

lingen mellan det individuella livet och de kollektiva gemenskaperna.

Inledningskapitlet ger de teoretiska förutsättningarna och presenterar samtidigt empirin, vilket återspeglar den faktiska arbetsprocessen. Utgångspunkterna för det analytiska arbetet – såväl metodologiskt som teoretiskt – är flera. I grunden finns en kombinerad genus- och postkolonial teoribildning som tar fasta på hur dessa unga muslimska kvinnor i diaspora befinner sig i en flerfaldig minoritetssituation. Likväl är det aktörskap, delaktighet och förhandlingar som är Pia Karlsson Mingantis tematisering av materialet. Genom att betona att tjejnerna är praktiserande muslimer understryks att de genomlevt kriser av olika slag, tagit konsekvenserna därav och upplevt en religiös förändring. Men detta är inte en studie i psykologi eller av konventionella livshistorier; det aktiva ställningstagandet för islam och viljan att engagera sig i muslimska ungdomsorganisationer ses i avhandlingen väsentligen som en social positionering och som aktiva val som obönhörligen leder till kollisioner mellan genusordningar, maktstrukturer, förväntningar och uppmaningar.

Avhandlingen har en genomgående och välgenomtänkt diskussion i självreflexiv anda om röster, tolkningsföreträde och etiska överväganden. De unga kvinnorna befinner sig i ett spänningsfält mellan familjens traditionalism, purismen i väckelseislam och majoritetssamhällets explicita och implicita krav på svenskhet. Detta försätter dem i en utsatt position oavsett vilka val de fattar, oavsett vilka synliga eller osynliga strategier de väljer. Att vara huvudperson i en akademisk avhandling kan naturligtvis göra individen än mer sårbar. Pia Karlsson Mingantis långt drivna anonymisering av informanterna är därför ur ett etiskt och moraliskt perspektiv fullt förståeligt, men gör samtidigt att vitala element av avhandlingens analys blir ofullständiga. Studien håller en konsekvent – och väl genomförd – berättande ton med många och långa citat från informanterna. Denna empirinära metod står dock i kontrast till de individer vi kommer nära som "Noor" eller "Latifa", men vi saknar avgörande information om deras etniska bakgrund, deras vardagsmiljö (skola, utbildning) och de sociala rum de rör sig i. För läsaren blir det svårt att förstå var förhandlingarna verkligen äger rum, socialt och spatialt. Detta blir särskilt påtagligt då en av deras gemensamma nämnare är riksorganisationer som arbetar med offentlig verksamhet och också presenterar sin verksamhet på internet. Vidare saknas informanternas bredare kontext som lokalsamhälle (skillnaden mellan att vara muslim i

storstad och småstad), välfärdsstaten Sverige (med sin mycket bestämda utbildnings- och jämställdhetsideologi) eller världen i stort i globaliseringens tidevarv. Flera av informanterna besöker sina hemländer eller släkt i diaspora i andra länder. Detta finns endast antytt i studien och de transnationella aspekterna av de unga kvinnornas liv förblir otydliga.

Pia Karlsson Minganti har tagit oss nära nio individer i det svenska samhället och visar genom sin empirinära metod på människor och det mänskliga bortom kategorier och stereotyper. Avhandlingen visar på komplexiteten och motsägelserna i de unga kvinnornas livsvärldar, och genom att utgå från genusordningar och maktstrukturer blir inte heller deras tillkortakommanden, besvikelser eller i vissa lägen passivitet viktigmiserande utan symptom på de strukturer och diskurser som formar och styr människor och som pareras mot den egna viljan och initiativkraften.

*Muslima* är en i alla bemärkelser läsvärd avhandling. Den har en flytande framställning, den levandegör och är en genomarbetad och konsekvent bok för en läsekrets långt utöver den akademiska.

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Fataneh Farahani: *Diasporic Narratives of Sexuality: Identity Formation among Iranian-Swedish Women in Sweden*. Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Stockholm 2007. 326 s. ISBN 978-91-85445-62-2.

I began this thesis just after reading a travel article in the Guardian newspaper written by Tony Wheeler (2007), head of the Lonely Planet travel guides. He was recalling his travels in Iran, in particular Tehran, and how much he enjoyed his time there. He tells one story of how when he was waiting to cross a busy road a scooter went past with a man driving and a woman in full hejab on the back. Just as he was perusing the strange visibility to a Westerner of scooting with hejab, the contradictions and links between the modern and the traditional, the woman winked at him. He was stopped in his tracks; a position he says he felt constantly during his experience in Iran. Just when he thought he knew what was going on around him, something came into view that challenged his interpretation. It is this unsettling complexity that is presented by Fataneh Farahani's thesis. It maps the incredibly intricate ways that Iranian women narrate their lives in Sweden through discourses of sexuality

– really heterosexuality – telling stories of creativity, inventiveness and nuance, with levels of complexity that make it difficult to do justice to its subtlety.

Overall, this is a beautifully written, very thorough thesis with a strong literature review and a wide range of utilized theoretical sources which displays great sensitivity to and with the words of the women who are interviewed. I was not at all surprised when I found out that Fataneh Farahani is also a poet: many sentences capture the mood of Iranian regulation and Swedish normativity in ways that are rare in scholarly writing.

Providing a fine example of the technique of situated knowledge and the display of reflexivity in research, the author is aware of her own location and aware of the limits of the techniques deployed, although it led me to ask for whom was the thesis written? In defense Fataneh said for the women, to give voice to a subaltern experience. Yet is it possible to ‘give voice’: how, where and for whom? Does describing the discourse used to explain the experience of living just reproduce the discourse? Or does it instead give an academic space to voices rarely heard within Swedish academia? The thesis also displays a strong awareness of its own translation issues, particularly the difficulty in finding a single direct translation for the word sex or sexuality in the Persian vocabulary. The thesis is also situated within a traditional Swedish discipline – Ethnology – a discipline challenged by the issues in the thesis, of the diasporic impact of peoples who reshape what was previously thought of as national culture.

The thesis begins with *The Hidden Face of Eve* – Nawal El Saadawi (1980) – a powerful book, for which the author was imprisoned, that tells the story of the power of religious interpretation. It’s a book that has stayed powerfully with me since reading it, many years ago; a book that enables an understanding of the power of religion when institutionalized and divorced from its spiritual foundations, a book about how men vie for and legitimate political power by claiming religious authority. The thesis, like Saadawi, points to the significance of story telling for both inheriting and being positioned by power struggles in the interests of others and oppression, but also learning techniques of resistance. The thesis uses literary sources well to point to the forms of alternative knowledge used in a highly publicly regulated religious-state society.

The thesis shows how Iran produces its own normativity which is radically different from the West, and not explainable by theorists of Western sexuality. So when

women move nations, and it’s a study of the re-location of Iranian women to Sweden, they carry with them understandings that come up against other national/local understandings – they move not just their bodies but also the knowledge they inherited from one powerful normativity and re-shape it in new conditions: a new normativity, a diasporic sexuality. But this is not an easy inhabitation, especially after years of habitation, and it is this uncomfortable but creative dislocation that the thesis explores.

The research was based on ten in-depth interviews with first generation Iranian immigrant women living in Sweden, all but one woman was aged between 38 and 51, who had lived in Sweden between eleven and eighteen years. All left after the 1979 revolution. Only one is in the same relationship that she was in when she came to Sweden. Six had divorced at least once. All but two had paid work in Sweden. All the participants defined themselves as respectable women, negotiating both Iranian and Swedish moral codes. Two were political activists and all had contact with political activists at some point in their lives in Iran.

The interviewees and the author come from a contradictory historical context in which women were forced to unveil (1935) and re-veil less than 50 years later (1983). The first was a radical attempt to modernize and has left a complicated legacy whereby unveiling is associated with modernity. In the re-veiling it was western-toxification that impelled the re-covering; a resistance movement against western imperialism. As with many political struggles, or state crisis, women’s bodies become the site of the inscription of the moral power struggle made visible. Yet Iranian women were not passive in the re-shaping of their corporeal visibility: the 1979 Khomeini ruling outlawing women judges led to a five day long demonstration beginning on International Women’s Day. Others have documented women’s political resistance in detail.

The veil (or bodily display/cover) became in Iran a temporal contradiction: not just the symbol of modernity, but also of contestation to racism and imperialism. Being the visible corporeal bearers of wider geo-political struggles led Fataneh’s respondents to desire a secular society where religion was a private matter rather than political authority, and where they were not the marked carriers of the stakes in a patriarchal struggle for state power, into which their family and partners were recruited, with various incitements and punishments.

So we learn from the thesis how they deal with being the repositories of fantasies of power, how they cope with the intimate regulation of their bodies and how they creatively speak the dilemmas of being a regulated subject that also has value and desire. The discourses of sexuality are examined to show how the women negotiate these positionings and how their discourse changes as they move across national spaces where the conditions of possibility for speaking changes, yet where they become subject to a different regulation, the Orientalist gaze.

Fataneh Farahani notes the Swedish media obsession with the murder of Fadime Sahindal in 2002 and how this has shaped public perceptions in Sweden of the 'East' as the site of tradition, misogyny and atavism, and how this inscription is also read on the women's bodies: bodies subject to so many powerful assumptions. The thesis carefully locates this incident to show how cross-national understandings feed the 'civilising mission' of the east/west trope, where women's bodies become the site of measurement of the lack or quantity of civility and modernity, and how different bodily inscriptions and speaking positions are shaped by these historically powerful imperial tropes.

Foucault is one of the main theoretical voices shaping the thesis, yet only used for his work on sexuality, and not for his Iranian analysis (Foucault's biographers describe his fascination with Iran, documented in his fifteen articles on the country). Fataneh Farahani points to Foucault's total lack of attention to and understanding of Iranian women. As many Western feminists have already noted, gender was not his strong point. Yet one useful point taken from Foucault and developed throughout the thesis is how repression and regulation produces an obsession with an object that is always a deflection, a supplement, a fantasy of power.

The focus of the thesis is on sexuality as it is seen – via Foucault – as one of the central organizing principles of modern and Western identity formation. But also an identity formation organized *out of presence* by the Iranian government after the 1979 revolution. The inability to speak of women's independent sexuality (not just as the repository of men's desire) is presented as just as important as the Western obsession with speaking sexuality as a source of self. This movement, from surreptitious speaking to sexuality as *the* source of the self produces difficulties and discomforts for the research respondents. Yet it made me wonder why the state was so absent from the thesis yet so present as a present and

absent structuring force: violence by the state, violence by men, condoned and legitimated by the state is an ever presence in the women's lives.

So we begin with an analysis of Iran, where regulation generates affects that give shape to how women's bodies can be seen, interpreted and move: shame is considered a key criteria to social acceptance, where female beauty is based on muteness and immobility and where innocence and silence express dignity. And where gender difference in desire is made publicly stark through the *hejleh* – a mourning public monument to young men who have not had sex before death, with the divine promise of numerous untouched virgins in paradise. We learn that sex is public and important for young men but must be hidden in women. As Fataneh notes: 'despite that fact that women's bodies are the object of enormous erotic investment, the indifference to women's sexual needs in paradise is not far removed from the lack of concern about women's desires in general in the earthly world'.

Yet there is a total obsession with the power of women's bodies, and as the thesis shows women know this, and some know what to do with it. I did think the thesis manifestly tells us lots about masculinity, male insecurity and the workings of gendered power. Legitimated masculine power is the structuring absence of the entire thesis.

For instance, we have the paradoxical Iranian Islamic state interpretation of women's sexuality – autonomous whilst also dangerous and seductive. As Fataneh Farahani notes, orthodoxy and eroticism are positioned hierarchically in relation to men's power. *Fitna* – is a term that describes women as provokers of sexual disorder, which could be *fantasy turned into law*. I was fascinated by the representation of men in Iran as so out of control with their desire as to be powerless; distracted and controlled by the very sexual power of women. It is a contradictory legitimation that positions them as 'almost' powerless in order that they can claim power; like a 'victim' position, what Lauren Berlant (in *Transformations* 2000) once described as 'absolute power', for the non-victim who claims victim-hood has no responsibility for its actions.

This understanding of sexuality also reminded me of Valerie Walkerdine's psychoanalytic take on femininity as fantasy. Femininity was for Walkerdine, produced through men's fantasy, enshrined in the symbolic, and habitually performed because there was no alternative. When her critique was written (in *Oxford Review of*

*Education* 1992) many of us thought that femininity was a bad patriarchal trap, but now we've seen that in the West the performance of femininity often has little bearing on symbolic power and masculine expectation; instead femininity may be an inventive and creative way of dealing with power, an ambivalent response rather than straightforward social reproduction.

The thesis establishes *key tropes*: virginity, honour, modesty, and veiling (which organize the chapter formation), alongside *key moments*: the wedding night, first sexual experiences, and *key movements*: migration.

The women use sexuality as a trope to talk about changes in their lives, desires, bodies and maturity, but rarely speak of sexuality as practice or identity so the thesis poses an interesting diversion/direction in terms of how sexuality is known in a space where it is difficult (often illegal or punishable) to articulate directly.

The thesis presents pretending as performative: everything is not what it seem, suggesting that if we keep pretending we may be able to use the pretence for the creation of our own space and desires. This tactic could be regarded an empty gesture to power that enables power to be repeated and legitimated as if it works. But does power work if people have become so creative at not doing what it asks? At gesturing to power. Do the women's pretend performances change anything, prepare the ground for future changes, for instance, or is it just 'bare survival' in difficult conditions? This query haunts me throughout the thesis.

And not only does everything not appear to be what it seems, everything appears to be paradoxical. The thesis provides a great sense of an underground culture in Iran, where things happen that everybody knows about, but nobody says anything because speaking can be punishable: 'turning a blind eye', i.e. pretending that they 'know nothing' develops into a significant response to power in the thesis – who sees and who knows (and can therefore be punished for knowing – means many tactics of seeing and knowing are required to disguise what one knows and can tell), a paradox which must present problems for research within the country, or for those who are used to speaking furtively or through displacement.

And now I will consider some of the research in more detail.

The description of 'compulsory virginity' provides one of the best examples of surreptitious speaking, of stories that show how to evade regulation fully. We have

the invention of 'temporary marriage', a social contract for a situation where as long as there is a formal engagement and some family consent, sexual contact is allowed. We also have – my favourite – 'renewable virginity', complete with renewable hymens (hymenoplasty), or strategies to 'prove' virginity on the wedding night, including blood capsules to spill on the white wedding sheet. 'Pretending' to do these things, argues Fataneh Farahani, is the performative dimension to sexuality and gender: pretending to be (through doing) that which one is expected to be, whilst doing something else entirely is the way in which constraint sustains performativity. This is almost a reversal of Western theories of performativity based on an unconscious iteration of the habits of heteronormativity. Instead these Iranian women develop inventive tactics (and Fataneh uses de Certeau's (1988) distinction in *The Practice of Everyday Life* between strategies and tactics) to consciously perform to expectations, whilst creatively doing many other things. 'Renewable virginity' is presented as 'bargaining with patriarchy', a tactic that leaves the system intact. Or does it? Does it bring the possibility of being different into view, offering a perspective of a different life, a different way of living?

What is interesting is how in such a regulated society some doctors are willing to perform 'renewable virginity techniques', for as Fataneh Farahani points out, a range of different reasons. Not only are the women being creative with constraints, so are those who can either profit from the creativity or politically support the challenge to the regulation of women's sexuality.

In Iran tradition has it that women have to be 'tamed and transformed' on their wedding night. Fataneh shows how there is also great literature on the 'event' for instance in *The Thousand and One Nights*, where the central female character, Shahrzad, exemplifies women who work to rescue themselves using subjugation to tame and transform the King; a protester who constantly feels the shadow of death. Shahrzad uses hesitation to generate uncertainties in the King in the hope that she will not be killed. These inherited tactics are used by the sexually experienced who have to 'pretend' not to be. Again, inventiveness generates creative responses. The women distinguish between 'real' and 'complete' sex, taking their definitions from traditional patriarchy based on male penis-vagina penetration. This gives them a great deal of scope for many other sexual activities (possibly many more than heterosexual women in the West who are located in the traditional discourses of penetrative

definitions of sex). And some mothers support them in their 'pretend' activities – turning a 'blind eye' and not hearing about what they do.

Yet this incredibly visual description of pretence also made me wonder about the methodology. Is it possible to describe the hidden nature of so much interaction through the interview method? Does speaking public discourse just reproduce public discourses? This makes me think that an enormous amount of cultural knowledge has been brought to bear in the interpretation. Were the interviews necessary? Did they limit the range of topics covered? Do they operate as a form of authenticating that which is already known? Could other methodological sources (e.g. film, literature) capture the tactics and performances just as well? When alternative knowledge forms are used in the thesis they seem to capture more complexity.

Yet there is also a horrific downside to this not knowing, when one of Fataneh's respondents, Katty, is raped and traumatized by 'pretend sex' i.e. an anal rape that she is unable to speak or do anything about it for years. The men also collude in the 'pretend' game so that they cannot be trapped into marrying or accused of rape. And emergency wards operate with a saying 'a bride has arrived' in full knowledge of the repeated injuries on wedding nights. Pretence is a creative tactic but can also be folded back into institutionalized power structures.

The women of the research remember the experience of their wedding night in great detail. It becomes a ritualistic event for organizing their lives chronologically into a before and after. Their stories reveal how they think about their bodies, located in a discursive movement between shame and shyness. Fataneh Farahani demonstrates how shy refers to a constraint, something that stops one behaving in public and shame is used to display the struggle the participant has with existing social norms. Shame enables another respondent, Simin, for instance, to move through different Iranian social spaces (which to me sound similar to the Catholic use of guilt – enabling whilst constraining, abdicating responsibility whilst doing).

In retrospect the women of the research suggest that the primary issue for dealing with the wedding night was the lack of information available on what to expect. One of their major re-assessments of Iran, following a move to Sweden, was bemoaning the absence of any institutionalized sex education in Iran. They have an idealized image about what liberal Swedish sex education would contain. Their fantasy is that it would be open

and not punitive, yet as Don Kulick's (in *GLQ* 2005) research has demonstrated, this may not be the case. Swedish sex education just operates with different regulative normativities premised on definitions of 'good sex' (natural, non-pornographic, non-object based) and good relationships (couples, not multiples, meaningful not anonymous). Yet as a great deal of queer theory has shown these moral binaries are just as regulatory as those described by Foucault, hence also why I think the thesis describes heterosexuality in its specific discursive productions, rather than sexuality more generally.

A substantive chapter in the thesis provides an incredible description and analysis of the complexities of the debates surrounding the veil and whose interests these debates serve. There are no positions outside the discourse of the veil – women just squiggle in between them. This chapter uses a beautiful example, taken from Iranian lawyer Mehrangiz Kar, of how the fashion mannequins in shop windows in Iran were slowly transformed by men with legal and religious authority *and* guns into just a pair of hollow and dead eyes, bearing, she argues, little similarity to the chastity and modesty that the Islamic republic had hoped to achieve.

The chapter also explores the many different interpretations within Islam that are given to the veil, all tightly connected to men's property rights in Iran. Primarily the veil is examined as an instance of disciplinary power, with one of its main functions as the display of respectability, especially among upper class women. The veil displays that women are protected by a man, a manifestation of chastity and modesty to garner respect and honour. Modesty is central to both men and women in Muslim thought – men are expected to 'guard their eyes': women are seen as powerfully seductive to be guarded against. It is a society in which looking is dangerous, where looking-away enables things to happen.

Yet the Islamic positioning of women as powerfully and actively seductive is, as Fataneh points out, radically different from the Orientalist gaze that positioned the women as passive, *only* as the object of white male fantasy. And the colonizers only thought the veil an issue when it interfered with agricultural productivity. Typical.

Fataneh uses Milani's (*Veils and Words* 1992) metaphor, who describes the veil as a 'portable wall' that women are forced to carry, through discourse and time, but also the spatial apartheid in the city itself, enabling women to be both visible and invisible. Visibility, as

Fataneh is aware, does not always or necessarily equate with power. Yet wearing the veil is an attempt by women to demand respect. And some women argue that it protects them from the male gaze: all responses are contingent and Fataneh asks why are all Western debates about the veil located at whether women themselves feel subordinated or not (it's a bit like 'is lap-dancing a form of liberation?' question). As she notes feelings come to equal agency as if a measure of power.

And as with other forms of pretending, an enormous amount of behavior occurs *under* the hejab. Moreover, sexual harassment did not decrease when women's bodies were covered, rather the fetishism increased, as Foucault would have predicted.

Just as Pia Laskar (2005) in *Ett bidrag till heterosexualitetens historia* has shown in relation to Western sexuality, the Iranian women's body stands as property within the institution of the family. All people in Iran have to marry. Yet they do so for very different reasons, often just to leave home, but also for political reasons, or to punish their family. Two of the women who talked to Fataneh were postal brides ordered by Iranian men already living in Sweden who wanted traditional wives. But a structural problem was already built in to the exchange: the women who were willing to come and live in Sweden were looking for transformation.

In opposition to marital regulation the women were obsessed with narratives of 'first love' which represented romance and freedom. And love (or lack) was used as the reason for their failed marriages. Here their discourses appear similar to the Swedish national discourses on 'good sex': all relationships must be meaningful and loving. I wondered where their love-bounded fantasies come from. Is romance a furtive discourse in Iran or is it a reinterpretation from Sweden? As Mary Evans (2002) notes in *Love*, in the West romantic love has repeatedly been used to negotiate the relationship between state and capital, to re-shape property relations, or promulgate the myth of free will. Only one woman interviewed can deal with the meaninglessness of sex (most associate one night stands as Swedish and immoral). But we need to remember that these are women who are middle-class and define themselves as respectable.

Not surprisingly there were a high number of divorced women in the study, itself not an entirely straight-forward matter. Fataneh Farahani shows how few men initiate divorce in Iran due to their religio-judicial obligation to pay the marriage settlement, which can be a large amount. So they make life unbearable for the

women so she will leave without demanding the money. But women cannot have other relationships if they are still officially married. This can lead to women being obligated for some time. One woman had been waiting for a divorce since 1998 and feared developing any new relationships in case she lost her children. To deal with the dissatisfaction they experience, and the difficulties of instituting change, many women develop tactics such as the 'the art of abstaining from everything whilst playing on the promise of giving', which I suspect is not just Iranian.

The diasporic movement as we would expect generates many issues. The women assess themselves continually in comparison to Swedish women: 'a Swedish woman would never do that' becomes a measure to achieve, but change may not be easily achievable, or recognised. On arrival in Sweden these highly educated, qualified middle-class women are de-skilled and de-valued: they have to come to terms with unemployment, non-acceptance of their qualifications and/or skills and another rendering of themselves as valueless.

Their stories about movement are full of emotional confusion. For instance, when they arrived in Sweden they were most impressed by two people kissing in public. Yet their previous experience continually generates reflections and comparisons which continue to haunt them. One respondent, Mehri, continually measures herself as lacking and unable to perform Swedish normativity (although this is certainly not a problem for all the women).

The thesis also demonstrates the longevity and sedimentation of power as it works on bodies: when another respondent, Farideh, wears a swimsuit she feels constant conflict, describing the 'feelings and tendencies still inside me'. Farideh was also unconsciously fixing her non-existent veil for a long period of time after she first moved here, a powerful account of the workings of the power of bodily habitus.

What we have is a past that continues to reappear, tactics that habituate the body, spaces where value cannot be seen or recognized: gains and losses but rarely comfortable inhabitation. Fataneh Farahani describes this as hybridity, but I wonder if such a neutral term can capture the tension, struggle, contradictions, difficulty and pain that these women describe.

One of my main issues with the thesis was the catholic (small c) use of so many theories, which for me have very different and incompatible epistemological basis: for instance, the use of Gramsci with Foucault,

who have entirely different understandings of power. Or the insistence on discourse and post-structuralism with concepts of agency? Does consciousness matter if we are produced through discourse? There is a lot of movement in the thesis between the conscious and unconscious subject, i.e. repetition is not performed by the subject, it is what makes the subject, and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject (as in the theories of performativity). Fataneh defended this critique well, arguing that each theory was used to describe different facets of the complex processes she was describing.

And the processes are complex: we have stories of profound creativity, clever performances, almost manipulation, violence, fear and wounding. These ten women's lives are lived in complexity and this is what the thesis brilliantly shows: that life is never totally resistant or totally oppressive; mechanisms are found to make life bearable. None of these women are living 'bare life' in the Agamben (*Homo Sacer* 1998) sense. Rather, what they are trying to do is deal with movement, between cultures that sediment on bodies, leaving their residue behind. They understand that movement doesn't necessarily mean progress, and that the West is not necessarily modern. It is coming to terms with these major difficulties that the thesis documents, carefully and subtly through discourses of heterosexuality which speak for so much else.

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Jutta Ahlbeck-Rehn: *Diagnosticering och disciplinering. Medicinsk diskurs och kvinnligt vainsinne på Själo hospital 1889–1944*. 391 s. Åbo Akademi University Press. Åbo 2006. English summary. ISBN 951-765-302-6.

Ett läst kvinnorum, så beskriver sociologen Jutta Ahlbeck-Rehn inledningsvis den anstalt – Själo hospital – som är föremål för hennes avhandling *Diagnosticering och disciplinering. Medicinsk diskurs och kvinnligt vainsinne på Själo hospital 1889–1944*.

Institutionen grundades 1619 som en anstalt för spetälska, förlagd till ön Själo i Nagu skärgård, dvs. mellan finska fastlandet och Åland. 1755 omvandlades det till Finlands första statliga sinnessjukhus. 1840 gjordes anstalten om för individer vars tillstånd inte "medgifver hopp om förbättring" (s. 19). 1889 blev den en renodlad kvinnoanstalt. Männen fördes över

till Kexholms nybyggda sjukhus på fastlandet. 1889 är också Ahlbeck-Rehns bakre gräns för undersökningen som sträcker sig fram till 1944, då den sista kvinnan skrevs in på anstalten.

Hospitalet var avsett både för s.k. sinnesslöa och för sinnessjuka patienter. Gemensamt för dem var att psykiatrin inte närde något hopp om deras förbättring. Hospitalet hade karaktären av asyl med låga eller obefintliga terapeutiska ambitioner. Lappvikens sjukhus utanför Helsingfors öppnade 1841 och blev den optimistiska och behandlande psykiatris finska sjukhus.

Många hade redan institutionella erfarenheter när de kom till Själo, inte minst från Lappviken. Majoriteten av kvinnorna som skickades till Själo var unga och ogifta. De flesta kom från landsbygden och över 1/3 tillhörde den obesuttna klassen. Ahlbeck-Rehn menar att Själo bl.a. kom att fungera som ett slags förvaringsanstalt för fattiga ensamma kvinnor. De uppgivna sjukdomsorsakerna pendlade mellan kroppsliga och moraliska.

25 av de sammanlagt 192 intagna kvinnorna på Själo var s.k. kriminalpatienter. Författaren redovisar ett par gripande historier kretsande kring lösdriveri och barnamord men också kring sorg, olycka och förödda liv. Dessa berättelser ligger tätt inpå sjukhusets egna källor. Här tycker jag också att undersökningen fungerar bäst, delvis tack vare närheten till källorna och deras individuella karaktär, delvis genom att Ahlbeck-Rehn här skriver med en empati som bryter igenom det psykiatriska perspektivet och ger läsaren en känsla av att komma kvinnoödena nära. Denna närhet ligger utanför avhandlingens syfte men finns där likafullt.

Ahlbeck-Rehn pekar på kopplingen mellan disciplin, kropp och diagnos och hur kvinnokroppens specifika organ och funktioner blev föremål för psykiatris beskrivningar och undersökningar. Framförallt framstår menstruationen som en sådan funktion som drog till sig läkarnas intresse. Vad kunde den avslöja om den undersökta kvinnan? Blödningen, menar Ahlbeck-Rehn, nämns aldrig i de medicinska texterna utan koppling till själ och sinne. När psykiatrin tyckte sig se ett samband mellan patientens blödande kropp och hennes oberäkneliga humör framställdes också kroppen som farlig. Sexualiseringen av avvikelserna, anser författaren, var en central del av motiveringarna till anstaltsvistelsens isolering. Om nervositet, nervsvaghet och melankoli hörde den borgerliga kvinnan till representerade kvinnan ur arbetarklassen den ohämmade och farliga sexualiteten. Ogifta avvikande kvinnor var osedliga. Sexualitet problematiserades inte sällan via kvinnors rörlighet, kvinnor som lösgörs från