nadja Furlan Štante, "Rojstvo in ženska kot prenašalka življenja: iz perspektive teološkega eko-feminizma" ("Birth and Woman as a Carrier of Life: from the Perspective of Eco Feminism"), in "Krogotok rojstva in smrti" (The Circle of Birth and Death), ed. Irena Rožman, *Poligrafi* 15, no. 58–60 (2010): 39.

thereby also the main principle of Roman law – *pater familias* – which was anything but favourable to the woman. According to Roman law, the woman was completely subordinate to her father or husband. She did not enjoy any legal protection or legal rights. Her status was marked and defined by the prejudicial belief in her physical and mental weakness. This same status was assigned to the woman within the Church and further aggravated in the 4th century. Many Early Church Fathers characterised women as dangerous to men. “You are the devil’s gateway!” said Tertullian about women in the 3rd century. Since the woman was considered impure in pre-modern cultures, this prejudice became the basis for excluding women from liturgical rituals. At the Synod of Laodicea in the 4th century, it was decided that, due to their uncleanness, women could not go to the altar. In 829, the Synod of Paris added the rule that women were prohibited from touching holy objects. In the same spirit, in the 12th century Gratian insisted that women be completely subject to their husbands, as they were not created in God’s image.¹⁰ Men of patriarchal views were almost completely blinded by human haughtiness. Even in the case of the canonisation of Teresa of Avila, a Church teacher who surprised the men of the cloth with unusual gifts and powers, the giftedness and extraordinariness of this woman were justified by the presumption that she had defeated her female nature. Only because she had defeated her female nature could she get closer to men. In other words, a woman could not succeed or do good deeds unless she adopted manliness or the male principle of action.¹¹

Negative stereotypical gender definitions of the woman *as an imperfect man, devil’s temptress, unchaste adulteress and sinner, inferior servant or forth-bringing uterus* have aggravated the position of women throughout history. Many negative gender stereotypes and prejudices have left a strong impact on the social sphere as well the Catholic Church and Christianity. Given the close interaction of culture and religion, that is, the society and the Catholic Church, it is understandable that the

¹⁰ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church, A Cultural Approach* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press 2004), 69–70.

¹¹ To a great extent, this is still valid today: the woman is secretly expected to assume the male principle of action if she wants to be successful in society.

gender stereotypes and prejudices present in the society transferred into the life of the Catholic Church and vice versa.¹²

Clearly, religion has been one of the patriarchal structures that have objectified women and denigrated their bodies. Although Christian theologians from early on recognized the goodness of the human body, they expressed a great deal of ambivalence with regard to woman's body. The Church Fathers were ready to admit that woman's body was a good creation of God, but at the same time, they tended to portray woman as intellectually inferior to man on account of her different body. It was this different body that pulled her away from eternal concerns and led her into temporal cares. This bodily weakness made woman an easy victim of deception and explained the tragic fall of the first woman, Eve. She was called "the author of sin" because she "dragged her husband" into sin and became the "Devil's gateway" to all humanity. Eve's carnal wickedness sealed the fate of all women.¹³ Women were perceived as susceptible to sin, inherently flawed, and in need of men's assistance against the weak powers of their bodies.

If the Church Fathers described Eve's deception of Adam as her "enticing" him and giving an "incentive" to his sin, they did not make an explicit connection between Eve's seductiveness and Adam's sin. At the same time, there are indications that such associations were made in a less direct manner. The early fathers were obsessed with the so-called cosmetic theology, that is, women's relation to their decoration. These early theologians criticized women's concern for personal appearance because they took it to be a sign of women's worldliness and a lack of spiritual discernment. One specific danger the fathers addressed had to do with the increase of women's seductive powers as a result of their adornment. A woman displaying her beauty was considered immoral not because she failed to protect her own sexuality but because she failed to protect the sexuality of men. As a result, Tertullian warned that a woman's beauty had to be feared.¹⁴ Woman's moral purity was seen as absolute when her body could neither tempt nor be tempted. This ha-

¹² Nadjia Furlan, *Manjkajoče rebro* [The Missing Rib] (Koper: Annales, 2006), 59–60.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 115–119.

¹⁴ Wioleta Polinska, "Dangerous Bodies: Women's Nakedness and Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 1 (2000): 46–49.

ppened only at the time of death, when her perpetual virginity was fully realized. At times, the Church Fathers recognized their own responsibility for sexual temptations. This distinction became clouded even further with the acceptance of Aristotelian biology in the late Middle Ages. According to this scheme, a man is fertile and perfectly formed, and contributes his soul to the offspring, whereas a woman is infertile and deformed, and contributes her body to the offspring. Not only is a woman a defective man, but also, in contrast to the man, who rules by nature, she obeys by nature.

Among other negative consequences that negative gender stereotypes regarding women's bodies have had on the perception of women as embodied subjects, the vulnerability of women's bodies and their abuse is fare more destructive.

Although the paper will not focus on the question of vulnerability of women's bodies further on, it would be appropriate to stress out three aspects of women's vulnerability in terms of embodied experience: (1.) on women's disproportional suffering from poverty and literacy, (2.) on feminicide (the phenomenon of the female homicides in Ciudad Juárez, called *feminicidio* (feminicide), involves the violent deaths of hundreds of women and girls since 1993 in the northern Mexican region of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua) and (3.) on women's involvement in abuse (be it sexual abuse in terms of rape) or in terms of Kelly Oliver's *Women's as Weapons of War*. Within popular discourse, women's bodies, menstrual blood, and female sexuality can be used as tactics of war because of the potency of their association with danger of nature. Oliver states that "akin to a natural toxin or intoxicant, women's sex makes a powerful weapon because, within our cultural imaginary, it is by nature dangerous."¹⁵

From this standpoint, the next focus of this paper will be the question about the gendering of perceived or marked vulnerabilities and how they function to expand or justify those structures of power that seek to achieve cultural-religious dominance in the social context of speech and voice: the two recognized metaphors of power.

¹⁵ Kelly Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex, and the Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 31.

Here we touch upon and deal with the question of vulnerability of silenced women's voice and speech and negative gender stereotype of women's silence (in discriminatory way) imprinted in our collective memory.

Negative Gender Stereotype: Women as Passive Listeners

After we briefly drew attention to the interaction between women and vulnerability (in relation to the formulation of gender order and negative gender stereotypes which correspond to the socio-religious agenda of a particular time and environment), we will now briefly highlight the proportion of the impact of institutionalized Christianity on the formation and strengthening of negative gender stereotype of women as passive listeners. This negative stereotype has in fact left a strong mark until today, burdening public participation of women as well as their scientific performance. The presence of women in public is a sign of their social power and its most perceptible metaphors are speech and voice.¹⁶ Verbal practice and social interaction are the places where the struggle for power and superiority of one gender over the other takes place and is reflected, notes Susan Gal, an anthropologist, and further indicates the political and educational institutions, courts of law and religion as a place where different forms of antagonisms between the genders are formed.¹⁷ In accordance with her arguments, it is in these institutions where the struggle for power between the genders takes place, the images of equality are created and where it is determined what, when and how someone can say. Throughout history, female silence and quietness were justified and argued with female modesty, humility and obedience, which are supposed to be characteristic female virtues. At the expense of highlighting these virtues, women were deprived of their participation in public debates, speeches and appearances. Their opinion was most frequently insignificant, put in shade and justified with modesty, humility and obedience, which all set a limit for women

¹⁶ Voice and speech on the material level include the symbolic-metaphorical level.

¹⁷ Susan Gal in: Deborah Borisoff and Lisa Mersill, *The Power to Communicate: Gender Differences as Barriers* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1998), 5.

which was not allowed to be exceeded. Because of these characteristics or virtues that were expected from women, they were neither allowed to speak publicly nor to expose their opinions. If women crossed the border of obedience and silence, they were labelled as unruly and immoral. Only the one-sided emphasizing of Paul's commandment for women to be subordinate, as the law says, and to remain silent in the Church¹⁸ has even more reinforced and enhanced such requirements in the Christian world. Therefore, throughout the history, the exposure of women in public has been perceived as unethical behaviour, worth of conviction.

At this point, we should make a brief excursus into biblical exegesis and the interpretation of the above mentioned biblical passage by the leading Christian feminist biblical exegete Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In Paul's behaviour she sees a preventive measure by which Paul wants to protect the Christians against external mischief makers. In her opinion, Paul's restriction on women's freedom and equality has grounds in the missionary inclinations. In doing so, the apostle Paul would only try to meet the then Roman social norms that prohibited women from speaking in public. Paul therefore had no intention to harm or oppose the spiritual freedom and the charismatic engagement of Christian women. One of the hypotheses is that Paul's restriction applies only to married women and widows. Regarding Paul's view on women, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza says:

In any case, Paul's view of women's leadership is double-edged. On one hand, it emphasizes Christian equality, parity and freedom. By encouraging women to lead unmarried life, he is enabling them to a new, independent way of life and participation. On the other hand, he puts women at a disadvantage both in marriage and in their participation in the Christian community.¹⁹

The double-edgedness of Paul's view was supposed to allow the later generations to transfer patriarchal hierarchy into the new Christian community. Later, in the process of institutionalization of Christianity this was even escalating. Regardless the fact that Paul's interpretation

¹⁸ The entire passage from 1 Cor 14:34–35: "As in all the churches of the sacred the women in your churches are to remain silent as well. They are not allowed to speak, but should be obedient as the law says. However, if they want to become learned they are to inquire of their husbands at home, because it would be shameful if a woman had a word in the Church."

¹⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroads, 1983), 236.

of the baptismal formula: “There is no Jew nor Greek and no slave nor freeman, there is no man nor woman: for you are all one in Christ Jesus,”²⁰ in his letters in Corinth it clearly confirms the equality of the charismatic gift, which is intended for both women and men in the Christian community. Both women and men can then have a prophetic and leading position in the Christian community. They are also both called to either married or unmarried life. For with the baptism the Christian men and woman receive religious equality.

In the times of Jesus, such religious equality at the same time meant socio-political equality. In the then Jewish society this meant that anyone who has become a Christian man or a Christian woman, among other things also received the norms of equality and thus had to abandon Jewish male religious privileges. The first Christian communities in the pre-Pauline period and in the time of the Apostle Paul, were characterized by a spirit of equality and mutual solidarity. During this period, the position of women in almost all things was equal to the position enjoyed by men. Women in the early Christian churches also administered the Eucharist, preached the word of God, performed various leading functions and did the missionary work. Women therefore played an important role in the formation of the first Church.²¹ Even Hans Küng recalls the spirit of equality, which was a typical trademark of the first Christian churches.²² In the process of institutionalization of the Catholic Church and Christianity, the ethos of equivalence and equality was replaced by a tendency for power and domination of men over women. Thus, Christianity gradually absorbed patriarchy and doing so also the power and domination over women. As culture marked Christianity with its patriarchy throughout the history, so did Christianity often help to reinforce the patriarchal mindset of the culture in which it has evolved. Tina Beattie, for example, reminds of this kind of reciprocity.²³ In her opinion, the Catholic hierarchy in the twentieth century took over and used the thesis according to which the passivity

²⁰ Gal 3:28.

²¹ Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church*, 70.

²² Hans Küng, *Women in Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 3.

²³ Tina Beattie, *Woman, New Century Theology* (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), 106–107.

of women together with other similar characteristics that are attributed to women, is the result of biological determinism of gender.

This prejudice is still present today, as the male way of presenting, speaking and lecturing in practice remains elevated as the norm, while female way is considered as emotional, rather confusing and not as rational as the male one. Despite the fact that women are today active participants in public speaking and shaping public opinion, they are still considerably marked by prejudice which closed them off to the area of silence and quietness. Consequently, researchers recognize the traces of negative sexual stereotypes of women as passive listeners, which is nowadays reflected in the understanding of the way the women are supposed to be delivering their public presentations. According to the research findings, such understanding is considerably marked by prejudices that women talk quietly, softly, mildly, timidly. As we already established, women were in the past faced with a particular pattern of true womanhood, which, among other things, commanded obedience; women being noticed or seen was regarded far better than women being heard. This revealed the role of women as an object of admiration. The ethical code of conduct for women in everyday life was to be seen rather than to talk.²⁴

In these negative stereotype commandments, Robin Lakoff, for example, cited by Deborah Borisoff and Lisa Mersill, identifies the causes for the previous voicelessness of women. In his opinion, this has left the consequences even today. In their speech and public presenting women are supposed to be using speech fillers or adjectives that mitigate words. Thus, public speaking and discussing performed by women is still often seen as weak. Female expression of the will is assumed as different from male mode, which is considered to be rational and strictly focused on the goal, while the expression of the will performed by women was characterized as weak in terms of indirect communication of the target result, and this is understood as a reflection of uncertainty. Such behaviour reflects stereotypes or discriminatory traditional notions of sentimentality, indecision and non-aggression of women. On the other hand, men in Western culture were constantly faced with the

²⁴ Borisoff and Mersill, *The Power to Communicate*, 14.

imperative of competitiveness, combativeness, aggressiveness. While the men were brought up for winning the women were requested to be compromising, permissive and adaptive.

The hierarchy of values presupposed and set male logic and objectivity to be the norm. As opposed to female stereotypes that were stigmatized as sexually laden and determined, the male stereotype presumed and reflected neutrality rather than sexual denotation or conditionality. Since the femininity was marked and identified with limitations and definitness, masculinity was stretched beyond the borders of one gender only, it is more difficult for men to understand the limitations of gender definitions.²⁵ Stereotypes that define masculinity in the normative role for humanity are much less an obstacle and more in support of the preconceived stereotypes than the stereotypes that are related to femininity. A destructive impact of gender stereotypes and prejudice is present at all levels and areas of everyday life. Covert and overt forms of power possession on the basis of gender are evident in both verbal and non-verbal communication. The latter is reflected in the mime, posture ... therefore, in the non-verbal expressions, which both genders are taught through sex education. Although many scientists, both male and female, were looking for an explanation of the phenomenon that men (usually) take up more space and women are often modestly satisfied with less space, and analysed biological conditionality, the social constructivism emphasizes the exclusive role of social stipulation and learning through culture. Thus, the assumption which was consolidated in the form of prejudice prevailed, namely, that men need more space by nature, while women are naturally prone to modesty about how much space they are to take.

Similarly, negative and unjustified generalizations with regard to women and their characteristics and capabilities often present obstacles which women face in everyday life. Therefore, women are supposed to be, for example, due to excessive sentimentality, unable to perform managerial and other important public functions. Attention to this problem is drawn in a study on vertical job segregation by gender, cited by

²⁵ Ibid., 15.

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein already in 1970.²⁶ The survey shows that women are prevented from promotion to senior positions because of employers' belief that they would jeopardize the company's operations because of their excessive sentimentality, while employers were not interested in emotional behavior of men.²⁷ Besides their sentimentality, there are also many other so-called female properties that do not meet the demands of women employment politics for influential jobs or vocations that are regarded as male. Qualities that are considered as female are in this context understood as weaknesses. The belief that "male" manner is the only right and effective manner, blocks the prosperity and perspicacity of women, as well as the enforcement of the characteristics that are considered typical of women or present femininity. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein also notes that women, if they want to succeed in the so-called male occupations or in leading positions, need to adopt the male manner of functioning. At the same time, women have to confront the stereotypes and prejudices that present an ambitious woman as a sinful image or the antithesis of a true religious-encoded traditional woman and femininity.²⁸ Gender stereotypes and prejudices are in this way a furtive manner of maintaining a hierarchy between the two genders, and thus, a destructive element from the perspective of egalitarian relationships.

The battle for power, therefore, marks the relations between the genders and their positions. While verbal communication today is often a distinct reflection of this battle, non-verbal communication reveals its origins.

²⁶ Unfortunately, the situation, as witnessed by modern findings, still has not changed significantly. This is also pointed out by Mirjana Ule, who, based on the research results, summarizes that they are "clearly supporting the hypothesis that sexual affiliation undoubtedly remains a central element of institutional life in Slovenian science, not in the lecture halls, but where there is power, influence, prestige, reputation, money, where the decisions are made." Mirjana Ule, "Gender Differences in Science Work and Career Conditions in Slovenia," *Theory and Practice* 49, no. 4 (2012): 626.

²⁷ Cynthia Epstein Fuchs, *Woman's Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

Conclusion

Different religious feminist approaches and feminist theologies strive for both the establishment of an equivalent, positive evaluation of women and femininity as well as the admonition about the issue of power perception. Just as emphasizing only the negative gender stereotypes and prejudice patterns in its core reflects and supports the violence between genders, so does emphasizing or communicating through the use of negative religion-marked gender stereotypes and prejudices support and reinforce both gender and inter-religious intolerance and violence. The battle for power is the key drive of violence, which has strongly influenced all interpersonal relationships, the complete global gender structure.

The aim of deconstruction and surpassing negative stereotypical perceptions and being trapped in biased perception of all that is different is empowerment of individuals. Through raising awareness and surpassing the entrapment in the nets of biased and negative stereotyping (of women's body stigmatized with prejudice of carnal wickedness and seductive wilderness, and negative stereotype of women as passive listeners who merely decorate the public table, and further on, the misconceptions of women's vulnerability,) the contemporary men and women both contribute to the process of empowering individual men and women, the principle of gender equality integration, as well as the decentralization of *power over* within patriarchal societies.

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