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Sexing the Alien: A Posthuman Hermeneutics of the Embodied Self in Lisa Tuttle's "Wives"*

ÖĞR. GÖR. **RIZA ÇİMEN****

Abstract

Dominant discourses seek to take hold of every epistemic framework through ubiquitous attempts to regulate quotidian experiences and routines. Ranging from language to culture, from gender to political organizations, disciplinary practices constitute a complex web of relations in hierarchical structures and produce specific identities and situations for subjects to inhabit. As critical scholarship in body studies has shown, body is among the central focuses of dominant discourses in that a regulated experience of corporeality secures, as a site of ideological inscription, the continuity of governing paradigms. Lisa Tuttle's "Wives" calls for a reformulation of the ethics of embodiment and explores how anthropomorphic demarcations are imprinted upon the genderless bodies of extra-terrestrial beings. In this feminist narrative featuring the generic qualities of science fiction, the heteronormative register of the anthropocentric thought finds a new space (a different planet) to actualize its political agenda. The story interrogates the functioning of the humanist set of beliefs against the background of the precarious relation of ideology to embodied subjectivity. As resistance is an immanent constituent of power relations, the nonhuman inhabitants of the colonized planet somehow manage to survive upon being captured by men; nevertheless, this happens at the expense of being reduced to what Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life," a way of living that is stripped of its potentials and qualities. This study offers a posthuman hermeneutics of the ideological embodiment in Lisa Tuttle's story and seeks to question the precarious continuity between ideology and the body.

Keywords: Lisa Tuttle, Wives, anthropomorphic embodiment, bare life, posthuman ethics

UZAYLININ CİNSİYETİ: LISA TUTTLE'IN "WIVES" ADLI ÖYKÜSÜNDE BEDENLENMİŞ BENLİĞİN İNSANÖTESİ YORUMU

Öz

Egemen söylem, günlük deneyimleri ve rutinleri düzenlemeyi amaçlayan yaygın girişimlerle her epistemik yapıya hâkim olmaya çalışır. Kültürden dile, cinsiyetten siyasal organizasyonlara kadar değişiklik gösteren disiplin uygulamaları hiyerarşik bir yapıda çok yönlü iktidar ilişkileri teşkil eder ve öznelerin yaşamaları için belli koşulları üretir. Beden alanındaki eleştirel çalışmaların da gösterdiği gibi beden hâkim söylemin temel hedeflerinden biridir; zira ideolojik bir yazım sahası olması itibariyle, düzene sokulmuş bir bedensellik deneyimi hâkim paradigmanın

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** Orta Doğu Teknik Ün., Yabancı Diller YO, Temel İngilizce B., rizacimen@yahoo.com, Orcid: 0000-0002-8074-9155

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devamlılığını sağlar. Lisa Tuttle'ın "Wives" ("Zevceler") adlı kısa hikâyesi bedenleşme etiğini merkeze alarak insanbiçimci sınırların dünya dışı varlıkların cinsiyetsiz bedenlerine nasıl işlendiğine odaklanır. Bilim-kurgu türünün özelliklerini taşıyan bu feminist anlatıda, insan-merkezli söylemin heteronormatif yapısı politik gündemini gerçekleştirebileceği yeni bir gezegen keşfeder. Hikâye, ideoloji ve bedenlenmiş öznellik arasındaki tehlikeli ilişki çerçevesinde insan-merkezli rejimin işleyişini sorgular. İktidar ilişkilerinde direniş içkin olduğu için, sömürgeleştirilen gezegenin yerli halkı bir biçimde hayatta kalmayı başarır; ancak bu hayatta kalma hali, Giorgio Agamben'in "çıplak yaşam" – ihtimallerden ve nitelikten arındırılmış bir yaşama biçimi - olarak adlandırdığı konuma indirgenmek pahasına mümkün olur. Bu çalışma Lisa Tuttle'ın "Zevceler" adlı hikâyesindeki ideolojik bedenlenme dinamiklerine insanötesi bir yorum getirir ve ideolojiyle beden arasındaki tehlikeli devamlılığı sorgulamayı hedefler.

Anahtar sözcükler: Lisa Tuttle, Zevceler, insanbiçimci bedenleşme, çıplak yaşam, insanötesi etik

INTRODUCTION

Science fiction (hereafter SF) envisions alternative worlds with an imaginative take on human potential for building geographies of alterity beyond habitual assumptions. In its attempts to "investigat[e] habits of thought, including conceptions of gender" (Attebery, 2002, p. 1), SF provides an opportunity to test various hypotheses formulated around the primacy of the *present*, the privilege of human agency, and the so-called superiority of the epistemic organizations catering to the needs of dominant discourses. Focusing on the generic characteristics of SF, David Seed (2011) states that the genre "constantly interrogates the limits of identity and the nature of difference" (p. 27). To put it in other words, SF, by transgressing the liminal space between common perceptions and unexplored modes of being, brings the human reality into contact with various modalities of "*ontological alterity*" (Gomel, 2014, p. 26, my emphasis). The unsettling aspects of such encounters in turn produce a series of onto-political gaps in over-confident narratives of human existence and identity, thereby disrupting the widespread assumptions that rely on ideologically constructed definitions of the human and heading towards developing an understanding of the "posthuman condition" (Pepperell, 2003).

Alien narratives are among the most effective tools for exploring how the familiar conditions of human existence can be put to test with the help of semiotic contributions that alien imageries can make. Within literary and cinematic constructions of alien worlds, "difference", Roberts notes, is "frequently described through a quasi-allegorical displacement of the alien on to other countries and planets, following a strategy of encounter whereby readers are encouraged to re-examine their self-conceptions as a result of confrontation with the Other" (2011, p. 27). This "strategy" evidently prompts a reflection on the identificatory processes by which the Self is constituted by a series of confrontations with the Alien. The implications of such paradoxical yet well-directed assessments might seem at odds with what the genealogy of the genre reveals, especially when it is generally thought to be "a male territory" (Lefanu, 1989, p. 2) that takes much of its inspiration from the dualistic idea of the rational Man in conflict with the irrational forces of Cosmos. However, such

prospects also conceive the encounter between the Self and its ontological others in SF as a new space of discussion which could help to imagine a novel conception of what it means to be human. The inherent plurality of voices that SF projects makes the genre, as Sherryl Vint argues, "particularly suited to exploring the question of the posthuman because it is a discourse that allows us to concretely imagine bodies and selves otherwise, a discourse defined by its ability to estrange our commonplace perceptions of reality" (2007, p. 19). Answering the question of difference in SF then could be very much related to the ontological implications that arise from the crossover between SF as a generic set of values and posthumanism as a critical project of non-binaristic thinking.

Through this intersection between SF and posthuman politics of difference, feminist science fiction claims a visibility for the repressed realities of women's embodied subjectivities. Related to such a view, Jenny Wolmark (1988) claims "feminist science fiction is at odds with the whole history and development of SF as a genre" (p. 48). Accordingly, SF initially developed as a kind of popular fiction which was "dominated by writers and readers with a knowledge of science and engineering and a commitment to the idea that technology is the motor of social change and progress" (p. 48). The idea that science is an inherently "progressive and civilizing force" produced "repetitive and formulaic" patterns, which ultimately reproduced "the most conservative assumptions about social and sexual relations" (p. 48). Radically transforming the ways its subject matter is handled, feminist SF emerged in the 1960s as a nodal point between the "New Wave" (or the Second Wave) feminist politics and contemporary fictional strategies. Addressing a more "heterogeneous audience", new narrative structures with a feminist perspective on SF attempted to "shift the focus […] from the conventional expectations about social and sexual relations that are built into such narratives and towards alternative and non-patriarchal assumptions" (p. 51), thereby "subverting the dominant ideology of gender" (p. 52). Ideologically constructed definitions of gender relations thus came to be scrutinized in ways that at first sight seem pleasurable modes of reading but, on a closer look, offer critical ways for assessing women's experiences. Therefore, the patriarchal binary of Man vs. Woman is disrupted within fictional landscapes where the privilege attributed to the former category is challenged with a new emphasis on the materiality of women's oppression under hegemonic discourses. Thus also arrives the entanglement between feminist politics of difference and posthuman critique of humanism.

In his important book *Alien Chic* (2004), Neil Badmington states that alien narratives mostly depend on a set of simple binary oppositions such as human versus inhuman. According to him, "Aliens are not just entirely different from humans; they are at once an enemy to be feared, hated, and destroyed" (p. 3). In a similar vein, Kelly Hurley (1995) notes "liminal entities" like aliens inspire "body horror" narratives which work "to disallow human specificity at every level, to evacuate the 'human subject' in terms of bodily, species, sexual, and psychological identity" (p. 220). What is common to both views is that alien forms of embodiment dislocate the centrality of human corporeal form. For Hurley, in body horror narratives "traditional gender roles are consistently inverted" (p. 213); anatomical differences help to produce a new economy of relations

beyond human psychic formations. Alternative embodiments create a "confusion of tentatively recognizable forms", which in turn suggests that "the 'human species' is no longer viable as an integral and distinct category" (p. 219). As such, these narratives show the potential to build a posthuman economy of differences where the generative power of bodily and cultural particularities address a further shift in understanding the position of Man within an ever-changing assemblage of bodies, things, and non-dualistic relations. SF in this sense bears the imprints of a posthumanist mode of thinking.

The alignment between feminism, SF, and posthuman critical theory has been assessed by a number of scholars (Halberstam and Livingston, 1995; Haran, 2006; Hollinger, 2009; Gomel, 2011; Yaszek and Ellis, 2016; Braidotti, 2016; Koistinen and Karkulehto, 2018; Hay, 2019). Now an established field with an immensely diversified canon of its own, feminist SF has been for decades interrogating the trenchant legacy of humanism (thus patriarchy) which, though in various forms, always finds expression as masculine supremacy. Lisa Tuttle's "Wives" ([1979] 2006) offers a chance to explore the limitations of humanism imposed on women's embodied experiences by putting an emphasis on the ideological construction of subjecthood. The narrative revolves around the ethics of embodiment and questions the ways by which anthropomorphic demarcations are imprinted upon the genderless bodies of extra-terrestrial beings. In this feminist narrative featuring the generic qualities of science fiction, the heteronormative register of the anthropocentric thought finds a new planet to actualize its political agenda. With strong implications resonating with the gender system that women are subjected to, the story questions the functioning of the humanist regime in the context of the precarious relation between ideology and embodied subjectivity by transliterating such 'worldly' concerns into an alien setting on a different planet. In its reflection of aliens' (and by the same token women's) disempowerment under the hegemonic forces of humanism, the story critically responds to the vision of embodied selfhood that conforms to masculinist ideologies where only a limited set of bodily relations are gratified instead of viewing the corporeal experience as a signifier of plenitude. Whereas alien bodies are "miraculously different […] in scent, texture, and taste" (Tuttle, 2006, p.192), men, in their Odyssean ventures in a distant planet, import the worldly concerns of patriarchy and seek to build a strictly heteronormative regime, much to the dismay of aliens, their relatively monistic take on meaning in general, and their "old knowledge and […] old abilities" (p.194). Through such contestations between different epistemic models, the narrative reflects the convergence between feminism and science fiction as well as "function[s] disruptively within a masculinist popular genre" (Wolmark, 1994, p. 3).

Published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1979), the story has been held in high esteem in feminist science fiction canon and frequently anthologized. Feminist SF collections such as *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women* (1995), *Daughters of Earth: Feminist Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (2006), and *Feminist Philosophy and Science Fiction: Utopias and Dystopias* (2007) all feature the text. However, despite the evident fact that the story holds an important place in the canon of feminist SF, it is hard to say it has been the subject of much critical discussion. To my knowledge, there have been two studies devoted to the analysis of the text. Cathy Hawkins's essay

"The Universal Wife: Exploring 1970s Feminism with Lisa Tuttle's "Wives" (2006) accompanies the story in *Daughters of Earth* and specifically focuses on the junction between the story and the feminist theory of the 1970s, namely the Second Wave Feminism. Hawkins offers an incisive analysis of how "Wives" mirrors the key ideas proposed by the second wave feminist movement. Consulting a rich array of sources and names ranging from Gayle Rubin to Johanna Russ, from Kate Millet to Shulamith Firestone and Ursula K. Le Guin, Hawkins sees "direct parallels between [aliens'] experiences and the real-world concerns of early second-wave feminism" (212). The essay draws a diverse body of analogies between the rich fabric of the story and the theoretical, political, and cultural atmosphere of the 1970s as well as historical events such as the Vietnam War. In its tackling the issue of women's oppression under the hegemony of patriarchy, Hawkins's work does an admirable job. However, the second wave feminism, despite the considerable achievement it represented, has lost impetus along the course of critical theory's journey into more pluralistic modalities. Now that "Theory is back!", as Rosi Braidotti puts it, the existing literature offers new challenges to face, new modes of reading to follow on, and new perspectives to be gained. Therefore, I believe the story and its vibrant characters and spaces offer a chance to follow new tracks in critical path.

With an emphasis on how the story "critiques the tendency to relate monstrosity to women's reproductive functions," Zeynep Z. Atayurt (2014, p. 84) studies the ways in which patriarchal assumptions of female embodiment become materialized through rigid corporeal systems that operate across a wide range of practices. Through the end of her paper, Atayurt highlights the relevance of Donna Haraway's "cyborg" in understanding the erosion of human-nonhuman boundaries and makes a keen observation on the story's posthuman potentials. In a similar vein, this paper aims to present a re-reading of "Wives" through the contemporary lens of posthumanism. By mainly focusing on the ideological embodiment that the extra-terrestrial subjects have to abide by, the critical analysis of this paper interrogates and lays bare the working mechanisms of the humanist thought and its accompanying forms of oppression in bodily terms.

ALIEN BODIES HUMAN MASKS

In *Science Fiction, Alien Encounters, and the Ethics of Posthumanism* (2014), Elana Gomel addresses the similarity between postcolonial concepts and SF's adoption of themes of oppression. Alluding to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967) and the concept mimicry, Gomel entitles one of her chapters as "Human Skins, Alien Masks" to show that postcolonial undertakings on hybridity might shed a light on SF as well. However, where most allegorical readings of "mimicry" and "hybridity" fail to highlight the cultural assimilation promoted through humanist assumptions, Gomel interrogates whether "SF […] inadvertently strengthen[s] another myth: that of universal human nature" (p. 118). "Wives" echoes similar concerns. The compulsory mimicry that the aliens of the story have to maintain offer the reader with a chance to interrogate the functioning of an essentialist "anthropo-corporeal" regime with respect to the precarious relation of ideology to embodied subjectivity. While the narrative at first sight seems like a straightforward account of hegemony and resistance, its significance lies not only in its allegorical representation of

power struggles but also in its potential to show how the basic assumptions of the humanist discourse and its corporeal expectations can find expressions in nonhuman contexts. The story is set on an alien planet where men have mostly wiped out an alien civilization. Some of the aliens survive by serving as wives to human husbands despite the fact that they do not have a concept of gender. They wear a skinsuit, put on a heavy makeup, and use strong perfumes to hide their authentic shape, mask their bodily scents, and appear as women. As common within the long lineage of monster stories where the monstrous other with inhuman corporeal qualities are coerced into gratifying human morphology, the colonized aliens are not allowed to reproduce. Susie, an alien wife, wants to rebel and return to the old ways of their civilization, but the other wives resist her as their priority is survival. In the end, Susie is killed by the other members of her community in a cannibalistic ritual since her resistance poses a threat to the remaining alien existence on the planet.

As the short glimpse into the story reveals, body is the main site of meaning-making for both the humans and the aliens: it is a site of ideology where the human hegemony inscribes itself; it is also an object of cannibalistic practice functioning as a defence mechanism for the aliens. It is a semiotic mediator through which the self finds expression to relate to the material world. While organic, alien morphology is fundamentally different from that of the humans; with their extra arms, peculiar odour, and most importantly, androgynous (or ambisexual) gender economy, aliens mark a radical break from human embodiment and its "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980). Considering that feminist SF as a generic mode "challenges the notion of a natural heterosexuality" (Lefanu, 1989, p. 71), through androgynous alien figures this challenge intensifies in the story. Androgyny, Carolyn Heilbrun (1973) explains, is "a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes and the human impulses expressed by men and women are not rigidly assigned.... Androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals" (p. x). "Based on uniting of contradictions" (Annas, 1978, p. 150), androgyny as "plenitude" (Attebery, 2002, p. 139) suggests an undoing of the dualist gender economy where human subjects are forced into an antagonistic relationship between two modes of self-expression. Being an "impossible referent," as Francette Pateau (1986, p. 63) puts forth, androgyny unlocks a considerable potential for a posthumanist understanding of gender.

This aspect of the story offers a posthuman reading of the embodied self because the entanglement of power, resistance, and subjective experience become concretized along the androgynous corporeality of the alien population. Sexuality plays an important role in pointing out the androgynous –and more egalitarian- dimension of alien existence. When two alien wives, Susie and Doris, strip off the skintight that bars them "from sensation, freedom and pleasure," they find a chance to be "partners, not strangers, as they explored and exulted in their flesh" (Tuttle, 2006, p.193). Such sexual intercourse offers the couple "a feast, an orgy of life after a season of death" (p.192). The evident emphasis on the vitalistic affluence that alien embodiment stimulates holds out critical possibilities for probing into how the body can be read as potentially articulating a non-dualistic, relational, fluid, and in turn, posthumanist sense of engagement with the self, its socio-biological realities, and the environment it is enmeshed within. In this vein,

Patricia MacCormack (2011) argues that "The body…is the foundation and the site of the event of the posthuman encounter" (p. 1). Relationality, which is one of the key aspects of the posthuman moment, is possible through ethical encounters mediated by a productive movement between a materially embodied subjectivity and a wide array of possibilities that contribute to the emergence of further relations and becomings. The dynamic encounter between the human and nonhuman forms of embodiment in this sense could envision an alternate world where the existing (humanist) paradigm might be replaced by a more inclusive model of thinking with a pluralistic take on embodied experiences. Susie and Doris's sexual intercourse, where they appear as equal partners, exemplifies this non-binaristic perspective. Sexual intercourse, for the alien characters, is not an instance of domination and subservience but a "true act in all its meaning" (Tuttle, 2006, p.193). Such posthuman egalitarianism hints at a monistic ontology as it resurfaces in Susie's rejoicing of a spider's nesting in a sofa; "It was time for building nests and cocoons, she [thinks] happily, time for laying eggs and planting seeds" as she is well aware that "the spider was driven by the same force that drove her" (pp.190-192). Alien sexuality and its biological and cultural reflections in Susie's life experiences showcase the difference between humanist insistence on dichotomies and Susie's monistic celebration of differences.

However, "Wives" also suggests the loss of this potential renders the heteronormative gender economy an ideological construction which is at odds with the biological, social, cultural, and more importantly, subjective realities of alien existence. To put it simply, men cannot welcome bodily differences, and for that, they initiate a destructive project for homogenizing corporeal differences. The patriarchal/humanist impulse to gender and anthropomorphize the alien subjects clearly has a long history, one that is replete with diverse forms of violence committed to valorise an essentialist and universal idea of human identity. With this in mind, the demise of marginalized bodies under violent regimes, like the continually retreating aliens in "Wives," echoes the concept of "docile bodies" formulated by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977). According to Foucault, bodies under modern forms of power are rendered docile through a web of arrangements which removes the "deviant" capacity of the subject by socializing the body as a nexus of relations taking effect across rigid corporeal expectations. Gender is a "key economy of relations" where subjects are "interpellated" as perpetuators of a body regime. In Susan Bordo's words, hegemonic discourses ensure that bodies are "trained, shaped and impressed with the prevailing forms of … masculinity and femininity" (2003, p. 165-6). In a similar vein, the aliens in the story are made part of a stringent corporeal regime in order to cater to the hegemonic human morphology that male desire relates to; in a way, they are expected perform as "docile bodies." Overwhelmed by the restrictions of such a disciplinary system, Susie thinks that she is not what she used to be; she is "something else now, a 'wife', created by man in the image of something [she has] never seen, something called 'woman'" (Tuttle, 2006, p. 194). Apart from saluting Simone de Beauvoir's famous proposition that "One is not born a woman, but becomes one", Susie's self-questioning addresses her own subjection not as a simple matter of discourse but as a material reality in touch with a series of repetitive cultural practices that take much of their cue from patriarchal discourses of gender. The skintight she has to wear, which is a "plentiful" (p. 194)

technology of incarceration, ensures that she appears as a woman and remains within the heteronormative circle of the humanist gender economy by concealing her bodily differences such as extra arms. This corporeal regime does not rely on consent; it is exercised through coercion. For this reason, Susie feels "the skintight punished her muscles" (p. 190) since it is both symbolically and physically designed to do so. As Atayurt notes, "the skintight represents the captive and enslaved position of the wives, a reminder of their subservient position to their colonizers" (2014, p. 85). In other words, the skintight becomes a metaphor for the centrality of human exceptionalism and the "docility" of subjugated aliens, which in turn severs the possibility of an ethical relationship between the two subject positions.

A posthumanist understanding of embodiment underpins the significance of corporeal potential for further connectivity. Halberstam and Livingston (1995) state that "Posthuman bodies are not slaves to master-discourses but emerge at nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse, and discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message, context" (p. 2). As opposed to such a pluralistic conception of embodiment, the humanist body regime in the story functions through a strictly binaristic logic, a deep seated "us vs. them" formulation. The discourse of "humans contra aliens" is so powerful that the extra-terrestrial subjects are alienated from their own material existence, which is evident in such passages:

> [Susie] caught sight of herself in the mirror over the dressing table: her sharp teeth were bared, and she looked like a wild animal, bound and struggling… She looked down at her dead white body, feeling distaste. She felt despair at the sight of her small arms, hanging limp, thin and useless in the hollow below her ribs. She began to massage them with her primary fingers, and after several minutes, the pain began, and she knew they weren't dead yet. (Tuttle, 2006, p. 190)

The humanist project of colonization codifies specific norms of embodiment upon the alien body at the cost of mutilating its natural form. By attributing a new structure to the corporeal integrity of the subject, the dominant discourse offers a detrimental model for the flux of relations between the self and its embodied materiality. In this context, physical pain caused by the skintight is both a physical and a symbolic mediator between human morphology and alien subjectivity. As physical pain is the sole sensation in this process of becoming, any posthuman chances for further relations between the aliens and humans, between the aliens and their planet, or between the humans and the colonized planet are missed. "Posthuman ethical body," MacCormack argues, "need…only and always connectivities" (2011, p. 6); however, the entrenched dichotomy between the 'rational' human body and the 'irrational' alien morphology hinders the realization of such ethical togetherness.

The rhetoric of the omnipotent masculine is the main drive behind the erasure of alien subjectivities. Within the dialectics of masculine identity formation, the aliens are construed as the "specular image" for re-constituting a sense of humanness and maleness. A considerable amount of 'image-making' exercises is involved in the specularization of the aliens through corporeal regulations such as an overuse of cosmetics and plastic surgery. "Nervous about being displaced by one of the other wives", Doris struggles to keep her position as a wife by adhering to the

expectations of men: "her three breasts carefully bound and positioned to achieve the proper, double-breasted effect. Gaily patterned and textured stockings covered her silicone-injected legs, and she tottered on heels three centimetres high. Her face was carefully painted, and she wore gold bands on neck, wrists and fingers" (p. 191). The main objective of such practices is clearly related to men's desire for a gender system where unfamiliar subjectivities are integrated into the familiar sexual semiosis of the human civilization. Through such semiotic reconstructions, men are able to transform the alien setting into a 'heterozone' of human primacy into which the dualistic gender system of humanism is imported for the well-being of absolute patriarchy.

Such cosmetic procedures also recall Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytically oriented analysis of the unilateral relationship between patriarchal gaze and the female body. Mulvey claims that within the domain of images, women stand as the ones "to be looked at" while men are the "bearer of the look":

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle. (1989, p. 62)

The hierarchy in specular relations works against women, in this case, the aliens. Their objectification by the male gaze provides the men with on the one hand voyeuristic pleasures and on the other hand a sense of self through which they can identify themselves with. In other words, the human males can find both pleasure and ontological security in the corporeal regime they build through large-scale investments in specular relations.

This line of argument with traces of psychoanalysis has received widespread attention within feminist criticism. The tension between female bodily plenitude and patriarchal norms of embodiment has been frequently surveyed under the Freudian concept of "the fear of castration." Barbara Creed, for example, in her seminal *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993), argues that "All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (p. 1). Popular myths abound with images of female monstrosity such as Medusa and Sirens. However, the ever-presence of the figure of the monstrous feminine, especially in art works, "speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity" (p. 7), which means an analysis of female difference with regard to its 'monstrous' appearance has much to do with the Freudian notion of "castration crisis" (p. 7). Creed goes on to argue, "man's fear of castration […] led him to construct another monstrous phantasy – that of woman as castrator" (p. 7), which has ultimately paved the way for the violence committed against women. Following this mode of thinking, the tension between men and aliens in "Wives" has much to say about the fear of castration in male psyche. With their extra arms which possibly evoke a virile phallic imagery, aliens and their overreaching sense of empowerment activate the entrenched fears underneath the male consciousness. In the words of Atayurt, "the wives' anatomically different physique, arguably, arouses the husbands' fear and fascination; that is to say, by moulding them into a form that is familiar to them (as humanlike wives), they eliminate

the possible danger of the unfamiliar" (2014, p. 85). From a posthuman perspective, the bodily plenitude of the repressed aliens (like women) is eliminated by the privileged (hu)man in order to establish a unified sense of masculine self with psychic integrity. The castration crisis underlying the formation of the male psyche results in a symbolic inability to acknowledge *other* agencies as simply *different* rather than inferior, and this in turn drives the colonizers to commit violent acts which, socio-symbolically, counter-castrate the alien 'intruder'. In this context, the posthuman opportunity to "imagine bodies and selves otherwise," as Sherryl Vint argues (2007, p.19), is missed along the psychic crisis of men.

BARE LIFE IN DOMESTIC SPACE

Human interventions in symbolic spaces are not limited to the alien body; colonial architecture in the landscape also addresses an economy of relations that emphasizes the primacy of human agency. When Susie desires sexual intercourse with Doris, she feels "shy and a little frightened" since "it would be wrong to mate [in the settlement] built by man, wrong and dangerous" (Tuttle, 2006, p. 192). Susie thinks "they must go somewhere else, somewhere they could be something other than wives for a little while, and follow their own natures without reproach" (p. 192). The inherent fear in this need for escape suggests that, although men are absent due to their ongoing campaign, their disciplinary power is still effective over the native inhabitants. This is because the human settlement contains such symbolic structures as human houses which appear to Susie as "alien artefacts" (p. 191).

The house, Gaston Bachelard explains in *The Poetics of Space* (1964), is an experiential site where subjects acquire a primary sense of consciousness. It is "our first universe" (p. 4), a place of belonging which projects "the topography of our intimate being" (p. xxxvi). However, while Bachelard's phenomenological study of the house shows topophilic inclinations to focus primarily on intimate values of home, in the domestic context where alien subjects are moulded into humanlike forms, the house as a symbolic space acquires a rather negative meaning as it is tinged with a sense of colonial mentality. Since the house means nothing more than an "alien artefact" to the colonized subjects, it functions as the extension of the regime of incarceration that human technologies like skintights practice. Because of such reasons, Susie and Doris travel to "the far northern edge of the human settlement … a very old place… They both felt it was a holy place, and it seemed right to mate here, in the shadow of the huge, black, standing stones" (Tuttle, 2006, p. 192). The search for a distant place is a search for a different space of consciousness "away from the distractions of the [human] settlement" (p. 194). The kind of house that the men expect to find is "a spotless house, filled with the smells of [their] favourite foods cooking, and a smiling, sexily dressed wife" (p. 198). This petit bourgeois vision of domesticity is in stark contrast with Susie's desire, so she and Doris flees to a place where she can "be what she had been born to be" (p. 194), at least for a little while. Alien bodies ripe with nonhuman desire meet at a symbolic location beyond human reach where the possibility of contacting with the desiring self is much higher than in the incarcerating geography of the human settlement.

The political system in the story does not merely rely on the exercise of power by military force; beyond that, the system requires its subjects to put on everyday performances, which suggests the whole materiality of the bodily existence needs to be integrated into the system. In such a political structure, subjects have to perpetrate "performative acts" (Butler, 1988) to comply with the dominant social reality. To put it simply, *life* itself is the main field of discipline, which is evident in the confrontation between Susie and the rest of her community:

> We're dying as a race and as a world, now. Being a wife is a living death, just a postponement of the end, that's all… They've already killed our culture and our past – we have no 'way' anymore – we can't claim we do. All we are now is imitations, creatures moulded by the men. And when the men leave – if the men leave – it will be the end for us. We'll have nothing left, and it will be too late to try to remember who we were… They 're killing us slowly" (Tuttle, 2006, pp. 195-196)

The dynamics of life as explicated in Susie's anti-colonial sentiment have similar characteristics to what Agamben calls *bare life*. In his *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), Agamben sees *bare life* as a product of urban civilization. Accordingly, ancient Greeks used two different words to define life: *zoe* to express "the simple act of living common to all living beings" and *bios* to address "a qualified life" "proper to an individual or group" (p. 1). Agamben himself adds the third category, *bare life*, to refer to the insertion of *zoe* into *bios*. In this in-between state of existence, the modern subject, an enigmatic figure like asylum seekers, becomes part of the dynamics of urban civilization while not having many possibilities and potentialities to follow on. This state of existence marks, as Alex Murray claims, "a crisis of the political" (2010, p. 61) since politics, which is expected to be a set of potentials, fails to foster new -and qualified- modes of engagement with life in general. In this context, the kind of living that Susie and her alien community has to sustain addresses the dynamics of bare life. Here on this planet, life continues for its native inhabitants at the expense of being stripped off further possibilities and potentialities. Maggie, an older member in the alien community, interprets their condition as such:

> [Susie] may be ready to die now, but the rest of us are not… If [men] see [her] snarling and violent, they will wake up and turn new eyes on the rest of us and see us not as their loving wives but as beasts, strangers, dangerous wild animals to be destroyed. They forget that we are different from them; they are willing to forget and let us live as long as we keep them comfortable and act as wives should. (Tuttle, 2006, p. 196).

This is life without further potentials, connections, or relations. While the intersubjective context in the story addresses a posthuman semiotics, the type of living that the aliens have to maintain is strictly humanist and thus "imperial" (Davies, 2008, p. 141). This debilitating regime of living, however, is not limited to the alien life; it also extends towards the other constituents of the alien ecology. Susie's husband, Jack, keeps a pet spider at home which, in line with its biological nature, build nests and cocoons in the living room to continue its reproductive function. However, after Susie is replaced by an extra wife at the end of the story, the new spouse "[gets] rid of the spider's gigantic egg-case first thing" believing that, while "Jack might like his football-sized pet", "he wouldn't be pleased by the hundreds of pebble-sized babies that would come spilling out of the egg-case in a few months" (Tuttle, 2006, pp. 197-8). Symbolically, the pet spider is allowed to

exist on condition that it does not pose a threat to the absoluteness of human primacy. Given this, Jack's relation to his pet is akin to his relation to his alien wife. The type of co-existence that he favours is beyond answering to the emergent complexities induced by the new encounters in an interplanetary scheme. The anthropocentric mode of thinking inherent in this kind of unilateral relationality marks the nonhuman contributions of reproductive agency as threats to "human exceptionalism"; therefore, the (hu)man regulates *life* through boundary-making practices in order to shape all possibilities of life around his own privilege.

In the end, the aliens kill Susie to secure the continuity of their survival. Susie's attempts to initiate a unified action against their oppressors fail at the hands of her fellows. This suggests that the dynamics of life as bare have been somehow internalized by the alien population. When Jack returns home, he does not seem to realize that his wife was replaced by someone else; he is rather more interested in the way he is served, which is manifest in the choice of words he makes at the closing of the story: "Three tits and the best coffee in the universe…With this to come home to, it kind of makes the whole war-thing worthwhile" (Tuttle, 2006, p. 198). As Jack's closing remarks suggest, the value of *life* is measured with reference to how the narcissism of the dominant members of the political system is gratified. Therefore, the story ironically underlines the importance of a posthumanist understanding of life as a pluralistic ground for relations if human-nonhuman relations are to be fostered along an ethical co-existence.

CONCLUSION

The ending of "Wives" is indicative of a series of conclusions which can point to the rootedness of patriarchal/humanist norms as well as make the reader realize how hegemonic systems can be fragile. One important point to consider is the collective reaction that Susie's defiance of men sparks within the alien community. Having been already defeated many times before, the aliens led by the more senior members of the community refuse to be part of Susie's schemes; Maggie, for instance, advises Susie to keep the obedient-wife narrative intact and "be a good wife to Jack" who "loves [her] in his own way" (Tuttle, 2006, p.196). The reason is obvious: the fear of total annihilation has far-reaching effects on the community's hold on life, so even day-to-day activities are well-informed by the fear of impending death. This atmosphere of terror necessitates a kind of trade-off between the aliens and the men: "They forget that [aliens] are different from them; they are willing to forget and let [them] live as long as [they] keep them comfortable and act as wives should act" (p.196). The implication here is that the alien community, for fear of extinction, has somehow given in to the indoctrination of men through a process which Judith Fetterley calls "immasculation," that is, a process where women (in this case, aliens) come to "think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values" (1978, p.xx)). The figure of the *immasculated alien* shows that, despite the proliferation of resistant voices like many waves of feminism and anti-/posthumanism, the hegemony of patriarchy and its ideological forms of thinking like humanism might be more potent than they seem. One conclusion to draw from the story is then that there might be still a long way to go.

Other conclusions relate to the adverse consequences of the fragility of hegemonic systems. In Lisa Tuttle's "Wives", aliens are made to live a bare life through corporeal limitations in order to reinstate the heterosexual structure of the humanist psychic formation. Since a post-gender alien body stands nowhere in the entrenched model of human subjectivity, an encounter with 'alien-as-difference' risks what Elaine Graham calls "a dissolution of the 'ontological hygiene'" (2002, p. 11). Liminal creatures like aliens and monsters expose the instability of the boundaries as they address, in the words of Rosi Braidotti, "a process without a stable object" (1999, p. 300). Therefore, by sexing the alien, the (hu)man under anthropocentric assumptions attains a number of goals: the masculine psyche achieves stability in an unstable landscape; the unfamiliar onto-epistemology of extra-terrestrial life is made familiar; the dualism in human-nonhuman relations is re-established; and the 'universal masculine' produces 'the universal feminine' as a repressed category by re-asserting his so-called primacy. In short, by sexing the alien, the (hu)man "sexes the self," to use Elspeth Probyn's words (1993), and secures his unshared ontology as the single stable paradigm of meaning.

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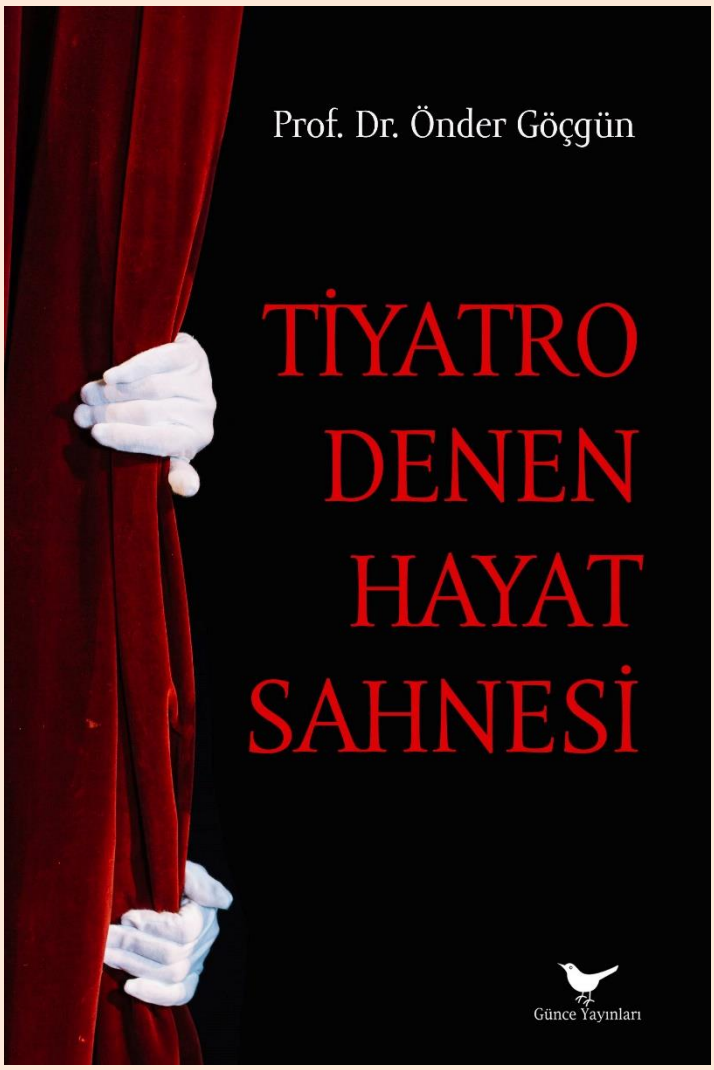

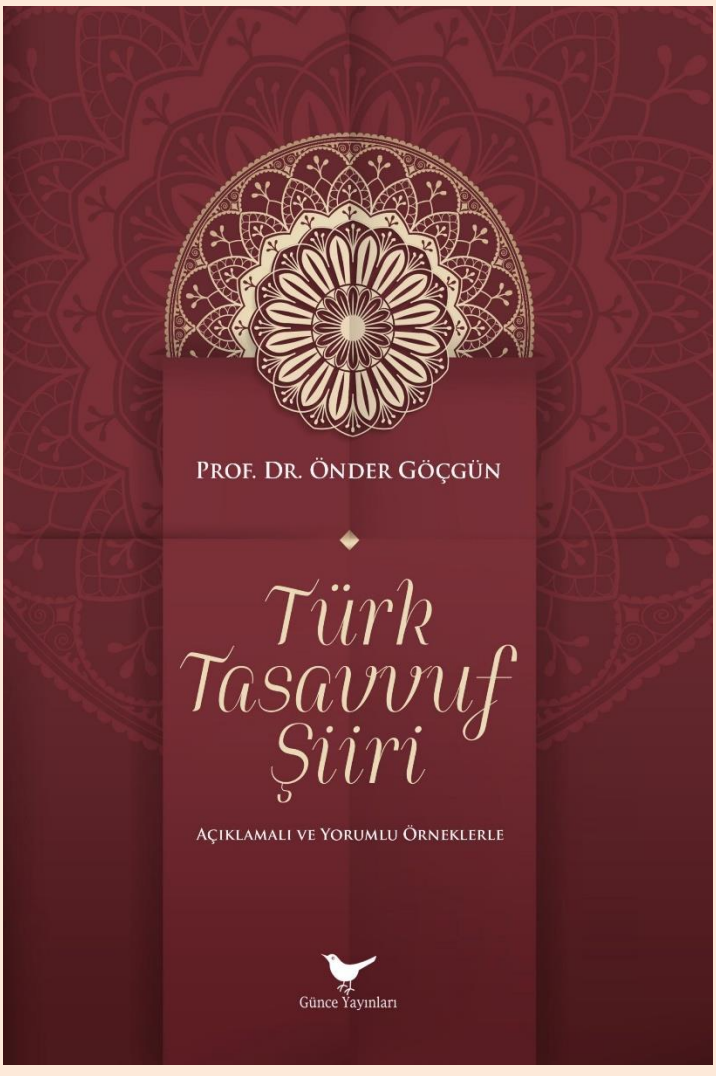

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