

COMPLICITY and the POLITICS of REPRESENTATION

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Ruhr-Universität Bochum



Student Conference
(UFO 01/07)

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PROGRAMME

SATURDAY, 26 JUNE

11.00 **Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Cornelia Wächter

11.15 **COMPLICITY AND THE POLITICS OF SEX AND GENDER**

Chair: Nina Simon

Sandra Marzinkowski

Marginal Marginalities Escaping the Double Bind: Double Complicity and Non-Monosexual Non-Complicity

Vivian Susanne Sper

Complicity and the Representation of Sex Workers: The 'Fallen' Women of Holbeck in BBC's Documentary Mini-Series

Christian Wuckelt

Turbo Lover: The Perception and Treatment of Queerness in the British Heavy Metal Community

12:45 *Coffee/tea break*

13.30 **DOMINANT COMPLICITIES**

Chair: Sandra Marzinkowski

Miriam Fabri

The House-Elves' Complicity in Their Self-Reinforced Slavery and the Othering of the Wizarding Community Towards Them

Alexander Kurunczi

The London Riots as Anti-Complicit Protests

Niels Keulertz

The White Dragonqueen and Her Eastern Fellowship of Humble Birth: Complicity in Orientalism and the Orient in George R. R. Martin's Fantasy Series *A Song of Ice and Fire*



ABSTRACTS

The House-Elves' Complicity in Their Self-Reinforced Slavery and the Othering of the Wizarding Community towards Them

Miriam Fabri

The magical world of *Harry Potter* belongs to the realm of fantasy and yet, in terms of political issues, is strikingly similar to our own. Born into a world of privilege, the wizards methodically oppress beings that are different from themselves - most prominently the house-elves toiling in slave labour. Most characters in the novel series, including the 'good' ones, see nothing wrong with that. As George Weasley states it, "they [the house-elves] like it" (*Goblet* 239). Even the elves themselves seem to accept or even take pride in their status.

This paper examines the political implications of Rowling's representation of Othering and slavery in the novels and the way in which she depicts characters' reactions to it - specifically, how those deemed morally good can still be complicit and supportive of the categorical enslavement of another species. This complicity arguably originates from growing up in a racist society, backed by the wizard government, that normalises slavery. For that reason, even the most liberal characters display blindness to privilege. Virtually all characters appear to believe that slavery, if accepted by the enslaved, is acceptable. This conviction is reaffirmed when the only free elf in the series displays signs of unhappiness with his freedom. The question that arises here is what the moral implications of this depiction of slavery are in light of the novels' young readership.

Following, for instance, Seyour and Green, this paper demonstrates that Rowling's narrative strategy is to trace Harry's coming of age, including the gradual development of his moral reasoning skills and their application to morally ambiguous situations. This also entails his increasing awareness of the ideologies and internalised stock narratives which the wizarding community deploy to naturalise their superior position.

The analysis leads to the conclusion that the *Harry Potter* series, which exerted significant influence on a generation of young readers, offers much to discover not only about its fictional world but also the state of our own. The novels demonstrate how social injustice can be naturalised and implicitly suggest that this also occurs in our own world, including the possibility of naturalising slavery. This paper goes beyond previous essays on the subject in also considering the reasons for the house-elves' complicity in their own enslavement.

The White Dragon Queen and Her Eastern Fellowship of Humble Birth – Complicity in Orientalism and the Orient in George R. R. Martin's Fantasy Series *A Song of Ice and Fire*

Niels Keulertz

It is said that George R. R. Martin tackles different issues, like feminism, oppression and classism, in his book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Furthermore, Martin is not afraid of using graphic language and writing about controversial topics, such as rape and incest. All these issues are set in a fantasy dark age, which can - despite its supernatural elements - be described as realistic. However, something that is frequently overlooked in the entire genre of fantasy fiction is the depiction of the East as uncivilized or evil. This form of othering and marginalizing has already been connected to Tolkien's portrayal of the East as the evil in *The Lord of the Rings*. He locates Mordor, the home of the antagonist, in the east of his world and portrays Orcs, the inhabitants of Mordor, as evil and an uncivilized horde. Nevertheless, Tolkien is one of the few authors that has been accused of this in fantasy fiction.

This paper will therefore show the complicity of modern Western fantasy authors, in this case George R. R. Martin, in Orientalism and hidden racism towards the Orient. Therefore, I will have a closer look at Martin's book series and focus mainly on the storyline evolving around the character of Daenerys Targaryen. Other aspects, like the geography

of his world, will be mentioned as well. This method will show that the East and its inhabitants are portrayed as uncivilized and in need of rescue, which happens through the white haired and skinned Western queen. She furthermore uses the uncivilized Eastern people to satisfy her own needs. All these aspects will be connected to Edward Said's definition of Orientalism to show Martin's complicity in Orientalism.

The London Riots as Anti-Complicit Protests

Alexander Kurunczi

As structures of neoliberalism have increasingly become a hegemonic and pervasive force, modes of resistance are often conceived of as eschewing theoretical and practical imaginations. In continuation to ideas of totality emerging prominently in the theories of the Frankfurt School, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri conceive of neoliberal biopolitics – or "Empire" as they term it – as a deterritorialized and deindividualised instrument of influence on society in general and its subjects in particular. Such accounts postulate that complicity with neoliberal economic imperatives is virtually an inevitability induced by the overwhelmingly influential forms of subjectivisation.

In response to these analyses which delineate the ineluctability of commodification and consumerist logic, this paper suggests that the London Riots of 2011 offer a decidedly anti-complicit – and local – protest which disavows and challenges the parameters of contemporary capitalist epistemology. In their specific disruption the riots respond to the very processes of subjectivisation and stigmatisation; they cannot be limited to a mode of "destructive violence" (Žižek), which is in the end bereft of any political dimension and demand. Instead, I argue that the violence characterised a particular response of the subaltern and subjugated from the "zone of non-being" (Fanon), ushering in a transvaluation and rejection of established conceptions of morality in neoliberal paradigms, while shattering classically liberal monopolies of violence exclusively associated with the state. The visibility of the disruption and the overt forms of transgression entailed a making-visible of the – usually effaced – violent forms of dominance and hegemony of the nation state. The riots also defied the logic of racial intelligibility so pivotal for neoliberal regimes of power and punishment, while offering both a perspective and a voice of the abjected and socio-economically stigmatised underclass. The riots also conceptualised the members of this so-called underclass as potentially revolting subjects of a newly constituted "class for itself." Consequently, the evident need of the government to stymie these revolting individuals was present in the aftermath of the riots, invoking a rhetoric of securitisation and punishment and attempting at cleansing the body of governed subjects from its tainted *lumpenproletariat*. Hence, it is essential to dispute the narrative of the riots as destructive, which conservative forces and the government utilised to pursue a backlash against social unrest. Rather, the riots can be read as being indicative of anti-complicit endeavours and performative forms of protest defying the asymmetrical relationships between the neoliberal state and its citizen-subjects.

Marginal Marginalities Escaping the Double Bind: Double Complicity and Non-Monosexual Non-Complicity

Sandra Marzinkowski

Marginalized groups, although superficially resistant to mainstream ideology, often display the very same exclusionary tendencies they seek to defy. This paper investigates the attitudes towards non-monosexualities – an umbrella term encompassing bisexualities, pansexualities, as well as sexual fluidities and flexibilities. In LGBT+ spaces, just like in heteronormative spaces, one striking manifestation of these tendencies is the following: non-monosexualities are discursively erased and under constant scrutiny as regards the truth value of their identity label. In both spaces, non-monosexuals are considered transitional identities that need completion and lack authenticity: while male non-monosexuals tend to be viewed as closeted gays, female non-monosexuals are often

thought to be curious heterosexuals. The underlying assumption is that identities placed beyond a system of binary oppositions must be impostors. In that regard, LGBT+ spaces mirror the discriminatory practices of heteronormative spaces.

The current trend to view sexuality as spectral rather than categorical stands in contrast to the above. Lisa Diamond (2009), in a large-scale survey on women's sexuality, found that sexual fluidity is the norm rather than the exception regardless of one's sexual orientation. According to a 2015 survey, for young adults in the UK to identify as "not completely straight" (1-5 on Kinsey Scale) is much more common nowadays than it is for people from the age of 40 upwards to do so. Even though the Kinsey Scale, which covers heterosexuality, homosexuality, as well as degrees of bisexuality based on sexual response and practice, has been around for over 60 years and has since been embraced by parts of the LGBT+ community, terms such as *heteroflexible* or *homoflexible*, as well as the notion of sexual fluidity, have only been gaining salience, enabling people to inhabit spectral and polar positionalities discursively.

Looking into contemporary (popular) cultural practice and using complicity as a tool for analysis, the following twofold pattern will be illustrated: (1) both mainstream culture and LGBT+ culture have been largely complicit in marginalizing non-monosexual identities by accusing the latter of complicity in the other culture respectively. This double bind – both cultures being complicit in accusing non-monosexuals of complicity in the other culture – makes it impossible for non-monosexuals to occupy subjectivities in either of the two because both deny them compliance – that is, access to a fully valid identity category devoid of scrutiny – within their own space, turning them into the *queer* other within LGBT+ and mainstream society. (2) Conversely, the tendency to adopt identity labels that contest and go beyond binary oppositions, such as queer and pansexual, as well as identity labels that view sexuality as spectral or polar, such as *fluid* or *-flexible*, is on the increase. It will be argued that this tendency to be anti-complicit in perpetuating binary oppositions in sexual identity is part of a recent youth cultural movement in contemporary British society. Sometimes, dubbed the *gender fluid generation*, the movement makes it possible for identities situated in the grey areas of opposed, although overlapping, spaces to claim validity. The larger implication of the present paper is that there is a general tendency in contemporary western culture not to name and validate the in-between, which is defied by an increasingly vocal youth culture.

Complicity and the Representation of Sex Workers: The 'Fallen' Women of Holbeck in BBC's Documentary Mini-Series

Vivian Susanne Sper

Despite the UK's history of criminalising sex work, Holbeck, an area of Leeds, has been declared Britain's first legal red light zone in 2014. Otherwise illegal activities associated with sex work are now allowed during the night time. This step towards decriminalisation has been welcomed by sex workers and their advocates. Against the background of this new concept and ongoing considerations of a change in sex work policies, BBC Three released a mini-series on Holbeck called *Sex, Drugs and Murder: Life in the Red Light Zone*. The programme features eight women who work as street prostitutes.

Since their emergence, documentaries about sex workers have sparked questions about complicity: voyeurism, stereotyping, sensationalism, and exploitation of an otherwise mostly invisible group may contribute to its stigmatisation and criminalisation. As scholars have pointed out, stereotypical images of victimised women and their criminal activities in the media and public discourses have contributed to a criminalisation and the formation of 'red light districts'. In these spaces, sex work becomes invisible for the 'good citizen' but remains illegal and mainly unsafe. This paper will investigate how media frames and their narrative constructions of subjects and spaces associated with sex work are complicit in forming the social imagination, policies and 'ordered' and 'unordered' spaces.

Using the example of BBC's mini-series as part of an ongoing media discourse on Leeds' controversial red light zone, the question of complicity will be directed at this documentary.

The analysis will inspect its narrative conventions and realist aesthetic style used to represent the street sex workers as well as the area of Holbeck. It will be argued that certain tropes and cinematic techniques are utilised to construct an image of Holbeck's female sex workers as 'fallen', degenerate victims. Drugs, abuse and violence are the dominating themes in the women's lives which appear to be in a constant downward-spiral. Their biographies are emphasized while structural issues are mainly omitted. These notions of personal decay are narratively and aesthetically linked to the area where the women work. The district is portrayed as unordered and polluted as a result of the legalisation of sex work.

The series is thus complicit because of its use of narrative devices which convey a one-sided image of the women and the area portrayed. It reproduces discourses which have informed stricter anti-sex work policies before, leading to unsafer working conditions while not addressing structural problems.

Turbo Lover: The Perception of Masculinity and the Treatment of Women and Queers in the British Heavy Metal Community

Christian Wuckelt

The Heavy Metal genre has become more fashionable and appealing to young and old people alike since it has emerged. British Heavy Metal pioneers like Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden or Judas Priest gained a worldwide reputation as the founders and "heroes" of Heavy Metal. Heavy Metal fans have created a subculture and scene which not only focuses on music but also on ideology and lifestyle. This genre of popular music has also become more interesting for scholars worldwide. However, almost all studies and contributions reproduce the same narrative: Heavy Metal is a male dominated genre of music which glorifies maleness and which is hostile to women and queer people. These narratives are quite enduring because bands often present themselves as hypermasculine, violent or powerful. Indeed, the scene has produced many female fronted bands over the years and has a steadily increasing membership of women, but many studies fail to consider these contributions to the development of Heavy Metal. Another explanation could be that female and male fans are not paying much attention to lyrics or a band's ideology which makes them unwittingly complicit in reinforcing traditional gender roles. Furthermore, many studies foster the impression that homophobia is a severe problem in Heavy Metal as it is constantly reproduced by fans and performers. What we do not know is whether performers and fans consider anti-homosexual comments and lyrics as offensive or not. Perhaps they just use these comments as an expression of anger against society or life. This assumption is questionable because many male fans openly admire the masculine, leather wearing musicians, which renders Heavy Metal very conservative. The question is whether Heavy Metal is really all about suppression and exclusion? I argue that the Heavy Metal subculture and scene is not static and has not enshrined mainstream norms and values. It is rather a multi-faceted subculture and scene which anybody can join. Moreover, open-minded Heavy Metal musicians like Robert Halford (Judas Priest) explicitly try to advocate more tolerance through their performance or through subtle lyrics.

