
Gasparyan, D. E. 2023. "Understanding the Interpretation of Bakhtin's Ideas in Feminist Theory" [in English]. *Filosofiya. Zhurnal Vysshey shkoly ekonomiki [Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics]* 7 (4), 125–140.

DIANA GASPARYAN*

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERPRETATION OF BAKHTIN'S IDEAS IN FEMINIST THEORY**

Submitted: June 13, 2023. Reviewed: Sept. 30, 2023. Accepted: Oct. 09, 2023.

Abstract: In recent years, M. Bakhtin's concepts have garnered increasing recognition in Western academic circles, finding applications in diverse fields ranging from linguistics to psychiatry. This belated recognition might appear peculiar without an appreciation for the particular historical context in which Bakhtin's ideas were introduced to the West. Their initial introduction was deeply intertwined with the evolution of feminist theory, feminist criticism, and discussions surrounding gender identity. Notably, the first English rendition of some of Bakhtin's thoughts appeared in Julia Kristeva's «Word, Dialogue and Novel» in 1966, a seminal work in feminist theory. Subsequent to this introduction, for over two decades, Bakhtinian concepts such as «voice», «dialogism», «hybrid construction», «heteroglossia», and «carnival» were predominantly employed in feminist interpretations by renowned feminist theorists, including J. Kristeva, W. Booth, and D. Bauer. This persisted even after direct translations of Bakhtin's works emerged in the 1980s. For many, this association might appear unexpected and even counterintuitive, given that Bakhtin himself did not address feminist concerns or gender topics directly, nor did he reference female authors in his literary critiques. In this article, I will examine the feminist appropriation of central Bakhtinian notions and explore how Bakhtin's theory offers a fertile ground for feminist interpretive strategies. I further contend that while this feminist embrace significantly propelled the spread of Bakhtinian concepts in the West, it simultaneously restricted their broader adoption by employing them as a «Bakhtinian toolkit» to address theoretical deficiencies and circumvent challenges in feminist theory. Often, this led to a simplistic and reductive understanding of Bakhtinian ideas. Additionally, I posit that this issue stems from a core challenge illuminated by Bakhtin's own work: translations and interpretations of the same ideas across languages are not equivalent, as they are influenced by distinct dialogic systems.

Keywords: Bakhtin, Feminist Theory, Gender Identity, Dialogic, Monoglossia, Heteroglossia, Carnival.

DOI: 10.17323/2587-8719-2023-4-125-140.

*Diana Gasparyan, PhD in Philosophy, Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia), dgasparyan@hse.ru, ORCID: 0000-0002-5541-074X.

**© Diana Gasparyan. © Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics.

Acknowledgements: The article (review) was supported by the Russian Science Foundation under grant No. 19-18-00100.

INTRODUCTION

Bakhtin's ideas were introduced to the Western academic sphere with a notable delay. Their initial presentation is closely linked to J. Kristeva and her essay *Word, Dialogue and Novel*. In this work, Kristeva synergized Bakhtin's concepts of "dialogism" and "carnival" with semiotics, forging a theory of intertextuality. It was largely due to her influence that Bakhtin's work gained attention and became subject to scholarly exploration in the West (Gasparyan, 2021).

Kristeva, leveraging Bakhtin's notions of dialogue and ambivalence, spatially situates them along horizontal and vertical axes. The horizontal dimension (dialogue) elucidates how words within a text establish a connection between the subject (author) and the addressee (reader). Meanwhile, the vertical dimension (ambivalence) links the text to other extant writings, which serve as reference points for the present text (Kristeva, 1986).

This perspective encapsulates the concept of intertextuality, suggesting that no text exists within an isolated, immutable bubble of the author's conception. Instead, every text is perpetually interlinked with others. Kristeva articulated it as follows:

Bakhtinian dialogism identifies writing as both subjectivity and communication, or better, as intertextuality. Confronted with this dialogism, the notion of a "person-subject of writing" becomes blurred, yielding to that of "ambivalence of writing" (ibid.: 39).

Kristeva's elucidation of Bakhtin's concept of ambivalence delves into the operational nature of words within a text. When a word, previously employed by another author, is reused in a new text, it concurrently sustains its prior meaning while assimilating an additional one. Consequently, the word becomes ambivalent, bearing dual significance.

This notion would play a pivotal role in the subsequent evolution of gender identity theory, especially concerning the discourse on gender pronouns. Therefore, the manner in which Bakhtin's concepts were introduced into the Western academic arena significantly influenced the avenues through which his ideas were later employed, extending beyond the confines of literary theory.

From Kristeva's interpretation of Bakhtin, his theory proves to be a particularly apt framework for addressing various feminist methodological and theoretical challenges. This compatibility with feminist analysis is especially pronounced in Bakhtinian concepts like dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia,

and carnival. Intriguingly, this alignment might be deemed almost too fitting, especially when considering that Bakhtin does not explicitly address gender in his deliberations on linguistic theory.

While Kristeva doesn't overtly label Bakhtin as a "feminist", her writings suggest that she perceives his ideas as conducive to feminist topics such as power dynamics, sociocultural marginalization, and political subversion. Specifically, Kristeva hints that the Bakhtinian concept of "carnival"—encompassing essential rebellion and subversion—resonates with a feminist objective of societal, linguistic, and political insurrection. By adapting Bakhtin's concepts for feminist purposes, she aligns feminism with carnivalistic and subversive linguistic movements. Though this alignment might appear innocuous on the surface, it fundamentally associates dominant, hegemonic structures with patriarchy and contrasts marginalized dialogic discourse with feminism. This leads to a simplified interpretation of Bakhtin's idea of carnival, which is understood as the "absolute overthrow of established hierarchy in society, politics, and domestic spheres" (Bakhtin, Iswolsky, 1984b: 237).

This constrained interpretation of Bakhtinian ideas was highlighted by subsequent feminists, such as Kay Halasek. She contended,

It is easy to create a biological male/female dichotomy (as Kristeva appears to do) when addressing ... such pairs of constructs. However, I propose that the real dichotomy is more about empowerment versus disempowerment across various spectrums, be it race, class, gender, or ethnicity (Halasek, 2020: 55).

INTERPRETATION OF BAKHTINIAN CONCEPTS IN FEMINIST THEORY

Despite the active incorporation of Bakhtin's ideas within feminist theory, there is a conspicuous absence of references to feminist thought in Bakhtin's own works. He seldom acknowledges women in roles as speakers, writers, or intellectuals, and does not engage with gender-centric issues in his compositions. His discourse on dialogue omits the inclusion of women, and he fails to represent female perspectives within dialogic exchanges. While Bakhtin's theoretical constructs do make room for marginalized voices, as seen in the concept of carnival, many Western scholars hold the view that women and their voices are excluded both from Bakhtin's discussions and his overarching theoretical framework (Cobb, 2019).

This presents a compelling dichotomy: while some feminists posit that by overlooking gender, Bakhtin fosters a monologic male discourse that fails to recognize linguistic diversity stemming from gender differences (Schweickart,

2014). Furthermore, the observation that Bakhtin acknowledges “worlds” and “verbal-ideological systems” encompassing race, profession, class, age, academic institutions, and even family — but glaringly omits gender (Bakhtin, Emerson & Holquist, 1981: 288–291) — has led to the perception that there exists “a woman, a reader absent from Bakhtin’s text, a disempowered, silenced subject” (Halasek, 2020: 53).

This revelation, for some feminists, aligns with expectations of a male author, as articulated by W. Booth on the subject:

Bakhtin, otherwise a subtle critic of ideologies and pleader for a dialogic imagination, has largely excluded women from the dialogue. Nothing in that is either surprising or new. According to Bakhtin’s own analysis all language is not only tainted with ideology — it actually exists as ideology. Every statement, every work of art, will be ridden with ideologies — which means that even the most polyphonic work must exclude, simply by its existence, some languages in order to do justice to others (Booth, 1982: 166).

Despite the critiques, Bakhtin’s ideas are deemed too invaluable to be constricted by the nuances of feminist hermeneutics. Consequently, they were reformulated to better align with methodological needs. An early instance of Bakhtin’s appropriation in feminist discourse was the rationale for the adaptability of his theory to accommodate marginalized, or “other” voices, inclusive of women, as well as ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities. As Schweickart suggested, Bakhtin’s writings are among those “demonstrably sexist texts [that] remain appealing even after they have been subjected to thorough feminist critique” (Schweickart, 2014: 42).

One method for such interpretation is through a feminist lens, reintroducing women’s voices within the framework of Bakhtin’s dialogic community. Drawing upon the premise that diverse voices are essential in Bakhtinian dialogism due to their equal participation in dialogue, Bauer terms the retrospective incorporation of female voices as “empowering” (Bauer, 1988). Consequently, by integrating female voices, the feminist critique aids Bakhtin’s endeavor to dismantle hierarchical and patriarchal frameworks. This transforms Bakhtin’s dialogism into an inclusive domain, welcoming continuous engagement from individuals irrespective of race or gender (Bauer & McKinstry, 1991).

Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism and unfinalizability were later incorporated into postcolonial feminist frameworks, bolstering the potency of postcolonial feminist perspectives. The intersection of Bakhtin’s principles of dialogism and non-finalizability with postcolonial feminist thought lies

in valuing the voices of the culturally distinct “Other” without reducing them to oversimplified cultural stereotypes about caring for individuals from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds (Frank, 2005).

In examining the spectrum of research employing these concepts, it's clear that they are interpreted in a diverse array of ways. For instance, numerous studies exploring the intersection of Bakhtinian thought and feminism utilize the concept of “dialogue” in its traditional sense, denoting human engagement and the resolution of conflicts. This concept is then contextualized in diverse settings, predominantly as a critique of relations rooted in power dynamics and dependency. This trend underscores a prevailing inclination to equate Bakhtin's idea of “dialogic” with “dialogue”—that is, an egalitarian and open interaction or connection.

Utilizing “dialogue” in its conventional sense tends to dilute Bakhtin's concepts of “dialogic” and “voice.” While Bakhtin's usage of these terms (among others) is not always consistent, neither does it typically pertain to individual subjects. As a result, Bakhtin differentiates between a standard dialogue involving individuals and dialogic relationships between “voices.” The latter refers to varied facets of heteroglossia, which might overlap but typically do not align precisely with specific subject positions.

Thus, for Bakhtin, “dialogue” represents merely one potential outcome of dialogical relations and hinges on the willingness of both parties to communicate. In contrast, Bakhtin's concept of the enquotedialogic encompasses a conflict between opposing “voices,” considering voices that opt out of the dialogue and those that are sidelined from participating in it.

This intrinsic comprehension of “voice” and “dialogic” facilitates the exploration of marginalized and deviant narratives within prevailing discourse. Bakhtin's approach encourages to conduct a contextual discourse analysis that transcends mere plot interactions and individual character dialogues. It correlates the linguistic and discursive characteristics of a literary text to its distinct historical and societal backdrop. Therefore, Bakhtin's theory already furnishes linguistic categories that further the examination and recognition of the multifaceted subject positions of women. Thus, although the expansive application and reinterpretation of theoretical concepts might be beneficial for feminist critique, Bakhtin's notions are most robust and persuasive in their original context and meaning.

BAKHTINIAN IDEAS IN GENDER STUDIES

Contemporary gender studies, in spite of its burgeoning prominence and influence in academia, remained somewhat of a “nomological outlier” for

an extended period, given its ambiguous disciplinary standing. Gender-related issues were perceived as facets of political philosophy, postmodern philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis, cultural psychology, and so forth. Given its unmistakably interdisciplinary nature, the precise niche of this field remained elusive for some time before it eventually established itself as an independent discipline. A notable twist in this evolutionary trajectory was the integration of Bakhtin's methodology, which played a significant role in fostering the growth and autonomy of gender studies tools and anchoring them within a defined disciplinary framework.

While Bakhtin's concepts have been extensively employed in feminist theory, such studies have increasingly grappled with issues related to categorization. Second-wave feminists initially emphasized gender distinctions, categorizing subjects as either male or female, and employing a dominant, dualistic perspective grounded in biological distinctions (Stoller, 1968). As noted by Becky Francis and Carrie Paechter, there exists considerable potential within Bakhtin's writings for reconceptualizing the notion of gender; it would indeed be a missed opportunity not to harness this potential (Francis & Paechter, 2015). This is especially relevant when seeking methods to navigate the binary of individual agency versus the determinism inherent in the social milieu, and when addressing the shortcomings of strictly discursive analyses that may overlook the impacts of tangible and bodily factors. As suggested by these scholars and several others, Bakhtin's thought processes and methodology appear to be the most compelling and empirically fruitful for analytical inquiries in the social domain.

Bakhtin's methodological advancements appeared pertinent for probing the essence of gender. In his diverse treatises on literature and culture, he illustrates how the subjective self, conventionally perceived as largely unchanging in traditional discourse, is influenced externally, either through a collective framework or through dialogues externalized by others. The "subject" defines itself in relation to its own essence, engaging more with the Other than with itself. In this context, as Bakhtin envisions through the concepts of polyphony and dialogue, the discourse in which individuals comprehend their identities unfolds not under the aegis of a transcendent authority, but through the autonomous volition of each participant (Paechter, 2003).

Conversely, deconstructing gender binarism presents an inherent challenge to feminist theory. Once this binarism is deconstructed, categorization becomes disrupted, leading to an ambiguous research subject. Without the avenue for such deconstruction, feminist and gender studies grapple with

a methodological shortcoming that is nearly insurmountable—the societal framework of binary roles.

Becky Francis underscores this when she notes that behaviors demonstrated by boys/men are typically labelled as manifesting a form of masculinity, while behaviors shown by girls are perceived as expressing facets of femininity (Francis & Paechter, 2015). The constructs of gender binarism permeate language and cultural artifacts, embedding them within sequences of descriptors so deeply ingrained and lasting that they form the very essence of existence, aspiration, solace, and imagination. As a result, while gender studies cannot overlook the impact of binary gender structures, it also faces the dilemma of being unable to envision a society devoid of them.

Bakhtin acknowledges the impact of politics (that is, external contexts) on linguistic expressions and emphasizes that monoglossia inherently conveys the ideological convictions of the prevailing societal group. Through a feminist lens, male-centric “patriarchal” societal epistemologies can be interpreted as monoglossic. However, in line with Bakhtin’s perspective, any endeavor to rigidly define discourse is ultimately futile. Such efforts contradict the inherent adaptability and dynamism of language. Consequently, language perennially embodies a dialogic heteroglossia.

In dissecting the binary gender through Bakhtin’s lens, Francis posits that she envisions the monoglossic narrative as a representation of an overarching worldview (ibid.). This viewpoint prioritizes specific sociopolitical interpretations and cultural expressions, striving to eliminate alternate perspectives in its quest for an unchallenged dominance of the monoglossic narrative. When extrapolating the ideas of monoglossia and heteroglossia to the realm of gender, I contend that elements of both are mirrored in gender behaviors and the construct of gender itself. A salient feature of the monoglossic portrayal of gender is its apparent straightforwardness. This monoglossic perspective on gender can present itself as cohesive, skillfully obscuring inconsistencies and tensions, even when they stand out conspicuously.

Furthermore, Bakhtin’s assertion that

truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction (Bakhtin, Emerson, 1984a: 110)

can be employed to theorize the use of gendered pronouns. This model suggests truth is malleable, subject to interpretation. It does not originate within the confines of an individual’s cognition but is dialogically shaped through genuine social interactions. Consequently, every individual’s inner psyche or

consciousness — encompassing their thoughts, language, and expressions — is sculpted through their interactions with others. Each person, therefore, grasps only a fragmentary viewpoint, one that is inherently mutable.

This perspective stands in contrast to the monological concept of consciousness, which champions the notion of truth as being objective and rooted in authority. Our expressions or manifestations of gender cannot emerge from isolated spontaneity: they are crafted within historical frameworks and mirrored in both historical and contemporary expressions and the reactions of others.

Given that our existences are imbued with symbols and norms, it is evident that Bakhtin also perceives a concrete and intrinsic opposition to these norms and their dismantling, an opposition embodied in heteroglossia. His emphasis on the significance of context, encompassing the physical realm (thereby alluding to embodiment), counters discursive interpretations that neglect to sufficiently acknowledge the intertwined roles of social infrastructures and the human body in gender construction. Further, by focusing on “targeting,” gender theorists accentuate the deep-seated mutual nature of gender formation; dissecting the intricate dynamics of these interactions, and their ties to the particular socio-historical environment in which they emerge, counters narratives that perceive gender solely within a societal framework or, in contrast, merely as an individual decision.

Through this lens, Bakhtin’s contributions can tackle prevailing theoretical dilemmas associated with gender identity by recognizing the intertwined roles of the individual and societal structures, and by simultaneously pinpointing the heteroglossic nuances. Melding the concepts of monoglossia and heteroglossia furnishes a layered and persuasive portrayal of concurrent gender “norms” and deviations. As a result, an extended utilization of Bakhtin’s insights promises to be beneficial for gender theory and the empirical examination within the realm of gender identity.

Thus, by perceiving individual portrayals and interpretations of gender in the manner Bakhtin envisages utterances — as merely a singular link amidst a continuum of gender expressions — one can achieve a recognition of their inherent subjectivity, all while embedded within the pervasive framework of gender.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND THE POLYVALENT SUBJECT

In various gender-related studies, Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism is deemed exceptionally fruitful, primarily because it eschews any hierarchical framework within which communication might occur. His work illustrates how

an individual can define themselves through a collective lens rather than through solitary introspection. This perspective aids in framing a communal identity as opposed to an insular, self-focused one. Consequently, gender scholars highlight that dialogue, being intrinsically egalitarian, offers a more apt description of processes tied to the voluntary exploration of gender compared to other forms of social interaction—such as directives, mandates, or impositions, even those within hierarchical educational systems where the educator's authority is paramount.

For instance, T. Lillis (2003), in her educational research, draws upon M. Bakhtin's writings as a foundational theory to advocate for a transition from a monological method that emphasizes the singular, authoritative voice of the educator, to a dialogical method that accommodates a plethora of discourses and perspectives. A tangible representation of this method is the notion of "two-way communication," contrasting the traditional "feedback" mechanism on students' written assignments. Such an approach makes the subject matter more permeable to a wider array of external interests and influences. This shift represents a crucial step in transitioning the approach to academic literacy from merely theoretical to practical pedagogical underpinnings.

Dialogism and polyphony align seamlessly with the exploration of identity, especially at the juncture where dialogue unfolds. In this space, one is not restricted to mere prescriptions but possesses the agency to choose. The "selector" can rebuff the presented options, offering counterarguments to such refusals, mirroring the dynamics seen in intellectual or worldly debates. In her work, Jessica N. Ellis (2020) delves into how language and cognition shape human gender, contending that her proposed psyche model, which deviates from the conventional, encourages a shift from an individualistic perspective to viewing gender identity as a more collective or plural entity. While Bakhtin and his dialogism theory are not the focal points of the study, he serves as a pivotal reference in bolstering the paper's central argument. Bakhtinian concepts vividly illuminate what the psyche, envisioned as a decentralized multiplicity, could resemble. Primarily, Ellis's argument counters the "misconception of a static gender identity category" (Ellis, 2020: 82).

Gender, as previously noted, pertains to an identity or collection of characteristics that an individual assigns to oneself and uses as a point of self-identification. Thus, gender, in terms of gender identity, is intrinsically linked to the structure of the psyche itself. In this context, prior to dissecting the notion of gender, it becomes imperative to classify the concept of psyche

under the umbrella of either individualism or collectivism. Specifically, Ellis (Ellis, 2020), as previously mentioned, perceives the psyche as inherently self-referential and self-identifying, a trait characteristic of the capitalist subject. Such an atomized perspective inherently infers a binary approach to gender and is restricted by these demarcations. This provides a framework to question the essence of “self” and “selfhood” from an objective standpoint: the very act of possessing an identity is likened to owning an object. To further explore this narrative, the author delves into topics such as the capitalist subject, the concept of women as private property, and the notion of “self” as an object, drawing upon Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage theory.

Furthermore, the exploration of the psyche as a multifaceted entity is crucial. Several scholars propose a counterpoint to the notion that the soul or the psychic apparatus is singular and atomized. The phenomenon of the transgender individual, for example, can act as a manifestation of this plurality. Thus, there appears to be a need to identify a model of the psyche that acknowledges its multi-constitutive nature.

Such theorizations underscore that the foundation of gender is not rooted in the individual subject perceived as an immediate, autonomous entity, but rather in the multiplicity that arises through interactions with the Other in language. Hence, Bakhtin’s dialogism is pivotal in understanding gender identity because it is invoked by researchers to merge consciousness, language, and cognition into a model of the psyche that represents itself as diverse and multifaceted. Identity, in this context, becomes contingent upon interactions with others, cultural norms, and societal structures.

MONOGLOSSIC DISCOURSES IN DIFFERENT SOCIETAL CONTEXTS

This circles back to the issue of a reductionist interpretation of Bakhtinian concepts within feminist theory and the oversimplification of equating monoglossy with patriarchy. Monoglossic discourses act as overarching, encompassing “worldviews.” Intrinsically, they do not hardly aim for a harmonious, conflict-free communication landscape. Rather, they seek to permeate all facets of ideological existence, prioritizing certain sociopolitical interpretations and cultural expressions with the intention of suppressing and eliminating alternative viewpoints, in the quest for an unchallenged dominance of monoglossic discourse. However, beneath this seemingly impenetrable veneer of monoglossia lies a heteroglossic undercurrent, which inherently ensures that resistance is not just feasible, but often an inevitable outcome.

Heteroglossia represents the inherent disorderly coexistence of diverse languages in the world, while dialogism describes the structured interplay

among them. This interaction unfolds between opposing or contrasting languages — where one underpins the prevailing ideology and the other develops the counter-narrative. Bakhtin labels these ideological stances as centripetal and centrifugal social and linguistic forces. Collectively, they offer a framework through which knowledge is both challenged and constructed.

Bakhtin introduces the concept of a prevailing, hegemonic, monologic, centripetal discourse being challenged by a subordinate, heterologic, dialogic, centrifugal discourse. These dual inclinations — towards unification and dispersion — are in perpetual dialogue and conflict with each other. This dynamic encapsulates Bakhtin's theory, which highlights the interplay between centripetal and centrifugal societal forces as manifested in language.

Centripetal forces, be they political, linguistic, or social, advocate for uniformity and adherence to traditional values. Authoritative texts similarly sustain the existing order. In Bakhtin's terminology, these centripetal discourses are "monologic." They elevate themselves, purporting to be the final or "ultimate word" (Bakhtin, Emerson, 1984a: 293). Such discourse demands unwavering commitment. The veneration that authoritative discourse receives from its audience is undeniable. The power of these discourses does not arise from their intrinsic merit but from established cultural, religious, or generic conventions. In essence, it represents accepted or canonical knowledge and belief.

Therefore, Bakhtin's dialectical approach, which juxtaposes centripetal forces against centrifugal ones, offers feminist critics a tool to further their analyses. They can identify their stance as centrifugal and counteractive, contrasting the dominant and centripetal male perspective. The language used by centripetal forces can be termed as "authoritative." In Bakhtin's framework, "authoritative" denotes a discourse so compelling and dominant that it elicits only reverence and allegiance, thereby perpetuating the prevailing norms. Such discourse, in its delivery and reception, often appears sacrosanct, aloof, and its compelling authority seems beyond dispute. Centripetal, traditionalist, and hegemonic languages aim to suppress centrifugal voices by negating their legitimacy.

The crux of the matter is that an authoritative text asserts a singular reality — its own. Feminists contend that this is perilous for women, given that authoritative texts are predominantly crafted by men, for men, and align with "patriarchal ideology." Such texts are so revered that they are perceived as beyond reproach; they communicate their male-centric "truths" with such conviction that their underlying presumptions often go unchallenged. From

this perspective, even Bakhtin's writings are seen as reinforcing patriarchal ideology and thus require empowerment or reevaluation.

In different historical and social contexts, it is imperative to recognize that feminist theory and its applications are largely concentrated in the more privileged parts of the world. Countries in the global "North"—those that are developed, liberal, and socially progressive—have largely addressed fundamental issues of social discrimination, like access to education or freedom of speech. Presently, these nations are delving into subtler facets of persisting inequalities. This backdrop is essential to bear in mind when discussing the utilization of Bakhtin's ideas in exploring gender identity.

This perspective is deemed credible by some feminists, although they may view it as superfluous. This is because Bakhtin envisioned dialogism not merely as a literary construct but as a principle deeply rooted in societal structures, cultural norms, and interpersonal dynamics. This sentiment is echoed by scholars such as Kay Halesek, who articulates:

At the same time, I believe Bakhtin's theory needs to be transformed into a 'more inclusive' one. It is already inclusive at its core, but one must take into account the social context in which Bakhtin's ideas were formed and in which they are now applied (Halasek, 2020: 61).

This perspective not only contrasts with an earlier statement by the same author (cited above in the text), in which she emphasized the need to perceive Bakhtinian hierarchy not merely as a male/female binary but as broader oppressor/oppressed categories spanning various dimensions, but it also stands in opposition to the fundamental tenets of Bakhtinian theory.

Kay Halesek's assertion that, due to their historical disenfranchisement, authoritative discourse is a women's issue, tends to overlook a crucial perspective. It fails to recognize that, in a broader socio-historical context, "patriarchy" may not be the most oppressive hierarchical structure. Taking into account the specific socio-historical contexts mentioned, it is essential to note that feminist theory and practice largely originate from and address issues pertinent to more privileged parts of the globe. Nations in the global "North"—characterized as developed, liberal, and socially progressive—have largely addressed basic social disparities, such as access to education or freedom of speech. Consequently, their focus has shifted to more nuanced persisting inequalities. As discussions delve into the application of Bakhtin's concepts in the exploration of feminism or gender identity, this context should remain at the forefront.

In countries where equal access to education for both genders is denied, or where gender-based violence is institutionalized within societal structures, there is a pressing need for tangible, actionable solutions, rather than purely theoretical discussions (Petersen et al., 2005). This underscores the importance of acknowledging gender differences, which the global North seeks to minimize, as these differences play a vital role in implementing targeted reforms in the global South. Concurrently, it is crucial to recognize that several non-Western cultures have historically embraced a more diverse spectrum of gender identities. This presents an intriguing aspect of Bakhtin's theories: despite the socio-historical contexts of their inception (in places like the global South with more binary gender systems), these contexts do not compromise the integrity and clarity of Bakhtin's categorical framework.

In numerous countries and regions globally, authoritative hierarchies extend beyond gender, oppressing individuals — both male and female — based on racial, ethnic, or class distinctions. Within this landscape, Bakhtin's concept of the carnival shines in its essence, representing a temporary suspension of *all* hierarchical structures.

CONCLUSIONS

Feminist theorists, in their endeavors to fortify their theoretical constructs, often employ Bakhtinian concepts as tools for bridging gaps or for maneuvering through intricate realms of feminist hermeneutics. I argue that instead of absorbing Bakhtin's ideas in their entirety, they deploy a Bakhtin "toolkit," selectively appropriating his concepts. There is a prevailing notion among some theorists that Bakhtin's works, by virtue of being authored by a male, inadvertently perpetuate patriarchal paradigms. This stance serves as a convenient justification for contorting Bakhtinian categories to better fit the feminist theoretical mold.

While certain feminist critiques strive to make Bakhtin more inclusive or seek to amplify female voices within his discourse, they inadvertently foster a reductive understanding of Bakhtin's work. These critiques mistakenly equate Bakhtin's notion of authoritative discourse with patriarchy and disempowered voices with female narratives.

Bakhtin postulated that a monologic discourse is primarily concerned with the perpetuation of stable norms associated with certain identities within consistent social contexts, with these norms only being contested over extended durations. He often characterizes monologic discourse as the domain of societal elites. However, he refrains from exclusively branding this elite as patriarchal.

Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque encapsulates the spirit of radical democracy—an equality fashioned by the masses, distinct from and in opposition to established socio-economic and political structures. It celebrates collective triumphs: the bounty of material abundance, the essence of freedom, and the ethos of equality and fraternity. Carnavalesque democracy emphasizes genuine equality, transcending socio-economic disparities. Bakhtin's vision is one of an unwavering democracy that critiques the capitalist dichotomy of economic and political democracies and emphasizes profound participatory inclusivity in both economic and political spheres.

This brand of democracy, rooted in Bakhtin's philosophy, inherently champions greater inclusivity than one constructed on a mere gender binary. It possesses the flexibility to adapt to varied cultural and social contexts and is applicable to any community characterized by hierarchical dynamics. Therefore, for feminist scholars and theorists to truly harness the potential of Bakhtin's ideas, there is an imperative to engage with them holistically, rather than limiting themselves to cherry-picked, diluted versions.

REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Ed. by M.E. Holquist. Trans. from the Russian by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- . 1984a. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. from the Russian by E. Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 1984b. *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. from the Russian by H. Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bauer, D.M. 1988. *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Bauer, D.M., and S. McKinstry. 1991. *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Booth, W. 1982. "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism." *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1): 45–76.
- Cobb, C. 2019. "Theoretical Foundations: Bakhtin and Feminism." In *Slavery, Gender, Truth, and Power in Luke-acts and Other Ancient Narratives: A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action*, 39–80. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ellis, J. 2020. "The Psyche and Gender as a Multiplicity." Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. 6976. Accessed Jan. 30, 2023. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/6976/>.
- Francis, B., and C. Paechter. 2015. "The Problem of Gender Categorisation: Addressing Dilemmas Past and Present in Gender and Education Research." *Gender and Education*, no. 27, 1–15.

- Frank, A. 2005. "What Is Dialogical Research, and Why Should We Do It?" *Qualitative Health Research* 15 (7): 964–974.
- Gasparyan, D. E. 2021. "Ponyatiye sotsial'noy identichnosti v zapadnoy retseptsii M. M. Bakhtina [Evolution of the Social Identity Concept in the Western Reception of M. M. Bakhtin Ideas]: ot 'Arts & Humanities' k 'Social Studies' [From *Arts & Humanities* to *Social Studies*]" [in Russian]. *NOMOTHETIKA [Nomothetika]: Filosofiya. Sotsiologiya. Pravo [Philosophy. Sociology. Law]* 32 (4): 5–27.
- Halasek, K. 2020. "Feminism and Bakhtin: Dialogic Reading in the Academy." In *Landmark Essays on Bakhtin, Rhetoric, and Writing*, 51–62. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kristeva, J. 1986. "Word, Dialogue, and Novel." In *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by T. Moi, 34–61. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Paechter, C. 2003. "Learning Masculinities and Femininities: Power/Knowledge and Legitimate Peripheral Participation." *Women's Studies International Forum* 26 (6): 541–552.
- Petersen, I., A. Bhana, and M. McKay. 2005. "Sexual Violence and Youth in South Africa: The Need for Community-based Prevention Interventions." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 29 (11): 1233–1248.
- Schweickart, P. 2014. "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading." In *Readers and Reading*, 66–93. London & New York: Routledge.
- Stoller, R. 1968. "A Further Contribution to the Study of Gender Identity." *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 49:364–368.

Gasparyan D. E. [Гаспарян Д. Э.] Understanding the Interpretation of Bakhtin's Ideas in Feminist Theory [Интерпретации идей Бахтина в феминистской теории] // Философия. Журнал Высшей школы экономики. — 2023. — Т. 7, № 4. — Р. 125–140.

ДИАНА ГАСПАРЯН

К. ФИЛОС. Н., ПРОФЕССОР

НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКИЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ «ВЫСШАЯ ШКОЛА ЭКОНОМИКИ» (МОСКВА);

ORCID: 0000-0002-5541-074X

ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ ИДЕЙ БАХТИНА В ФЕМИНИСТСКОЙ ТЕОРИИ

Получено: 13.06.2023. Рецензировано: 30.09.2023. Принято: 09.10.2023.

Аннотация: В последние годы концепции М. М. Бахтина получают все большее признание в западных научных кругах, находя применение в самых разных областях — от лингвистики до психиатрии. Такое запоздалое признание может показаться необычным, если не учитывать конкретный исторический контекст, в котором идеи Бахтина были представлены на Западе. Их первоначальное появление было тесно связано с развитием феминистской теории, феминистской критики и дискуссий о гендерной идентичности.

Примечательно, что первое англоязычное изложение некоторых мыслей Бахтина появилось в 1966 г. в работе Юлии Кристевой «Слово, диалог и роман», ставшей основополагающим трудом в феминистской теории. После этого в течение более двух десятилетий такие бахтинские понятия, как «голос», «диалогизм», «гибридная конструкция», «гетероглоссия» и «карнавал», преимущественно использовались в феминистских интерпретациях известными теоретиками феминизма, в том числе Ю. Кристевой, В. Бутом и Д. Вауэром. Это сохранялось даже после появления в 1980-х годах прямых переводов работ Бахтина. Для многих эта связь может показаться неожиданной и даже контринтуитивной, учитывая, что сам Бахтин не обращался напрямую к феминистским проблемам или гендерным темам, не ссылаясь на авторов-женщин в своей литературной критике. В этой статье я рассмотрю присвоение феминистками центральных бахтинских понятий и выясню, насколько теория Бахтина плодородна для феминистских интерпретационных стратегий. Далее я утверждаю, что, хотя это феминистское принятие в значительной степени способствовало распространению бахтинских концепций на Западе, оно одновременно ограничило их более широкое распространение, используя их в качестве «бахтинского инструментария» для устранения теоретических недостатков и обхода проблем в феминистской теории. Зачастую это приводило к упрощенному и редуктивному пониманию бахтинских идей. Кроме того, я полагаю, что эта проблема связана с основной проблемой, освещенной в работах самого Бахтина: переводы и интерпретации одних и тех же идей на разных языках неэквивалентны, поскольку на них влияют различные диалогические системы.

Ключевые слова: Бахтин, феминистская теория, гендерная идентичность, диалогичность, моноглоссия, гетероглоссия, карнавал.

DOI: 10.17323/2587-8719-2023-4-125-140.