

Chapter 21

Representations of Masculinities in Gaya Jiji's Film Named My Favorite Fabric

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ABSTRACT

Masculinity refers to the roles expected of men by gender ideology. Masculinity studies after 1990 revealed that masculinity cannot be taken as a universal subject. Another important concept in this study is orientalism. Orientalism generally refers to the West's point of view regarding the East. In Western narratives, Eastern women are generally depicted as oppressed heroes, and men as heroes who are always strong. However, alternative narratives reveal that different forms of femininity and masculinity can be seen in Eastern societies. In this study, a Syrian director's film named My Favorite Fabric is analyzed with a semiotic method within the framework of these concepts. When the representations of masculinity in the film are examined, it is seen that different forms of masculinity are constructed, and an alternative to the orientalist discourse is presented accordingly. It has been revealed that different variables are effective in the construction of masculinities.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sex refers to biological sex. Patriarchal societies based on the biological structure determine certain roles and behaviors they expect from men and women, depending on their sex. These expectations, defended with essentialist approach, are presented as norms that cannot be changed. The essentialist approach bases the roles and behaviors that shape social norms on the human nature. Even though the rules of these roles and behaviors of patriarchal societies, which have survived since the Early Neolithic Age, differ according to time and societies, the subjects of male domination, which make biology its basis, maintain the inequality between women and men and expect that women to be dependent on patriarchal authority. It can be argued that before the nineteenth century, individual struggle pioneers such as Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft laid the groundwork for struggles in the following

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centuries. From the second half of the nineteenth century, individual struggles began to turn into social struggles. The Victorian era, in which women were restricted through concepts such as chastity, honor and morality, went down in history as the period when the first steps were taken against increasing domination. In the Victorian era, when patriarchal norms surrounded women, rebellion against all norms was seen as the only solution and the struggle in this direction has begun to liberate not only women but also men. Described by Millett as a “sexual revolution”, this movement aims to abolish all institutions of patriarchy along with patriarchal ideology, to align polarized women and men on the basis of rights, and to upset the norms of the roles assigned to women and men. In this period, which is called the first wave of the feminist movement in the literature, some rights were obtained. However, the reactionary period that followed this period served to strengthen the patriarchy again (Millett, 2000: 62). The acceleration of left movements in the world towards the end of the 1960s brought the issue of women’s rights back to the agenda and this time focused on the specific problems of women. Feminists realized the necessity of a struggle independent of their leftist groups. This is also the period when feminism began to be studied in academia. In the first half of the twentieth century, both the feminist movement and the developing literature helped the academy with a strict patriarchal structure to gain new perspectives. In this period, the argument of the essentialist approach that gender roles stem from the nature of human beings was opened for discussion and it was determined that gender roles were a social construction. Stoller uses a concept that first appeared in his book *Sex and Gender*. The concept of gender, which is also in the title of the book, is a concept that reveals that gender is socially, culturally and psychologically constructed. Stoller states that the process of learning gender identity begins with learning that a person belongs to a gender. Gender roles determine the social position of women and men (1968: 9, 10). Contrary to the essentialist approach, the constructivist approach reveals that with the concept of gender, gender roles cannot be explained by the nature of human beings, that they are built and changed by societies in line with expectations and are also imposed.

Oakley argues that gender is defined by the social situation and is the sum of many qualities such as attitude, way of speaking, dress, topic choice in conversation (1985: 161). In the first phase of gender studies, the construction of female identity has been analyzed and femininity has been described as a universal identity, based on the qualities that Oakley mentioned and the male domination of women in patriarchal societies. The acceptance of femininity as a universal subject was criticized after 1990 with a postcolonial and poststructuralist approach. It was pointed out that while examining femininity in the studies in the first period, variables such as race, class, religion were ignored (Kandiyoti, 2011: 44, 45). Butler, author of *Gender Trouble*, a revolutionary book in gender studies, problematized the scope of the concepts of women and women. The concept of woman as the singular reduces femininity to a restricted identity by ignoring many personal characteristics. The concept of women, who are supposed to express an identity with common characteristics, is politically problematic. This concept cannot represent all women as claimed; because gender is discursively established under the influence of different variables in different dates and societies (Butler, 1999: 6). It has been determined that there are similarities as well as differences in the formation of female identity and the experiences of women in patriarchal societies. This determination also affected the studies of masculinity that developed in the period following the publication of Butler’s work in 1990. Studies on the construction of masculinity began after 1970. However, these studies have described a general masculinity by focusing on the difference between women and men. In addition, it has been found that the criteria determined by gender policies for men also put pressure on men (Hartley, 1974: 7-13). Masculinity is generally an identity that is expected to be built on the basis of physical, emotional, economic power, competition, conflict, success and gain. The roles

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