

University of Bern - Institute of Social Anthropology, Lerchenweg 36, 3012 Bern
Introduction to Social Anthropology, Group Tuesday 12 to 2 pm
Lecturer: Moslem Ghomashlouyan, M.A., Fall Semester 2022

Essay

A Job for Women.

**Bare-Breasted Barmaids with the eyes at their back and the Awkward Relationship
of Female Bartending to Feminism.**



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The Awkward Relationship between a Job for Women and Feminism

Introduction

My paper is dedicated to comparing the two texts "*An Awkward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology*" by Marilyn Strathern and "*Introduction: Out of Exile*" by Ruth Behar. I seek to apply the perspectives and insights gained by the authors to the relationship of the professional practice of female bar staff to feminism. This conceptual transferability will be illustrated using the SAGE publication "Views on the Traditional Role of Barmaids" and "Das Grosse Lehrbuch der Bar" by the Swiss gastronomy lecturer Harry Schrämli, which allows a look at the proportionality of the two fields to each other three generations ago.

Paradigms in understanding female professionalism in different professional segments:

To what extent can we apply the elaborations regarding the asymmetrical, crisis-ridden relations between anthropology and feminism by Marilyn Strathern and Ruth Behar to the relationship between feminism and professional female bartending?

The subject matter of the two texts is the same, both authors deal with the relationship between feminism and social anthropology and state that there are incompatibilities and dissonances between the two professional fields, on the one hand feminism as the representative and revolutionary struggle discipline of women who feel oppressed, on the other hand social anthropology, a science that has taken its place in the structure of university disciplines for many decades. Here, one side feels that it is not properly perceived by the other, either because of quite conscious and deliberate attitudes and positions, or because of crises and problems that feminism and social anthropology each have within themselves.

The fact that social anthropology is taken seriously today is not least due to its willingness to repeatedly compare its approaches with other disciplines, first and foremost with the natural sciences, and to adapt its methodology accordingly. The difficult, multi-crisis relationship considered in the two works is between a revolutionary, liberation-seeking feminist current and a recognised science that, like many other sciences, is accused of a considerable "male bias".

Behar's position is that of women writers whose work is not taken seriously by male-dominated social anthropology, whose breasts are perceived as more important than what they write. Thus they have considerable difficulty finding their place in the scholarly canon and on the important book shelves.¹ She points to dichotomies between "Daughters" such as Ruth Benedict and "Papae" such as Franz Boas², between the "Self" and the "Other", between the "Inside" and the "Outside"³. Ruth Behar's outlook is the hopeful future in which "women writing culture" is moved from marginality to centre stage not only because of collaboration between women, but also in and of itself as a full-fledged discipline.

Marilyn Strathern's positioning is more distanced and theoretical. Her text has greater analytical depth and differentiates in detail the constructivist theorisations that stand in the way of the paradigm shift that is underway. She points out that feminism in its radical nature

¹ Behar, Ruth, und Deborah A. Gordon, Hrsg. *Women writing culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995., 2.

² Ibid., 18.

³ Ibid., 23

has in some cases too little willingness to engage in real collaborations and does not necessarily correspond to ethnographic interests. Feminists' interest in their social context as conflictual does not mean that this conceptual framework should be classified as a paradigm in an absolutist way.⁴

Behar's and Strathern's texts give me the impetus to reflect on the relationship of feminism to social anthropology that they consider to the professional field that I myself practised for forty years of my life: bartending for women. The structural concepts of anthropology and the profession of bartending are different, one is academia, the other is in the service sector. Both are in relation to other, outside people and both can be practised alone or in collaboration with others. If the practitioner is in a hierarchical structure, male superiors are usually superior.

Ruth Behar shows how the Bear Breasted Women are exposed to observations and gazes. Peter Bailey already described this in the context of the barmaid as part of a cultural display in his essay "Parasexuality and Glamour: The Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype": The Other Behind the Bar as an exoticised and sexualised object, which beyond this becomes an object of danger, which itself is also in threat.⁵ This object is appraised from top to bottom, must please, and if this succeeds, a conceptual framework is created that could be interpreted by feminism as a paradigm.

In the "Das Grosse Lehrbuch der Bar" (1949), Harry Schrämli still clearly divided a female and a male profile in his treatises on what it means to work at the bar and what profile the staff must have for this. He devotes half a page to the general requirements of the bar profession, then follows "The Barman" with a good three and a half pages, followed by "The Barmaid" with two and a half pages. The section on "Career", which is included in the male chapter, has no equivalent in the female chapter, it is simply not there, the barmaid was seen more as a companion and not as a manager. The section on "qualifications" is preceded in the women's chapter by almost a page on "generalities", where attention is subliminally drawn to morals and how they are endangered.

Barmaids have been around for a long time. Harry Schrämli described what she should look like. To this day, only a few bar managers are female, but among the subordinate bar helpers and temporary staff, the proportion of women predominates. Behavioural rules concerning dress codes and body techniques are more pronounced in the female segment than among men.

The multifaceted discussion about equal treatment of women in the bar industry seems like a perpetual motion machine, hardly advanced since the temporality of Peter Bailey's essay: the fact that there are still cocktail competitions in which only women are admitted, but conversely no competitions exclusively for male competitors, indicates that a pronounced gender asymmetry still prevails in this field.

In Switzerland, women's suffrage was introduced in the year 1971. In the professional association of bartenders in Switzerland SBU, women were only admitted three years later. In fact, in the general assembly in question, not all members agreed that female bartenders could now also belong to the "profession", there were also opponents. So there were still professional colleagues in the seventies who could not imagine that barmaids could conform to the classic professional ethos of bartending. The fact that this narrative was so publicly visible shows the

⁴ Strathern, Marilyn. „An Awkward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology“. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, Nr. 2 (Januar 1987)., 284.

⁵ Martin, Scott. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Alcohol: Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspectives*. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2015., 2.

actual inferiority of women. Even today, it is a common opinion among many bar managers that women should not predominate in a bar team, as there tends to be a greater potential for rivalries and complications. Marilyn Strathern's described lack of genuine collaboration can be compared to this.

In the time since Schräfli's book was published, the female professional image at the bar has been professionalised from shareholder to employee with a collective labour agreement, but a real balance has not been realised, not even in the area of remuneration. The concepts around emancipation, feminism, women's quotas and the effects of the Me-Too movement have left their mark, yet the percentage of women in leadership positions in bar teams is not at the same level as men.

Here, too, there are parallels with the professional field of anthropology.

Conclusion

Behar and Strathern's work allows for a reflective comparison on the relation between female bartending and feminism.

The barmaid or bartender, as the Other on the other side of the bar, has always been viewed differently from her male colleague. The asymmetries are not only conceptualised by superiors, male professional colleagues and the people in front of the bar, but also by the women themselves. Dissonances do not always arise because of genuine paradigm differences, but also because of crises inherent in the discipline of the profession in and of itself and, on the other hand, in the nature of women's aspirations for emancipation.

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Declaration of authorship

I hereby declare that the following essay with the title «A job for a woman» was authored independently, and it was so far never submitted elsewhere as a partial or full requirement. I also confirm that I have not used any other sources than the ones documented. All passages that were either literally taken or paraphrased from the documented sources have been marked as such. I am aware that, should that not be so, I would be guilty of plagiarizing, which is considered grave academic misconduct and would be sanctioned accordingly.

Mont-Vully, 1.2.2023, Katharina Leisi

