

COMPULSORY COUPLEDOM AND MULTIPLE BELONGING:

MINORITISED WOMEN SPEAK BACK!

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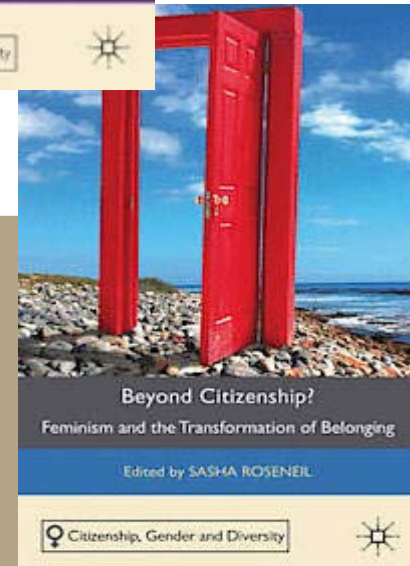
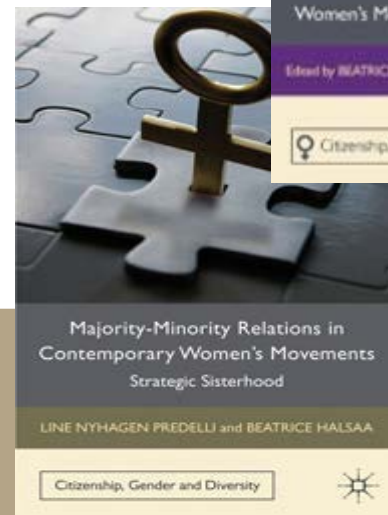
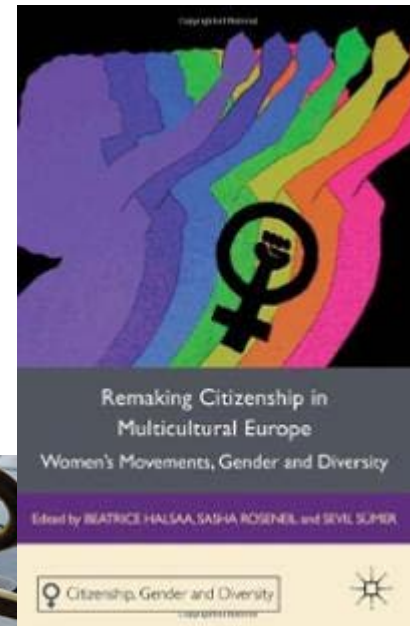




Femcit

› Gendered Citizenship in Multicultural Europe: The Impact of Contemporary Women's Movements

FEMCIT explored the relationship between the changing forms and practices of gendered citizenship in a multicultural Europe and the demands and practices of contemporary women's movements. We are studying how citizenship is gendered, and how women, as ordinary citizens and activists, have been involved in challenging inequalities and injustice across Europe.



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Disabled intimacies

Sexual and reproductive citizenship
of disabled women in Portugal

To explore the multiple ways in which disabled women relate to the spheres of sexuality and reproduction, including opportunities, constraints, expectations and representations.

Strand 1, Disabled women and sexuality: sexually-related topics re: marriage, cohabitation or non-cohabiting relationships; sexuality as a single person, including the right to pleasure and to self-determination.

Strand 2, Disabled women and reproduction: intersection of disability and motherhood from a gendered perspective; biological motherhood, adoption, co-parenting and fostering; surrogacy and assisted conception.

Strand 3, Cultural representations: the role of professionals and family members in women's decisions regarding sexuality and reproduction.



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LUISA, LATE 40S, ROMA: BEING SINGLE AS THE ONLY WAY OUT

Rejecting (available) coupledness:

I constructed my own love story. It would have to be with someone who I cared for, with love, with much love. But at that time, in my ethnicity, there was no such thing. [...] So, if anyone would look at me or say something to me, I would pretend I had nothing to do with that. I would get away. [...]

I took the driving licence and there was a big 'Awww!', like 'Why would she want the driving licence if she is in the age of getting married?'



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LUISA, LATE 40S, ROMA, SINGLE

Independence & autonomy:

After a certain age, am I going to put up with a man? I already had my driving licence, I was already independent...

I can't be bothered! My life is already so full. A gipsy man giving me orders, having to obey his rules... Maybe even be beaten on the top of that [...] Erm, no, not in this age.

I've got my job. If I was married, the husband would not allow me to work. Then I wouldn't be able to walk around as much... No, I'm not into that, I'm not into that... I want to help people, I want a different life from that. I'm really not into that.



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LUISA, LATE 40S, ROMA, SINGLE

I didn't make any effort in finding the prince on his white horse. [...]

Sometimes I say I regret not having married because I'm no longer a young person and if I had married perhaps I'd have my children, my husband, and people who could renew me. And now, if I die, I don't leave anything behind.



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CATARINA, EARLY 30S, CAPE VERDEAN: MARIA OR MAGDALENA, NEVER BOTH AT THE SAME TIME

“Despite being an absolute feminist, umm, I never had imagined that to give our body, exclusively, regardless of emotional bonds, could lead us to so many little problems in terms of our conscience, of our mind. Because we are raised to be Maria or Magdalena – never both at the same time. And I remember that the first time, [...] though I consciously knew it would never be anything but hooking up and even if it would happen again it would still be about hooking up – I tried to attach to that person certain emotional features that would justify the ‘giving’ of my body. It is interesting to think about it now. [3 seconds] Very Simone de Beauvoir with her *Second Sex*.”.



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CATARINA, EARLY 30S, CAPE VERDEAN

“After turning 30, I already hear the 4th question and also the 5th , which nobody asks but everyone thinks. Umm, the 1st question, “have you finished your studies?”, the 2nd, “boyfriends?”, the 3rd, “when are you getting married?”. Now the 4th question is “so when are you having kids?” The 5th question, as a Spanish friend of mine would say, is “are you a dyke?”, but no one asks!”

“Based on the natural cycle of things, I should have had a boyfriend for some time, right? And we should be planning to get indebted for 40 years after buying a flat. And who knows, we should already be married or about to be married, and immediately after I should announce I was pregnant! That would be the ultimate happiness.”

“Everyone, ranging from the postman to the milkman, the father, the brother, everyone is obsessed with that bloody idea of being a married woman and having children. I mean, a cycle which was imposed thousands of years ago. And because of that it comes a time when you start playing based on that, right?”



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CATARINA, EARLY 30S, CAPE VERDEAN

Well, I am not looking for a prince. I am looking for someone who can go on completing me. It doesn't have to be one person. It can be several people in different moments of my life.

[...]

So there is this person missing, one who would fit, the missing piece in the puzzle. But then this person does not exist. Rather, there are several pieces of the puzzle. And then there are many puzzles that you need to fit, many objects, and then you like aspects of each of them, and then you can't mix them all up and make your own milkshake! [laughs]



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MARILYN, LATE 30S, BULGARIAN, MARRIED

“I knew it would be me to decide about my own body, not boys. And the argument ‘If you’d love me, you’d sleep with me’ was never an issue because it did not strike me as a condition for love. When I want may be different from when the boy wants. And actually my first erotic encounters were with women, with girls, not boys. Not sure why, really. Not sure whether this is because I am a little bit bisexual.”

“At some point I felt a relationship with a girl was safer than with a boy. Because I feel we’re equal. Whereas with boys, I was never sure, whether he was trying to humiliate me or seduce me and then leave. With girls I didn’t feel like that [...] and I never felt guilty. I enjoyed it very much.”



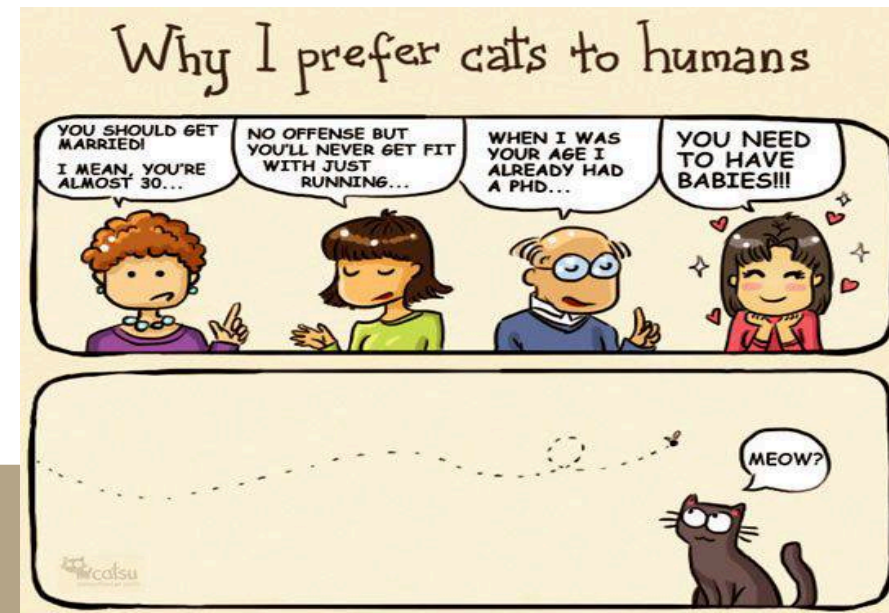
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MARILYN, LATE 30S, BULGARIAN, MARRIED

“For me it would not have been acceptable to carry on the relationship after learning he had a wife”

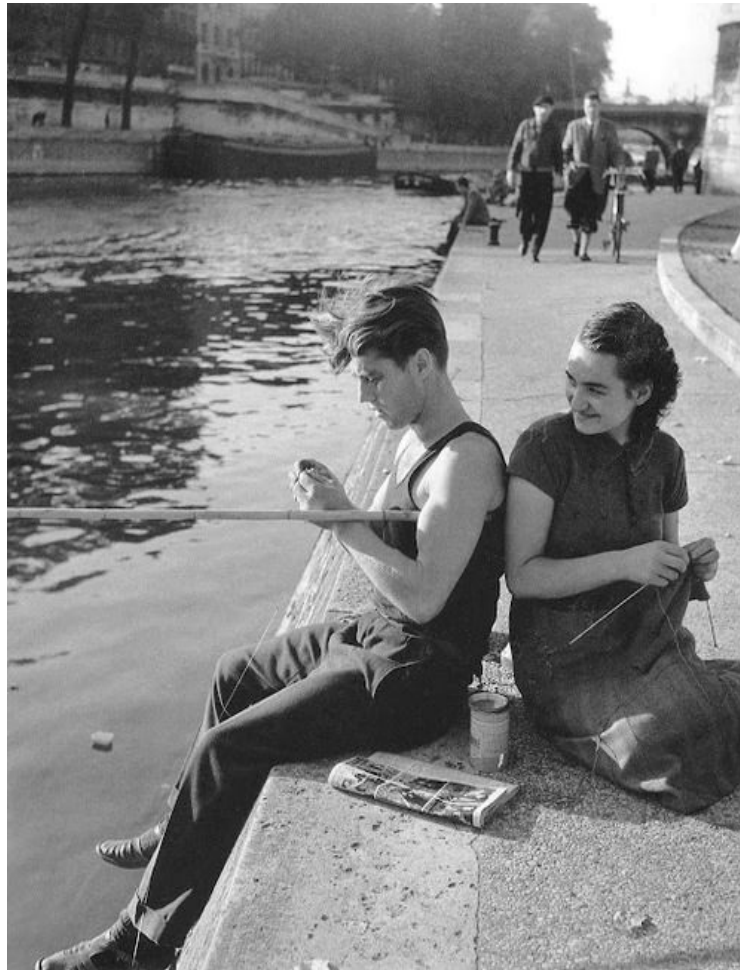
“There is a dominant view [amongst her women friends], which really annoys me and frustrates me: that a woman cannot and should not be alone. Cannot be single, or she’ll loose market value. [...] And so each of these women has her more or less happy relationship, in some cases rather unhappy, but they endure because they must. Because when you’re 32, 33, 34, 35 years old you can’t be on your own, the family will ask: ‘what about a boyfriend? When are you having kids?’. And so I get the feeling that these women accepted to be with someone because it’s what will look better in the picture, because it must be done so.”



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Pic: Robert Doisneau



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Pic: Heather Landis, Abyss of the Disheartened

SINGLE:
Is not a status, it's a word that describes a person who is strong enough to live and enjoy life without depending on others.



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It is a given that people should be able to love whom and how they want and if pairing off for any length of time is what appeals, then that's fine. But it's time that coupledness stopped being touted as the best option, an idea reinforced not just by state approval and resource allocation, but also by religion, the market, popular culture, assorted therapists and our own anxieties.

Resisting the consolidation of invidious forms of social exclusion, it's time to get beyond the notion that yoking together love, coupling, marriage and reproduction is the only way to achieve happiness. The scare stories about single people dying earlier or loneliness becoming a pandemic must be seen in the larger context of a social order that is hostile to non-couples and an economic order to which the collective good seems to be anathema. Our own imaginations – and hearts – can come up with better.



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Priyamvada Gopal, Is compulsory coupledness really the best way to live?, guardian.co.uk, 13/02/2013