Master and *Con*vert: women and other strangers

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ABSTRACT:
This paper is about estrangement, about exile: about waiting to be called into existence. Waiting. In transit. Homesick. Lost. The paper offers an attempt to examine the position of women as foreigners, as strangers in a male world. Despite the criticisms of Kristeva's work for its lack of attention to class, gender and race, her ideas have currency for the examination of these areas. Other criticisms have mentioned the extent to which she deals with her own subjectivity in her writing. However, this seems to be a very unreasonable criticism. It is precisely Kristeva's own experiences which makes her supremely capable of this particular analysis and, for me, it works to open up not only a gendered space but also a class wound.

Keywords: feminism, exile, foreigner, Kristeva, gender, psychological homelessness

"A woman will only have the choice to live her life either *hyper-abstractly* (original italics) .... in order thus to earn divine grace and homologation with the symbolic order; or merely *different* (original italics), other, fallen.....But she will not be able to accede to the complexity of being divided, of heterogeneity, of the catastrophic-fold-of-'being', (Kristeva, 1986: 173).

Copenhagen Airport

Waiting to be Called

It is Saturday 19th March 2005 and I am at Copenhagen airport waiting for the flight back to London. I have been attending a two day "summit" on *Organisational Theatre* organised by the Learning Lab Denmark at a conference centre at Lisegaarden on the coast. The conference has brought together a group of people who are all involved in various ways in organisational theatre: directors, actors, choreographers, consultants and academics. The well-known Dacapo Teatret from Denmark is well represented. The event has been a strange and disjunctive experience. I am very tired. I have spent a congenial hour or so in the coffee bar before check-in with an old friend, Chris Steyaert, from St Gallen and a new friend, Jan Rae, from South Bank. Now, like actors entering the performance arena, we have to pass through check-in into the indeterminate space which is the international departure area. Not wanting to sit around for two hours, I have taken a trolley and I am wandering past the line of shops, stopping occasionally to gaze wide-eyed at the high

prices of duty free goods. Trapped in this nether world like a lost soul in limbo, I become fascinated by the slow sweep of the aisles that I have started to make and I imagine myself like the tranquil robotic women of Stepford. And so, I begin playing out the role of a Stepford wife. I move majestically up and down the aisles of the duty free shop, glide silently out through Accessorize, along past a shop which specialises in Danish foods, along towards the bookshop. There I see Chris Steyaert casually studying the book titles but I glide on and past. I do not stop. We are in a different world now and the conventions of civility do not apply. I glide on. And wait to be called.

In Transit at Airport

This paper is about estrangement, about exile: about waiting to be called into existence.[13] Waiting. In transit. Homesick. Lost.

Diverted

Fare forward, travellers! not escaping from the past
Into different lives, or into any future;
You are not the same people who left that station
Or who will arrive at any terminus……..
TS Eliot The Dry Salvages, *The Four Quartets.*

[13] In Transit photo http://mischarmed.wordpress.com/?s=singapore

Milan Kundera's ([2000] 2005) novel *Ignorance* is about the great journey, exile and return. In it he says, "The Greek word for 'return' is 'nostos.' 'Algos' means 'suffering.' So nostalgia is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return. To express that fundamental notion most Europeans can utilise a word derived from the Greek ('nostalgia, nostalgie') as well as other words with roots in their national languages: 'anoranza,' say the Spaniards; 'saudade,' say the Portuguese. In each language these words have a different semantic nuance. Often they mean only the sadness caused by the impossibility of returning to one's country: a longing for country, for home", (Kundera, 2000: 5). So there is a time of exile which is a time of

waiting to return: a time of homelessness. This is a time of heimweh: the pain of separation, homesickness.

Returning

Similarly, Julia Kristeva in her book *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) traces the position of the *foreigner* as an introduction to her discussion of the nature of otherness. She speaks of the elusive strangeness of the other in terms of the toccata and fugue. Toccata in terms of an inchoate otherness "barely touched upon": a flourish of performance, something not defined, and fugue as that journey of the self, that diversion which distances the past and moves into a different future. The fugue is an elaboration, an excess which is characterised by digression. Here the intention is to take the ideas which Kristeva offers on the nature of estrangement and consider how such otherness might be applied to the feminine. It is a selective reading of the text, something which would not disturb Kristeva, and like her own writing, a personal reading. What is it then to acknowledge the strangeness of the world and to identify oneself with the foreigner, with the exile, with the other?

Scars in the Flesh

Kristeva makes a number of points about the foreigner. First, she says that the foreigner is always something "in addition" whether "perturbed or joyful" what she describes as "the ambiguous mark of a scar" (Kristeva, 1991: 4). There is always something, she argues, between "the fugue and the origin", between the diversion and the starting place, "a temporary homeostasis" (Kristeva, 1991: 4). It is temporary nature of this state which is of interest here. In the airport, being neither here nor there: being between departure and arrival - this is a state of not being at home. Kristeva's second point is about the "secret wound, often unknown to himself [sic], (which) drives the foreigner to wandering. The foreigner seeks the "invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he [sic] bears in his [sic] dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond" (Kristeva, 1991: 5). Driven from home by the desire for home, nostalgic for a home which no longer exists, suffering the pain of separation, the foreigner is one who has lost the mother. Like Camus's stranger, a strangeness brought on by the death of the mother: physical, metaphorical, a loss of mother, mother land and mother tongue. The foreigner, Kristeva argues, find a role in assuming a position of humiliation, for example, by taking on the role of the domestic in relationships or being the partner who is a nuisance when ill or victim: the one who is put upon.

Immigrants for domestic service arriving in Quebec

Photo Source [14]

Kristeva says that this is not merely masochism, although this is a part of it, it is also "a hiding place" from which to scorn the "tyrant's hysterical weaknesses" (Kristeva, 1991: 6). "The space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plane in flight", (Kristeva, 1991: 7, 8). The foreigner is caught between the courage to leave and the humiliation of difference, now homeless and dissimulating, the foreigner acquires multiple masks and a repertoire of performances that conceal an absence of self.

The foreigner explains him/herself as doing what is required of him or her, responding to the wishes of others. Kristeva's view is that the sense of "me" does not exist (Kristeva, 1991: 8). Moreover, Kristeva says that when the foreigner does find a cause albeit a job, a commitment, a person, he or she is consumed, "annihilated" (Kristeva, 1991: 9).

Polish women immigrants 1890s

[14] Quebec photo
http://www.canadiana.org/citm/_images/common/c009652.jpg
http://www.canadiana.org/citm/imagepopups/c009652_e.html

Photo Source [15]

Lost Homeland

The foreigner might "survive with a tearful face turned towards the lost homeland") where "the lost paradise is a mirage of the past he will never be able to recover" (Kristeva, 1991: 9, 10). And so, she argues, the foreigner turns the rage against others, against those who caused the exile, into a range against the self, "How could I have abandoned them? I have abandoned myself". So that melancholia becomes the love of absence: the foreigner a "lover of vanished space" (Kristeva, 1991: 9). "Always elsewhere, the foreigner belongs nowhere" (Kristeva, 1991: 10), neither tied to the past or the present. However, Kristeva argues that there are two types of foreigner. "There are those who waste away in an agonizing struggle between what no longer is and what will never be" whom she terms "the ironists" (these she later, and perhaps more appropriately, terms the "cynics") and "those who transcend: living neither before nor now but beyond, they are bent with a passion that, although tenacious, will remain forever unsatisfied: it is a passion for another land" (Kristeva, 1991: 10). These she calls the "believers". While the ironists grieve, the believers convert.

Conversion of Muslim women, bas relief 15C Grenada Cathedral

Foreigners then, feel "completely free" (Kristeva, 1991:12) but such freedom is a form of solitude. According to Kristeva, deprived of belonging, the foreigner is free of everything, *has* nothing, *is* nothing. "No one better than the foreigner knows the passion for solitude" and believes it to be an enjoyment, or something to be borne as suffering, a space where "none is willing to join him [*sic*] in the torrid space of his [*sic*] uniqueness" (Kristeva, 1991: 12). The foreigner, she argues, "longs for affiliation, the better to experience, through a refusal, its untouchability" (Kristeva, 1991: 12). In other words, being excluded in itself confirms both the position of "outsider" and the elusive quality of affiliation.

Belonging Nowhere

The differences do not end here. The foreigner is "one who works" (Kristeva, 1991: 17). The foreigner values work as means of achieving dignity and establishing their worth. The foreigner takes on all jobs and tries to succeed in those which are the scarcest, to find a niche, to think of something that has not been previously undertaken, to pioneer new ideas and developments. It is toil that is taken across borders and sacrifice. To the person who is without definition, without standing, work gives identity and meaning.

[15] Polish Immigrants photo
http://www.indianahistory.org/programming/immigration/images/polishgirls1890sclaghorn.jpg
http://www.indianahistory.org/programming/immigration/INTRO/intro15.html

BBC Website discussing racial hatred

Photo Source [16]

Undoubtedly, the foreigner experiences "the hatred of others"……. "hatred provides the foreigner with consistency" (Kristeva, 1991: 13). Kristeva argues that the foreigner is authenticated by hatred. It makes experience real and, she argues, it confirms the secret hatred the foreigner bears "*within himself*" [*sic*] [original italics] against everyone and no one, the possibility of "*being an other"* [original italics] (Kristeva, 1991: 13). The foreigner learns what it is to be tolerated and to be expected to be grateful for such toleration, to be abused because one comes from "nowhere", nowhere of any importance. The foreigner is always deficient, always lacking.

…..and silent. The foreigner is silent because s/he is cut off from the mother tongue. The poetry of the foreigner's own language is lost. It "withers" to be replaced by attempts to gain mastery of the new language which will grant an accommodation, an assimilation: a desire to pass unnoticed amongst natural citizens. In the space between these two languages is silence.

"We must often remain silent,
A sacred language is missing - hearts are beating and yet
Speech can't emerge?" (Hölderlin, 1801, *Homecoming*, James Mitchell, *translator*).[17]

Mute in the absence of mastery, the foreigner must do rather than say. Activity replaces social discourse so the foreign becomes a master of activity: domestic, leisure and/or work. The foreigner is industrious and silent. Aware that s/he is being tolerated and hesitant in the alien language, the foreigner retreats into active isolation where the only respite comes from fellow foreigners and particularly those of the same kinship. Kristeva speaks of the new language as a "prosthesis" (Kristeva, 1991: 16); an artificial augmentation which attempts to compensate for a missing or deficient body part, like a silicone breast implant that makes a woman appear something that she is not. The foreigner seeks to *appear* like a native. But, is never *the real* thing. "Saying nothing, nothing needs to be said, nothing can be said", she continues, "it is the silence that empties the mind and fills the brain with despondency, like the gaze of sorrowful women coiled up in some non-existent eternity" (Kristeva, 1991: 16).

[16] BBC photo http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/38720000/jpg/_38720955_graffiti300.jpg

[17] http://home.att.net/~holderlin/index.html

"The sorrowful gaze of women"
Women Waiting for Food Distribution in Darfur

Photo Source [18]

More than silence, there is a reluctance to argue, to challenge the values, tastes, judgements of the native. Kristeva says that the foreigner feels that s/he has no right to argue with those who have such strong roots in native soil. The foreigner, in turn, she argues, begins to take root in a world of rejection unable to utter, to express her/his views. In this way, native and foreigner face each other across an abyss concealed by what appears to be "peaceful co-existence" (Kristeva, 1991: 17) by the silence of the stranger.

[18] Darfur photo
http://www.thewe.cc/contents/more/archive/darfur_sudan.html

University of Pennsylvania

Photo Source[19]

Quotations from women at the University of Pennsylvania:

"I was the second or third French woman in the MBA program, and the only woman in most of my business classes, with all the conspicuousness you can imagine in those days. Whenever my name was called every single person (man) turned to me -- being the only representative of my gender and nationality, I was supposed to have an opinion (different?!) on any issue that was raised in class discussions! It wasn't always easy to deal with the sometimes condescending comments from teachers and classmates, but for the most part curiosity, recognition and respect were the most frequent attitudes people had towards this 'daring and original student'." --- Catherine Anne Geneste, 1972 A.M., 1973 M.B.A.[20]

[19] University Penn - archives Digital Images Collection
http://imagesvr.library.upenn.edu/cgi/i/image/image-idx?type=detail&cc=pennarchive&entryid=X-20030820001&viewid=1

[20] Geneste
http://www.archives.upenn.edu/img/20030820001x180.jpg
http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/women/quote8.html

The foreigner comes to be feared as an invader, as someone who does not know his/her place, who provokes a sense of homelessness in the native who no longer feels "at home" in his/her world. This produces a desire to "kill the *other*" (Kristeva, 1991: 20) who poses such a threat to the native's way of life and understanding. The foreigner's speech "fascinating as it might be on account of its very strangeness, will be of no consequence, will have no effect, will cause no improvement in the image or reputation of those [the foreigner] is conversing with. One will listen to you only in absent-minded, amused fashion, and one will forget you in order to go on with serious matters…… The foreigner is a baroque person" (Kristeva, 1991: 20): excessive in rhetoric and gesture. It seems that there is either silence or an insistent and defiant otherness: the playing out of a formulaic repertoire.

Kathy Prendergast, *Lost*, 1999

Photo Source [21]

Lost

"At first glance, Kathy Prendergast's **map of the United States** appears straightforward, providing topographical information about mountain ranges, lakes, and state borders. Yet, closer inspection reveals that the only places located on this map have been named, "lost." Do these Lost Creeks, Lost Islands, Lost Mountains, Lost Lagoons, and Lost Canyons, describe the actual places and their hidden position or report on a particular wasted resource? Or do they describe the mental states of the early settlers who named them? Or, perhaps, the eventual fate of the native peoples and their traditions? The ambiguity evoked in these actual place names mirrors a feeling of possibility in a land of uncertainty. *Lost*, 1999, provides a poetically ambivalent reminiscence of American history".

The acquisition of the appearance of the native separates the foreigner from her/his past, from parents and home so that the foreigner is alienated from past and present: an orphan. Lost. Belonging to neither world. "Friends …… could only be those who feel foreign to themselves" (Kristeva, 1991: 23). She identifies paternalists, who are kind to foreigners as a gesture of largesse as long as they are in the power position of having more to offer, paranoids who identify with the otherness of the foreigner until they see this too as an element of their oppression, and perverse people whom she says prey on the foreigner's need for a home at the cost of "sexual or moral slavery". One response to this is for the foreigner to form an "enclave of the other within the other, [where] otherness becomes crystallized as pure ostracism: the foreigner excludes before being excluded" (Kristeva, 1991: 24). Here the foreigner adopts a fundamentalism, a symbolic "we" which is given meaning by austerity and sacrifice (Kristeva, 1991: 24). On the other hand, to cross one boundary permits the crossing of many others and permits the casting aside of inhibition and an excess of

[21] For a fuller discussion of this debate see Ziarek, (1995). Photo Source: http://www.albrightknox.org/fresh/memory/memory_images/P2000-4.jpg http://www.albrightknox.org/fresh/memory/memory_pages/memory_04.html

difference. The foreigner can become liberated to the excesses of the flesh, experimental and transgressive, can throw him/herself into unrestrained physicality but, as Kristeva observes, this can also lead to the "destruction of psychic and corporeal identity" (Kristeva, 1991: 31): a paradoxical annihilation of difference.

Conversion

Men do not realise the extent to which women live as strangers in their world. What is normal and taken for granted is a world which is defined, constructed and maintained by male notions of order. Kristeva's analysis of foreigners provides a range of issues which apply very well to the position of women. *Strangers to Ourselves* ([1988] 1991) does not apply theories of difference to race, class or gender yet her analysis of the foreigner appears to offer significant insights into what it is to be a woman and a stranger in a male world. Of course, some might reject this notion out of hand. Some would argue that the world has changed over the past thirty years and that, in any case, the world is what you make of it. However, these are also the self assurances which the foreigner offers him/herself. "It is not too bad", "You can make of it what you want". "If you are prepared to work, you can achieve anything". This is the simple rhetoric of those who desire to be assimilated. It is the language of resignation and stoicism.

Kristeva's work is redolent with personal insight and subjective tensions. This has not made her ideas acceptable to some critics who see her work as concentrating on the psycho-analytical to the exclusion of the socio-political (Butler, 1990; Fraser, 1990; Ziarek, 1995). However, other writers, notably Young (1986) have seen considerable potential for the reconceptualization of the political in Kristeva's writings. In relation to this, women can only be defined, constructed and ordered as objects in that world and to be saved must submit themselves to the therapeutic quest for order: must be converted to reason. To become accepted as a member of an organization, a woman must either conform to the male projection offered to her or else acquire a metaphorical phallus as the price of entry into *member*ship (Höpfl, 2003). Women who do conform acquire the status of "honorary man" but in order to do so they must accept impotence.

Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* ([1988] 1991) which forms the theoretical backbone of this paper, has been criticized for its lack of attention to class, gender and race and Kristeva has been criticized for her lack of political insight and confusion of the personal in the text. Yet it is clear that many of the insights that she offers on the foreigner derive from her own experiences in Paris in the 1960s. Kristeva is Bulgarian by birth and upbringing. She arrived in Paris around Christmas 1965. She was twenty-five, Bulgarian and supported by a French government scholarship (Lechte, 1990: 91; Moi, 1986: 1). She was already disposed to an ambivalence towards French language and literature from her Bulgarian education, already had an awareness of oscillating positions and exclusions. These two constructions alone have had a significant influence on her work. She had come to Paris to study and was at first committed to the communist cause and was a supporter of Maoism but she later remained in Paris as an exile from Bulgarian-Soviet communism. Within a year, she was contributing to the most influential and prestigious journals, *Critique, Langages* and *Tel Quel.* In the subversive mood in the Paris of the mid 1960s, Kristeva found a fertile site for her ideas and, no doubt, gained insights from her own experiences of exile and of difference which gave impetus to her prolific writing during this period. From the start of her studies in Paris, she was to work with some of the leading figures in French structuralism. She was particularly influenced by Roland Barthes who, as one of the foremost champions of structuralism, had sought to reveal the ways in which bourgeois ideology was embedded in French language and literature. Barthes was one of the *"New Critics"* and a semiotician. This concern with

semiotics and the implicit regulation of language was significant in terms of the development of Kristeva's writings although it is clear that she was already forming a dialectical relationship to these ideas even in her early writing. Barthes himself acknowledges Kristeva's influence when he says that she "changes the order of things.....(that)....she subverts...the authority of monologic science and filiation" (Moi, 1986: 1), (vide: Höpfl, 2004)

A Stranger

Kristeva had gone to Paris to study Bakhtin. She had been schooled in Marxist theory, spoke fluent Russian and had lived under the strictures of Eastern European communism. She had a formidable intellect, knew Latin and Greek, spoke French, Russian, German, as well as her mother-tongue Bulgarian, and, at the same time, she carried powerful experiences which, with simplification, one might set against her intellectualism. Clearly such tensions find expression in her ideas and in her writing. She was a foreigner and a foreigner exiled from her native land: estranged from her own country and estranged from the theoretical ideas to which she was exposed in her adopted one: another vacillation between the appeal of semiotics and her own theoretical position. The notion of *strangeness/estrangement* was to play an important part in the development of her ideas. Not only this but also, in the mid 1960s, Kristeva was a woman in the masculine world of French intellectuals. It seems that in virtually every respect Kristeva was confronted by repressive structures, by alterity and by estrangement. Yet, it is precisely these experiences which provided the tensions from which her ideas spring. It is as if the more emphatic the restriction, the more emphatic the resistance. Her writing disrupts and disturbs the phallogocentric order. Along with estrangement and exile, there is the notion of subversion and revolution in Kristeva's writing. There is also the border. The border plays a very important role in Kristeva's ideas. Given her background and experiences, this is not particularly surprising and her concern to examine the borders of subjectivity seems to relate to her own homelessness and exile.

Foreigners/Women

It is not possible to do more than outline some of the implications of Kristeva's characterization of the foreigner for an understanding of the position of women. However, it is worth considering this is more detail. First perhaps one might consider her description of the foreigner as being defined by work. The foreigner, unable to speak freely in a tongue other than the mother tongue is first reduced to silence and then defines him/herself by a commitment to work. I think of my mother, now over eighty, who has for years told me that I should “not say anything”. “Don't say anything” she counsels every time I look as if I might be angry or fed up. “Don't say anything, keep quiet, smile”. My mother is a strong woman: not at all meek, and she offers me this advice more in defiance than in submission. “Don't say anything or he will know he has got you”. She is saying don't place yourself into a position where you can be manoeuvred. Her words are meant to salve and she is telling me, “Don't get into competition. Men can't stand that. Don't get involved. Don't submit”. I remember when I was working at a new university in the north east of England and the new Vice Chancellor announced a restructuring. At that time there were twenty two Heads of School of which ten were women and twelve were men. After the reconstruction and following amalgamations, there were eleven new schools and they were to be headed by ten men and one woman (a woman who left within eighteen months of the new regime). Following this period of displacement, and when fates were sealed and it was too late to attempt to bring about changes, the newly homeless women consoled each other. “Don't let them know how you are feeling. Smile and nod” they said to each other. They were not reduced to a mute compliance but rather united by a sense of outrage and impotence: spectators as their

own destinies unfolded and yet completely unable to act. Grief and distress was private. It took place in the homes of mainly female colleagues where a "tearful face [was] turned towards the lost homeland" (Kristeva, 1991: 9, 10). "Waiting. Displaced. Homeless.

So, what of Kristeva's explanation that the foreigner, unable to speak, puts every effort into activity be it domestic, leisure or work. Certainly, women work. Studies of women at work seem to suggest that women do more to achieve the same degree of promotion as men. There is a polite collusion which indicates that women are now accepted in organizations on an equal footing as men. However, the reality is rather different. Just as is the case with Kristeva's own experiences and the support she received through influential men, it is still arguably the case that women achieve participation in organizations to the extent that they first, renounce or annihilate themselves in order to conform more fully to the male desire for organization, which Jung has described as the pursuit of "sterile perfection" (Dourley, 1990: 51), and secondly learn to speak in the prosthetic language of the patriarchal discourse. Sterile perfectionism, according to Jung, is one of the defining characteristics of patriarchal consciousness. Order and rationality function to exclude the physical. The organization is not a world for real women of flesh and blood. Whitmont puts forward the view that the *control* of passions and physical needs traditionally have been valorised because they idealise maleness (Whitmont, 1991: 243) and give emphasis to the "*merely* rational" [italics added] (Whitmont, 1991: 243). Organisations then, as expressions of collective expectations, render physicality "dirty" corrupting and, by implication, not good. Indeed, the corollary of this emphasis on rationality is a distrust of natural affections and the loss of compassion (Whitmont, 1991: 245). Flesh is exiled from the site of production. Women can only enter as ciphers: as homologue or as objects of desire. Recently, I had a conversation with a young woman academic in her early thirties. She had recently finished her doctorate and contemplated improving her publications, "But", she confided, "I haven't given up the idea of having a family. But it would be so difficult. I don't have family nearby who could help and the university is no place for that sort of thing". That sort of thing - the physical, pregnancy, with all that goes with it such as a changing body, the smells and realities of maternity - have no place in a world dedicated to abstraction and tidy rationality. In this sense, Kristeva is right the foreigner is exiled from mother, mother tongue and mother country. In the organization, it is the mother who is exiled. Women must dedicate themselves to work as the price of their participation. They cannot permit a personal life, the life of the homeland, to enter the ordered world of organization. Recall the terrible story told by Joanne Martin of the woman who arranged to have her baby induced early so she would be available for the launch of some corporate initiative or other (Martin, 1991). Germaine Greer once famously remarked that most women have very little idea how much men hate them. In psycho-analytical terms, the boy must kill off the mother in order to become a man and this dynamic remains. Not surprising then that the organization is not a place for the mother. So, in effect, women can enter as quasi males but in order to do this they must first be neutered - just as a foreigner might be naturalized in order to be granted citizenship in the country of exile.

This is more than to *neuter* as one might neuter a cat: render it sexless. There is no term in the English language to refer to the removal of a woman's power. To remove a man's power is to *e-masculate*. However, to *effeminate* is not a term in use: effeminate means unmanly, womanly. In order to enter into membership a woman must not only be rendered sexless but must be turned into an impotent man: must not be a threat to male reality definitions. Women permitted to enter are not real *members* and do not possess real *members*. Such quasi-men cannot become the "fathers" of the organization. In any event, since organizations only produce "sons" reproduction of the organization is

entirely phallocentric. Women who become true homologues renounce the friendship of other women, declare themselves to prefer the company of men and make phallic shows to confirm their *member*ship. There is a lot of "bad faith" (Sartre, [1943] 1989) amongst women about the extent of their permission to participate. Women have to be converted in order to achieve standing in this male world. They must be converted to reason and rule by logic, to the language of order and to the rules of their adopted country. They must demonstrate that they are believers. As converts they must not only conform but do more. They must actively demonstrate their commitment to the values and customs of their new land.

And is the stranger treated with hospitality? One might say, only if they agree to renounce their old ways and be received "out of heresy" as the old form of words for the reception of converts into Catholicism used to say. Here, Kristeva's comments on paternalists, paranoids and the perverse seem to have some relevance. Indeed, some men welcome women as they might welcome the stranger and are generous while power remains on their side. Others might seek to share some intimate meaning, to try to understand a common sense of oppression and other might seek to exploit or manipulate women for their own ends. These are thumbnail sketches that require more detailed and sophisticated analysis. However, the point here is merely to identify the way in which Kristeva's characterization of the foreigner might be further explored.

The paper offers an attempt to examine the position of women as foreigners, as strangers in a male world. Despite the criticisms of Kristeva's work for its lack of attention to class, gender and race, her ideas have currency for the examination of these areas. Other criticisms have mentioned the extent to which she deals with her own subjectivity in her writing. However, this seems to be a very unreasonable criticism. It is precisely Kristeva's own experiences which make her supremely capable of this particular analysis and, for me, it work to open up not only a gendered space but also a class wound. My own experiences of moving between classes accords very well with Kristeva's account of her own strangeness. It is on the political front, however, that the criticism of her work is perhaps least founded since Kristeva offers a way forward through her postmodern characterization and her commitment to a new approach to ethics. Kristeva's appeal to us to find "the foreigner within" as a means of establishing a new cosmopolitanism deserves further attention. However, one place to start is with postmodern characterization which involves "first, the confusion of the ontological status of the character with that of the reader; secondly, the decentring of the reader's consciousness, such that she or he is, like the character, endlessly displaced and 'differing'; and, thirdly, the political and ethical implications of this 'seeming otherwise', shifting from appearance to different appearance in the disappearance of a totalized selfhood" (*such that there is*) "a marginalization of the reader from a centralized or totalized narrative of selfhood" (*which renders*) "the reading subject-in-process as the figure of the dissident" (Docherty 1996: 67).

This is an interesting and provocative suggestion which invites women to take up the position of dissident in relation to the text. To move to a position of "marginalization and indefinition; [where] they are in a condition of 'exile' from a centred identity of meaning and its claims to a totalized Law or Truth". Docherty argues that exile itself is a form of dissidence "since it involves the marginalization or decentring of the self from all positions of totalized or systematic Law (such as imperialist nation, patriarchal family, monotheistic language)". Hence, Docherty puts forward the proposition that postmodern characterization, "construed as writing in and from exile, serves to construct the possibility, for perhaps the first time, of elaborating the paradigmatic reader ….. as feminized" (Docherty 1996: 68) "always dispositioned towards otherness, alterity". Consequently,

to perceive oneself as "the foreigner", as an exile is a good starting point. A compassionate community requires that the man must learn to bear the child: to experience the *other within.* The man must learn to bear the child and this requires a loss of standing. To move and to carry requires a renunciation. It is a renunciation of both standing and of the power to define. If women are no longer to simply wait or learn to be like men, there needs to be both bearing and moving: to move and to bear. This is accomplished when the man learns to bear the child. In other words, when men find the feminine in themselves and learn to bear children as well as they bear words. Women know this in their hearts: even from exile. The man must learn to bear a child.

"A Palestinian man carries a badly wounded child..." (Khalil Hamra, AP, 2004/05/19)

"A Palestinian man carries a badly wounded child as others rush to help moments after an Israeli missile strike on a demonstration in the Rafah refugee camp, southern Gaza Strip, Wednesday, May 19, 2004."[22]

[22] http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/040519/481/akcf11005191349

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