

CHAPTER IV

SUBJECT AS CONSTRUCTED

“Western misogyny has its root
in the rules for the household as the model of the state.
A feminist theology therefore must not only analyze
the anthropological dualism generated by Western culture and theology,
but also uncover its political roots in the patriarchal household of antiquity.”¹

Introduction

Explaining the intimate relation between the creation of knowledge and the construction of subjects is made simple by Rosemary Hennessy’s “what we do impacts what we can know; and what we know impacts what we can do.” The delineation of roles on a superficial level—in the public realm—effectively serves to control all realms of subordinated peoples’ lives. These roles reflexively dictate what kinds of knowledge are possible or allowable within the individual communities.

An assessment of the creation of knowledge begins by addressing the power dynamics within and behind the text. The materiality of this knowledge is found in the subjects it constructs. These subjects are addressed by granting the importance of the content of ecclesial correspondence, naming the ideologies at work behind commands or prescriptions, acknowledging the various aspects of wo/men’s reality that are affected by such prescriptions, and sorting through how actions and behaviors are circumscribed by a text. These two pieces, the construction of knowledge and of subjects, are predicated upon an agreement with Nancy

¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Praxis of Co-equal Discipleship,” 240.

Hartsock's insight that the relations that define and circumscribe wo/men's activity are embodied in and perpetuated by their communities.²

What Can She Know?

In this context, what a wo/man can know is determined by an analysis of what is said to and about wo/men. What is said to them—a set of commands or “strong encouragements”—is reinforced by what is (or is not) said about them in the text and social fabric. Though Hennessy's assertion suggests that an analysis should begin with what women “do,” I will begin with what women can “know” because of the extent to which women and their roles were confined and controlled by the kyriarchal society in which they found themselves.

The world as defined and ruled by men limits the possibilities within it according to those concepts used to comprehend and domesticate it.³ In as much as men or kyriarchal representatives are defining and constructing the world, all aspects of it will reflect the interests and desires of those with the power to define and construct. After all, “knowledge is a construct that bears the marks of its constructors.”⁴ Wo/men are, in fact, only able to know and be known in terms of the kyriarchal system and to participate corporately in terms of that system. While such restrictions may not be absolute,⁵ in a system in which wo/men are granted little if any

² Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power*, 155.

³ This idea, which I have drawn upon from various scholars' work throughout this project, is also acknowledged indirectly by Ludwig Wittgenstein, “*The limits of my language means the limits of my world.*” *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, trans.; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 5.6 (italics original).

⁴ Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1991), 55.

⁵ Code, *What Can She Know?*, 65.

power to change, and then those descriptions and prescriptions are themselves codified/canonized, they might as well be written on stone tablets.

I will first address the knowledge that 1 Peter constructs regarding women, which is reinforced by a brief comparison with the identity of the community as a whole, and then I will look at the implications or effects of this knowledge in a colonized space.

Constructing Knowledge in 1 Peter

Submission

The nature of the submission that the wives are to have to their husbands is defined by fear. It is an injunction that resonates with the way the slaves are to relate to their masters, and the men are to relate to the imperial authorities. It is a fear marked by respect as much as a trembling before the person who is one's authority or superior. The way the wives live their lives is to be marked by holiness in fear (*ēn en fobō hagnēn anastrofēn*). This is the same kind of behavior that marks priests before their god, an element of worship that is highly debated in terms of what kind of fear this is or to what extent a person is fearful, in today's terms, of the deity in question.⁶ However one understands this fear/reverence, it is not devoid of mortal fear, given that the worshipper puts her life into the hands of this deity. The language of 1 Peter

⁶ While I appreciate the difficulty of naming the quality of this fear, it is the focus on requiring fear in the followers of Christ that I consider to be dangerous and self-defeating. An email conversation with a male colleague from seminary about the wrath of G*d shows my concern quite nicely. These are some of his thoughts: "Can't one have a loving relationship with a loving Creator who has the potential to wipe her life out or is that an oxymoron? (I might ask my daughter about that? Not that I'm God, but the principle might translate?) ... I'm not sure, but if I was going to put my money on it...I'll choose fear of God (reverence that is) everytime!" In all fairness to this friend, I believe that he truly does not have a difficulty embracing the (what I consider to be contradictory) ideas that his God could "wipe him out" and yet this God loves him utterly. He may define the fear that he has for his God as reverence, but there is no question that there is some mortal fear in the mix.

implies that we transfer this fear of G*d to the husband/wife relationship. As a priest is reverent before his god, so wives are to be before their husbands.

In terms of creating knowledge, then, what does this kind of submission allow a wife/woman to know? Ultimately, it is easier to say what these wives do not get to know, which is their own dreams and calling. They are not allowed to embody a position of subjectivity in their own life, but only for the furtherance of someone else's needs or agenda. They do know a mortal fear, one that keeps them sufficiently motivated to upholding their part of the kyriarchal structure. The proper behavior, marked by silence and a reverent and/or mortal fear, is an outward manifestation of the inner spirit.

Quiet inner/muted outer

There is a strong connection between the clothes we wear and the role we inhabit or the personality we embody. In terms of roles, whether ecclesial or secular, our attire directly reflects what it is that we are empowered to do and indicates the realm of expertise with which we are supposedly conversant. I am aware that there is a great deal of scholarship on the issue of dress, in terms of gender roles and social conformity. Here again I can only direct the reader to other sources for a more thorough theoretical base on this matter.⁷ An analysis of this section of 1 Peter, however, highlights the fact that the author is clarifying for the wives that their outward adornment reflects their inner beauty, which is a gentle and quiet spirit. Thus, it seems prudent to acknowledge the connection between dress and social control and their effects for women.

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). See also, Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger, eds., *Off with Her Head!: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995).

The only other places that attire is addressed directly, in new testament texts, is in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians 11, which are similarly connected with strong images of communal identity and behavioral control of women.⁸ The result of these brief texts, in particular those of the post-Pauline tradition, along with a general social concern for women as property and a need to control women's sexuality, is a heightened focus upon the clothing and outward adornment of women in certain Christian circles. The material reality of such a powerful combination is seen in the way pure or simple clothing has become a primary measure of Christian piety for *women*.

This call in 1 Peter 3 for simple dress that calls no attention to itself stands in stark contrast with the image of priests in their elaborate ornate robes. Not only does clothing make the human body “culturally visible,” Kaja Silverman asserts that “clothing is a necessary condition of subjectivity—that in articulating the body, it simultaneously articulates the psyche.”⁹ The communities in this letter are associated with priesthood, as we see in 2:4-10, yet the wives, for having to be singled out, are not included in that priesthood and are relegated to the pews, condemned to sit there in muted attire until their labor is needed. This may be an “innocent” command given the socio-political dynamics that the members of these communities

⁸ For discussion on the role of veils – or hairstyles, as some understand the veiling issue – for women in the Corinthian discourse, see Jouette M Bassler, “1 Corinthians,” in *Woman's Bible Commentary, with Apocrypha* (Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, eds.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 411-19; Castelli, *Imitating Paul*; MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*; Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University, 1995); Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991); Jerome H Neyrey, *Paul, In Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990); David W. Odell-Scott, *A Post-Patriarchal Christology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Jorunn Økland, *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space. (JSNTSS 269)*; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), esp. chs 4 and 6; Daniel Patte, *Paul's Faith and the Power of the Gospel: A Structural Introduction to the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), esp. ch. 8; Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, esp. 226-36; and Antoinette Clarke Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

⁹ Kaja Silverman, “Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse,” in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Tania Modleski, ed.; Bloomington: Indiana University, 1986), 147.

were facing, but the impression upon the wives' psyches, indelibly carved into future generations through the medium of the *habitus*, is one of silent, demure submission and subservience.

On the flip-side of this assertion, Freud himself made the claim that “the ego is first and foremost a body-ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface.”¹⁰ Though his phrasing implies a one-way relation between the external “body” and the internal ego or “self,” he does appreciate the formative reciprocity at work between a person’s interior and exterior worlds in the construction of subjectivity. Elizabeth Grosz brings in theories of gender and of space in her search to understand how a person’s exteriority is psychically constructed, “and conversely, how the processes of social inscription of the body’s surface construct for it a psychical interior.”¹¹ The point is that what is happening to our bodies, in this case in terms of attire and what it communicates about a person, has an effect upon what a person internalizes about herself.

In many conservative circles today attire “provides a visual display of religiosity.”¹² As Linda Boynton Arthur notes, for women within the Holdeman Mennonite community, “dress is a metaphor; it is interpreted as a visual symbol of the suppression of the self to the demands of the community.”¹³ These women struggle to define themselves within a restrictive circumscribed context within the twenty-first century. Their present-day reality is, by their own admission, directly connected to the commands seen here in 1 Peter. As people who identify with the

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (James Strachey, trans.; 18 vols.; London: Hogarth, 1953-66), 9:26.

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz, “Bodies-Cities,” in *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton Papers on Architecture; Beatriz Colomina, ed.; Princeton: Princeton University, 1992), 242.

¹² Linda Boynton Arthur, “Clothing, Control, and Women’s Agency: The Mitigation of Patriarchal Power,” in *Negotiating at the Margins: The Gendered Discourses of Power and Resistance* (Kathy Davis and Sue Fisher, eds.; New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1993), 66. She is speaking here in terms of Holdeman Mennonites, but also refers to scholarship on this topic in relation to the clothing of Hasidic Jews.

¹³ Arthur, “Clothing, Control, and Women’s Agency,” 68.

“strangers” and “pilgrims” ascriptions in the first two chapters of this letter, they have adopted “plain” dress as indications of their commitment, non-conformity to worldly standards, and separateness. They also eschew displaying wealth through outer adornment out of a desire to be humble and modest, as this section of 1 Peter instructs.¹⁴

The first-century command to wives to be silently submissive and to let their beauty be that of their “inner being” instead of that which comes from jewelry, braided hair and fine clothes is being lived out in obvious and subtle ways today.¹⁵ It is not that modest clothing is a problem in itself, but that it has become a significant marker of godliness. Given the connection between the inner person and prescribed clothing, how they inform and reflect one another, such requirements have the potential to squelch personality and spirit.

Luce Irigaray speaks of the “dominant scopic economy” that women passively submit to or engage in today as objects to be admired or observed.¹⁶ If this “dominant scopic economy” is the issue behind the directive in the text, we might applaud the author for wanting to “protect” the women in these faith communities from this objectivity. The problem remains, however, in the fact that prescribing extreme forms of attire is a textual symptomatic irruption indicating the need to control women. Instead of “their” women falling into that scopic economy, women are repressed from self-expression entirely, all for the sake of social control and order.

¹⁴ Stephen Scott, *Why Do They Dress That Way?* (People’s Place Book No. 7; Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 1997), 4-17.

¹⁵ There is no question that my own attire was considerably less flattering or fitting for many years because of this same belief that not only did my attire reflect the purity of my “inner being” but that it also must not draw attention to me. My attire and I were both to be pure and demure. My own experiences aside, there is much to be said regarding clothing and various other religious traditions, whether regarding restrictive expectations (e.g. some branches of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism) or simply those that come from a sense of simplicity (e.g. Buddhism, Jainism).

¹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex*, 28.

The wives are to know that a quiet submissive spirit is valuable to their god. Lest they forget, they also know to dress in a manner that will reflect, and perhaps at times remind them of, their inner gentle spirit. They are also, indirectly, informed that because they cannot don a priestly robe they are not able to be leaders of these communities. Their clothing tells them who they are and what they can and cannot do. They are to know the things that are focused upon forming a subjectivity that is conducive to sustaining others' visions and needs. This reality works to contain women's subjectivity within the spheres of kyriarchy and male privilege, where they know the tasks of maintaining, instead of resisting, the social structures.

Daughter to Sarah

For this is also how the women of old who hoped in God
once used to adorn themselves and were subordinate to their husbands;
thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him, "lord."
You are her children when you
do what is good and let nothing terrify you. 1 Peter 3:5-6

In this brief association between these wives and Sarah, the author creates what some see as a step toward the subject-hood of the women. In a sense, this image parallels the "children of Abraham" communal identity—a people related to Abraham through the patrilineal genealogy and its attendant roles and relations—but in doing so it heightens our awareness that women were not, symbolically speaking, children of Abraham. The obedient wives are related directly to Sarah not through faith or a covenant but in accordance with the proper deferential behavior that has been—however midrashically—attributed to her. In addition to creating a singular, essentialized image of "the faithful woman," it also raises the question, "What then does it mean to be Sarah's daughter?"¹⁷

¹⁷ I must acknowledge and thank Susan Hall, LMHC, for her insightful responses and suggestions that deepened and clarified the meaningfulness of this section.

Three stories are conflated in this brief comment about Sarah and her relationship with Abraham. In Genesis 12:11-20 we have the account of Sarah being taken into Pharaoh's house after the men in his court saw her, beheld her beauty and counseled him to procure her. Abraham did not resist him, but—knowing how beautiful she was and that he might be harmed in order for other men to get to Sarah—he claimed that she was his sister in order to protect himself.¹⁸ In Genesis 20, Abraham, again under the guise of being her brother and for the same reasons, handed Sarah over to the King of Gerar. In neither of these accounts is Sarah recorded as calling him lord/*kurios/adonai*. She does call him lord, however, in a fit of laughter at the thought of Abraham giving her a son in their old age.¹⁹

¹⁸ This is not, of course, the only story in the biblical texts where the safety and well-being of the man is considered more important than that of the woman associated with him, or even that depicts how the former is 'bought' at the expense of the latter. See Judges 19 and Genesis 19 for two of the most notable examples of this in the Hebrew text; see also Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). This is a practice that is still well attested today; and in particular within the realm of abusive marriages, where the husband feels justified in subjecting his wife to any kind of treatment, especially if it will lead to his own sexual gratification. For example, there are still laws on the books in Tennessee that allow a husband to expect sexual intercourse from his wife whenever he desires it, and in the face of her unwillingness, he will not be punished for raping her. A bill that would remove the spousal exemption from the state's rape law was before the Tennessee legislature ten years in a row. It is not illegal for a man to rape his wife in Tennessee unless he "uses a weapon, causes her serious bodily injury, or they are separated or divorcing." When wife rape does qualify as a crime, the law treats it as a less serious crime than the rape of any other woman. "If he held a knife to [his wife's] throat or beat her to a pulp while he did it, he could be looking at up to 15 years in prison. If he did the same thing to someone he never met before or even his girlfriend, he would face up to 60 years behind bars." According to one of the reporters for the Nashville daily newspaper, "To remain one of the few states that distinguishes spousal rape from other kinds of rapes is a stain Tennesseans should be embarrassed to have. Only 15 states, including Tennessee, don't consider spousal rape without force a crime." Online: http://www.tennessean.com/government/archives/05/03/69230536.shtml?Element_ID=69230536 .

¹⁹ It is worth noting that this trajectory of Christian thought and theology has chosen to take the "lordship" aspect of this text and ignore Sarah's laughter, whereas many Judaic traditions have done just the opposite. See, for instance, Jonathan Kirsch, *The Woman Who Laughed at God: The Untold History of the Jewish People* (New York: Viking, 2001), 7-9, where Kirsch claims that "the woman who laughed at God embodies one of the essential values of Judaism—the audacity, boldness, and daring that are summed up in the Yiddish word, 'chutzpah'" (9). As Elaine Phillips notes, the treatment of Sarah in the early Jewish and Christian traditions was determined by the agenda of the respective texts/sources/authors. Elaine Phillips, "Incredulity, Faith, and Textual Purposes: Post-biblical Responses to the Laughter of Abraham and Sarah," in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition* (JSNTSS 154; SSEJC 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 33. Most notably, according to the Aggadah (Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, and Megilloth) Sarah was highly praised and respected, she was a prophetess with greater powers than Abraham, she prayed to God for deliverance from Pharaoh, and at the news of her death the inhabitants of Hebron "closed their places of business out of respect for her memory and as a reward did not die before they participated 38 years later in the obsequies of Abraham (Gen. R. 58:7; 62:3)" Aaron Rothkoff, "Sarah," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol. 18 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007), 46-7.

According to 1 Peter, Sarah is to be emulated for calling Abraham “lord” and for not being frightened by anything to which she was subjected. The use of Sarah in this particular way is a symptomatic irruption in the fabric of the text—why this particular reference to Sarah in this midrashic form?—that shows us that the author is attempting to smooth over social disruptions. The way Sarah is re-interpreted as having called Abraham “lord” indicates her compliance with his will, no matter how frightening it may have been for her.

In order to shed light on why it was so important that Sarah had called Abraham her “lord/master,” I refer here to a reflection from Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Note the connection between using a title that acknowledges the superiority of the other and one’s disposition toward that person.

He was a slaveholder without the ability to hold slaves. He found himself incapable of managing his slaves either by force, fear or fraud. We seldom called him “master”; we generally called him “Captain Auld,” and were hardly disposed to title him at all. . . . Our want of reverence for him must have perplexed him greatly. He wished to have us call him master, but lacked the firmness necessary to command us to do so.²⁰

As Douglass so poignantly notes of the slave/master dynamic, the woman who willingly admits the “master” role or label of her husband is simultaneously admitting her dependence upon him and her fear/reverence and obedience toward him, a dynamic that perpetuates a (co-)dependent relationship at the expense of the woman’s self-identity and worth.²¹

In both Genesis 12 and 20 the narrator notes that it was “because of Sarah” that things went well for Abram/Abraham. As Gayle Rubin has noted, women are the conduits of exchanges or relations between men, exactly what we see happening to Sarah, who was not the direct

²⁰ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely, eds.; New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 40.

²¹ As Susan Hall, LMHC, has noted, “Any psychologist worth her/his salt will tell you it is never appropriate for an adult to be dependent/obedient upon another adult unless there’s some disability creating that dependence.”

benefactor of her own “circulation,”²² but in her obedience to her “lord” kept *him* safe. Instead of trotting out a list of the current global practices that are based primarily, if not solely, upon the circulation of women, I refer the interested reader to several sources on this matter. Sarah is not alone in her experience of frightful things.²³

There is another aspect of this text, regarding Sarah’s ability to endure whatever frightful thing she had to face, which is striking for its resonances with the realities of some women today. The reference in 1 Peter 3:6 to terror or something significantly intimidating, in conjunction with an allusion to Sarah’s sexual abuse, highlights the possibility that there was not just discord between husbands and wives due to religious differences but some form of sexual abuse going on behind the scenes that the author of 1 Peter was trying to ignore or to get the women to stop discussing.²⁴

²² Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic of Women” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (Rayna R. Reiter, ed.; New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 174.

²³ Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations, “Germany’s World Cup brothels: 40,000 women and children at risk of exploitation through trafficking: Hearing House of Representatives, One Hundred Ninth Congress, second session, May 4, 2006; United States, Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations,” n.p. Online: <http://www.internationalrelations.house.gov/archives/109/27330.PDF>; Julia O’Connell Davidson, *Children in the Global Sex Trade* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2005); Filomina Chioma Steady, ed., *Black Women, Globalization, and Economic Justice: Studies from Africa and the African Diaspora* (Rochester, Vt.: Schenkman Books, 2002); and Ursula Biemann, “Touring, Routing and Trafficking Female Geobodies: A Video Essay on the Topography of the Global Sex Trade,” in *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility* (Ginette Verstraete and Tim Cresswell, eds.; New York: Rodopi, 2002), 71-86.

²⁴ I am confident that certain concepts have been interpreted and translated over the centuries in ways that have down-played their severity or seriousness, just as others have been heightened, due to the interests of the translators and those who controlled the translations. This term, *ptoēsis*, is a perfect example of such a concept. It is cited only twice in the LXX and Greek new testament combined, and is variously translated as “panic,” “fear,” “disaster,” or “terror.” [The other occurrence is in Proverbs 3:25, “Do not fear the sudden terror that comes or the impulse of the wicked.” The Greek and Hebrew are significantly different on this verse, which only adds to my fascination regarding what was being communicated and what was being covered over (or why things needed to change). In any case, there is a sense the wise-one was referring to frightening things, due to the association with the wicked.] The Liddell and Scott lexicon suggests a more visceral understanding, “vehement emotion or excitement.” While I will not try to make a definitive claim about the thrust of this term, I will suggest that the reader consider the terror or frightful aspect, in particular because the author of 1 Peter is addressing the dynamics between a wife and her abusive husband. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Revised and augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie; New York: Oxford University, 1996).

The voice of the author in 1 Peter looms overhead in this prescription for women to silently hope that their actions may win over their husbands. What has been read for centuries as a clash of faith/religious traditions, between the supposedly newly converted wives and their still-pagan husbands, can be read with the insights we now have regarding sexual, emotional and physical violence and abuse in “committed” relationships.²⁵ It should not surprise us that one of the top ten myths about intimate violence against women today is that if she is patient and understanding her situation will get better.²⁶ The reality, according to research and testimonies within counseling settings, is that the longer a woman stays in such a situation the more violent the abuse becomes.

In suggesting that these women endure their abuse, what does the author allow them to know? A woman/wife being abused by her partner does know physical and emotional pain, trauma, a constant fear, helplessness, depression, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, and a deeply rooted need to appease the man who has direct control over her.²⁷ A battered woman will learn to be helpless, will blame herself, and will feel extreme shame and humiliation.²⁸ In these situations, abuse of any form does not have to happen often in order to be a “constant, hidden,

²⁵ I say “committed” in order to draw our attention away from violence perpetrated by strangers and to acknowledge that there is a spectrum of relationships that can be informed by these insights, not simply those that claim the married status.

²⁶ Carol A. Grothues and Shelly L. Marmion, “Dismantling the Myths about Intimate Violence against Women,” in *“Intimate” Violence against Women: When Spouses, Partners, or Lovers Attack* (Paula K. Lundberg-Love and Shelly L. Marmion, eds.; Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006), 14.

²⁷ Jean Giles-Sims, “The Aftermath of Partner Violence,” in *Partner Violence: A Comprehensive Review of 20 Years of Research* (Jana L. Jasinski and Linda M. Williams, eds.; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 44.

²⁸ Margareta Hydén, *Woman Battering as Marital Act: The Construction of a Violent Marriage* (Oslo: Scandinavian University, 1994), 8-9.

terrorizing factor.”²⁹ As if these problems were not difficult enough, she is often isolated and silenced, both of which function as “weapons of subjugation.”³⁰

As Andrea Dworkin, a survivor of partner abuse, has explained, “You become unable to use language because it stops meaning anything.... Once you lose language, your isolation is absolute.”³¹ When isolation is combined with a sense of powerlessness, it leads to hopelessness and desperation. A person experiencing such disconnection and isolation will do almost anything to overcome such feelings.³² The victim, thus, becomes a willing participant in maintaining this place of isolation and desperation with her own silence—it becomes unsafe to speak because every word can and will be twisted and used against you.³³ Silence becomes the refuge of sorts even as it simultaneously damns one to isolation.

There are many factors that contribute to this silencing. The two most common means are by creating the illusion that the victim is responsible for her own abuse in some way and by threatening the life of the woman should she speak out about her situation. In the case of the former method, the victim often carries the guilt for what has been done *to* her. This response is referred to as “introjection”—taking on the shame that the *perpetrator* should be feeling—which

²⁹ Grothues and Marmion, “Dismantling the Myths,” 10.

³⁰ Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 41. In some ways isolation and silence are some of the most damaging things, because in isolation none of us can gain strength with which to resist. It is only in relationship and naming what has happened that we have a sense of self, out of which we may gain the fortitude to leave or fight back.

³¹ Andrea Dworkin, *Life and Death* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 53.

³² Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver, *The Healing Connection: How Women Form Relationships in Therapy and in Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1997), 72, 84.

³³ I am reminded of the second item in the Miranda Rights read to a person taken into custody of a law enforcement office: “Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.” As is the case in so many circumstances in life, the very people who need protection, or who need to be believed and taken at their word, by a protector of any form—spouse, system of law, etc.—are in effect not able to be fully protected by that entity, due to the nature of the difficulty in conveying the problem to an entity that requires “facts.” See, for instance, Robert F. Barsky, *Constructing a Productive Other: Discourse Theory and the Convention Refugee Hearing* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1994).

in turn makes it incredibly difficult for the woman to report the abuse. This issue of blaming the victim, suggesting that something about her provoked the attack/maltreatment, is one reason so many women hate their beauty: they believe it caused their rape/abuse rather than making the rape/abuse about the men who inflict it.

Interestingly enough, Sarah is depicted as responsible, due to her beauty, in both the text and the scholarship on this passage.³⁴ When the scholarship does not problematize this dynamic, it is merely reflecting what is “in the text” and as such belies the fact that many people today still believe that a woman “asks” for mistreatment any time she is not covering her body or hiding her beauty in any of its forms. When scholars have voiced the problem with Abraham trying to put the blame on Sarah, they have gone no farther than to note this problem in the text. This passage actually stands as a witness to the way blaming continues to this day; it helps us see how easily it can happen.

Not only does Sarah not speak out about the treatment she must endure—like a lamb led to slaughter she was silent—but Sarah is also silenced in the story of Israel, as she fades from the narrative once her reaction to the (almost)sacrifice of Isaac is noted. Again, the author of the biblical text offers us an example of how women were and are still being treated.

The silencing of women in such situations, keeping them from speaking out about any abusive treatment they have received, is not only a primary mode of control over them but also allows those around them to deny what is happening. It creates a secret, something appropriately referred to as “the elephant in the room.” Various social cues teach us to keep such secrets or to

³⁴ Genesis 12:11-16: When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account." When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram.

“ignore” the elephant in the room.³⁵ In the case of an abused wife, it is the tenuous nature of her relationship with her husband and the fear of things becoming more intense that keep her silent. In 1 Peter we see a similar tenuousness, and their being urged to silently endure mistreatment serves to maintain the overall socio-political “peace.”³⁶

“Breaking the silence” is often used by therapists or in safety slogans in efforts to raise awareness about the extent of abusive relations in our culture today.³⁷ Speaking out gives the victim her personhood, allows her story to be heard and responded to, and helps to keep it from happening again. Airing a secret helps to remove the fear, shame, and guilt, and brings the woman back into community from her space of isolation. Titles such as *Bearing Witness* and *Ending the Silence* give testimony to the need to put to words these abusive and harmful situations.³⁸ From this perspective, the feigning-calm, soothing voice of the author sends chills down the spine of a person in tune with these most basic dynamics associated with physical and sexual abuse.

Even if a person does not wish to see sexual abuse/rape in the backdrop of these commands in 1 Peter, it is worth noting that the emotional abuse that such limited roles and silence cause women is harmful in itself. Emotional abuse is considered the most common and harmful form of abuse, primarily because the scars created by emotional abuse remain with a

³⁵ Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room*, 21.

³⁶ I have somewhat intentionally blurred the line between the women in the text of 1 Peter and women today in this last phrase. At a basic level, that comment applies to all relations within a kyriarchal system.

³⁷ Giles-Sims, “The Aftermath of Partner Violence,” 49.

³⁸ Celia Morris, *Bearing Witness: Sexual Harassment and Beyond—Everywoman’s Story* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1994); Ron Thorne-Finch, *Ending the Silence: The Origins and Treatment of Male Violence against Women* (Buffalo: University of Toronto, 1992).

person much longer than physical abuse.³⁹ Emotional abuse is also the most difficult to identify or prove, and is likely to be “the bedrock from which other forms of abuse, such as physical and sexual abuse, stem,”⁴⁰ and it becomes a part of the “grooming” process, also called the “set up.” This process allows the perpetrator to create an emotional climate in/by which the transition of power, responsibility, and guilt occurs: he takes the power and she takes the responsibility and guilt. This grooming is all on the emotional level before any kind of physical or sexual abuse even occurs.

The factors that create and sustain the abusive system all work without being seen explicitly; they function beneath the surface of everyday encounters. In reality, there is no aspect of a woman’s life that is *not* affected by the abusive situation. Thus, its effects are all the more insidious for being unseen and unnamed.

Some scholars may think my suggestion regarding the connection between this text and abusive relations between husbands and wives is preposterous, and others may desire to silence this kind of suggestion altogether. Given the seriousness of these suggestions, reactions that would deny or disregard these connections would in themselves be symptomatic irruptions that should be read for what they disclose about the scholar, what it is that is being maintained by their reactions, and what the reaction tells us about the need to control information.

The power that allows the control of information, or of blocking access to it,⁴¹ is also noted in Douglass’s *Narrative* as an effective way to manage and control slaves. He sought an

³⁹ Brittney Nichols, “Violence against Women: The Extent of the Problem,” in *“Intimate” Violence against Women: When Spouses, Partners, or Lovers Attack* (Paula K. Lundberg-Love and Shelly L. Marmion, eds.; Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006), 7.

⁴⁰ Susan Vas Dias, “Inner Silence: One of the Impacts of Emotional Abuse Upon the Developing Self,” in *Psychodynamic Perspectives on Abuse: The Cost of Fear* (Una McCluskey and Carol-Ann Hooper, eds.; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2000), 159. See also, Nichols, “Violence against Women,” 6; Grothues and Marmion, “Dismantling the Myths,” 12.

education on his own, out of the sight of his masters, precisely because it was something they did not want him to have.

“Now,” said [Mr. Auld] “if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy.”⁴²

It seems to have been ubiquitously believed that slaves should not be allowed to learn to read or write, as this would give them a taste of all that they *could* be and accomplish. Being aware of the difference between their current state and the fulfillment of living a life of freedom would upset the already tenuous state of affairs between slaves and their masters. Douglass notes that “to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one,” and an obedient one.⁴³ Contentment in this case is merely being resigned to one’s socio-political position, not having the will or the means to resist it. These passages from Douglass’s *Narrative* help us to see the efficacious nature that controlling what a person knows and requiring her/his obedience has on a person.

So what is the material effect on women of the comparison to Sarah in 1 Peter 3:1-6? As I see it, there are effects within the three primary realms of their lives: household/marriage, the socio-political realm, and their contributions to ministry or other religious/communal settings (or in contemporary terms, their “call,” whether in ordained, lay or volunteer positions). Because of the control that the husband has over his wife/partner in these situations, the space that is most directly related to the married/partnered relationship becomes the space by which her subjectivity is defined, namely the household or home.

⁴¹ Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room*, 39.

⁴² Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 29.

⁴³ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 64, 66.

These women are highly gifted in myriad ways, yet those gifts are channeled toward the wants and needs of the patriarchal and kyriarchal power relations all around them. These women know the destructive effects of the resistance of others in response to their natural gifts and abilities; they know the frustration of not being heard, of being brushed aside, of being considered irrelevant or unimportant and of being devalued by various kinds of abusive relations. The consequences of such a simple phrase, “submit yourselves in silence,” are far reaching and are anything but life-giving for the person who has been silenced. The subject that these women become, then, is one that is compliant and submissive, helpless and dependent, silent and demure, all characteristics that are helpful for maintaining the kyriarchal structure and relations of power. One can see the damage this “simple” command creates, once it is codified and becomes absorbed into the *habitus* of the movement.

Daughters of Sarah are women who know a great deal more than they are allowed to speak or to put into words.

Excursus

I recently attended a retreat with some ordained women. The retreat was intended to be a time to reflect upon their calling – to voice the joys and the frustrations or road-blocks they are experiencing in their ministry. I had expected the reference to this passage of 1 Peter to help air some of the roots of their struggles, in particular in light of the (male) priesthood language and the silencing piece. The piece that stuck out to them, instead, was the way this idea that “women

as the weaker sex” is all-pervasive in our culture or part of society. They were much more frustrated with the larger picture than the details of how it plays out for individual women.

Somewhere in the mix of their tears and anger, joy and delight, I realized that there is a deep tension for these women who have such strong voices and such clear gifting for the work that they do. While there is a sense of deep fulfillment in their vocations, there is also a certain amount of shame for them because they must uphold the kyriarchal structure in which they were called to live and work.

So I ask, “Are these women ‘daughters of Sarah’ or not?” On the one hand, they are indignant at, rather than afraid of, the injustices they endure. Because of their calling in life, they are obedient to the structures and systems that allow them to do what they yearn to do. Surely these are traits they have most admirably inherited from their foremother. On the other hand, they are not quietly submissive or acquiescent. They are bold, daring, courageous, and self-possessing, and they very deliberately use their voices. They are a part of a long line of women who have refused to be fully submissive to the kyriarchal ecclesial structure that they find defines their possibilities, and in some sense even their very selves. If they were obedient daughters of Sarah, according to the Christian tradition,⁴⁴ they would refrain from speaking out against the constricting nature of their ecclesial setting. I, for one, am glad that they are not.

The Effects of this Imagery in a Colonized Space

What a person can know affects what she can do, a matter which is the focus of the next section of this chapter. As a bridge to that topic, I would like to tease out some of the implications of the knowledge that is created or that women are “allowed” by this text of 1 Peter, when written and received within a colonized space. For the wives, living in a colonized or

⁴⁴ See note 19.

occupied space compounds the limitations placed upon them in terms of the way that information is controlled and to what extent it is available to them. The dynamics of domination, control, fear, silencing and obedience take on new dimensions under the light of imperialism or colonization.

Written from the heart of the Empire by someone imprisoned yet who had an authoritative voice for these communities, the “daughters of Sarah” imagery reflects some of the concerns and structural needs of an imperial order. Matters of submission to the ruling powers and of populating an empire with obedient citizens are of utmost importance from the perspective of the ruler. Sarah, exemplary in her submissiveness to her husband, was (eventually) the vessel for the seed of Abraham, the nation of G*d’s people. Her obedience to Abraham and courage when placed in terrifying situations are examples of behavior that are beneficial to the kyriarchal system of empire. In addition, from a colonizer’s perspective, a “gentle and quiet spirit” is much easier to control than an independent and strong-willed one.

The fact that this letter was written from prison gives it an appeal to and authority over the recipients that is stronger than that of correspondence written by a non-imprisoned person.⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu notes the “hidden correspondence” between the structure of the social space in which the communication is created and the structure of the overall social class in which this space is located.⁴⁶ In addition to the content of the letter, the author also communicates something of the imperial social structure and dominating nature, which he is experiencing viscerally as he writes. The letter, in a sense, embodies the imperial mindset and power dynamics so that the communities receiving it are affected by and embody them as well.

⁴⁵ See chapter 3, n. 43.

⁴⁶ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 40. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, discusses this phenomenon in terms of the resistant yet imitative response that a colonized people have toward an imperial power. In attempting to subvert or resist, a community mimics and reinscribes the very form they seek to undermine.

On a similar note, as Nancy Hartsock so poignantly stated, “To the extent that either sexual relations or other power relations are structured by a dynamic of domination/submission, the other [relations within that community] as well will operate along those dimensions, and in consequence, the community as a whole will be structured by domination.”⁴⁷ It is clear that the sexual and household relations within these communities are based upon a dominant/submissive model. We could expect that all relations within these communities and their organizational structure to be marked by a dominant/submission dynamic.

The effects of “power over” are many; of particular interest for this topic is the way it determines “the scope of the information others can access as well as what they pass on and thus promotes various forms of forced blindness, deafness, and muteness.”⁴⁸ The women are being asked not to speak of some of the things they know, in particular the truths that they most need to speak. Their muteness in relation to abusive situations not only allows those situations to continue, but teaches others not to see them as well. People then learn to “turn a blind eye” toward any injustice or abuse if speaking of it would upset the imperial stasis. This transfer of imperial relations and the knowledge it creates and prevents is no small matter.

It is no mere coincidence that the household code was drawn upon and adapted in this context, or that the general concepts behind the household code itself were as prevalent as they were. They address the most intimate and individual relationship between men and women and ensure that power remains within the hands of the men.⁴⁹ As Ann Oakley has noted, it is when women are embracing freedoms that we see men moving closer to women’s power base in order

⁴⁷ Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power*, 155.

⁴⁸ Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room*, 15.

⁴⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Introduction: Crossing Canonical Boundaries,” in *Searching the Scriptures* (vol. 2; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., with Shelly Matthews; New York: Crossroads, 1993), 7.

to control and confine women.⁵⁰ Within the general context of the development of the Jesus movement, we can safely say that freedoms that women enjoyed in the beginning were being taken from them by texts such as this one.

Within the context of the discussion of what the women can know, we must also consider the elements of fear, silencing, and allusions to sexual (or other forms of) abuse in this section of the letter. When men are socialized to use violence to maintain control, then there is every reason to think that violence is used within the household as well.⁵¹ There is a logical connection between the societal norms and private interactions. The higher the man's need for power and control is, the higher the risk of violence or abuse.⁵² This finding also suggests that a lack of control over one's life events is a higher risk factor than when the lack of control is in the husband/wife (partner) relationship.

In other words, in the atmosphere of general unrest in occupied regions of Asia Minor, we can expect men to have carried out aggressive, dominating or violent behaviors within the households. If one throws into the mix the added self-possession or self-confidence that many women gained through the early Christian gatherings, the independent spirit of women being subjects in their own lives and not just subjected to maintaining the lives of others, we can see how the reaction to such change might be the anger or frustration of the husbands/paterfamilia.

⁵⁰ Though she is speaking of Ann Oakley's work in sociological studies, as she addressed the cyclical inequalities that maintained male supremacy within the field and within the findings of it, this claim has been affirmed time and again throughout the history of western civilization (at least). Dale Spender, *For the Record: The Making and Meaning of Feminist Knowledge* (London: The Women's Press, 1985), 139.

⁵¹ Glenda Kaufman Kantor and Jana L. Jasinski, "Dynamics and Risk Factors in Partner Violence," in *Partner Violence: A Comprehensive Review of 20 Years of Research* (Jana L. Jasinski and Linda M. Williams, eds.; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 5.

⁵² Kantor and Jasinski, "Dynamics and Risk Factors," 5-6.

The women are to know their place and stay in line. They cannot be leaders, except in their willingness to lay down their lives for Empire. Most importantly for this discussion, they are not allowed to speak the truths that most need to be aired.

What Can She Do?

In light of the previous section, this question, “What can she do?” begins to sound like a search for solutions to the problem today instead of an inquiry regarding what activities were allowed a woman in these communities. In a sense, the two approaches to this question are intimately related. The kind of knowledge and circumscribed subjectivity this text engenders has been a part, consciously or not, of maintaining limited possibilities for women today. In spite of almost two thousand years in between, the options available to women and their representation are still significantly defined by these texts and the *habitus* that proffers them.

The commands in any of the letters retained by various Christian communities become performative utterances, in the sense that they create what they state. They are legitimized simply by being accepted and passed along, and in so doing they take on the life or status of divine word.⁵³ The follower of Christ, then, will obey these commands and will embody the roles prescribed. Both the roles and the structure that need and maintain them are perpetuated by the faith communities that receive these texts. Members of these communities are compelled to behave according to the designations given to them. In other words, a woman will live into the name or role prescribed for her, she will live within the boundaries of appropriateness for the role, and so forth.

In terms of social control or social movement theory, this kind of interaction between the members and the authoritative voice of a leader is intended for accountability and to keep people

⁵³ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 42.

in line, as much as it is to let members know what they cannot do.⁵⁴ Since the means through which these prescriptions are offered is a familiar socially normative expectation, however the form may be transformed in this instance, they take on the sense of being based upon natural or objective differences within the social, political and household realms. As Bourdieu reminds us, these are the most efficacious distinctions one can make.⁵⁵

It is also important to note that these instances of accepting the authoritativeness of someone from outside their community, their submission to his commands, and the symbolic domination that these exchanges represent, are in themselves a form of complicity. The affectivity of the *habitus* upon the people in the community creates this ambiguity between willing and passive submission.⁵⁶ Perhaps we can talk about it in terms of being a hybridity of the two, or as an action that reflects the middle voice in some sense. Whatever the case, the women in these communities are just as wrapped up in conforming to, though perhaps at times not agreeing with, their socially predicated roles and expectations as any other member of society would have been.

The economic aspect of the households is never specifically addressed in any of the new testament texts,⁵⁷ which is part of the reason we can so easily forget that it is in the mix of relations that are effected by them. In the household code in 1 Peter, the peripheral, powerless and “otherness” status of the wives and slaves is centralized or elevated, yet it is done within the overarching power structure of the kyriarchal Empire. By avoiding addressing the economically

⁵⁴ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 121; Benford, “Controlling Narratives,” 53.

⁵⁵ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 120.

⁵⁶ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 50-1, 114.

⁵⁷ Certainly there are hints of the economic realities that the people dealt with, noted by the many references to money/economic issues in the teachings of Jesus and in the letter by James. But the direct acknowledgement of the household’s role in sustaining and producing the socio-political reality is not addressed in any of the new testament texts.

sustaining aspect of the lives and production of the slaves and women within the household, this aspect of their daily lives is taken for granted and is assumed will remain the same. Granting honor and value within the social relations that conform to the overall expectations,⁵⁸ the author ensures the maintenance of this kyriarchal/patriarchal socio-political normative structure with all of its attendant power relations.

From this perspective, this adaptation of the household code is read as a symptom in the text that indicates the need to de-center or marginalize these otherwise potentially powerful people. When that marginal space is elevated and described as ordained by God, the consequence is that the so-honored people will not seek to change their location. As Toril Moi has so poignantly noted, “The paradox of the position of women and the [slaves] is that they are at one and the same time central and marginal(ized).”⁵⁹ The needs of the kyriarchal structure are met and those meeting the needs are praised for their service. The wives and slaves must remain in their subject positions in order to keep the structure/order in place. Ironically, it is their relatively marginal location within their socio-political identity that has created the sufferings that they are subject to in the first place. Additionally, the master of the household is still in place as the one with the final say, the man who is living into the three main roles of the patriarch within a household. Upholding the status quo and behaving in proper and non-disruptive ways are some of the things “she can do.”

According to Jorunn Økland, we can see in the metaphors that Paul uses in his letters an attempt to create a sacred “sanctuary space” that is separate from the space in which usual events of household life take place. The metaphors helped to create rituals, boundaries, and “a meaningful ordered territory, a different hierarchy and a different map of role models from outside the

⁵⁸ See Barth Campbell, *Honor, Shame and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998).

⁵⁹ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (2d. ed.; New York: Routledge, 2002), 170.

sanctuary space.”⁶⁰ Later in the book, she notes that women’s ritual dress and speech were also a part of creating this separate, *ekklesia*, space.

Økland’s investigation of the use of gendered bodies and rituals in 1 Corinthians assumes that Paul is working with a purely performative social role of gender in contrast with our modern concept of *being* male or female.⁶¹ The point, according to Økland, is that even though the presence of women is necessary for the creation of the “appropriately” constructed sacred space, women do not have a place or any representation within the hierarchy of the communities’ structure.

Throughout this project I have been attempting to indicate how the metaphors used and the roles allowed for women in the letter of 1 Peter specifically exclude women from leadership positions, among other things. Whatever positive intentions Paul may have had regarding the roles of women in this movement, they were subverted by his successors. The introduction of the household code ordering and the subsequent overlapping with the roles within the household proper and the worshipping space meant a dissolution of the boundary between the daily life and the *ekklesia* space. The language used by the author of 1 Peter affectively gives women the roles of producers and maintainers of the population, sustainers of the means for economic production and survival, and beleaguered place holders for the kyriarchal structure of the household, *ekklesia*, and Empire.

Granted, the author and the communities who received and embraced his writing felt a need to find a way to maintain the movement. Survival trumped any concept of seeking to change the social order. The premise of this project, however, is to attend to the materiality of

⁶⁰ Økland, *Women in Their Place*, 4.

⁶¹ Thomas Walter Laquer, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1990), 8.

these efforts, no matter how well-intentioned they may have been. Their attempts to sustain this movement do not allow for change, which is something that is inherent to human nature. Since what the women do matters a great deal, and their contributions and subjectivity are circumscribed within the household, I am led to ask: “Is a woman—and all she knows, signifies, and does—allowed to change?”

Conclusions: Subject as 1 Peter has Constructed

The issue of constructing subjects taps into numerous socio-political dynamics of social acceptability and sustainability, vertical and horizontal power relations, essentialism and representation, and even mimicry and collusion. What we can do affects what we can know. What we can know is affected by the nature of the communities of which we are a part. The goal of this chapter has been to address how 1 Peter functions in “the discursive construction of the subject of woman,”⁶² primarily because having the power to name and define what a woman can know and do is precisely the power to own/possess, control and dominate her. In order for wo/men to (re)claim the role of self-possession, we must be able to see some of the ways they have been prevented from doing so.

The very nature of subject construction implies that there are counter-images simultaneously at work, ones that the dominant ideology needs to silence or eradicate. According to Carol Smart, each discourse constructs and thus brings into being its own version of “Woman” and in doing so proclaims that version to be “natural Woman.”⁶³ In 1 Peter’s household code, this construction of “wives,” instead of “women” in general, implies that the wives represent a category to discuss and define while also inhabiting a subjective positioning within the early

⁶² Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism*, xiii.

⁶³ Smart, “Disruptive bodies and unruly sex,” 7.

faith communities.⁶⁴ Given the nature of the household code—which only addresses women in terms of their married/maternal status—this focus upon “wives” is understandable. This essentialist focus becomes an issue, however, when we search for instructions, identity or even subject construction of the other women.

The text is silent regarding all other women in the communities. The materiality of silence—indicating a lack or a negation—relegates those persons to secondary or tertiary status, at the very most. Consequently, we are able to see the materiality of irruptions, and the lack thereof, within the communities that have embraced this text.

Textual Symptomatic Irruptions

All of the symptomatic irruptions that I have discussed in this project point to the fact that the women have been vocal and influential, and the over-construction of women’s silent subjectivity betrays a fear that the author might not be taken seriously. After all, it is deeply important that the women comply with proper and appropriate behavioral expectations.

Of the four textual irruptions that I have focused upon, the indirect comparison with Christ in his suffering has received the most attention from scholars, biblical and theological. The christological implications of valorizing suffering cannot, in my opinion, be over-problematized. It brings to the fore the images of physical torture and an agonizing death, images that the early church did not portray visually.⁶⁵ When the author then adds to this the “daughters

⁶⁴ Smart, “Disruptive bodies and unruly sex,” 8.

⁶⁵ I am aware that there are many possible reasons for this lack of visual/artistic portrayal of Jesus on the cross and in the beatings and whippings he received prior to his crucifixion. It could be because such treatment was so commonplace that they did not need a reminder of what it was like for him. It could be because it all represented a complete failure of their movement, whereas the resurrection was hopeful and gave life to his followers to carry on. It could have had something to do with what people felt was important or “worthy” of depiction. I raise the issue only to point out that whatever suffering Christ experienced, it was enough to refer to it for the depth of it to be communicated. In the western spiritualized interpretations of the Christ-event as something for his followers to

of Sarah” imagery, the combination is overwhelming. Fearing nothing, the wives are to endure whatever treatment comes their way. While the echoes of martyrdom are not far off,⁶⁶ I must also point out the drastic difference between choosing martyrdom and having no power to choose for oneself in any realm of life. The autonomy that is a prerequisite for choosing to die, and then doing so willingly as the ultimate sacrifice for and connection to Christ, is altogether different from being forced to be in such a situation.

The command to be submissive to their husbands, in silence, and to never give up on the possibility that their actions might win them over—from what, to what is unclear—is also duly labeled a symptom or irruption, since encouraging women to be submissive to their husbands was not a new idea. In the vein of “he doth protesteth too much,” the author is pulling in the reins on active, powerful and influential wives/women. The image of wives that is constructed by: the reference to Sarah, the admonition to endure hardship, and the charge not to fear anything added to the submissively silent obedient model of Christ before his crucifiers, is the epitome of the idea that wo/men are to serve the purposes and needs of men. Women are the possessions of men, thus any and all dominant/submissive dynamics are not only understandable but are

emulate, I fear that the bodily realities can be overlooked. Clearly in a movie such as Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ,” the physical abuse and torture is more than accentuated. What remains disturbingly left unspoken by a film such as Gibson’s is the implications this gore has for discipleship and “Christ-likeness.”

⁶⁶ Indeed, the issue of martyrdom in early Christianity, and what exactly were the forces that gave rise to it, receive much scholarly attention. See Glen Warren Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995). Given that the use of the term *martur* in Christian rhetoric as anything other than a legal ascription of a “witness” did not begin until at least the late second century, and the fact that it is only in 5:1 that any form of *martur* appears in 1 Peter, I do not presume to suggest that there is a terminological foundation for this development in this letter. In fact, I think that there are many dynamics that are relevant to the “where did this urge come from?” discussion that I have yet to see addressed, specifically the fascination with death, gore, and violence that can be traced, ever so problematically, throughout civilizations dominated by men. That Christianity is a thanaphiliac religion is not a new claim; that this interest in death, and a theological justification for inflicting it, becomes more and more drawn out over time is not only disturbing but has had implications within every part of society over the last two thousand years. Thus the mingling of a lack of social control on the part of Christians within empire, the voices within the Christian communities to identify with Christ’s sufferings—and the psychological predilection in some members to comply with such a command—and the imperial-kyriarchal structure in place to rid the empire of potentially disruptive misfits makes for fertile ground for the development of martyrdom within Christianity.

necessary. It is frighteningly abusive, controlling, and belittling, and, as Susan Hall, a counselor who specializes in relational and sexuality issues and domestic violence, has said, it is “maladaptive in the highest degree to ask someone to forego their self-preservation instinct as this text is doing.”

The piece of this text prescribing plain clothing and simple adornment does not stand out in terms of topics discussed under house-hold management, but it does become a symptomatic irruption within the context of this letter. The calling of the communities in general to be a royal priesthood and holy nation—supported by the reminder that they are now G*d’s people, who, like living stones, come together to create the house of G*d and as G*d’s people offer spiritual sacrifices (2:5)—evokes imagery of grandeur and holiness. Any roles of leadership that women might have had in these settings would have been marked by various forms of outward adornment and distinctive attire. Thus all the more do the glorious robes of these priestly people seem other-worldly in comparison to the demure and self-effacing expectations imposed upon the wives.

The silence discussed in this section is in relation to husbands; the adornment and attire is concerned with the character of the wives; the obedience and not-fearing are in terms of how wives are to relate to their husbands. Every aspect of what a woman/wife can know and who she can be is circumscribed by the household, and this knowledge becomes the fabric of the constructed women, according to 1 Peter.

Constructed Subjects

Producers and reproducers

For these women immersed in their cultural norms, the line between household production and re-production is blurred. The acculturation of the household order implicitly affirms, and thus circumscribes, women in their (re)productive role. This claim may seem like a bit of a stretch, but their political reality was structured to some extent by laws that favored the married state and encouraged the rearing of children. There is no doubting that motherhood was an expectation of married women. As Roland Boer has noted of Rebekah, one of the Mothers of Israel, we can also say of the wives in these communities, which is that the needs of the family and the state come together in their wombs.⁶⁷ So, while the advice to be subject to their husbands may have been consciously about the acceptability of the movement, the implicit messages reinscribe kyriarchal roles and possibilities for the women in all areas of their lives.

According to the “seamless” narrative of kyriarchy, the grand narratives of the faith communities only address the males and issues on the surface of social interactions,⁶⁸ which is why the acknowledgement of wives and slaves is itself a symptomatic irruption in the narrative. Yet in the midst of it all, the aspects of life that are acknowledged or drawn upon are not those of the production and reproduction that sustains the system, their most important roles, but those of peaceable living instead of disruptive behaviors.

By focusing on the superficial level of “doing what is good and not being terrified of fearful things,” the author overlooks the activities that sustain and maintain the household. This oversight resonates with the need to separate “life from necessity,” which is of course an ideological separation. As Mary O’Brien has noted,

⁶⁷ Roland Boer, *Marxist Criticism of the Bible* (New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 38-40.

⁶⁸ Mary O’Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge, 1981), 140-1.

The social structures which emerge from attempts to separate life from necessity are the *division of classes* in the productive realm and the *division of public and private life*, of family and polity, in the reproductive realm.⁶⁹

The realms that are superficially separated, from the androcentric perspective, meet and are grounded in the lives and bodies of the women in these communities. For our purposes, then, we might ask, “What are the effects of this discursive separation on the construction of women?”

These women, then, are subjects not in “life” matters, but only in the outwardly noted necessities. They are vessels and pawns, possessed and used for the purposes of kyriarchal systems, structures, and relations of power.

Material Irruptions

When the textual irruptions are interpreted in light of the wives’ socio-political location, we see women constructed as silently submissive and subjugated wives, who are essential, as constructed, for the maintenance of Empire and the Christian *ekklesiai*. So it is only through a role in the kyriarchal system that the women are subjects in this Christian movement.⁷⁰ Their position is not one of freedom; rather, the author of 1 Peter limits the agency of women, circumscribing their activity within the household domain. It is not life-giving for the women, only for the kyriarchal society in which they live. Indirectly the letter prescribes the married status as the epitome of faithfulness for women, since only wives are addressed and none of the women can identify with the symbols attributed to the community as a whole. This self-sacrificial and child-bearing image of the socially constructed “woman” then remains in our consciousness and becomes our inheritance.

⁶⁹ O’Brien, *Politics of Reproduction*, 141, italics original.

⁷⁰ Boer, *Marxist Criticism*, 38.

As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza noted in the early 1980s, this adaptation of the Christian community to the ethos and *habitus* of the kyriarchal society in which they lived “open[ed] up the community to political co-optation by the Roman empire.”⁷¹ We can see how this is the case, since the household code and the knowledge it allows women to have and express creates and maintains obedient, submissive subjects.⁷² As subjects of the Christian *ekklesiai*, they are good imperial subjects as well.

⁷¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 78.

⁷² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 78.