

Feminist Epistemology in Allison Pearson's *I Don't Know How She Does It*

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Abstract

This paper is mainly concerned with feminism and how women can have their rights as opposed to the previous centuries when women were under man's power, male-dominant. The paper will be shown so many issues related to the oscillation of women from liberal feminism to backlash in the Allison Pearson's novel *I Don't know How She Does it*. Allison tries to convey a very important message to the reader, which is the phenomenon of working women and the dilemma they face in their life because of that. Many questions will be answered in this paper such as: what should be sacrificed and why? Is it possible to " have it all " ?"

Another important term is used throughout this paper which is Liberal feminism, which means is an individualistic form of feminist theory, which focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their own actions and choices.

Key words: Liberal feminism, women, and social discrimination

الخلاصة

يتناول هذا البحث مفهوم النسوية وكيف يمكن للمرأة أن تحصل على حقوقها في الوقت الحاضر مقارنة بالقرون السابقة عندما كانت المرأة تحت سلطة الرجل، وهيمنتته فكريا. وقد يبين البحث الكثير من القضايا المتعلقة بتذبذب النساء أو تقلبها من النسوية الليبرالية إلى رد فعل عنيف في رواية أليسون بيرسون "أنا لا أعرف كيف أنها تفعل ذلك". إذ تسعى أليسون إلى نقل رسالة مهمة جدا إلى القارئ، وهي ظاهرة المرأة العاملة والمعضلة التي تواجهها في حياتها بسبب ذلك. وسيتم الرد على العديد من الأسئلة في هذا البحث، ومنها مثلا: ما الذي يجب أن تضحي به المرأة؟ ولماذا؟

وهناك مصطلح مهم سيتكرر في هذا البحث وهو مصطلح النسوية الليبرالية، وهو الذي يعني الشكل الفردي للنظرية النسوية، والذي يركز على قدرة المرأة على الحفاظ على مساواتها من خلال أفعالها وخياراتها. الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية الليبرالية، المرأة، التميز الاجتماعي.

Introduction

"I could have stayed home and baked cookies and has teas, but What I decided to do is fulfill my profession"

Hilary Clinton on a campaign speech Jul 2, 1992

The question of identity has always occupied a considerable space of feminist thinking. This reading of Allison Pearson's *I Don't Know How She Does It* (2003) is an approach to Liberal feminism in order to investigate the following. First, the challenge feminist epistemology offers against traditional epistemology. Second, whether or not conflicting subjective experiences allow for different autonomous identities. Third, does a deep engagement with liberal feminism allow for a wider perspective of women's autonomy?

Epistemology, which is a discipline concerned with the nature of knowledge, its origin, and methods of attaining it has been an important factor of self – realization.

Feminists noticed that, epistemology is androcentric owing to the fact of its being first approached by male thinkers, As early as Aristotle, philosophers sought objectivity and certainty of knowledge. Emotions did not fit into these objectives, so they were discarded together with personal experience. Enlightenment philosophers such as Hume and Kant aspired at producing universal truth that can be applied to all people with their diverse cultures, races, social groups... etc. one of the outcomes of such “universal truth” is that western writers “think they can assume that their audience, shared knowledge and shared culture” (Griffith 18-19). It is also noticed that these theories are male made and that they “showed the systematic bias inherent in the standard theory, usually in the way it left out women altogether”. Further, a close reading of this perspective identifies it with western imperialism. If western traditional epistemology dismisses the personal or the particular in human “thinking, therefore, it becomes inadequate to tackle feminist issues.

Ever since the emergence of feminism, feminists have tried to tackle this paradigm, both highlighting such androcentric imperial characteristic in traditional epistemology and posing a challenge to it. To begin with, feminists welcomed what is dismissed by traditional epistemology. They relied on personal experience, accepted the change of knowledge and identity, and they did not seek objectivity or certainty. Hence, as Morwenna Griffiths argues:

Descriptions of experience are always reversible... There is no transparent language. I start from this situation and this situated self I can recount my experience as it feels to me now, with my present level of understanding. It is quite possible that as I continue to think and theorize and observe, that I will understand more and my situated – self understanding will change accordingly.

People’s subjection to various experiences either changes or develops their own visions and conceptions of life. Their accepted beliefs, which mainly constitute their identity, are liable to modification or even rejection. Feminism’ revision of traditional epistemology is part of recent increasing western debates which also argue that class, race, nationality, gender or politics that interfere in constituting truth and knowledge. In consequence, the supposed neutrality of traditional epistemology is open to challenge and revision.

Hilary Clinton’s statement presents a defiance to the image of the domesticity of women. Her words contradict an emerging media sentiment in the US and Britain of the domestic goddess. Ever since the 1980s and even before that the two feminist camps: liberal feminism and post feminism have been advocating their cause. The first camp – liberal feminism – advocated the equality of women to men, asserting women’s capability, and the necessity of transformation of laws and politics to attain their rights. The second camp – postfeminists – accused liberal feminists of not having much space for family stability and the right of children to enjoy a warm maternal care. In this respect Estelle B. Freedman asserts:

Fear that feminism will unleash changes in familiar family, sexual, and racial relationships can produce anti – feminist politics... the recurrent caricatures of feminists as “mannish” reveal an anxiety that feminism is somehow antithetical to femininity, that to embrace its politics is to reject a gender identity that many men and women wish to preserve.

Overlooking the rights of women as mothers made middle class women rather reluctant to be called feminists.

Popular culture also posed questions on the validity of liberal feminist movements. In *No turning Back* (2004), Freedman asked “why fear feminism” she traced the attitude of the media towards liberal feminism in the 1960s to the end of the 20th century and showed its antagonistic tone. Articles in *Harpers*, *New York Times*, *Newsweek* advocated that “radical days of feminism are gone... (and) the failure of feminism”. American television programs such as “*Martha Stewart Living*” and a magazine of the same name show Martha, owner of a multimedia empire, “making cachepots from pumpkins for thanks giving, sewing buttonholes into linen napkins... growing and drying herbs, laying dinner party tables with individual place names” (Brunsdon 41). Britain has had a variety of corresponding “life style” programs and books such as “two fat ladies”, “*Home Front*”, “*Changing Rooms*”, and Nigella Lawson’s “*Domestic goddess*” and her cookbook *How to Be A Domestic Goddess*. These concerns for the welfare of the family and the preservation of the femininity of women led the media to promote the image of women as a “domestic goddess”. Highlighting the comfort of women's domesticity is often attributed to Margaret Thatcher disinterest in gender issues and the Regan era in the US “where an emphasis on “family value” created a backlash against feminism (Hollows and Moseley 7)

Backlash popular culture presents the impact of the gains of liberal feminism on women. The thesis is that these gains granted women equality and autonomy, but at the same time made them miserable. Working women sacrificed home, fertility, marriage for the sake of their independence. As a result of such deprivation they have become lonely, depressed, and emotionally void. Debates about the backlash – based as a main postfeminist characteristic – have attempted to accentuate its paradigm. Susan Faludi traces its antagonistic relationship to liberal feminism, she asserts ironically, “it must be all that equality that’s causing all that pain. Women are unhappy precisely because they are free” However Faludi does not offer a clear-cut identification of the precise demands of backlash. In *No Turning Back*, Estelle Freedman rejects backlash as an attempt to turn the clock back abolishing all the gains of feminism. E probing does not support this thesis, she views postfeminist domesticity call for a home return as “a choice” (qtd in Hollows 103). Ann Braithwaite assumes that the trend of backlash is a term which broadens the “scope of feminist issues”. She suggests that the backlash is not against feminism, but “about” it, “a way of articulating changes in and the evolution of feminism. She also adds that “using backlash... in these open ended ways allows an insistence on the plurality of positions and issues of different women...”. Braithwaite allows for perspectives that situate backlash and liberal feminism within feminist epistemology. Liberal feminism has achieved its goals, it is logical to expect a multi – dimensioned liberal feminism that allows for numerous scopes for different autonomies.

This paper will explore the oscillation of women from liberal feminism to backlash in Allison Pearson’s *I Don’t know How She Does it*. The novel portrays the dilemma faced by working women: what should be sacrificed and why? Is it possible to “have it all”? From this perspective the paper will examine how and to what extent can feminist epistemology help women achieve self-realization.

The form of diary

Narrative confessions diary, autobiography, memoirs and journals play an important role in feminist self – realization, but this narrative knowledge “is delegitimated in western societies when it fails to conform to the empirical knowledge that has been

vaporized historically by elite white males". As for feminists, they consider these narratives as "means of sharing the knowledge that is necessary for survival". Knowledge of childbirth, child rearing, family ties personal experiences... etc. are shared by feminist narrative confessions. Women here don't seek universal fixed truth like androcentric epistemology, their goal is "to strip away the superficial layers of convention and to expose an authentic core of self of meaning as fully present to itself" as Felski mentions. The structure of diaries is "episodic and fragmented, depicting events as they occur rather than attempting to select and organize in terms of any unifying vision... through this kind of structure, the confession seeks to emphasize its status as reflecting and contingent on living experience...". Thus autobiographical retrospections are a step forward towards attaining self – realization. *I Don't Know How She Does It* takes the form of a diary. The protagonist, Kate Reddy, is not one of the elite: politicians, writers... etc, whose auto/biography is mostly published and often repeated. However, according to Liz Stanly, ordinary women's personal writings are historically more significant than the elite's because they constitute precisely "the vast majority of population". The author Allison Pearson, a mother and a journalist, depended on letters that had been sent to her by women complaining about the difficulties they face as they try to "have it all" The diary poses questions on motherhood, emotional needs of children, equality of genders and the fight to have it all. Indeed, this diary fulfills what Judy Simons sees as women "taking upon themselves the role of family historian, their diaries providing a communal chronicle of domestic life". Kate Reddy records her diary with the clear consciousness of gender significance. As James Goodwin argues.

Since gender has functioned in western history as a basis for social differentiation and legal determination, it follows that the genre issues of identity, experience, and representation in women's autobiographies are engaged with larger issues of culture and politics.

A fight to have it all: Kate Reddy is a successful career woman, mother of two and a wife of a loving and "long suffering husband." She is a fund manager in Edwin Morgan Forester Corporation, where making profit takes priority over ethics. The main interest of Kate and her colleagues is to "screw the client for every penny {They} can". Kate's oscillation between, on one hand the requirements of such a demanding job, and the requirements of motherhood on the other, is sustained throughout the novel until she reaches a final decision. At the outset of the novel, Kate is represented as a champion of liberal feminism; she is an autonomous career woman, and she excels in the Darwinian struggle in the man-dominant financial world. Kate's attitude can be attributed to the impact of the image of her father. Her memories of her father's treatment for his family motivated her to become a feminist. Joseph Aluisus Reddy, Kate's father, had been a dominant patriarchal figure despite the fact that he was neither responsible nor brilliant. Indeed, he is described as a "colourful character", usually in debt, "he gambles a lot on fancied horses, pretends it's scientific and hopes to God they'll come home, and when they don't, he leaves town", and to the end the novel pursued by his creditors. Because of his unstudied projects, he causes a lot of financial problems to his family and money is usually short. Further, Joseph, who was once "beautiful rather than handsome" and "a lady's man" walked out on his family when Kate was only thirteen. He could hardly provide his family with a sense of protection. Kate recalls one of her father's inventions which almost cost him his daughter's life, "I used to think that I remembered that day so

well because he had saved my life; now I think it's because it was the only time in our years as father and daughter that he did anything to protect me". The cognitive deficiency of the past self is highlighted here. The experiencing self and the narrating, each has a different understanding of the same incident. In the past, Kate was still overwhelmed with admiration of her father; now the narrating self can independently analyze his actions and realizes the rarity of his paternal protection. Her retrospections develop both frustration and cynical attitude towards him; she no longer identifies with her past self which indicate a change in her filial attitude. Such disrupted feelings develop in her a feminist determination of independence, she is determined to have her own autonomy and refuses to live as what Simone de Beauvoir calls in *The Second Sex* (1949) "parasite".

Kate comments, "Dad was the one for the broad sweep, Mum picked up the bits with a dust pan and brush". The experience of the mother made her conscious of the partialities practiced against woman. Such partialities kept woman in a powerless and subdued position while assigning men's roles which sometimes they are not up to. Kate's frustration at her mother's vulnerability develops in her a feminist determination of independence, "All I knew was that I didn't want my mother's life: I didn't need a role model to teach me that being dependent on some man was debilitating, maybe even dangerous". She is determined to have her own autonomy, or as Simone de Beauvoir puts it to be "productive, active ... in her projects she concretely affirms her status as subject, in connection with the aims she pursues, with the money and the rights she takes possession of, she makes trial of and senses her responsibility". Thus Kate's early personal experience developed in her an awareness of current gender politics.

Kate's adoption of feminist standpoint allies her with the woman whom {d}epend for their livelihood or even of whom they care and those survival on being sensitive to the moods and disposition of those they serve. This causes them to develop perceptual capacities, communication skills, a facility for emotional management, conflict resolution, discretion, acting skill... (Cole, 91)

Kate went to Cambridge, yet she relies more on her intuition and personal experience than on books or traditional epistemology. She employs feminist epistemic strategies in dealing with her stubborn boss, Rod Task. Kate tells Momo, her assistant, "If you make him think everything you want to do is his idea, he'll be happy as Larry". Without Task's awareness, Kate dominates their formal relation which actually empowers her to have her plans executed rather than his. She instructs young Momo, on how she can persuade clients of trusting the corporation with their "awful lot of money". She adopts the effort to be what she points in the novel as "Country Love":

... We protest our undying devotion, Desperate to please the beloved, we'd walk a million miles for one of their files, that kind of thing. And the key is to keep reminding them that although we have hundreds of white guys behind us who practically invented banking, we also have an unparalleled commitment to diversity... we can give them the best of British with a rainbow gloss, which is where you and I come from.

Kate doesn't make use of books which theories on how to manage time or make strategies of investment. Actually, she considers books as *The Warren Buffet Way* and *The Ten Natural Laws of Successful Time and Life Management Proven Strategies for Increased Productivity and Inner Peace...* as Volumes {that} have been carefully chosen for size and durability". This is an outlook that underestimates traditional epistemology and allows more for her intuitive feminist standpoint to inspire her investment tactics.

Joseph's paternal misconduct is reflected upon Kate's relation with her daughter. The fact that the father did not provide Kate with a proper sense of protection, makes her eager to be a good mother, "I want to have and protect and never ever hurt her". Here Kate suffers contradictory sentiments, which marks an identity crises. On one hand, she is an autonomous woman, on the other she is a loving protective mother who does not want to let her daughter down. This attitude represents a part of her oscillation between liberal feminism and backlash.

The novel opens with Kate in the kitchen at 1:37am baking mince pies. Actually, she is faking pies, already bought from the market, in order to "look like something mother made" (Pearson 5). She is doing this "faking" in response to a letter sent by her daughter's school asking if "parents could please make a voluntary contribution of appropriate festive refreshments". She's just returned from a business trip from the States and hasn't had enough time to bake real mother made pies. The image of Kate in the kitchen is against her feminist sentiment. Liberal Feminists are against the "imbalance in domestic work" caused by the fact that "when men and women both leave the home to earn wages, woman continues to perform more of unpaid domestic work" (Freedman 131).

Kate's efforts to send her daughter's school such food, even if she had to fake it, is simulated by some childhood memories. In 1974, at one of her school festivals, she was informed that there were two kinds of mothers the bad and the good ones. Negligent mothers who "went out to work" and were labelled as "Woman Who Cuts Corner". The good ones are the "proper mothers, self-sacrificing bakers of apple pies". The fact that Kate is still haunted by this memory corresponds to Dorrit Cohn's remark that "in autobiographical novels the time off in tensest reflection is more often the present rather than the past", now at the age of thirty-five, with the deeply implanted memory, Kate humbly insinuates she belongs to the bad mothers' camp. Indeed, she experiences tensions between autonomy and maternity, which leads her to reflect upon the paradigm of gender equality.

According to Kate equality between sexes outside the family can be negotiated. Equal political, economic, social rights with men, which liberal feminism has fought for; do not always work within the family. Kate's convention of the major role women plays in their family life echoes Caron Gilligan argument that "women define themselves through relationships with others, through a web of relationships of intimacy and care rather than through a hierarchy based on separation and self fulfillment" (cited in Chapter 77). This "type of relational identity" as Hertha D. Sweet Wong calls, it is partly due to "women's ties to biological rhythms such as childbearing or to socially unscripted patterns like domestic labor and child rearing". Owing to Kate's comprehension of the differences between the two sexes, she compares herself to the "port" and her husband to the "ocean" in their Kids' life. Therefore, to Kate, equality of the sexes is an immature idea, she therefore maintains: do I believe in the equality of sexes? I'm sure. I did once, with all passionate certainty of someone very young who knew absolutely everything and therefore nothing at all. It was a nice idea, equality; noble, indisputably fair. But how the hell was it supposed to work? Women carry the puzzle of family life in their heads, they just do.

This outlook echoes Eve Browning Cole's feminist epistemic interpretation of men and women,

{w}omen's work in the domestic sphere tends to require a high degree of interpersonal interaction, involving as it does other human beings and their welfare. Men's work takes place in more regulated situations, in which the interpersonal element typically is subordinated to some larger bureaucratically defined process and where rule-following can govern behavior.

Kate knows very well that no matter how her husband shares responsibility in looking after the kids, her maternal care can never be dispensed with. This is partly due to how each comprehends life. Her feminist epistemology enlightens with the notion that. Life is a road for a man, for women, it's a map we're always thinking about side roads and slip roads and doubling back, while they simply plough on in the fast line. Their only diversion is an occasional brilliant idea for short cuts, most of which turn out to be longer and more treacherous than the original route.

Kate's contemplation is a backlash against liberal feminism and its impact on family life.

Kate's habit of faking food marks an initiation of a gradual change of conception of self – realization. She is honest enough to admit that, she has taken part in demoralizing her children. She bribes them to be quiet and obedient, or even as a compensation for her absences, when she buys her daughter a “global Barbie collection” from all the international airports she's been to. Her daughter “now has a gift to mark each occasion of her mother's infidelity – playing away with her career”. Kates's autonomy has no importance to the little girl. What really matters is having her full share of maternal care and love, indeed, kate's business trips are looked at as an intruder on mother's time. The little girl's sense of her mother's “infidelity” is aroused by the violation of her own filial rights by such occasional travels. On the other hand, Kate knows that her gifts are more temporal compensations, and nothing could “really” compensate for such absences, which makes the words of her mother – in – law keep echoing in her mind “you can't buy their love”. Kate even admits that she is convinced that, “ any working mother who says she doesn't bribe her kids can add liar to her CV”. Conflicting experiences, being both caregiver and maintainer, make of kate her own severe critic. The mother in Kate, as usual torn apart between motherhood and autonomy, is occasionally subjected to imaginary courts of motherhood where her maternal performance is examined by the judges.

Whenever she appeared before the court of motherhood, the women never seemed to do herself justice ... there she was, all the arguments on the tip of her tongue, the perfectly good reasons why she went out to work, the way it benefited both her and the children, the killer quote from Gloria Steinem about how no man has ever had to ask advice on how to combine fatherhood and a career.

The passage represents Kate's mixed sentiments. Her inability to defend herself is a result of feeling that she is a negligent mother. Meanwhile, the passage seeks women's right to work and to have equal opportunity with men, it attacks gender, political and social discrimination against women where men can go to work without any blame, while women are exposed to blame if they do. Despite her autonomy, kate submits to these social codes as she puts away the photographs of her children in the drawer of her desk at EME instead of putting them on it. She contemplates on this act acknowledging, “If a man has pictures of kids on his desk, it enhances his humanity, if a women has them, it decreases hers. Why? Because he's not supposed to be home with the children: she is”.

Kate's argument is brief and unsophisticated, yet it implies her deep sense of resentment and frustration at such biased social milieu. Such a biased social attitude deepens Kate's sentiments of liberal feminism. Eve Browning Cole sheds light on this burden with which women are loaded, and of which men are relieved, she points out that behavioral and epistemically women have to excel in their ability to speak two languages as caregivers and maintainers of life. As for men they "will be monolingual... their epistemic strategies will show this singularity of emphasis". Still, Kate accepts the challenge of being an autonomous liberal feminist.

On several occasions, Kate expresses her firm rejection of the idea of retirement for her kids' sake. She simply can't imagine herself playing the "ideal" which is a "mummy staying at home and laying down her life for small feet to walk over ... you don't know me very well if you think I could do that". She even thinks that giving up work would make her "go mad". Kate's attitude accords with liberal feminism's which is described by Rita Felski as "anti - home" as it associates home with "familiarity, dullness, stasis" (qtd in Hollows 100). In most of liberal feminist's narratives leaving home is the major condition for exploring the world, crossing gender boundaries and for emancipating women. Though liberal feminists are enthusiastic about women exploring the world, they remain silent about the notion of women "return home". Kate's rejection of the ideal picture of motherhood echoes Friedman's image of traditional women:

Kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing stationwagonsful of children at school ... Their only dream (is) to be perfect wives and mothers...they wanted the men to make the major decisions. They gloried in their roles as women, and wrote proudly on the census blank: "Occupation: housewife. (Friedman 18)

Kate is still a liberal feminist, she is not yet prepared to make personal sacrifice for such an ideal regardless of her kids with emotional needs.

However, Kate's spending long time away from her kids, sometimes in the office and other times abroad, instigates her contemplations over here maternal loss. She poses questions over her substitutes.

What is the cost when you pay someone else to be a mother to your children? Has anyone calculated it? I'm not talking about money. The money's a lot, but how much is the other thing?

Kate admits that while she was away in the office, her daughter, "formed her first sentence: want to go home. But I was not there to hear it, nor was I at the home where she so badly wanted to go". Kate's sense of regret and sorrow is evident for missing such precious moments of her daughter's growing up.

Kate's position as a liberal feminist is further shaken by the role played by a nursery and nanny in her kids' life. She experiences a dreadful feeling of jealousy of the nanny's intimacy with her children. Once, on her return home from the office she finds: Paula on the sofa with Emily and Ben. All snuggled up together with Toy Story on the TV and giggling uncontrollably.

So I ask Paula if she hasn't got anything better to be getting on with, and I hate the sound of my voice: priggish, pious, lady of the bloody manor. And they all look at me, eyes widening in amazement, and then they start giggling again. Can't help it. Giggling at the silly lady who's come in and tried to stop the fun. As though you could turn off just like that.

Sometimes I think Paula's too close to them, it's not healthy.

Kate's sense of competition with the nanny over her children's intimacy is obvious. Her nanny shares the kids their happy time, while she, the mother, is excluded. She arrives home burdened by the demands of her job, while her nanny enjoys the cuddling and intimacy of the kids. Feeling jealous, the mother tries to dismiss the company and end the fun, but the company is being too entertained to mind here. She is looking at as an intruder, both by her children and the nanny. Kate is so moved by her inability to share these intimate moments. But, ironically, she reminds herself that she is paying for her own estrangement from her kids, and her own maternal loss, so, she has no right to complain.

Pursuing career and money does not only endanger Kate's relation with her kids, but also with her husband. She works hard to achieve autonomy, and insist on equal share of responsibility. However, the job which Kate occupies is busier and more hilarious than her husband's, which strains their relationship. Her constant absences from home; leads Richard to either watch TV or read the newspaper, other times he is distracting the baby while Kate leaves for office. She herself admits, "I expect a man-my man-to do woman's, because if he doesn't I can't do a man's work" (pearson51).

Moreover, Kate's salary makes her the "main breadwinner," which represents a violation of the conventional social concept that "the gender boundary of breadwinning is maintained by constructing men as major (rather than sole) breadwinners, while wives are seen as helping out" (Tichenor 128). Her violation of such social convention makes it difficult for her husband, who admits "I have a pretty hard time with it myself" (Pearson 60). It is obvious that Kate's status represents what Tichenor points out as, "a threat to the husband's masculinity or sense of self as a man and therefore uncomfortable for him". The difficulty of the situation is acknowledged by Kate, who notices the deterioration of her husband's condition. She mentions that there were wrinkles between his eyebrows which she hadn't noticed before, and that they show more when he frowned, another time she notices that his looks were wild, or that he looked old. Moreover, Kate doesn't make much effort to cure such deteriorations but only ironically comments that she is thankful that her absences haven't turned him into an alcoholic serial adulterer. Her main contemplations revolve around her detachment from her children, the failure of her motherhood and the demands of her career. Kate's resistance to her mother's fate made her hardly able to notice that she has turned her husband into semi-image of her mother.

However the turning point in Kate's life occurs while on a business trip to the states. During her absence walks away and her baby is seriously injured. The nanny reads her, over the phone, her husband's note in which he tells her of his decision. The effect on her is painful indeed and gives "the sensation of the ground, giving away beneath your feet". Kate recognizes that she has been a negligent wife. This recognition makes Kate realize that for a long time she and her husband have not been communicating with each other:

I tried to think of the last time I saw him. Saw him properly... not just you see the blur of a person in the rear-view mirror. In the past few months, I go out and he takes over or he leaves and I take over. We swap instructions in the hall... or else we leave a note. Sometimes we barely meet each other's eyes.

Though the spatial distance between the experiencing self and the present is rather short- it could be a few years or even months; since her daughter is only six-yet the

cognitive privilege of the latter over the former is evident. She realizes that their marriage has turned into a race relationship. Each is keen to keep racing only to hold the fort. It has become a matter of performing domestic duties in the form of rotating shifts. Their eyes barely meet, either because they don't have the time or because they don't want to face the reality that their marriage has become void of intimacy.

Kate pays a visit to her mother, who leads a traditional life very different from hers. At the moment of crisis Kate does not seek consolation for women like herself with liberal feminist views but goes to her mother. Liberal feminist views have led to marital estrangement and eventually the breaking up of her family. The diversity of the two worlds, the daughter's and her mother's, is clear. Kate acknowledges that "women's liberation... never reached the parts where my parents lived, and to a remarkable extent, still hasn't". The life of each of the two women is employed to dwell on the losses and gains of the two camps: liberal feminism and backlash, and their effect on woman's behaviour. When we first see Kate's mother, "she is holding a handkerchief which is attached to the bloody nose of small girl". The mother knows that the school, where she works and basically runs, pays her less, but she "doesn't like to make a fuss" unlike her daughter who usually has to fight hard to get her bonus, or to negotiate to be promoted. Kate realizes why her mother is so keen to make her sandwiches, "that eating wasn't the point of... mother's sandwiches. They were there to give her something she could do for me". Unlike Kate, who once raced to purchase a pair of zebra shoes just because she saw another woman considering buying them, the mother here has a "gift for putting others before [herself]". This self-effacement for the good of others is yet another value which Kate has not really experienced. Further, despite the fact that she has been hurt, humiliated and deserted by her husband, Kate's mother is always defending him and finds excuses for the wrongs he has been doing.

Leaving her mother's home, Kate goes back to the humdrum life of work in London. She undergoes another experience which helps her to realize what she has been overlooking for a long time. Her baby, Ben, has had a fall and he "went all limp". When Kate takes the baby to the hospital, she is subjected to a severe test of mother care. The doctor keeps asking her questions about her son which she can't answer. She doesn't know for "how long has the little boy had a temperature", or whether he has been "bowel movement", she can't tell her baby's weight, and she hasn't even put her son to bed for two nights because of her arrival home late after his bedtime. All is left of his nanny to do. This incident helps Kate to view her relation to her family from a different perspective.

Kate's personal experience is analogous to the film; children in both cases are the victims. At a moment of enlightenment Kate realizes that "suddenly, I have the most disturbing feeling that the film is talking to me. Then her daughter announces "when I have babies, mummy, I'm going to look after them myself till they are adult. No nannies". Kate considers that the afternoon she spends with her kids as "the most profitable few hours of the financial year to date". Compared to Kate's earlier materialist concept of time, this can be considered a drastic change of attitude. She fully realizes now that she has been missing very precious time of her kids' infancy by not being with them. This realization helps her to make the decision of giving up work and as usual she enlists her reasons:

1. Because I have got two lives and I don't have time to enjoy either of them.

2. Because 24 hours are not enough.
3. Because my children will be young for only a short time.
4. Because one day I caught my husband looking at me the way my mother used to look at my father.
5. Because becoming a man is a waste of a woman.

These reasons are actually a backlash to the gains of liberal feminism which has always fought for equal rights, overlooking family life and children's needs.

Kate is finally able to evaluate her hectic life. She realizes that she only performs her duties, but she neither enjoys her motherhood nor her career. She also realizes that the demands of her career have victimized both her husband and the children. She acknowledges that the relation between the two sexes is not a question of superiority and inferiority. She even believes that, "men without wives, they lose their spines, their ability to walk in the world... Men need women more than women need men".

Kate's comprehension of the relation between the two sexes, changes from being a competitive one into a complementary relationship. Actually, it is women who have the higher hand in this relationship, but that is "the untold secret of the world." Indeed, her earlier feminist belief that if men can't do women work, then women won't do men's work, gives away to her family demands. Further, Kate's downshifting, giving up working and moving to the country, is decided regardless of class position, secured by her career. As indicated earlier, she was not one of the securely middle class who usually "possess the security of reserves of economic capital and the security of their middle-class habits" (Hollows, 113), in other words kate did not inherit her middle-classness but achieved it. Her earlier financial worries are now overweight by her worries about the stability of her family. Indeed, as Joanne Hollows suggest,

One significant feature of downshifting stories is their ability to seemingly resolve the problems of modern femininity through geographical relocation. The pressure to "work-life balance" are magically resolved through the process of relocation as urban femininities are abandoned in favor of rural femininities, which seem imbued with balm of the "rural idyll".

Downshifting, as a postfeminist "Choice" is not necessarily a "turning back" as has been viewed by liberal feminism. This "choice" broadens the scope of women's autonomy by suggesting that it can be achieved in different areas. Kate's decision marks her final self-fulfillment, it also accords with feminist epistemology which argues that identity is subject to change, it has never been fixed as enlightenment philosophy once insisted.

Conclusion

The paper shows an approach to Liberal feminism for the sake of investigating the following issues: Firstly, modern feminist epistemology offers against traditional one. Secondly, do the subjective experiences allow for different independent identities?

Another important factor has been discussed in the paper which is the influence of the gains of liberal feminism on women. The proposition is that these can guarantee that women equality with men and they can have their autonomy but spontaneously made them miserable.

Obviously, the novel, *I Don't know How She Does it*, is subject of the personal experiences, but this is attached with a strong engagement with paramount social and political issues. Kate's contemplation can be considered as a backlash against liberal feminism and its impact on family life.

The relation between men and women, changes from being a competitive relationship into a complementary one. In fact, the higher hand is for women in this relationship. Finally, there is a real evaluation of the relation between men and women is not a question of superiority and inferiority. Kate believes that, “men without wives, they lose their spines, their ability to walk in the world... Men need women more than women need men”.

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