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## *The paradox of being a woman teacher*

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**ABSTRACT** *In this article I follow genealogical lines of analysis in an attempt to map the different discourses and practices that interweave women's position in education today. I have theorised education as a nexus of created paradoxical spaces, where the female self has attempted to surpass closed boundaries and to question the dichotomy of the feminised private and/or the masculine public. I have also considered the importance of time restrictions upon women's lives and have paid attention to the multifarious ways these lives are highly structured by specific space/time regulations. The genealogical cartography I have drawn, depicts various positions, where the female self has created parodic unities and temporary coalitions. Finally in tracing exit points that education has offered women, I have considered some of the implications of feminist theories for the subversion of the various dilemmas and dichotomies the female subject has lived through.*

### **What is our present today?**

I was a teacher. I never wanted to be, and now that I've stopped, I never will be again, but for several years it took my heart. I entered a place of darkness, a long tunnel of days: retreat from the world. I want to explain, to tell what it is I know. Teaching young children must always be, in some way or other, a retreat from general social life and from fully adult relationships, a way of becoming Lucy Snowe's dormouse, rolled up in the prisonhouse, the schoolroom (Steedman, 1992, p.52).

The staffroom is full of women eating cottage cheese or grapefruit. Each of them knows about diet and eating and sexuality. They are willing and happy to talk about these, caught inside what they are: the unique

combination of worker and woman, dependent and independent, free and trapped (Walkerdine, 1990, p.28).

At the end of August in 1987 I sat on the floor in my bedroom and I cried. I had spent the whole summer finishing my dissertation and had left myself only four days in which to get ready for the examinations which were to follow. And I didn't know a thing. I couldn't remember anything I had ever read....At the end of August I had been teaching for seventeen years and I had been a college lecturer for the last three of these years. I already had an MA....And yet here I was sitting on the floor and crying....One year after the MA I was suffering from withdrawal symptoms. I honestly believe that you are a better teacher if you are also a student at the same time... So I registered for a Ph.D. exactly one year later and I am going to finish this year. I will never do another course again, I have really had enough this time. Or have I? (Holding On diaries, 1994)

There are a number of interesting dualities in the above extracts: 'worker and woman', 'mother and teacher', 'teacher and student', 'dependent and independent' 'free and trapped'. The three of them come from women, who at a certain moment, left primary teaching to follow an academic career. Being a woman teacher myself, I was intrigued by them. In this paper I want to further consider these dualities and see how they are interwoven in the construction of the problematic status of the female educator in the UK, today. Following Foucauldian modes of interrogation I want to trace women's polymorphous positions in education and explore the power/knowledge relations that both condition this construction and derive from it. In the process of 'mapping' women teachers within a certain system of social relations, practices and discourses, past, present and future 'tenses' of the female self in education emerge and intermingle: what are we? what is this present of ours and how do we conceive ourselves within this present? how have we become what we are and what are the possibilities of becoming 'other'? In exploring these questions at the turn of the century, I am drawing on the unpublished autobiography of Constance Maynard, one of the first Girton students and later founder of Westfield College and the unpublished diary of Clara Collet, an assistant schoolmistress, who later left teaching to follow post-graduate studies and become a social researcher. Their unpublished autobiographical texts symbolize rather than represent, the Foucauldian grey, dusty and forgotten documents, genealogy seeks to excavate [1] and resonate silenced voices from the terrain of subjugated knowledges. In turning to the present, I am reading contemporary autobiographical texts of women educators. This is how I have read (hi)stories of the present: Carolyn Steedman (1992) has told fascinating stories of how it feels to be a teacher who cannot anymore bear the children she once loved and became passionately attached to. Her voice from within the 'prisonhouses' has broken the silence, the taboo of speaking out women's discontent of being with children, either as mother, or teacher or both. In reading Valerie Walkerdine's (1990) stories, I have recognised my own schoolgirl fictions that have constrained my becoming an adult of this world. She has depicted shocking pictures of women teachers struggling with unresolved dilemmas and incompatible contradictions. Unlike her great aunt, Clara Collet, Jane Miller (1996) never stopped loving teaching. She tells stories of

those women teachers -and they are many- who have seen teaching as a way to change the world, or at least do something about it. 'Holding On', was a group of women teachers that was formed at the end of an MA in Urban Education course. We came from different sectors of education, had different life patterns, different stories and even countries behind us. The group kept us together for almost two years, 1992-1994. During this period we had meetings, followed by social outings, discussed our readings of books and papers, wrote a paper in collaboration and we kept a diary for the same day and then for the same week, to share our experiences, 'all the horrors, joys and pains of working/living/just coping' (Holding On, 1993).

In focusing on these particular (hi)stories, I have obviously made certain choices. I have listened to some voices, while being aware of the epistemological problems such a selection, inevitably raises. As Morwenna Griffiths has clearly put it: '... which few others do I choose from the very large number I could listen to, since it is plainly impossible to undertake such a serious project with every human being.' (1995:45). In agreement with Griffiths that this is indeed a difficult question, I have drawn again on the Foucauldian framework of my analysis to make clear that the voices I have chosen to listen to, are voices of dissonance. They tell stories of women teachers who feel uncomfortable about their life, who do not hesitate to confess their dilemmas and reveal the dark side of their self. They are women who have interrogated their way of being in the world and have thus made of their 'subjectivity' an open and endless question, at once individual and collective.

### **The female self in education, a disappearing self?**

Teresa de Lauretis defines subjectivity as 'patterns by which experiential and emotional contents, feelings, images and memories are organized to form one's self-image, one's sense of self and others, and of our possibilities of existence' (1986, p.5). Today, dominant patterns of subjectivity have been disrupted. In this context, I will argue, women teachers feel the urgent need to reorganise their feelings, images and memories and rework their sense of self, grappling to make sense of the massive changes that have transformed social institutions, where they have managed to forge a place for themselves:

So in terms of the systems that have been set up, in terms of the general management ... I suppose I am thinking more logistical and financial, yes, it puts things in place that make it easier. In terms of the personal and how it's making you, the teacher, feel in what you are doing ... that's perhaps where I have the problem ... So again it's a double edged sword ... yes, it makes things set up in a very practical ... you know, it gives good messages to the children ... but then how you are personally feeling, I don't know. I'm gabbling, aren't I? I'm really gabbling (cited in Ball, 1997, p.327).

This is a young woman teacher of today, struggling to articulate feelings of 'losing' herself, while being interviewed about the use of Total Quality Management (TQM) in education. Five years earlier Steedman was depicting herself as 'retreating

from the world, entering a tunnel of darkness', in the quotation that initiates this paper. Since the late nineteenth century, women have been striving to create a new self, crossing the boundaries of the private and claiming their rights to be out in the world, to play their part in the public spheres of life. However in the threshold of the twenty-first century, some women teachers appear to be 'losing' themselves in the public arena. They are out but not rarely they feel lost. What is happening?

In their attempts to invent new patterns of existence in education, many western women experience critical contradictions and dilemmas, weaving around the very paradox of being a woman: 'the paradox of a being that is at once captive and absent in discourse, ... a being whose existence and specificity are simultaneously asserted and denied, negated and controlled (de Lauretis, 1990, p.115). Although the 'paradox of being a woman' is one of the major issues raised by feminism in the seventies, it is still very much in the foreground of feminist theorisations of the subject. De Lauretis refers to the instability of the existence and specificity of women, their 'nonbeing' (1990, p.115). It is to the specificity of women's various subject positions in education that the discussion of this paper now turns: the paradox of being a woman in the world of teaching.

### **The woman in the classroom: living through the private/public split**

The paradoxical status of women in education has not emerged in a void. It is poised on a critical dichotomy that has left women oscillating between two worlds: the private and the public. It has been widely discussed how, in the nineteenth century, teaching was for some women, practically the only way to get out of the enclosed circle of their families and assert themselves as independent individuals. Apart from being the only respectable career accessible to women, teaching would also enable them not to distance themselves too much from their private spaces. Teaching was seen as a communication channel, joining the private and public spheres of life. There were a number of discourses and practices that constructed and sustained such a conceptualization of teaching as a career appropriate for women. Following continuities as well as discontinuities and juxtapositions in the genealogy of the urban schoolteacher, Jones (1990) has traced changing images of the schoolteacher: the strict disciplinary figure of the male teacher, acting as a moral reformer of the declining urban poor, was later transformed to a protective father, this rational father-figure giving ultimately its place to the angelic image of a caring mother. Thus the image of the female teacher emerges at the point when love came to constitute a disciplinary technology of schooling and the persona of the teacher became a model parent in a school representing the emotional unity of the family [2]. The representation of school as a model family is I think a crucial point in the analysis of the specificity of women's position in the public spheres of life and work. In the disciplinary space arrangements of the school, the classroom became a private place of silence and isolation, where women once more found themselves enclosed within boundaries, acting as both carers and surveyors of children. In depicting schools as prisonhouses, Steedman (1992) has shown how the enclosed space of the primary school classroom still continues to frustrate women and impose real or ideological restrictions on their lives and choices. In historicising aspects

of women teachers' present experiences, Steedman has cited Charlotte Brontë's powerful narrative to trace contemporary feelings of suffocation back to the nineteenth century (1992, p.51):

Those who live in retirement, whose lives have fallen amid the seclusion of schools and other walled-in and guarded dwellings, are liable to be suddenly and for a long while dropped out of the memory of their friends, the denizens of a freer world... there falls a stilly pause, a wordless silence, a long blank of oblivion.

While working in the enclosed space of classrooms, women teachers continually move around private and public subject positions. Love is not so much 'used' as a disciplinary technology in contemporary pedagogical practices, yet there is an increasing belief in the psychological effectiveness of love and even in the secondary sector, women teachers continue to be considered ideal as caring and love-giving educators and to represent themselves as such. The school classroom remains the locale par excellence where women teachers try to make sense of themselves in relation to some important others, their students: 'I am never sure whether I know too much or too little about the children in my class. Byron for instance, lives in a residential home ... Bella lives with her father and his elderly lover, and David's father died last year ...' (Miller, 1996, pp. 119). The private space of the classroom is a locale which has promoted the cultivation and expression of women's 'natural' inclinations: being with children and caring for others. Such notions of constructed naturalness, is of particular concern for the genealogical inquiries of this paper. As it has been commented: 'the critical side of Foucault's thought was rather directed to the "naturalness" through which "systems of thought" maintain their hold over us' (Rajchman, 1991, p.101).

### **The woman who loves: deconstructing the natural**

The contemporary image of the woman teacher seems strongly bound to her maternal qualities, real or potential. Just because it is 'natural', women teachers are usually expected to conform to the model of mothering. Steedman has argued that this externally imposed motherhood might be the source of much of the frustration women-teachers experience today (1992, p.53). In the arena of power games the mother/teacher construct has several times turned the tables on the players. As a nineteenth century discourse, it was used for the mass recruitment of cheap and submissive teachers, a need that became urgent with the expansion of state schooling after 1870 [3]. Women on the other hand, saw teaching as a socially acceptable way to become 'other' than wives and mothers, or to evade poverty and 'go up into the next class'. In considering women's involvement in education, Grumet (1988) has stressed the pervasive impact of patriarchy on the discourses and practices that led to the 'feminization of teaching'. Grumet, however, has seen women teachers' experiences as positive sites of power and creativity, that not only influenced their teaching practices, but geared their existential and professional mobility. In this light, the deployment of mother/teacher relationship has a genealogy of conflicting episodes and discontinuities, that make up a quite

extraordinary and problematic puzzle. As Steedman (1989, 1992) has commented, the pedagogical model of mothering which has become a dominant discourse particularly within primary schooling, is a relatively recent cultural artifact and has been created in the classrooms by women who were not natural mothers. Steedman has noted that the ideal Victorian middle-class mother would devote very little time for her children who were otherwise looked after by other women, paid to do so, while Miller has commented that the working-class mother of the same period, would have so much to do that it was practically impossible to attend to her children. ‘So the teacher was not only an idealised mother but a compensatory mother, a mother designed to make up for the pretty serious shortcomings of most real mothers’ (1996, p.102).

At the turn of the nineteenth century, it was considered quite natural that unmarried women would perform their maternal teaching roles unproblematically. Soon, however, single women became a ‘problem’ and a social threat, things changed and unmarried teachers faced an increasing social hostility [4]. While however unmarried teachers were seen as a threat to family values and their female pupils, marriage bars in education were introduced between 1921 and 1923. Yet the marriage bar was again used in discourses aiming to protect family values. Married women teachers were presented as neglecting their own families for the sake of their work, without having a real need for money. Whether married or unmarried, women teachers were threatening well-established patriarchal structures. In the Foucauldian notion of bio-politics, the body of women, their nature, became the site upon which state policies wishing to control the workforce women teachers represented, were implemented and discourses rationalizing and sustaining such state interventions were formed. Even when the marriage bar was raised [5], the pieces of woman, wife, mother, teacher have never really ‘fitted’ together and their combination continues to be unstable and risky. It is not very long ago when John Patten as Secretary of State for Education in the U.K. produced the idea of a ‘Mums Army’, women with the experience of motherhood behind them, who could be recruited quickly and cheaply into teaching [6]. This is a vital example of how the discourses around natural motherhood can at appropriate moments be deployed to recruit inherently skilful teachers, in the sense that mothering is something acquired by experience and can be re-deployed into the classroom, an assumption that challenges and ultimately jeopardises the professional conception of the teacher.

The controversial discussions, different stances and structural arrangements regarding women teachers, marriage and mothering provide a strong paradigm of what Foucault has described as the polyvalence of discourses. As Foucault sees it, in a certain system of a ‘political economy’ of truth, discourses are often in opposition to each other and events are located in a whole lot of different levels, producing different effects: ‘The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of truth’ (Foucault, 1980, p.114). It would be therefore interesting to look closer at the politics of truth around the compatibility of women teachers and marriage, along the five traits Foucault (1980) has sketched in his analyses.

First, ‘truth is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it’ (Foucault 1980, p.131). In the beginning of their involvement in teaching, women would be expected to remain unmarried. This was almost taken for granted, as it was a common sense of the era that family commitments should completely

occupy a woman's space and time. However, since marriage was not statistically an option available to all women, those who fell out of the institution of the family, could be accepted into the institution of education. The scientific form of the discourses were around the naturalness of the maternal instincts of women, which turned them into the 'angel of the house' or 'the angel of the classroom', two options which were regarded as being incompatible with each other. Carol Dyhouse has pointed out to the medico-scientific discourses that were fabricated around the 'abnormal' effects education could cause to women [7].

Second, 'it is subject to constant economic and political incitement' notes Foucault (1980, p.131), which in the case of women's involvement in teaching applies to the already referred to economic, political and social conditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which first created the need for the mass recruitment of women in teaching, but later sought ways to solve the problem of unemployment by getting rid of them. Third 'it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption' and fourth 'it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media), (Foucault, 1980, p.131). Ideas and discourses about women, teaching, family and domesticity circulated around a number of apparatuses, became prominent themes of journalistic articles and/or literary writing, and informed every-day sayings, ideas conceptions and practices. I have already referred to the way Brontë's novels reflect feelings of suffocation experienced by women teachers, while in writing about women teachers at the turn of the nineteenth century, Copelman (1986), Kean (1990), Steedman (1992) and Miller (1996) have all cited literary writings of the era, depicting characters of women teachers and the ideas and perceptions that surrounded them [8]. Moreover Jeffreys (1985) and Mackinnon (1997) have critically presented the discourses of sexologists in the beginning of this century, concerned about the decline of moral responsibility and maternal duty among married women or accusing unmarried women of 'frigidity' and sexual perversity [9].

Finally 'it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles), concludes Foucault. This is an important issue to be considered, since it enlightens the stage of the war of discourses, the site where the previous four strategic traits in the 'politics of truth' are contested, disputed and resisted, but also recur, and are re-established perhaps on different levels and in different configurations. In relation to women teachers and marriage, it is the case that women were used as cheap labour force to reform and educate the children of the people, but it is also the case that some women used teaching to cross the boundaries of the private domestic circle and avoid the fate/curse of getting married and bearing children. Teaching according to the first wave feminist Hamilton (1981, p.127), constituted one of the few alternatives to forced marriage, while Collet commented that 'it is the only brain-work offered them, and badly paid as it is, it is better paid than any other work done by women' (1902, p.13).

Later on, however, some women also used teaching to combine marriage and family with waged work. I will refer again to Copelman who has noted that some 25 per cent of the women teachers in London's late Victorian and Edwardian state schools were married, attempting at that time not only to combine career and marriage, but also to invent new patterns of heterosexual relationships, 'a new comradeship between men and women' as the title of a lecture given in 1901 by a London woman teacher was

suggesting (Copelman, 1986:175). Alison Oram has further discussed the ways women teachers in the interwar years circulated among power relations and shifting discourses of sexuality and femininity, which were interwoven with the changing conditions of the teaching profession.

Hovering between the public and the private, women frequently found themselves trapped in their 'conquered territory' of teaching. Whichever the case however, they fought against reactionary structures and ideologies, adopted strategies that reversed the restrictive situations that were being imposed upon them and negotiated their place in the world. The discourses which turned out to be dominant at times were not simply dictated by some powerful apparatuses. They were also the result of endless ideological struggles and resistance, since as Foucault has commented, 'in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance ... there would be no relations of power' (1991b, p.12).

### **Juggling with space/time restrictions**

I have argued that in their moving out into the world, women carried their 'natural tasks' in their baggage and in the historical and cultural context of the nineteenth century accommodated themselves to semi-public spheres of life, 'rolling' themselves into new types of enclosures, the school classroom. I have also argued that in the public sphere of school, the classroom has functioned as a private zone within which the woman teacher is in a position of power, which however she cannot exercise, since this power is 'informal, fragile and constrained' (cited in Edwards, 1993, p.18), an assimilation of the power women have as mothers of families. The issue of powerlessness in teaching is of course, more complicated than simply defined by gendered inequalities, and has historically involved both male and female teachers. Lortie (1957) has traced a historical continuation in the issue of teachers' subordination to others, usually administrators and professors of the pedagogical disciplines, but outside the every-day reality of schooling. The historical powerlessness of teachers is however, further reproduced and perpetuated within schools, where power relations define different and sometimes contradictory positions teachers inhabit, according to the subject they teach and furthermore, along 'traditional' discrimination lines, like age, race and gender. In focusing however onto gendered related 'space problems' within a wider network of power relations within schools, it seems that in their passage to the twenty-first century, women are still oscillating between public and private, two spheres that remain separated, at the same time that they interact and impinge upon each other, creating crises, conflicts and dilemmas in women's lives. In addition, sociological work and writing on women and teaching has documented a series of discourses and practices that configure women's controversial status in education, in terms of career opportunities and working conditions (Acker, 1989, 1994). What I believe is dispersed in such discourses, ideologies and practices is the difficulty women face in attempting to fashion a self, that transcends restrictions and limitations of both the private and the public spheres and ultimately create patterns of an autonomous existence, beyond imposed space boundaries. Thus, the ambivalent persona of the female educator is invested by the accumulation of a series of layers that emerge from the gaps, ruptures and interstices women have slipped into, as they have been trying to avoid being

positioned in the social structuring of a world that recognises them only as belonging subjects, usually wives, mothers, daughters or sisters of enclosed spaces, like those of their families. Here is a page from the diary of a woman teacher, holding a senior position in adult education:

7.15: My husband gets up and drives to Canterbury where he teaches part time. Breakfast and organising children for school.

10.00 Go to my office and try to catch up on projects.

12.30 Go to another branch where I have senior arrangement responsibility. Pick up some art materials for my class on the way. Talk issues over with the branch secretary while I eat a sandwich. Check everything is functioning as it should be.

1.20 Set up my class, (life drawing) Class goes well, ... I give them feedback that the borough inspectors were impressed by their recent visit to the college...

4.30 talk to a colleague about the collapse of the adult education service in another borough on the way to the tube. Go home feeling guilty at leaving early.

5.30 arrive home and cook the children's supper and discuss the events of their day.

6.40 Go to the doctor with all the children in tow ... My husband meets me at the surgery and we all go home.

(Holding On diaries, 1994)

The above autobiographical extracts, mostly give voice to every-day frustrations, which however problematic in terms of their referentiality, mediate the life experiences of 'real' women teachers of today. 'Real' women can work in the adult education sector, and have a nuclear family with a husband and children and everything. In almost a magical way they can combine housework, child-care and a senior position in adult education. In the time and space of a workday they continually move in and out of personal and public boundaries. Women have been described as 'time-poor' (Edwards, 1993, p.64). Everything seems to be a result of good organization of time. The question of the expenditure of time is not simply quantitative, it is strictly structured by the time requirements of others' lives (Edwards, 1993, p.64). Sometimes women will even feel 'guilty', when they have managed not to be utterly exhausted. Women are reported to feel guilty about how they decide to allocate their time, about the responsibility of time combinations, 'of piecing together and coordinating the fragmented nature and strands of the demands of life' (Edwards, 1993, p.73), and above all, about having time to themselves.

Women can also be primary teachers, single mothers and part-time students in higher education. In juggling themselves between so many roles they have to succeed in

what Foucault has described as the exhaustive use of time, ‘extracting from time even more available moments, even more useful forces’ (1991a, p.154):

School again, but Monday is the good day. I only teach for four hours. However I had to apply for a day’s leave on Friday, the day of my college presentation and the headmaster was far from understanding. Since I had an hour off I rushed to the supermarket and then to a stationer’s to buy some transparencies for my presentation. School again,- the exhaustive use of time. Back home, I left my daughter with my brother’s girlfriend and rushed to the College. I had to collect an interlibrary loan. Back home I had to help my daughter with her maths. After she had gone to bed, I went on working for my presentation. My partner did not turn up or call, I think it is better if we have some time to ourselves. I went to bed rather early and read a little before I slept: ‘The Passion of Michel Foucault’ (Holding On diaries, 1994).

As I have already argued, the arrangement of time is exceptionally important in lives that run in between work obligations, child care and personal expansion. The student role adds more conflict to the already tense wife/partner and mother private roles of women. For women and the ‘others’ around them, taking time to study, means taking time for themselves. From a Foucauldian perspective, power games create moments and points of resistance. In striving to negotiate time and space for themselves women often come into conflict with their partners who feel neglected. In her research on the lives of mature women students Edwards (1993) has found that the various threats men feel about their female partners returning to education, have often ended relationships.

However conflicts in women’s lives do not occur in a social void. Individuals struggle to cope within certain limits of freedom and choice. These limits may be negotiable but not always on an individual level. Facing the rigid behaviour of the headmaster/headmistress or coping with the rejection of your partner, requires more than good time management. It is more an issue of collective reaction, of resisting socially and politically imposed structures and limitations on individual lives. It provides a good example of the personal becoming political and vice versa.

Sometimes ‘real’ women can work in further education and have grown up ‘children’: ‘Get home to find my eighteen year old daughter frying sausages whilst simultaneously talking on the phone. Grease everywhere! Spend half an hour cleaning up the mess before sorting out some edible food to eat’ (Holding On diaries, 1994). Is it again about the problematic relationship between mothers and daughters? Isn’t there any exception in the case of feminist women teachers at least? Unfortunately it seems that there isn’t. The tension of teaching affects women’s social relations with others, the way they are outside the ‘greedy’[10] educational institutions, their everyday attitudes and behaviour. Steedman has most powerfully recounted how women teachers find difficulty in switching off and on, when they move between home and school and how school devours their whole existence: ‘I loved my children and worked hard for them, lay awake at night worrying about them, spent my Sundays making workcards ... My back ached as I pinned their paintings ... We laughed a lot, cried a lot (Steedman, 1992, p.53).

The textual selves that are inscribed in the above autobiographical writings seem to be selves in a continuous interaction with 'others'. Of course, social interaction does not apply only to women. What is significantly different for the female social self, however, is the ways these 'others' are involved in the place women occupy in the world, how they intervene in the ways they 'negotiate themselves' and take decisions regarding their lives and careers. Thus, what seems to emerge as a 'truth' is, that however 'independent' women have come to be, they have never stopped caring for others and it is not surprising that the care debate has created a lot of tension in feminist theorisations of the self (Gilligan, 1982, Scaltsas, 1992, Noddings, 1994) [11]. It also seems that the tasks of care turn out to be the source of much of the frustration women teachers feel today and which is expressed as 'tiredness':

Teach first thing, sort out fairly boring admin. My Faculty Coordinator asks to see me for a meeting... Early evening: attend union branch committee meeting... leave meeting feeling exhausted... Evening: feel sick with tiredness. can hardly speak, shuffle around the house, eat some food, go to bed, still feeling very stressed out (Holding On diaries, 1994).

Tiredness is of course a general characteristic of mental work in high modern society. It is furthermore, a phenomenon directly and historically associated to the teaching profession. As Collet was commenting (1902:104):

The result is that we see girls following the stream and entering the teaching profession; after a few years, growing weary and sick of it, tired of training intellects, and doubtful about the practical value of the training, or altogether careless of it; discontented with a life for which they are naturally unsuited, and seeing no other career before them.

Collet was further noting about the assistant mistresses that: 'In the majority of cases they are devoted to their profession, for the first few years at least; and they only weary of it when they feel that they are beginning to lose some of their youthful vitality, and have no means of refreshing mind and body' (1902, p.57). Moving towards the twenty-first century and confronting the increasing demands and pressures of teaching, this inability to 'refresh' oneself, can become uncontrollable and go beyond limits. It is not very difficult for a self to be crushed under the over demanding pressures of 'greedy' educational institutions:

This could be a pleasant/tense day. I have arranged to have lunch with two friends, both of whom are in the field of 'Early Years' Education. One is a Head Teacher of a large Nursery School outside London, the other ... is unfortunately at the moment on 'indefinite stress leave'. This is all very difficult. I feel sympathy because I know only too well how easy it is to be 'victimised' in a work situation. The thing people loathe most in the 'caring' work arena are those people who are perceived to 'rock the boat' (Holding On diaries, 1994).

In the analysis of the discourses and practices that constitute the reality of disciplinary institutions, Foucault has stressed the importance of space and time arrangements in the organization of such institutions. The paradoxical spaces women experience in the sense that they are always crossing the boundaries of home and school, feeling uneasily in either of them, has been a central theme in my exploration of women teachers' lives. Time, however is no less important as a disciplinary technology in the lives of individuals and space/time is indeed of vital importance in the structuring of individual lives and collective attitudes. In a Foucauldian framework, the regulation of time constitutes a dominant set of disciplinary procedures. Time is regulated according to certain activities and tasks that must be carried out with precision during the day. The organization of time in schools affect the way individuals and especially women, structure both their private and public lives. As it has been commented, 'the emergence of time as a regulator of activities in school, may provide a basic socialization into subordination to time in other institutional contexts (Ball et al., 1984). Women feel obliged to conform to specific time arrangements, since time does not belong to them. They are expected to offer time rather than 'have' it. The giving of time relates the female self to others' lives. It is a symbol of caring.

### **Going out, going up, going beyond**

Some women tend to leave teaching either temporarily or for good. They do it for a variety of reasons, which are interwoven in their life trajectories in quite complicated ways. Some of them feel ambivalent about their job and they are seeking to distance themselves from the turmoil of school life. If this is the case, their first stop is usually a return to higher education. We therefore see that educating the self creates real and/or imaginary spaces of freedom where women take refuge, seeking to get away not only from the constraints of the domestic sphere, but also from the frustration of teaching. As Marjorie Theobald has lucidly commented, 'what happened to women as teachers - as subjectivities shaped by institutionalization, the "everydayness" of waged labour, and the lifetime of self-censure demanded of them - may well be the antithesis of the pleasurable melodrama of emancipation experienced by nineteenth century women in the western nations' (1999, p.21). This tendency to get away as a result of intense discontent with their job, can be traced in the auto/biographical writings of early professionals:

Sun. 28th September 1879: Again comes that 'Tomorrow I go'; which for seven years now has been the chief feature in my life and I go out again into loneliness, conflict and silent work ... Plenty of work, plenty of games, now and then an expedition, and various teas and dinner parties ... This third year at St. Andrews was to me even more strangling and choking than before. *I wanted to tear it right in half and get out, out into air and freedom and to be myself.* All through my life I have been an artist manqué and there was a lion within that raged and roared at times [emphasis added] ( Maynard, unpublished, chapter 35, p.386).

This is how powerfully Maynard expresses her drive to get away of St. Andrews, where she worked for three years as a teacher, after her graduation from Girton College. The seven years she mentions, refer to her three years' study at Girton College, one year at Cheltenham Ladies' College and the further three at St. Andrews. The enthusiastic Girtonian pioneer needed only four years of teaching work to feel again trapped and suffocated within the educational institutions, that only seven years before, were representing for her, a heaven of freedom and creativity. What she was really looking forward to, after only four years of teaching, was to fulfil her life's ambition, to cultivate her passion for art. And that is what she actually did: she left teaching for almost two years and attended the famous Slade School in London:

So I toiled through the loneliness of Cheltenham and the extreme tension and trial of the three years at St. Andrews, which left me with a pervading sense of failure. I had tried my very best and had failed. Then came the sudden bursting of bonds, the leaving my miseries behind in the orange-coloured sunset sky that glowed and the plunge into the entire freedom and happiness of my two Sessions at the School of Art. The first Slade School year seems to me as I look back of it to be unclouded, with its hours of silent and successful work, its warm friendships.... and its magnificent whole-hearted meetings of several different kinds (Maynard unpublished, chapter 44, pp. 2-3).

Despite the initial difficulties and disappointments, Maynard did love teaching. She saw the two years at Slade School as a pleasant break that gave her new strength to go on with teaching:

1880: This great year, the greatest in my life except 1872 is not done with yet, for I have to tell of the Slade School, a beautiful, very busy and yet a true holiday time wedged in between Girton, Cheltenham and St. Andrews ... The Second Session was a good deal, swamped in the active preparation of Westfield and a conflict arose and strengthened week by week between the joys of freedom and the sense of a duty hovering over me like a cloud that was almost appalling in the stringency of its demands upon my life friendships ... and its magnificent whole-hearted meetings of several different kinds (Maynard, unpublished, chapter 39, p. 31).

Other women teachers however, would leave teaching for good. As it turned out, from the very beginning, women would use teaching as a path to higher education, as well as to other professions and careers:

Very shortly after the announcement of the admission of women to degrees Miss Buss sent for me to her room. ... she told me that she had recommended me for a post in the new Wyggeston Girls' Grammar School to be opened in Whitsun week. I should only have 80 pounds a year to begin with but Miss Ellen Leicester the headmistress would give me every facility for preparing myself for the Intermediate Arts

examination in July 1879 and the Final BA in October 1880 (1st BA and 2nd BA in those days). Masters from the Boys' Grammar School would give me lessons in Greek and applied Mathematics and I could manage Latin and English subjects by myself. A little lady who had been spending some time in our classrooms turned out to be Miss Leicester. Interviews followed with my father first and myself afterwards. I went down to Burlington House on Saturday, 15th June, saw my name on the alphabetical honours list of matriculation and was just in time to catch the train to Leicester with no refreshment other than a petrified bun at Kentish Town Station. My brother Wilfred met me there and gave me the extra five shillings necessary for a first class ticket (Collet, unpublished, p.6).

Collet describes how she finally 'found herself as a teacher'. A pupil of the liberal North Collegiate School, she is encouraged by Miss Buss to combine further studies in higher education, with a teaching job in a secondary school. Every arrangement is made to ensure that she will make the best out of her opportunity to prepare herself, working in an educational milieu and as her diary records the whole experience turns out to be both fruitful and exciting for her. However it is through this very route of teaching and studying that she is finally led to the decision to leave teaching:

20-10-1884

My diary makes no reference to my decision to go into residence at College Hall, London in October 1885, to study at University College and take my MA degree in Moral and Political Philosophy (which included Psychology and Economics), nor does it mention that I told Miss Leicester I was giving up my post in July 1885 (Collet, unpublished, : 75).

Studying in higher education was not only a privilege of teachers from the middle classes. As Copelman has noted (1996:171), many London elementary teachers, pursued advanced degrees through the University of London, at the turn of the nineteenth century.

From a perspective of change, women teachers have from their very early stages sought to change themselves through education. Educating others, they have come to feel a strong need to further educate themselves. This drive has created another paradox, that of being a teacher and student at the same time. Recounting the approaches she uses to encourage academic writing among teachers who pursue master's or doctoral studies, Miller notes that 'almost all of them are women working in primary or secondary schools, or in further or higher education' (1996, p.258). What makes women teachers come back to education? Is it their desire to become better professionals? Is it their ambition to climb the hierarchical pyramid of education, by gathering more qualifications? Is it their feeling exhausted and used up in the classrooms? Is it what Walkerdine (1990) has defined as the schoolgirl's fiction, this performative part of femininity that always leave women with a sense of incompetence and unfulfilled goals in life? Or is it a sign that women seeking to reinvent themselves, find in education the transitional space that is essential for reflection upon themselves and their lives? I think that all these possibilities are valid in some ways. Although, none of them can give a full

account for women teachers' tendency to return to education, they highlight the Foucauldian 'care of the self' [12] as a major theme for women's 'will to knowledge'.

The idea of education as a transitional space that offers women the opportunity to imagine themselves differently, has not occurred to me only through various empirical and theoretical readings. It has emerged from my own experience of becoming a mature post-graduate student, as well as my involvement in 'Holding On', the women teachers' group that emerged from the good times we had during the two years of an MA course, which we wanted to sustain and prolong. We wanted in a way to keep a space for reflection in our lives and we saw that place in relation to our return to higher education and staying there longer than the structures of a post-graduate degree allowed. Apparently, 'Holding On' created fragmented moments of transitional experience, and offers partial and limited aspects of women teachers' experiments with the self. However, disparate and 'improbable events', can also be of significant importance. In this view, the isolated 'event' of 'Holding On' experience can be an important 'detail' in the cartography of women teachers' lives and in the exploration of the 'myriads' of relations which are interwoven in the web of women's subject positions in education.

Since education has indisputably disrupted the unequal structure of gendered relationships and has affected women's position in the public world, it is not surprising that it is to education that women turn to remap their position in the public spheres of life. Education has historically been a field of struggles for women, an arena where feminism has evolved in both political and theoretical levels. In the area of higher education, feminists are gradually constructing new models of teachers, students and educational values. As Miller has noted, 'most of the innovative pedagogic experiments of recent years have been conducted by feminist teachers in marginalised or alternative areas of further and higher education (1996, p.53). Feminist research in these areas has shown that there exists, a part of the female self in education that wants to defend her right and choice to be a teacher, but without being obliged either to mother, or to be distant, authoritative, disciplinary or even a post/modern caring manager. In a combination of the notions of Foucault's specific intellectual and Gramsci's engaged intellectual [13], this 'other' female educator seeks to contest the hegemonic discourses that dictate her 'natural' roles and tasks. In 'Teaching to transgress', bell hooks emphasizes the pleasure of teaching as both an act of resistance and performance, 'countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterest and apathy ... of the classroom experience ... offering space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts ...' (hooks, 1994, pp.10,11). In surpassing the constructed binary oppositions and paradoxes that dominate their lives and work, women teachers can open paths towards what Morwenna Griffiths (1995, p.142) has defined as the personal and public autonomy of the self.

### **The paradoxical spaces of education**

Education has been an arena of power relations and antagonistic discourses at play. It is within this matrix, that dispersed images of women teachers as mothers, scholars, students, workers have emerged, to finally produce 'the unique combination' of the female persona as 'dependent and independent, free and trapped', the paradox of being a woman 'at once captive and absent in discourse'. Education has thus created

paradoxical spaces, where the female self has attempted to surpass closed boundaries and to question the dichotomy of the feminized private and/or the masculine public. In exploring the paradoxical spaces of education, I have sketched out a cartography of various subject positions that the female self inhabits, not in a permanent manner, but rather moving around them. In a way I have edited a logbook of travels of the female subject. I have argued that in travelling around unstable, ambivalent and contradictory subject positions, women have been trying to recreate patterns of their existence and imagine new gendered relations, where ‘women are neither the same as men, nor men’s opposite, nor the same as each other’ (Rose, 1993:136).

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### NOTES

1. According to Foucault, ‘genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times’ (Foucault, 1986, p.76). Thus in the Foucauldian framework, the unpublished autobiographical texts of Maynard and Collet, cannot reconstruct the past, neither can they represent women teachers’ actuality. Emerging from the gray area of forgotten documents they are read as frozen symbolic moments of women teachers’ lives at the turn of the century.
2. Dave Jones recounts how from the mid-nineteenth century educational reformers rejected corporal punishment as a means of reforming pupils and introduced the idea of the loving teacher who would transmit moral values to the pupils (Jones, 1990, p.64).
3. Feminist analyses of education have indeed placed a great emphasis on the ‘feminization of teaching’ (Nicholson, 1980, Lather 1987, Grumet, 1988).
4. Hilda Kean refers to the ways the terms ‘flapper’ and ‘spinster’ were used in reactionary discourses in the beginning of the twentieth century, to describe single women teachers, who were over-energetic as a result of sexual frustration and educated girls to be critical of men (Kean, 1990:101).
5. In the mid and late 1930s several local authorities reviewed and raised their marriage bars. See, Oram 1996, pp.57-72 and Acker, 1989, p.24.
6. In June 1993, John Patten as Secretary of Education in the U.K. called for a Mums army to be enrolled in primary schools, to teach young children the ‘3Rs’ of reading, writing and arithmetic.
7. As Carol Dyhouse (1977, 1978) has pointed out, in the 1860s, Herbert Spencer had related strenuous intellectual work with serious effects upon the female physiology, such as sterility and in some cases inability for the educated woman to breastfeed her children in the normal way. In America, in 1873, Dr. Edward Clarke, a professor at Harvard was suggesting that ‘College-educated women in the United States were permanently disabled and he reported a number of female ills, like menstrual disorders, ovaritis, *prolapsus uteri*, hysteria and neuralgia amongst them’ (Dyhouse, 1978, p.302). According to Dyhouse, his ‘concerns’ became popular in England, where John Thorburn, a professor at Manchester argued in the 1880s that he had seen ‘a very large number of cases where schoolgirls had been permanently injured by schoolwork during menstruation’ (ibid.).
8. See Copelman, 1986, Kean 1990, especially the chapter ‘The Home-maker and Unmarried Feminist in Fiction’, Steedman, 1992, especially the chapter ‘Prisonhouses’ and Miller, 1996, especially the chapter ‘The Feminisation of Schooling in Two Countries’.

9. See Jeffreys, 1985, especially the chapter 'The Invention of the Frigid Woman' and Mackinnon, 1997, especially the chapter 'The Selfishness of Women: Moral Panic and Declining Birthrate'.
10. Education and family have been described as 'greedy institutions' (Acker cited in Edwards, 1993, p.62).
11. Drawing on Gilligan's (1982) influential care debate, Nel Noddings (1994) has focused her interest on the ethic of caring and its implications for teaching. In building her argument for 'caring as a moral orientation in teaching', she analyses the notion of *relational ethics* which is based on the interaction of the subjects who are involved in a caring relationship. Since, however, caring pedagogy draws heavily on Gilligan's influential work, it also falls into the range of possible risks and dangers that have been pointed out by different critics of this work. Such critics have interrogated the validity of Gilligan's argument and have tried to articulate an approach to the female self that does not feel obliged to take essentialist perspectives with regard to a 'womanly' nature 'versus' the male. They have argued that women's acts of care-giving far from being freely chosen moral commitments have been historically developed within patriarchal structures which they have served to sustain and perpetuate (Scaltsas, 1992).
12. In exploring the constitution of the subject in the antiquity, Foucault suggested that 'to take care of yourself', 'the concern with the self', turned out to be one of the main principles of the life of citizens (Foucault, 1988a, p.19). According to Foucault, the care of the self, 'took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it became instilled in ways of living, it evolved into procedures, practices and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications and at times even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science' (Foucault, 1990, p.45). Foucault further traced the historical development of the 'care for oneself' from the Platonic dialogue of *Alkibiade*, where it refers to the pedagogy of young men only, its goal being, to prepare them as citizens, to the period of the Stoics where 'care for oneself' is expanded so as to mean to 'spend your whole life learning how to live' (Seneca in Foucault, 1990, p.48), and finally to the era of Christian asceticism, where according to Gregory of Nyssa, taking care of oneself is necessary 'in order to recover the efficacy which God has printed on one's soul and which the body has tarnished' (Foucault, 1988a, p.21).
13. This combination has been suggested by Giroux (1991, p.57).

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