

Female identity in George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter¹

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Abstract

As a problematic concept, identity refers to versatile complexities in its definition and it is clear that there has been an explosion about searching the concept. The question of subjectivity together with its formation process has a great importance in the revelation of one's personality and in the representation of one's identity. It can be said that a psychoanalytically influenced feminism and cultural criticism shows itself as a result of this process. In this context, all kinds of cultural identity forms such as ethnic, racial, gender and woman etc. are suitable to be studied in terms of essentialist or anti-essentialist concept of identity. For Etienne Wenger, who is an educational theorist, the concept of identity is related with such terms like participation, non-participation, exclusion and inclusion. He claims that one's identity determines his/her ability or inability in terms of the meanings that shape his/her form of belonging. In George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter, Dorothy Hare is the main character in the novel and he is the clergyman's daughter living in a small village, Knype Hill, in the county of Suffolk. Although Dorothy performs good works, and cultivates good thoughts she has to regain her life and accept sameness in Foucauldian concept of identity. In the study, Dorothy's identity is analysed in terms of essentialist and anti-essentialist identity forms both in order to show her ability in her adaptation to society and to define her position and her problems of identity as a female in Britain in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Female, Identity, Essentialist, Anti-Essentialist, Participation, Non-Participation, Ability, Clergyman, Sameness.

1. Female identity in George Orwell's A Clergyman's Daughter

The question of identity has been a basic philosophical issue since ancient times and has reached a noteworthy position within the human and social sciences up to now. Philosophically thinking, identity is firstly defined to be the unity of a thing with itself and later it is seen as an act of mediating between object and subject in a Heideggerian context. For Heidegger, "the principle of identity presupposes the meaning of itself" (Heidegger, 2002:11).

People's positions determine their identities in the society and they try to identify themselves with their roles. Due to this, they have versatile identities parallel to their versatile roles as the members of different groups in the society and each individual has different personal features. Individuals go on living in the society according to the social structure of that society. Theory of identity tries to illuminate the relations between identities and their effect on people's behaviors, sensations, feelings and ideas. "An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (Burke & Stets, 2009:31).

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It is possible to mention about some perspectives in the explanation of theory of identity. Strictly speaking it can be said that essentialist and anti-essentialist perspectives determine the identity form of a person. Essentialism is perceived as a malign word by the anti-essentialists or constructionists. "Essentialism, it appears, has become a dirty word. To be an essentialist is to be positioned as theoretically naive, and blind to specify and difference" (Lloyd, 2005:57). In the Western philosophy, an essence is critically marked to be a natural kind. "Natural kinds are those to which terms and classifications refer when they are true and consistent in all possible worlds" (Fuchs, 200:12). Essentialism establishes a viewpoint depending on either/or separations and changeable separations in degree are not so important within this context. Another characteristic of essentialist perspective is polar opposites in broad contrast to gradations (Fuchs, 2001:13). "Essentialism is defined by the belief that the manifestations of being in a social identity category are inevitably tied to biologically determined aspects of that identity" (Nagoshi J., Nagoshi T Craig, Brzuzy, 2013:88). On the other hand, female identity appears as a problematic within the identity discussions with references to essentialist and anti-essentialist perspectives as well.

George Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter* is an experimental novel about Dorothy Hare who is a clergyman's daughter. The novel begins in Knype Hill, which is a small village. Dorothy doesn't have any sisters or brothers and his father is the Rector of St. Athelstan's. She is described in one of the rustic regions of England in the 1930s as a clergyman's daughter who does the church work all the time. She is traditional in traits. She is responsible for all kinds of work both in the church and outside the church like regular visits to the people in the village and shopping. She participates in the Sunday School, the Girl Guides, the Band of Hope and the Companionship of Marriage and the Mother's Union. Additionally, she has to endure his father's selfish decisions all the time. Men around her such as his father and her neighbour, Mr Warburton make her life more difficult. His father is depicted in the following way:

Probably no one who had ever spoken to the Rector for as long as ten minutes would have denied that he was a difficult kind of man. The secret of his almost unfailing ill humour really lay in the fact that he was an anachronism. He ought never to have been born into the modern world; its whole atmosphere disgusted and infuriated him (Orwell, 1964:19).

Another man who complicates Dorothy's life is Mr Warburton. He is one of the members of the parish and interested in Dorothy. Although he isn't a faithful person and doesn't go to church Dorothy enjoys his friendship and is affected by his sense of humour. Dorothy meets him at a tea party. He sits down next to her on the sofa and tries to assault her outrageously.

He was totally devoid of shame. It was perhaps his most outstanding characteristic. Having attempted to seduce her, and failed, he was quite willing to go on with the conversation as though nothing whatever had happened (Orwell, 1964:73).

Although Dorothy is horrified she goes on meeting Mr. Warburton and she is subjected to abuse in this way. She insists on meeting him and doesn't change her choice. She can't save herself from this kind of abuse because she enjoys his sarcastic wit. It can be said that she has a fixed essence with reference to essentialist concept of identity. Nobody relies on Mr Warburton indeed because his life is full of these kinds of scandals with several women. Due to this fact, Dorothy's friendship with Mr. Warburton is criticized by other people in the village:

People wondered sometimes how such a girl as Dorothy could consort, even occasionally, with such a man as Mr Warburton; but the hold that he had over the pious. It is a fact –you have only to look about you to verify it –that the pious and the immoral drift naturally together (Orwell, 1964:41).

According to Etienne Wenger (1999), people constitute their identities through the practices they join in, and identities are formed by persons' participations and non-participations to events. For him, "our relations to communities of practice thus involve both participation and non-participation, and our identities are shaped by combinations of the two" (Wenger, 1999:7). Dorothy has to come in contact with Mr. Warburton because he generally subscribes to church although he isn't pious. Thus, her identity is shaped by this kind of combination of both participation and non-participation to social practices. She doesn't want to join in his life as a darling but she wants to learn about him so that she participates in his life experience on the one hand, and she refuses to participate, on the other hand. In this case, non-participation becomes "an opportunity for learning" (Wenger, 1999:7) in Wengerian terms. In another case, Dorothy finds herself as a teacher in participation with little girls in Mrs Creevy's school. Despite of the fact that she is hateful Dorothy doesn't mind this:

She saw quite clearly that Mrs Creevy was an odious woman and that her own position was virtually that of a slave; but it did not greatly worry her. Her work was too absorbing, too all important (Orwell, 1964:194).

Dorothy is so innovative at first as a teacher and she is fond of the children and anxious to do her best for them. However, she gives up her innovative style easily when she is criticized by Mrs Creevy and she is ordered to follow the old-style teaching method and schedule practised by the previous teachers at school.

From now on, I'm going to have things done my way, not your way. Do you understand that?

'Yes' said Dorothy again (Orwell, 1964:208).

In this concept, it can be said that Dorothy shows a submissive characteristic with reference to the forms of identity. She is submissive to herself, to her father, to her cousin and to Mr Warburton. She obeys the rules without resistance. Despite of the fact that she knows Mr Warburton's evil side she goes on seeing her repeatedly. Thus, her relationship with Mr Warburton changes her life's direction from a decent position to an indecent position. He is described in the following way in the novel:

In appearance he was a fine, imposing-looking man, though entirely bald (he was at great pains to conceal this), and he carried himself with such a rakish air as to give the impression that his fairly sizeable belly was merely a kind of annexe to his chest. His age was forty-eight, and he owned to forty-four. People in the town said that he was a 'proper old rascal'; young girls were afraid of him, not without reason (Orwell, 1964:37).

One evening, Dorothy visits Mr Warburton after working for the parish play. After a vivid conversation, Mr Warburton accompanies her back home and he tries to kiss her to say good-bye. But, the town-gossip, a busy-body neighbour, Mrs Semprill notices the incident while she is looking out of her window. Unfortunately, this will have a devastating effect on the rest of her life.

After this meeting, she suffers from amnesia and doesn't remember anything. She is alone in London streets and has little money with her. While she is wandering in the streets she joins in a group of young people and goes hop-picking with them. Dorothy uses a nickname and she says her name is Ellen because she suffers from magnesia. She begins to live together with East Enders and gypsies in Kent. She endures living in misery and poverty. Her sense of endurance never changes. She has a static characteristic and this very unchanging side of her identity can be explained with reference to Diana Fuss' approach to essentialism. Fuss perceives essentialism something fixed and unchangeable. For her, "essentialism is classically defined as a belief in true essence—that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing" (Fuss, 2013:2). Dorothy submits and endures everything such as poverty, dirt and the lowest wages as she does in the church. She displays a permissive and fixed characteristic in her responses to the problems. It is clear that Dorothy is afraid of changing herself in her life style. She never changes her static pose towards life. Dorothy and Mr. Warburton discuss on this fact because Mr Warburton notices her anxiety easily and utters as such:

"You've a hopeful nature, he said. But you aren't afraid, by any chance, that I might convert you? The dog it was that died, you may remember" (Orwell, 1964:69).

Abuse that Dorothy is subjected to in different conditions doesn't have a satisfactory impression on her. Despite of the fact that she loses her faith to God at the end after her adventure in the poverty she never tells this anybody. She is deprived of the ability and power to resist against injustice. She easily gives up new practices and plans when she is menaced in each case. Due to this, her identity form cannot be explained in the anti-essentialist terms. On the contrary to essentialist system,

an anti-essentialist system prioritizes empowering the individual. An anti-essentialist system would be premised on the importance of giving individual women as much power as possible, to the greatest extent possible, to define the abuse they experience and decide how it should be addressed (Goodmark 2013:138).

In the following episodes of the novel, Dorothy reads a newspaper article on 'the mystery of the clergyman's daughter' while she is working in the fields in misery. When she sees Pippin Weekly, she remembers everything suddenly and sends a letter to the rector to help her. Unfortunately, his father doesn't reply her. Meanwhile, the hop-picking season ends and she goes to London. She is still in trouble because she needs a job and some money to go on living. She is refused by the rich when she knocks at the doors to find a job. But they don't rely on her because she has a good accent. Eventually, everybody thinks that she doesn't have a good story. Thereof, she has to stay in the library during the day and sleep outside at night. She has to beg for money, despairingly. As a female who is penniless Dorothy is always abused and scorned by the people in such a contemptuous way that everything is like a nightmare for her:

One evening she was knocked off, in company with Mrs McElligot and another woman whose name she did not know. They had been careless and begged off a nasty old lady with a face like a horse, who had promptly walked up to the nearest policeman and given them in charge (Orwell, 1964:166).

Culturally, in the great majority of the world, "women have less power and status than men. Women control fewer resources, perform more domestic work, receive lower pay, and are not equally represented in high-level administrative roles" (Salkind, 2008: 426). According to Alice

Eagle's social role theory, social roles are directly connected to gender differences (Eagly, 1987:9). Dorothy is described in her miserable life in London from a humiliating perspective. When it is understood that Dorothy is not guilty and it is just Mrs. Semprill's slander her father requests his relatives to find Dorothy and help her. Dorothy's cousin, sir Thomas Hare brings Dorothy to his house because he respects his family name more than everything. Dorothy is abused and scorned by him, too. She is excluded in the family because a lady who has a bad fame is not valuable at all for her cousin:

‘What, my cousin is she?’ said Sir Thomas. ‘So she is, by Jove! Well, look here, Blyth, what I mean to say –it’s about time we got hold of the damn’ girl and locked her up somewhere (Orwell, 1964:170).

By the help of Sir Thomas Dorothy begins to work as a teacher in a small private school. But she is insulted by the owner of the school, Mrs Creevy because she is greedy, strict and pitiless. “Because of the status of differences in society, women had to adopt to roles with less power...” (Salkind,2008:426). Dorothy has to stay in this school as she doesn't have another chance and her status has already been disrupted as a result of Mrs Semprill's malicious gossip. Therefore, Dorothy has to adopt all kinds of roles as a worker in the field, as a beggar in London streets, as a teacher at Mrs Creevy's school, as a daughter of a clergyman and as a female during her degrading life period in the novel.

Although Dorothy tries to improve teaching conditions the parents oppose new perspectives in education and Mrs Creevy obliges her to do whatever the parents wish. That's why she obeys Mrs. Creevy's rules and does what the parents expect from her. She gives up teaching new subjects because she doesn't want to lose her job. Thus, it becomes impossible for her to transform herself. “ In modern period man's experience to establish himself needs to gather all differences or dispersions in the self in order not to put forward just one side of identity” for Foucault (Foucault, 1989:359). Foucault explains identity in terms of ‘sameness’ with references to normative categorization and the process of individualization. In his discussion, he sees identity something restrictive and limiting. Foucault holds little regard for ‘sameness’ and emphasizes the importance of transformation of identity or self- transformation. Devotion to a specific identity for Foucault restrains the probability for change (Foucault, 1989:344, 359 & MacLoren, 2002:120-122). But Dorothy has to adhere herself to Mrs. Creevy' rules in order to be able to earn money and she can't change anything. It is a kind of essentialist attitude when it is thought in terms of identity forms. Essentialism is the “mode of thought that defines individual experience as secondary to an essence. Essentialism assigns essences to people and/or experiences as a means of defining and explaining them, either through science or philosophy, religion or politics, the assumption being that people and objects have an essential or inherent nature that can be discovered” (Hook, 2004:306).

Finally, the novel comes to a close when Dorothy is dismissed by Mrs. Creevy. Mrs. Creevy sees her school like a trading establishment and finds a teacher whom she will pay less money. When Dorothy becomes penniless and homeless again Mr Warburton comes to school and brings her back to the Knype Hill and proposes marriage. However, Dorothy doesn't want to marry and refuses his proposal of marriage. She prefers to return back to her old-style life as a clergyman's daughter as Mrs Sempril has to leave the Kype Hill. She is responsible for church work and his father's service once again. The villagers behave very kindly to her because they feel guilty of having thought malevolently of her. Life is the same for her and she goes on living in the same

way as before. She adheres herself to living in this identity form as 'a clergyman's daughter'. Consequently, it is clear that Dorothy has a fixed identity type because she never changes in different stages of her life from misery to a middle-class life. She decides to return back her life before amnesia:

I shall go on with it, just the same as before. It's what I'm most used to. Besides, Father needs my help. He can't afford a curate, and the work's got to be done (Orwell, 1964:244).

Hence, her identity form is said to be far from anti-essentialist perspective. Foucault warns against the adherence to one identity to refrain from 'sameness'. For him, "the relationships must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation. Foucault's reluctance to advocate identity stems from his view that identity is formed through the regularity apparatus that defines subject individuals" (MacLoren, 2002:122).

In this concept, Dorothy's never changing traits and attitudes are possible to be interpreted within the frame of essentialist form of identity because she never gives up working in the church as an assistant and daughter of a clergyman and living in her father's house and in the church. As she has to be permissive and protect her own self and identity from the effect of unknown her attitude can be framed within the concept of 'sameness' in Foucauldian terms. She confesses her thought about differences on her habits after amnesia. To be seen as the same by the people is a fixed characteristic and she adheres herself to this purpose even in such a case that she has noticed a few changes in her habits due to her loss of faith:

Yes, there would be changes in her habits; but most of them would be secret ones (Orwell, 1964:253).

For Dorothy, it is confident to be the same towards life and people around her, and hence it comes to a conclusion that 'sameness' is a dominant characteristic of her identity in terms of essentialism. She does not want to change her marital status either despite of Mr Warburton's marriage proposal. It is clear that she intently prefers to show herself in the same position all the time in an essentialist attitude:

Perhaps it's better –less selfish –to pretend one believes even when one doesn't, than to say openly that one's an unbeliever and perhaps help turn other people into unbelievers too (Orwell, 1964:244).

In fact, "essentialism is the idea that our identities are somehow fixed and unchangeable that specific physical and social facts about who we are (such as gender, class and race) come to determine our identities (Duncan, Bowman, Naidos, Pilay, Fooj, 2007:7-29).

Despite of everything Dorothy is still untouched and she isn't aware that she is abnormal. She is sexually cold because she remembers the love scenes between her father and her mother: "though her sexual coldness seemed to her natural and inevitable, she knew well enough how it was that it had bugun" (Orwell, 1964:77). For Fuss, "essentialism can be located in appeals to a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untained (though perhaps repressed) by a patriarchal order. It can also be read in the accounts of universal female oppression, the assumption of a totalizing symbolic system which subjugates all women everywhere, through history and across cultures (Fuss, 2013:2). In this concept, Dorothy

subjugates all kinds of oppression and can't succeed in resisting the oppression on her and changing her life style as a female identity. It means that social and physical facts have determined her identity.

As a last, it is understood that Orwell portrays Dorothy according to the essentialist thought which is "something that a person inherently has and is something that endures throughout a person's lifetime and does not change" (Robins, 2005:172-175). Thus, Orwell writes of a world creeping in misery in the representation of Dorothy trying to participate in versatile social interactions both as an individual who has to lose her respectable life and has to live in poverty as a member of inferior class on the one hand, and as a female identity who refuses to change and confirms sameness in essence and in appearance during her individuation process in Foucauldian terms.

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