

Interdisciplinary Reflections in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*

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Abstract

Our paper credits Gilman for creating a utopian environment where tolerance, interdependence and mutual respect characterize intergender relationships. The premises of this utopia are drawn from Darwin's observations of social evolution which Gilman thinks refute the biological inferiority of women and alternately relate their oppression and subordination to socio-economic determinants. The paper also dramatizes Foucault's theorization of the panoptic powers of surveillance and discipline, and historicization of the genealogical relations between knowledge and power on account of which Gilman provokes women to unlearn the dominant discourse of patriarchy and initiate an inclusive reconciliatory discourse that recognizes men and women as equal human beings and gives equal value to both of them. Likewise, we recognize Gilman as a socialist for desexualizing paid and domestic labor and considering women as equal partners in terms of productivity and performance. Building on these presumptions, we conclude that the interdisciplinary resonances in Gilman's *Herland* enrich feminist studies and help reform social and gender relations.

Key words: Reformed feminism; Reformed socialism; Social evolution; Gender reconciliation; Interdependence.

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INTRODUCTION

Radical feminism juxtaposes the physical, social, economic and political oppression of women in patriarchal societies and the oppression of the colonized people, and legitimizes their resort to violence in the course of their struggle for their denied freedoms and rights. However, reformist feminism undermines gender competition and nurtures cooperation, reconciliation and interdependence which culminate in the empowerment of both genders. Charlotte Perkins Gilman is obviously a reformist feminist scholar because the utopian world she creates in *Herland* (1915) does not approve the resort to violence to redress gender binaries and inequalities.

Herland is narrated from the point of view of Vandyck Jennings who along with two adventurers, Terry Nicholson and Jeff Margrave, resolves to explore the civilization and culture of an isolated country that is rumored to be populated only by women. The advanced cultural, agricultural and technological systems available to the inhabitants of Herland were taken as signs of the existence of men. Upon arriving to their destination by Terry's airplane, they come into an encounter with three young women watching them from treetops. Underestimating the physical and athletic power of the watchwomen based on their stereotypes about women in heterosexual communities, they vainly chase them into a settlement, where they find themselves surrounded by a large assemblage of women who hold them as captives in a fort. Their attempt to escape is discovered and they are easily overpowered and put to sleep by a mysterious drug with which the women inject them. When they woke up, they received a friendly treatment and were assigned tutors to teach them about the language, culture and history of Herland. Van, in particular, gets fascinated by the utopian world the women managed to build and begins to question the truthfulness of the claims made by the patriarchal society about women. However, Terry grows impatient and convinces his two other friends to

scheme another escape. Unaware that their attempt is anticipated and that they are being observed, the three men used a rope to descend into the ground and draw back towards the hiding place of their airplane, where they will be rearrested and sent back to custody by the same three young women whom they chased upon their influx: Celis, Alima and Ellador. The gentle treatment they received and the free rein they were permitted in the second captivity accounted for their increasing trust and understanding with the women's community that began to view them as reliable sources of information about the outside world. Van takes advantage of that treatment to document the achievements of matriarchal civilization which he finds more developed, egalitarian, tolerant and peaceful than that of the underdeveloped, dogmatic, and violent patriarchal one. Eventually, each develops a love relationship with one of the women. While Terry responds to Alima's autonomous and non-conforming character that refuses to meet his expectations by attempting to rape her and is subsequently banished, Van and Jeff's marriages were more fortunate. Yet, they along with Ellador, Van's wife, are allowed to accompany Terry home only after they had assured their hosts to return as soon as their mission was completed, and gave pledge not to tell anybody about the utopia they have discovered.

In this paper, we read *Herland* as a work informed by Darwinism, Foucauldianism and socialism though Gilman (1860-1935) was a contemporary of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) but not of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) whose philosophy emulated the eighteenth-century panopticon of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). In addition, we argue that Gilman is more humanist than feminist for championing gender interdependence over independence and opposing the exclusive ideologies of feminism and masculinism. Similar arguments about Gilman's philosophy are made by such scholars as Maureen L. Egan (1989), John Bak (1994) and Mark Wiene Van (2003). Our approach is unique in three ways: First, while the former critics address one aspect of Gilman's genius in their articles, ours surveys her interdisciplinary theoretical and philosophical backgrounds, and examines their influence on her philosophy of reformed feminism for which she is mostly known. Second, we rely on the interdisciplinary reflections we draw from *Herland* to account for our arguments instead of surveying all of Gilman's works of fiction and non-fiction including diaries and letters as the other scholars do. Third, we view Gilman's version of feminism as a melting pot for her multidisciplinary, but Van attaches more weight to her socialist ideology than to her feminist ideology which, he argues, has crystallized in the aftermath of her boycott of the US socialist party in the late 1890s. Yet, we acknowledge the insightful guidance Maureen, Bak and Van provide to us in this paper.

1. DARWINIST ECHOES

Maureen L. Egan (1989) recognizes the significant contributions of Gilman's works and philosophy to reform Darwinism. In her review of the traditions of social Darwinism, Maureen identifies two different streams originated by Herbert Spencer and Lester Ward. William G. Sumner as a disciple of Spencer disapproves social reform movements for their artificial interferences with the laws of natural evolution and subsequently advocates the administration of the principle of "survival of the fittest" on economics and workforce. He, therefore, holds public charity responsible for "aiding the continued survival of the unfit," (105) and promotes the value of "unrestricted competition" which he views as a more natural struggle that is necessary for the progress of civilizations. Emanating from the social determinism of Spencer's Darwinism, Maureen notices that inequality is celebrated as "the result of true liberty, in which all persons are free to engage in the struggle for existence." (105) However, Lester Ward supports social reform movements and encourages people to use their physical, mental and ethical evolution for the purpose of ameliorating their social conditions. He additionally repudiates the laissez-faire social theory that opposes any form of intervention by the government in social and business affairs.

Though social Darwinists taught Gilman to apprehend human social progress as an evolutionary process, Maureen indicates that Gilman did not "agree that humans are caught in a struggle for the survival of the fittest. More radically, she questioned the criteria used by Spencer and his disciples for determining fitness. ... She found a more satisfactory account of human development in ... the so-called reform Darwinism." (105) The influence of reform Darwinism on Gilman's social philosophy, according to Maureen, are manifested in the presumptions she makes and the language of evolution she uses. Gilman, for instance, presumes that female superiority characterized human societies in the early stages of their evolution. In validation of that claim, she compares the superiority of women to that of female bees and spiders which have dominance over their idle male mates by the virtues of their devotion and voluntary attending to the chores of guarding, feeding and building their combs or webs.

The second stage witnessed the downfall of gynocracy and rise of androcracy which Gilman believes has emerged only in the modern history of human societies and resulted in the subversion of women's powers and hindrance of social evolution of human communities. The "gypsy moth," pursuant to Maureen, "provided (Gilman) with a model of the absolutely stationary female never permitted to leave the home." (108) This implicates that male domination not only suppressed women's energies but impeded the natural evolution of human beings. The emergence of androcentric culture of patriarchy as a dominant ideology, Gilman believes, was brought about by

what she terms the “laws of brain-action” which include the law of adaptation and the tendency to “personalize” than to “generalize”. What Gilman means by the law of adaptation, according to Maureen, is that “the things to which people are accustomed (i.e. economic, social and sexual domination of women by men) eventually appear natural and right, since they permeate the social environment.” In like manner, Maureen assumes that the second law “makes it difficult for us to see our individual condition as part of a social pattern -- a difficulty which has so far kept us as a species, from abolishing the practice of male domination.” (109) Gilman in *The Man-Made World* adds that androcracy was reinforced by the sociological law of inertia which supposes that “any idea, if sufficiently forced into the minds of a people, will keep going unless and until met by a sufficient opposing force, or by friction with its gradual effect.” (2010, p. 163) In her comment on this law, Maureen states that “either slow friction over a long period of time or a strong opposing idea (such as that of women’s economic freedom) would be required in order to halt this long held idea.” (109) Women accordingly can challenge the stereotypes stripping them of their humanity and reducing them to properties and sex objects by establishing a counter hybrid discourse that refutes all biased claims against their feminine identity.

Realizing the gender prejudices embedded in the discourses of gynocracy and androcracy, Gilman resolved to reform gynaecology. In her proposed doctrine which Maureen refers to as “the theory of the two natures”, Gilman argues that every person has a human nature and either a female or a male nature. The complementary relations between the generic and specific natures of men and women should ultimately cultivate interdependence and cooperation. This is what is signified by Maureen’s comment that “the ultimate goal of social evolution is a Human World: an economic democracy resting on a free womanhood.” (117)

In expansion of Darwin’s evolutionary theory and the theory of sexual selection first proposed in *The Origin of Species* and described as the “struggle between the individuals of one sex, generally the males, for the possession of the other sex” (1995, p. 87), we argue that Gilman as a social Darwinist emphasizes that a sense of unity or brotherhood needs to be created between men and women as a means for attenuating gender tensions and regenerating gender interdependence. She, therefore, redefines “sex” in relation to nature, culture and body as it is suggested by her assumption that “the pressure of life upon environment develops in the human mind its inventive reactions, regardless of sex” (102). This entails that gender is not limited to the static male/female binaries since it has social as well as reproductive functions to perform. Another Darwinian feature of Gilman’s feminist ideology, we believe, lies in her advocacy of procreative

heterosexuality and rejection of sex for pleasure sake as insinuated by her creation of a parthenogenetic species of women that can asexually reproduce. Bernice L. Hausman investigates that feature of Gilman’s approach in her reasoning that:

In the Darwinian world of sexual reproduction, “sex” suggests genital heterosexuality. In keeping with this tradition, Gilman believed that sexual relations apart from procreative purposes were indicative of the excessive sex-distinction ... and a vehicle for oppression precisely because of the way it was connected to an unequal economic relation (1998, p. 503).

In light of this reasoning, Gilman views the pursuit of productive sex as an efficient means for the liberation of women because it stands as a token for their maternal power and signifies their abilities to control their appetites for sex.

A third Darwinian feature is epitomized by her locating the source of gender tensions in the social class difference and her emphasizing that women’s overdependence on men justify their silence, submission and apathy towards their plight, marginalization, oppression and thingification. She further considers the tendency of some women to seduce men for money and power indicative of their dependence and low self-esteem. Gilman plainly explicates that assumption in *Women and Economics* in which she states that:

Sex distinction is with (the human female) not only a means of attracting a mate, as with all creatures, but a means of getting her livelihood ... because of the economic dependence of the human female on her mate, she is modified to sex to an excessive degree. It is not the normal sex tendency, common to all creatures, but an abnormal sex tendency, produced and maintained by the abnormal economic relation which makes one sex get its living from the other by the exercise of sex functions (1966, p. 38-39).

Gilman in this excerpt rebukes dependent women as sexual creatures and likens them to prostitutes for trading their bodies and freedoms for their living. Yet, she indicates that this derogatory image can be overturned by the model of autonomous women who can support themselves and function on their own.

However, we presume that Gilman’s evolutionary feminism reveals a suppressed fear of androcracy and bias to matriarchy as her invention of a utopian matriarchal community populated by strong, knowledgeable and independent women proposes. Despite her attempts to uproot gender tension, Gilman foregrounds the inherent sexual conflict between masculine and feminine ideologies. Kathleen M. Lant believes that “Gilman renders men, even her sympathetic male character, as bestial, predatory, and rapacious, and she depicts women as virtuous, determined and sexually inexperienced” (1990, p. 299). This raises the following questions: Will the virtuous Herlanders resist the unwanted advances of the intruders? And will the three men corrupt Herland? As for Jeff and Van, their marriages with Celis and Ellador

cohere effectively despite the confusion non-procreative sex causes to the two women. Van's explanation that sex "is a far nobler and more beautiful relation ... it is the last, sweetest, highest consummation of mutual love" (138) convinces Ellador to have sex with him. Having loved Van deeply, she decides to accompany him in his trip back to the bisexual world. This gives her the opportunity to explore a new world, and teach her people about it when she comes back. Similarly, Jeff leads a happy life with Celis who gives birth to a male child that represents the New Hope for Herland. Instead of traveling with Van and Terry, Jeff decides to stay as a permanent resident in Herland where he feels home with his beloved wife and child.

However, Terry exemplifies the lust and selfishness of the patriarchal society which brings him into conflict with the feminine Herlanders. As "an unattached young man" (5), he sets off to Herland not to explore its nature but to ascend to its throne "I'll put off being king of Ladyland for one more day" (10) and to seduce its women. He, for instance, lustfully seizes Alima's hand and flatters her with gifts. Although he succeeds in persuading her to marry him, she still loves him as a brother or father but not as a husband. Hence, she resists his sexual temptations and intentions to master her. In challenge to her parthenogenesis, Terry rapes Alima and so gets expelled from Herland. The motives for raping Alima can be understood from a psychoanalytic point of view. Terry is brought up in a patriarchal society, where women are subjugated and subserviently devoted for satisfying the sexual desires of their husbands. Upon his arrival to Herland, he meets a different species of women who are free, independent and brave. This maternal authority poses a threat to his patriarchal authority, so he decides to destroy it by raping Alima. In this context, Margaret Miller states that for Terry

Women are desexed by the exercises of authority as he is desexed by submitting to it. Unable to discriminate between maternal authority exercised as restraint and male authority exercised as violence, he responds to their power with a quintessential expression of male dominance, marital rape (1983, p. 192).

2. FOUCAULDIAN ECHOES

Bak (1994) compares Gilman's perception of home in *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) to the Panopticon Michel Foucault described in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). In that short story, Gilman narrates the story of a young woman whose physician husband confines in the upstairs bedroom of a house he rents for a summer vacation before he turns it into a sanitarium, where he intends to treat her from a temporary nervous depression. As a result of the restrictions forbidding writing, working and free access to other rooms, she develops a mental disease and grows psychosis. With nothing to do or think of, she

becomes infatuated by the color of the wallpaper which she describes as the "strangest yellow, that wall-paper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw - not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things. But there is something else about that paper - the smell! ... The only thing I can think of that it is like, is the color of the paper! A yellow smell.(549)" Soon she will imagine a woman captivated behind that paper and closely observing her. Her depression gradually evolves into insanity when she refuses to leave the room and begins to creep on the floor.

Following Foucault, Gilman perceives home not as a utopian place for women but as a jail or cage in which women are exposed to unabated surveillance that is far worse than physical confinement. Bak demonstrates the paradigmatic influence of Foucault's philosophy on Gilman in his assertion that "Gilman's narrator dramatizes Foucault's caveat that subjecting a human being to Bentham's inorganic Panopticon (or to Dr. Mitchell's dehumanizing treatment) was more pathogenic than antigenic. (para. 21)" Though the patriarchal panopticon, ie. house, supplies women with all of their nutrition, shelter and protection needs, the constant observation they endure in it deteriorates their psychological states and accounts for their feeling of alienation and subsequent insanity. Bak, therefore, argues that "the madness to which Gilman's narrator is led through her encounter inside the Panopticon ... paradoxically frees as it destroys. Though externally she is clinically insane ... internally she is, for the first time, devoid of that identity that her husband (and his patriarchal society) had inscribed upon her. (para. 21)"

As most of the oppressive agents of patriarchy are situated in domestic environments, where men and women retrospectively hold the positions of the observer and the observed as Bak conclusively puts it, we will extend his findings further to argue that Gilman in *Herland* sets up a counter-surveillance system which is designed to reverse the panoptic relationship between men and women for reformatory rather than punitive purposes. In their first confrontation with the women of Herland, the three male trespassers get terrified, and Terry pulls his revolver and fires upward to frighten the women away. Instead of returning his violence with an equal violence of their own, the women devise a four-pronged strategy to contain them. First, they resort to gentle violence when they successfully seize and drug them to sleep with a wetted cloth. Second, they confine them in a hall comprised of a bed chamber, a dining chamber, a closet chamber, a small library and a bathroom provided with towels, soap, mirrors, combs and notebooks. These facilities not only give a human face to prison but also help them lead a normal life and prepare them to join the mainstream easily when they are released. Third, the women rely on the affectivity of education to rehabilitate inmates and correct their misconducts. They, therefore, give printed books and assign a tutor to

each of Terry, Jeff and Van who are required to learn the language and culture of Herland and teach their own to women there. Only after they are tamed and trained to be peaceful and tolerant do the women bring them out to see the country and interact with people. Fourth, the women construct an almost imperceptible surveillance system that enables them to closely observe their detainees and keep them under constant control. That sophistication of that system is realized by Van who reports that

We were free of the garden below our windows, quite long in its irregular rambling shape, bordering the cliff. The walls were perfectly smooth and high, ending in the masonry of the building; and as I studied the great stones I became convinced that the whole structure was extremely old. It was built like the pre-Incan architecture in Peru, of enormous monoliths, fitted as closely as mosaics (35).

The ancient high walls of that garden that is illuminated at night suggests to Van that it must have been used as a fortress for surveillance and fortification purposes. Feeling restless of being constantly observed, they attempt another unsuccessful escape.

Moreover, we presume that Gilman as a Foucauldian genealogically explores the forms of gender power relations in order to determine the possibilities for resistance and social change. Her assertion that power is horizontally dispersed throughout the social body rather than emanated from the top down finds its echoes in the interview Martin (1988) makes with Foucault whose disclosures propose his conceptions of genealogy and archaeology and analyze the relations between gender, knowledge and power. The implication that nobody can monopolize power forever, Gilman asserts, would accelerate social change on the grounds that it gives hope to the women who endure oppression and a threat to the men who practice it and are now in danger of losing their gender superiority. In validation of that reflection, Gilman relocates women in an interactive and collaborative environment that allocates equal roles and rewards for both genders and gives more appreciation to the high productivity and performance of individuals rather than to their gender distinctions. Empirically, she confines the female gender in a desolate island to test its inventiveness and ability to survive in absence of the male gender. This experiment proves successful because the Herlanders, female inhabitants of the land, can construct a more sophisticated civilization than that of male or bisexual communities. At the medical level, Herland has no doctors because "sickness was almost wholly unknown among them" (71). With respect to agriculture, they grow food plants only and have a peculiar scheme of fertilization which treats and combines plant waste and solid matter from the sewage. This scheme complies with their conviction that "everything which came from the earth went back to it" (80). Industrially, they have motor and knitting factories which employ advanced technology without causing any damage to nature. Furthermore, they

have a distinctive educational system which enables them to "face the problems of education and so solved them that their children grew up as naturally as young trees; learning through every sense; taught continuously but unconsciously- never knowing they were being educated" (95). Here, education means training rather than "forcible feeding" of the mind as it is the case in heterosexual communities. Contrasted with heterosexual civilizations, Herlanders' is friendlier to environment, more human-oriented, more empirical and hygienic.

Gilman, likewise, epitomizes Foucauldianism in her emphasis that gender is socially and culturally constructed by the dominant discourse of patriarchy which women unconsciously internalize through their formal education and upbringing. She as well supposes that cultural fallacies related to gender roles rather than biological differences are used as pretexts to justify the dominion of one sex over the other. The way for women to restore their freedoms as Gilman envisages it is twofold. They firstly should reproduce gendered power relations by challenging dominant gender norms of marriage, motherhood and heterosexuality. *Herland* exemplifies gender bias against women by referring to the cultural connotations men usually attach to the words "woman" and "virgin" which conjure up sexual images and reduce women to sexual objects (45). In accordance with this norm, girls will bring shame upon their families in case they lose their virginity before marriage, whereas men's sexual experiences before marriage disgrace nobody because they culturally have no virginity to lose. Such cultural and sexual bias is conveyed by the stereotypes portraying women as charming, hot sexy chicks. In other words, the beauty and youth of women are determined by male criteria which objectify their bodies and proposition them for sex and fun but not for good and equal company. Gilman, therefore, believes that "those feminine charms are not feminine at all, but mere reflected masculinity" (59). Women are also portrayed as mothers in the patriarchal society, where they "are loved- idolized- honored- kept in the home to care for the children" (61) according to the three male visitors who justify that division of gender roles by claiming that "we assume that motherhood is a sufficient burden- that men should carry all the others" (92). These socially constructed roles often thwart the potentials of women and deny their rights of education and work which represent the passages women can take to the worlds of freedom and autonomy. Hence, Gilman urges women not to identify with but to resist any stereotypes the patriarchal society invents for the sake of subjugating their feminine gender and restricting their freedoms.

Women secondly ought to discard the exclusive ideologies of feminism and patriarchy and appropriate the humanist gender-blind discourse that disapproves the theories reifying gender difference and stressing conformity to gender roles, and reconstructs gender

relations on the values of tolerance, balanced communication, and solidarity. As a humanist, Gilman, on the one hand, advocates the unity of human beings regardless of their genders or races; therefore, her strategy of resistance promotes gender tolerance rather than gender prejudice. In her article "Revisiting the Concept of Community", Connell argues that

Herland is an attempt by Gilman to modify public consciousness by undermining stereotypes and revealing the absurdity of the natural through the use of a popular medium. Gilman's plan is to value the best human traits- courage, mutual affection, intelligence, strength- and she assumes that all the members of the community could learn to care for one another and work cooperatively if they valued their connections to each other (1995, p. 26).

In this excerpt, Gilman is viewed more of a humanist than of a feminist because though she recognizes gender differences, she seeks to bridge them through the reinforcement of intergender dialogues and interdependent gender roles in family traditions. Exposed to the humanitarian ideology of the Herlanders, Vandyck, a male narrator and a guest in *Herland*, conducts an objective self- critique of the patriarchal society, where men "talk fine things about women, but in our hearts we know they are very limited beings... we value them for the perverted maternal activities which make our wives the most comfortable of servants (141). The essentialist contradictions involved in the patriarchal discourse which Vandyck unveils are intended to displace patriarchy by an egalitarian culture equally respecting and voicing the concerns and interests of both genders. In such a proposed culture, women are no longer destined to be sexual objects or reproductive and productive laborers living to please and serve man. Rather, they are treated as equal partners in marriage, work, education and every aspect of their lives.

On the other hand, Gilman believes that balanced gender communication is necessary for reaching mutual understanding. In *Herland*, neither the women nor the three male guests can understand each other because they speak different languages. This miscommunication leads to violence when Terry who is about to be arrested by six women "pulled his revolver and fired upward" (23). Following this incident, the leader of *Herland* determines that each party should learn the language of the other. That done, the two sides agree that each will teach the other about his/her own history and culture. The guests are told that the men of *Herland* died two thousands year ago as a sequence of wars, natural disasters, and internal strife which left a small population of women alone. After a time, a young girl miraculously became pregnant, and her parthenogenetic female descendants are the present inhabitants of *Herland*. In turn, Jeff, Terry and Van are asked to lecture about the culture and life of a bisexual community at schools and universities. The hosts show great interest in the information they get from their guests

who eventually realize that they were "in training, they studied us, prepared reports about us, and this information was widely disseminated all about the land" (88). What Jeff and Van learnt about the female psychology, history and culture corrected their stereotypical images of women as they come to think of them now "not as females but as people" (137) who can do every sort of work. The dissolution of their inherent gender prejudices intimately brings them closer to Ellador, Celis, and Alima whom they will court and marry later.

3. SOCIALIST ECHOES

Mark Wienen Van (2003) introduces Gilman as a feminist, nationalist and reform socialist based on the latter's lectures on "She Who Is to Come," "The Real Woman," "The Dress and the Body," "Why We Want Nationalism," "What the People's Party Means," and "Some Objections to Socialism Answered." Contrary to the common belief that Gilman devoted herself to the cause of feminism, Van argues that

her most active political affiliations up until 1900 were not with women's organizations but with groups advocating gradualist, or reform, socialism: Nationalism, a movement for national ownership of industry catalyzed by Edward Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward*, 2000-1887; Populism, which proposed government control of railroads, banking, and communication while creating farmers' cooperatives as a buffer to the "free" capitalist market; and Fabianism, a slender American offshoot of the English society working for socialism through education and political influence. (para. 1)

Van in this excerpt gives documentary evidence highlighting Gilman's unacknowledged contributions to the movements of socialism and nationalism which she embraces in the early stage of her activism before she later identifies with the concerns and agendas of the women's movement as a feminist. Although Gilman's speeches and writings show that her views of class consciousness, class struggle and economic determinism are different from those of the revolutionary Marxist socialism, Van believes that they were "by no means as dramatically different as Gilman would have her readers of the 1930s believe." (para. 3) His search for evidence on the influence of revolutionary Marxism on Gilman's works leads to the discovery that her article *First Class in Socialism* suggests she has read A. Schaeffle's *The Quintessence of Socialism* and recommended it to her readers. He also discovers that "her treatment of capitalist 'thieves' in *What the People's Party Means* evokes certain passages of the book, which would have been available to Stetson in English translation by 1892. (para. 24)"

In response to Gilman's assertion that economic reform could be achieved through the power of the vote only when laborers or producers have equal social rights, Van contests that "the electorate is the tool of the capitalist class not just because of false tradition, popular opinion and personal cowardice as she suggested at the

outset but because the very economic inequality that is the socialist's central grievance is also the fundamental cause of a lack of common class consciousness. (26)" Having historically and philosophically demonstrated Gilman's indebtedness to Marxism and nationalism, Van reports that the collapse of the people's party in 1896 impelled Gilman to reconsider her position, retreat from political activism and avoid all socialist labels as her book *Women and Economics* suggests.

The second wave of Gilman's activism, according to Van, is marked by her advocacy of what she calls "twin struggle" (1966, para. 35) by which working class, and middle class women are brought to work together with working class men. Gilman's reformed models of socialism and feminism, as Van conceives them, engender interdependence and reprove competition as it is evident by her promotion of the formation of coalitions between the proletarians and women, and her prescription of nationalism and populism as "suggestive models for recognizing how another group with distinct interests – namely women-might be able to enter into revolutionary coalitions with men. (para. 27)" In her view, economic equality for men and women alike should foreground the basis for any progressive social ideology.

Drawing on Van's assumptions, we contend that Gilman notably introduces socialism as a liberal ideology both for the toiled proletariat as well as for the enslaved women who are alienated from their human nature and muted by male oppression and capitalism. Social conditions rather than the nature of mankind embody the root cause of oppression according to Gilman, who therefore, seeks to forge solidarity between male and female workers in a common struggle against the capitalist exploitation. As a social critic, Gilman advocates changing the public and private roles of women and publicizing their private spheres. In this context, Jeanne M. Connell states that

Gilman's main thesis is that a community could be transformed if positive values found in the private sphere. Gilman believes that attributes such as caring and cooperation that are usually associated with the private sphere and viewed as natural to women only, can serve as public values and become natural to all members of the community (25-26).

On the account of this statement, Gilman habituates the private virtues of "caring" and "cooperation" in the deconstruction of hierarchies and reformation of class structures and gender relations. She additionally romanticizes the public sphere as the space of pluralism, and solidarity that women laborers should inhabit in order to forge intergender coalitions that would ultimately defy classism and sexism. It is for this reason that women in *Herland* resist the male desire for living in private houses and resolve to find a shelter in nature where they will be public rather than private. In their conception, privacy is synonymous to 'slavery' and home to 'prison' because

they cannot stand living in one place all the time.

In translation of that liberal conception, Herlanders discard their individual identity in preference for assuming a communal identity that would cultivate a sense of obligation and gratitude towards their communities. They correspondingly believe that "the country was a unit – it was theirs. They themselves were a unit, a conscious group; they thought in terms of the community" (79). This goes in line with Connell's conclusion that "Gilman's purpose in *Herland* is to highlight the problems inherent in the individualistic tendencies in American society and to suggest remedies (23)". What Gilman celebrates as efficient remedies to privatism and egoism that are associated with capitalism are the socialist virtues of equality, cooperation and duty which she thinks would create a classless society and free women from the egoistic restrictions of private spheres, whether factory or home.

Realizing the significance of self-dependence for the attenuation of man's authority, Gilman instigates women to hold jobs of power, make the best use of their principal sources of power, i.e. body and intellect, and assert their equal partnership in the production process. This echoes Marx's statement that "men begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence" (1982, 69). "Men" in this excerpt is a generic word referring to both genders whose belonging to the human community is conditioned by their abilities to be bread winners for themselves. The tension that might result from competition over job opportunities in the capitalist community can be resolved by attaching more value to alliance and unity as it is signified by Gilman in *Herland*, where women "had had no wars. They had had no kings, and no priests, and no aristocracies. They were sisters, and as they grew, they grew together – not by competition, but by united action" (60). Enhancement of unity and construction of coalitions, therefore, would contribute to the creation of a gender-blind work environment that breeds cooperation and harmony. Gilman goes further to invalidate the male visitors' argument that competition is necessary for stimulating production without which no one "would be willing to work" (60); instead, she contests that competition cultivates selfishness, dishonesty and indifference to the suffering of the poor and destitute.

CONCLUSION

Gilman's assertions on the centrality of autonomy to the empowerment of women extends Darwin's theory of sexual selection which gives women an autonomous right to choose one of the males competing for their love. The range of that autonomy, in Gilman's belief, is widened by their holding jobs of influence and developing a sense of pride in their bodies, voices and gender. In

extension of Foucault's genealogy of power, Gilman holds sociocultural and socioeconomic dynamics responsible for the subjugation and oppression of women and advances the formation of cross-gender coalitions for the purpose of reinforcing intergender communication and reforming gender identities to be more tolerant and inclusive of women. The new social order Gilman envisages in *Herland* promotes socialism and humanism and renounces classism and sexism. By establishing this utopia, Gilman demonstrates that women will be as productive as men if they are given an equal opportunity. Thus, she advocates socializing the relations of gender and production to liberate women from both capitalism and patriarchy.

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