

Dismantling The Masculine Domination in Ibsen's A Doll's House

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ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to analyze the presence of feminist issues and mechanisms for dismantling male dominance within the theatrical discourse, through the lens of social drama in the work of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. It provides at the first place a general overview and modern vision to gender theories, and an analytical reading based on gender theory to one of his famous plays "A Doll's House." The article also summarizes the feminist language within the play and explores how it can be leveraged towards writing that champions women's issues and social balance.

Keywords: gender issues ; gender roles; feminism; drama; Henrik Ibsen

Introduction

The analytical approach of the masterpieces of the Greek theater heritage and the discussion provided to the most prominent feminist figures in the history of theatre including Antigone, Phaedra, Medea and Lysistrata explores elements of thought that go hand in hand with feminism. This article as well chases the same strategy and singles out the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen most famous play 'A Doll's House' as a case for analysis and investigation. The fact that Ibsen is one of the most prominent playwrights of the twentieth century and his plays are the most present on world stages after William Shakespeare, makes his works a fertile ground for academic research.

Choosing a writer known among practitioners as the father of modern drama is a choice of modernity in itself. The existed distance between texts belonging to a pre-feminism period to texts that are at the heart and the midst of the feminist era is supposed to be characterized with an evolution at the level of issues and motivations of writing. It should provide a humanitarian vision that improves women's condition.

The aim of course is not limited to the classical reading and interpretation of texts, but to compare, to some extent, the strategies of women's resistance and its evolution. More than that, it is crucial to examine the position of women in these plays in the light of feminism to see either the headlines of success or the gaps. It is also very important to shed light on these strategies through dramatic writing and to question the existed similarities that can be repetitive historical mistakes in the feminist mindset. And finally, such analysis may contribute a lot in re-considering playwriting and suggesting new visions, conceptions and styles that seek social justice and humanism more than eternalizing the conflict between the sexes.

Lights on gender theory

Understanding the subject of women's resistance and the process of destabilizing the masculine

domination in dramatic writing necessitates that the issue of gender needs to be highlighted and understood since it is the focus point of the study. Obviously, theorizing is the road map and the dashboard that facilitate the entry to any field of knowledge. However, the attempt to understand and examine the question of gender needs to go beyond the narrative of historical development of events and the chronological ordering of feminist waves. It needs also to scrutinize the concept of gender and its theoretical background. In this regard, this chapter gives an essential theoretical introduction that explain the most important concepts related to gender before diving into its interactions with dramatic art. It is classified in three titles that deal, sequentially with gender as a process of becoming, gender in relation to the concept of 'performativity', and gender in relation to sociology.

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine” (Beauvoir 1949)

Starting from the above statement, De Beauvoir in her famous book 'The Second Sex' establishes a new philosophical bridge to rethink and explore one's gender identity/existence. Gender for her has nothing to do with the verb 'born', rather she links it with the verb 'become'. To clarify this idea, gender is not something we begin with, it is not a start nor an essence determined and predefined by nature, and it is not related to the set of biological features one is born with (sex). But on the contrary, it is something we become. That is, that gender comes after existence as a social construct in the sense that society teaches us the set of norms and regulations needed in order to be a 'Man' or a 'Woman'. De Beauvoir clearly states that gender is not biological nor it is defined by the natural traits. Rather, it is constructed within a process of becoming where the human constructed civilization with all its components (Culture, Religion, Values, Laws, Politics, etc.) takes its final shape.

It seems logical that we become Men and Women due to social interactions and the processes of socialization, but the problem raised here is that becoming a Man is considered to be the social norm, the standard, and the elite gender, whereas the state of becoming a Woman is the act of becoming the other, the inferior, the shadow, or using De Beauvoir's terminology; '*The Second Sex*'. The mechanisms of becoming, for De Beauvoir contribute in shaping the so-called 'Woman' as being the second sex, as opposed to so-called 'Man', the original sex. Becoming a man or a woman does not happen in a balanced and fair manner, yet it happens according to unfair determinants that consider 'Man' to be the first sex whereas 'Woman' is trapped and surrounded in the second sex corner.

The process of becoming men or women is merely absurd and unjust since the manner by which masculinities and femininities are classified affects gender roles and mainly the position of woman in any given society. It affects not only the classification of gender in terms of binaries, but more than that, it largely contributes in legitimizing woman's inferiority and even in justifying the historical oppression and violence exercised against her.

This social and cultural distribution of roles between men and women within the process of becoming is unfair since it gives dominance to the male sex. The division of roles is based mainly on the division of power and constitutes a system of manipulation. This system of power in which 'man' is the dominant, is known as 'Patriarchy'.¹ According to *Oxford dictionary*, patriarchy is "a form of social organization in which a male is the family head and title is traced through the male line". Defining

¹ Comes from the Greek word *patriarkhēs*, literally means 'the rule of the father, it refers generally to social systems where all channels of power and leadership are controlled by men.

patriarchy as a system of power controlled by man, is the view point of many thinkers and philosophers including (Engels 1984), in ‘*Origin of the Family*’, and (LERNER 1986) in ‘*the Creation of Patriarchy*’.

women have not produced important advances in thought because of their biologically determined preoccupation with nurturance and emotion, which led to their essential "inferiority" in regard to abstract thought. (LERNER 1986) With this in mind, the situation where woman is the ‘other’, the fake version, and the second sex under the dominance and oppression of ‘Man’ has historical roots. This historical process by which gender roles are defined contributes in naturalizing these roles and in shaping the masculine doxa².

Women with no doubt live many stages of resistance to change the common beliefs about their secondary position. Unfortunately, centuries of socialization and invention of meaning and beliefs to create what is known as ‘*the Second Sex*’ cannot be dismantled easily but, real change requires time, repetition and consciousness rising.

“...this is a period of transition; this world that has always belonged to men is still in their hands; patriarchal civilization’s institutions and values are still, to a great extent, alive. (Beauvoir 1949, 185)

The academic understanding of gender as a process of becoming cannot be cut up from the existentialist philosophy which celebrates the human free will and independence, as opposed to the essentialist thinking that imprisoned the human existence in a box of rigid facts and mentalities. That is, linking gender to the essentialist views creates a form of resemblance between ‘*gender*’ (the cultural traits) and ‘*sex*’ (the biological traits). This confusion between sex and gender legitimizes oppression and justifies the patriarchal norms. However, looking from an existentialist standpoint where gender is considered to be constructed within a process of becoming contributes to a great extent in disconnecting it from the biological, in a way that will open the window of change and women empowerment.

The distribution of gender roles on the basis of biological traits makes it evident that women and men become a gendered body ((Martin 1998). That is to say, bodies are gendered and governed by a system of constructed relations. Gendering bodies is not just about dividing bodies in term of cultural and social roles, but it goes further to link ‘*Logic*’ with the male body and ‘*emotion*’ with the female one. Imprisoning the female body in the emotional traits affects its position at the level of power and knowledge. That is, if woman is considered to be man’s property it is because she is been excluded from the field of reason due to the virtue of serving man. (Beauvoir 1949). It is the act of excluding women from the fields of logic and knowledge that affects their presence in the public sphere. The act of being rational or emotional has nothing to do with nature. This means that the state of subordination and weakness that characterized women’s position and representation in society is just a social construct that need to be interrogated.

this is so simple: as they are not given responsibility for any family affair by virtue of our pedestrian customs, reason is never useful to them ... Let your wife settle your affairs with the farmers on two of your lands, and I wager that the books are better kept than by you” (Beauvoir 1949;297)

The statement above by Simone de Beauvoir reduces all the historical debates in the field of gender studies by emphasizing the importance of dealing with gender as a process of becoming. It is all about the

² a Greek word refers to a common belief or popular opinion., it is contrasted with the episteme which means ‘knowledge’.

socio-cultural expectations that categorized woman's roles according to the dichotomy of what is allowed and what is forbidden for her. Things are not natural, change is possible, and roles can be reciprocal: "*let your wife settle your affairs with the farmers*"³.

The process of becoming is determined by the set of expectations and characteristics already assigned by society to be respected by men and women. These gender expectations imprisoned women and men. The idea of being superior or inferior is engraved in men and women minds and affects their social behaviors and relations. This bitter fact about gender roles has been expressed for centuries even by writers and poets in their literary works. The poet Tennyson⁴, for instance, expresses this unequal gender division of labors in his narrative poem entitled 'The Princess'. He gives a clear poetic classification of roles that explains how societies used to be structured and organized in relation to gender.

He says:

*Man is the hunter; woman is his game:
The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;
They love us for it, and we ride them down.*

(Tennyson, 1847) Lines 147-150

*Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey;
All else confusion.*

(Tennyson, 1847) Lines 427-43

These poetic verses largely illustrate the concept of gender expectations and how culture provides an unfair distribution of roles. This distribution is based on the dichotomies; private/public, leader/follower, power/weakness, and of course Man/Women. However, through this poetic discourse, women are linked to intimacy and housework or the private sphere expressed poetically with terms such as: game/hearth/beauty/heart/needle/. This semantic field attributed to women is related to obedience which is woman's main function. The poet on the other side devotes terms such as hunter/field/sword/command/head (mind) to men. These terms connote power and celebrate men's braveness and ability to lead and occupy the public affairs.

The debate about gender as a process of becoming opens new horizons of analysis concerning the concept of gender and women's issues. Gender is disconnected from what is physical and natural, and that it is not associated with one's birth. In other words, Gender is something one's become. That is, it is the act of becoming and the process of socio-cultural transitions following one's birth which determines gender identity. (Beauvoir 1949). The fact of being a man or a woman is similar to being a box that get filled with all the social expectations about femininities and masculinities. However, gender looks biological truths that need to be examined from different perspectives (ECKERT 2003).

³Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*, French version copyright Paris: Gallimard 1949/ Translated version by Constance Bored; eBooks 2009) page 297

⁴ Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892); one of the most famous British poets in the Victorian period. His poetic works include 'Mariana', 'the Princess', 'Nothing will die', 'Ulysses', and many other poems. (1830,1832,1833-1891)

As far as culture is concerned, becoming a man is a historical luck in the sense that he is the first sex or the privileged sex. He sits on the throne of power and leadership as the hunter and the lord. But unfortunately, becoming a woman means falling into the depth of marginalization and social oppression, falling in the box of subordination and violence, and been imprisoned in the walls with domestic and productive roles. In this respect, the feminist struggle is in fact a struggle for equality and social justice. Becoming 'equal' is the starting point of feminism since its beginning in 1960s⁵ up till now. The main focus of struggle is always to change gender representations and to promote women rights to participate as equal as men in all aspects of life. It is also the struggle to end with the situation in which woman considers the private tasks as an ideal desire and as a final goal or what is called 'The Feminine Mystique' (Friedan 1963).

Gender as an act of performing

In Cambridge and Oxford dictionary, the verb 'to perform' means 'to carry out and to fulfill (an action, task, or function). The person who performs called 'performer'; someone who acts, sings, dances, or plays music, etc.) Here, the concept of gender which is determined by social roles, is linked to the concept of 'performance' that is characterized by intent. This linking between gender and performance makes possible to reconsider Shakespeare's verses where he compares the world to a big stage.

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players.

They have their exits and their entrances,

And one man in his time plays many parts,

His acts being seven ages.

William Shakespeare: As You Like It, Act 2, scene 7

William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the famous English playwright and poet considers the world a big stage/theatre where men and women are just players/actors and performers. According to this definition, life becomes a stage on which men and women are performing roles that have entrances and exits. These roles start with birth and end with death. Taking this Shakespearian verses into account, gender roles become an act of playing in a big stage with predefined rules and regulations. However, these games are neither safe nor enjoyable since the rules are not distributed equally between man and woman. In addition to that, the entrances and the exits are not the same, they are full of risks and gender biases.

The gender gap in the process of playing is very clear in the previous verses by William Shakespeare where he states that man plays the best and the most parts of the game (Shakespeare, 1623), whereas the least and the worst parts are given to woman. The notion of performance suggests new horizons of understanding and interpretations concerning gender and gender roles. Gender in this regard is a daily routine and no more than an act of doing (West & Zimmerman, 1987). We do gender the same way we stand on stage or we prepare to perform a theatrical role. We select what to wear, we memorize what to say, we train ourselves on acting in respect to what the audience expects, and we do the best to satisfy the others' expectations.

⁵ First wave feminism, mainly concerned with women's right to vote.

The same thing happened in our social life according to West and Zimmerman. Doing gender for them is guided by social perceptions and expectations, and also the interactional and micro political activities that are manifested or presented at the end as expressions of masculinities or femininities. (West & Zimmerman, 1987)

“In one sense, of course, it is individuals who “do” gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987:126)

Zimmerman’s ideas about the fact of doing gender put a watershed between sex and gender. Sex is associated with the biological traits one is born with whereas gender is a cultural construct. Gender is a product of culture that we do, we act, and we perform. This leads to the theory of ‘performativity’⁶ that is suggested by the gender theorist Judith Butler in her book ‘Gender Trouble’ (1999). To present her theoretical background and her understanding of gender, Butler applies the concept of ‘performativity’. She clearly states that:

The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body (Butler, 1999:16)

In Butler’s examination of the issues of gender, she attempts to distinguish the concept of gender from that of ‘essence’: the natural existence of things. That is, women’s existence is associated with their bodies. The struggle is mainly about dismantling the bridge that women’s bodies are related to sexuality, reproduction and maternity (Grosz 1995). she suggests a performative view about gender, that is against the essentialist views about women roles. To explain, essentialism *“refers here to the attribution of a fixed essence to women” (Grosz 1995, 84).*

The notion of performativity comes to break with the essentialist definition of gender roles. Gender is performed or created through one’s actions and behaviors. (Butler 1999). Furthermore, gender should not be linked to the body or to the biological traits, but to the notion of ‘performativity that is a crucial key in any attempt to theorize and understand gender issues. The discussion of gender from an essentialist standpoint is based on naturalizing the social roles. Which means, taking gender roles for granted to be solid facts. As an example, the Naturalizing of women’s works in the house means that cooking, rearing children and serving the husband becomes as natural as pregnancy. But for Butler gender roles are social products, which mean that they are produced and manufactured through a system of repeated acts. This repetition affects at the end the ways our gender roles are performed .

This dimension of gender makes it possible to discuss gender roles as a game in a field (Bourdieu 1998). Playing gender means that women and men are just performing roles that have nothing to do with their natural ‘essence’. It can be said that gender identity is all a question of performing roles that satisfy the social needs. this process of performing not as simple as it seems. On the contrary, it is very complicated. For, the aspects and dynamics of performing differ from one culture to another. It is:

“a performance with clearly punitive consequences” (Butler, 1999:213)

⁶ It is derived from J.L Austin (1911-1960) famous works on the philosophy of language ‘how to do things with words’ (1955/1962). It has applications in many fields such as anthropology, linguistics, gender studies, Etc. Used by the Gender theorist ‘Judith Butler’ to argue that gender is socially constructed through a process of acts or performances.

In this life performance, women are the punished and the victims. On the one hand, they are regarded as the second sex playing less important social roles. On the other hand, they perform their roles under the influence of fundamentalist and essentialist thought that naturalize the cultural and invent 'unchangeable' facts. That is, the consequences of gender as performance are not fair since men and women perform differently their roles. But in a way or another, women are victimized and stigmatized according to performances that are culturally and socially attributed to them. Gender by this meaning becomes a game of roles, an act of performing roles predefined by a set of cultural norms. The examination of gender relations in term of performativity enlarges the act of performing to include communication and all social interactions (Leach 2008).

"If we examine segments of life as discrete performances, we can extend the notion of performance to include virtually any social interaction" (Leach 2008:03)

The interactions between the concept of performance and society contribute greatly to the establishment of a system of cultural norms. This is what R. Wagner refers to as *'The Invention of Culture'* (Wagner 1975:17). The fact of "inventing culture" or "creating cultural components" refers to an anthropological idea that means: the culture of any society, with all its behaviors and beliefs including gender roles, is founded, created and constructed, that is, it is neither innate nor inherited.

It is brought into being by the invention of culture, both in the general sense, as a concept, and in the specific sense, through the invention of particular cultures. (Wagner 1975:17)

Performing roles, then: is nothing but interactions to invent a cultural system, or to create a system of meanings about behavior, beliefs, and social roles that have historically accumulated until they appear natural facts that cannot be changed. With this in mind, understanding gender is the attempt to analyze the cultural processes that contribute to a large extent to the construction of these meanings about 'gender'. Gender meanings are invented, created and constructed within society. This fact destroys the fundamental order of things and establishes instead a new structure on the basis of the fluidity and the mobility of meanings. That is, meanings attributed to gender are changeable and can be rearranged in the search of balance at the level of gender roles.

Nothing has any meaning until we give it one. We see something, but it has no intrinsic meaning until we make one for it. We construct the meaning. (Leach 2008, 14)

The constructed meanings beside the invented culture contributes to draw the major features of society with all its components: values, order, principles, and gender roles. However, this cultural invention creates gender bias (Butler 1999). The term 'Bias' in relation to gender is used *'when men and women are treated differently, in a way that is unfair'* (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). Unfortunately, it is believed that men are the source of logic and order whereas women are the source of 'emotions' and 'disorder'. These ideas are interpreted negatively to confirm gender biases and to shape a social reality where women are 'The Second Sex' (Beauvoir 1949).

There is a good principle that created order, light and man and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness, and woman (Pythagoras)⁷

In this context, approaching gender consists not only in understanding the ways gender is constructed and the mechanisms on which the masculine domination is based, but in going further to explore the dynamics of women resistance and empowerment. Understanding the nature of hegemony in

⁷ Pythagoras (circa 582-507 B.C) quoted by Simone d Beauvoir in "the second sex" 1949.

man-woman relationship of no value if it is not linked to women empowerment and the struggle for gender equality. Integrating women in the process of development and empowering their position in societies is the main concern of gender studies and was the crucial aim of the feminist waves from its early beginning up to now. Therefore, equal distribution of power and achieving gender equality necessitates re-considering gender dynamics and the mechanisms of masculine power.

Coping with gender dynamics within the perspective of performance or performativity can also be analyzed by applying the dramaturgical analysis method as suggested by Ervin Goffman (Goffman 1956) in *'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life'*. In the same stream of Butler and Shakespear, Gofman suggests that social life is but a set of performances that needs to be explored from within the theatrical approaches and the theory of performance. He argues that the dramturgical analysis approach can be applied to examin social relations and ineractions(Goffman, 1956). Comparing social roles to a performing process , as suggested by Gofman, is a concept with multiple uses. It is applied in theatrical studies, gender sudies, and also in sociological studies. Comparing life to a performance is highly beneficial for understanding gender performativity and also examining gender issues in plays suggesed for analysis in the coming sections.

The notion of performance is characterized by change and mobility, and it is not attached only to theatrical studies. Instead, it extends to take into account the full life as a big stage where individuals act and performe roles. For Goffman, a performance is the collection of activities and actions done by any individual/performer in front of others/audience. He argues that, the only thing needed for a 'performing act' to take place is the interaction in a communicative act between a performer/speaker and a reciever/audience. More than that, any communicative act is in fact a performance with a speaker/actor, and a reciever/ audience.

A 'performance' may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. (Goffman 1956, 123)

Influenced by Shakespeare's statement 'All the world's a stage' and the method of Dramatism⁸ presented by Kenneth Burke (1945) to analyze and interpret human communication and relationships, Goffman also considers life to be metaphorically speaking a big theatre with individuals/ Men and Women playing roles and fronting each other. The application of the dramaturgical analysis method on social relationships and interactions makes it possible to rethink and reconsider gender relations outside the box of biology since these relations are governed by the act of performing Masks (Personas/characters).

We can take this further, and consider many different roles which we play: for our parents, we play the child, even when we are long past childhood; for the bank manager, we play the innocent; for our beloved, we play the saucy, the sensitive or the seductive. In fact (...) we perform so many identities" (Leach 2008:14)

As far as performance is concerned, society predefines the social roles to be played and performed by man and woman. However, man get to perform outside the boundaries of the house whereas woman stick to her sexual and mother duties (ZNANIEKI 1965, 249). In this respect, it can be said that the situation of women as performers of secondary roles is not a matter of nature. Rather, it is a matter of performing roles that fulfils the cultural expectations about femininity and masculinity.

⁸ Life is theatre, suggested by Kenneth Burke in his book 'A Grammar of Motives' 1945 by Prentice-hall, reprinted and revised in 1969 by California edition.

The fact that femininity or masculinity cannot be reduced to the physical distinguishing characteristics of the sexes does not divest gender of all equivalence with the body. Rather, it means that it makes no sense to imagine gender as solely determined by physical characteristics. (BERNASKONI 1988, 47)

Social actions or behaviors are but a series of roles we perform in front of each other where the body has an important role in subjugating women's position in society. But it is a great injustice that woman's roles are defined according to the physical appearances in the sense that childbirth and pregnancy do not justify the imprisonment of women within the walls of the house. With this mind, identity as a whole becomes a social construct and a box filled with social tools and roles ready to be performed. These social actions contribute to the shaping of one's identity through accepting the social restored behaviors. Identity for Kath Woodward 'is the sense of recognition and belonging' to a particular language, religion, culture, race, gender, class, or ethnicity (Woodward 2000).

Our identities are built upon beliefs about the world: about gender, sexuality, race and religion which may not always be true or well grounded (Stahly 2007, 11).

That is, individual's identity is constructed by accepting their roles as defined by society. (McKettrick, 2012).

The application of the dramaturgical principles in the analysis of social life requires viewing social interactions including gender roles as drama (Edgley 2016). Approaching life as drama makes it necessary to understand the social and cultural conditions that made women perform offstage in the dark sides of society or using Marjorie Bard's term 'Shadow Women' (Bard 1990), while man plays on the upper stage and in the brightest places. This metaphorical division of gender roles in terms of front stage and back stage gives a clear vision on how gender roles are distributed throughout life. The front stage is in this sense a masculine area that symbolizes power, manipulation, knowledge and leadership; in the opposite, the back stage is feminine. It is a space of subordination, subjugation, and weakness. The casting/distribution of roles between these spaces (front/back) is governed by the social expectations about being boy or being girl (Paechter 2007). The fact that man takes the principle role is not a biological fact, but it is learned, acquired, and finally performed due to a set of social expectations.

Gender as a social construct

Approaching gender from a sociological perspective is a research necessity to understand the dynamics of gender in relation to the struggle for 'equality'. It is essential to examine the sociological dimension of gender as being a social construct that differs from sex. In this context, this section examines the concept of gender as a system of functions, and as a system of meanings and in relation to social conflict theory.

Gender as a system of functions

It is society which, fashioning us in its image, fills us with religious, political and moral beliefs that control our actions (Durkheim 1897:170)

Functionalism is a method of explaining society. It sees society as an organism where individuals fulfill their functions for the sake of creating a social balance (Spencer, 1998). That is, the balance and the stability of society is based on distributing functions and roles among individuals. It is presented by the French sociologist Durkheim (1858-1917), and developed by others including Herbert Spencer in his principles of sociology. The distribution of gender roles within the functionalist perspective is a social need to establish the social order. Gender roles are among the social elements that need to be organized

according to the social belief for the continuity of society and also to keep what Parsons refers to as ‘The Social Balance’ or ‘*the social system*’ (Parsons 1961:193).

With this in mind, the distribution of gender roles consist on attributing a system of principles to men and women. These principles constitute what Durkheim refers as social duties (Durkheim, 1895:170). In this context, the social balance is determined through this distribution of roles as social duties governed by a system of facts, values and beliefs that are constructed in society. The social duties are manifested through ideologies or system women is inferior to men. Men and women within the functionalist perspective, perform functions that fit the social facts that are already-made in society (Durkheim, 1895). The notion of social duties is suggested by Durkheim to describe how society defines and organised social duties. He states that:

When I perform my duties as a brother, a husband or a citizen and carry out the commitments I have entered into, I fulfill obligations which are defined in law and custom and which are external to myself and my actions. Even when they conform to my own sentiments and when I feel their reality within me, that reality does not cease to be objective, for it is not I who have prescribed. these duties; I have received them through education” (Durkheim, 1895:50)

Individuals, according to Durkheim, play different functions that do not contradict with the social facts or the social obligations already established through education. The process of education is not limited to school, but it refers to all the institutions responsible for socialization including family, school, and Media. As a result, Individuals may accept situations where they are segregated and oppressed because they consider the state of oppression as a normal state of performing social duties. The situation of accepting oppression is exactly what happens to women while dreaming of marriage and housework. They are, in fact, dreaming to fulfil their social functions and to satisfy the social expectations. The power of social values makes women think of their state of inferiority as a social duty represented in several functions that are necessary for creating the social balance.

Gender as a system of meanings

Coping with gender as a social product is essential to understand the mechanisms by which society distributes meanings among men and women. This requires an understanding of the various theories that attempt to approach society and its structures. The most important theory to be understood and discussed in this section is the social constructionism.

Social constructionism insists that we take a critical stance towards our taken-for- granted ways of understanding the world (including ourselves). It invites us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world. (Burr 1995, 02)

Gender roles, according to social constructionism, are constructed inside the social interactions. These interactions between individuals contribute to the construction of a social reality about gender and social duties (Luckman,1966:48). This theory as suggested by Burr 1995 questions the notion of social facts. That is, the social meanings are not absolute facts. Rather, it is social values shaped by people and can be changed. However, the historical factors and the power of repetition make these values look natural and people begin to take them for granted as absolute facts. Thomas.Luckmann, 1966).

Berger and Luckman, in ‘*The Social Construction of Reality*’ suggest that individuals create the objective reality. Which means, individuals, through interaction, construct their understanding of the world, or let’s say, vision of the world (Luckman,1966). Objective reality, according to these ideas, is

designed in the daily interactions. It is the excellent reality or the standard truth that need to be followed by everyone in society. Social knowledge is composed of a series of meanings individuals acquire through interactions. In this regard, gender roles are constructed according to the excellent meanings or the standard meanings that shape the objective reality. Individuals construct social meanings about masculinities and femininities, as well, through a series of operations including internalization, objectification, and externalization.

Externalization and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process. The third moment in this process, which is internalization (by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialization (Luckmann, 1966:78)

While De Beauvoir suggests the notion of ‘becoming’ to deal with the constructed aspect of women’s roles, Luckman argues that individuals become member of society. (Luckmann, 1966). That is, man and woman do not have specific traits that determine their social tasks. Instead, socialization with all its mechanisms is responsible for the distribution of gender roles. It based on constructing social meanings and establishing the objective reality gender roles. These constructed meanings about gender roles contribute in shaping gender identity and its dynamics. These meanings are performed by men and women as a social reality

Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world” (Luckmann, 1966 : 33)

This understanding of gender makes social roles a series of unrealistic and hypothetical meanings that society attributes to men and women. Life becomes a game to create imaginary and fake meanings or a simulacra (Baudrillard 1981). In this regard, gender identity becomes a representation of fake roles suggested by social norms that govern and control individual’s behaviors.

Here it is important to stress that our sense of who and what we are and how we fit into the world generally involves norms, which can govern our behavior (Stahly 2007, 11)

This is exactly what the sociologist, Judith Butler, attempts to defend by her theory of performativity. For her, nobody exists in fact as a ready-made gender, but the traits of femininity and masculinity are constructed later on within the social interactions. (Butler 1999) Men and women, while performing their gender identities, they are in fact simulating a collection of meanings, symbols, and representations that are culturally and socially manufactured .

Gender and social conflict

The first-class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first-class oppression coincides with that of female sex by the male. (MARX 1973, 23)

To begin with, it is necessary to shed light on social conflict theory and its possible applications to gender issues since it is a theory that summarizes the social dynamics in the concept of ‘conflict’. This theory is developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Frederic Engels (1820-195). For them, society is governed by conflict and struggle between the Bourgeoisie and the proletariat. (K. M. Engels 1965, 05). That is, society according to social conflict theory is divided into two main categories; the oppressed, and the dominants who control resources and means of productions. The application of this views on gender studies, requires a comparison between gender dynamics and social-class struggle.

The feminist struggle from a socialist perspective sees patriarchy as a version of capitalism. Man becomes like a capitalist who controls resources and means of production. That is; man is the upper-class

of society whereas woman is the lower class. With this in mind, gender struggle, from a Marxist standpoint, is concentrated on seeking equal distribution of resources between man and woman.

We called ourselves socialists because we inherited ideas from Marxism(...) this means that we assume that ideas, including feminist ones, relate to the material and historical conditions of people's lives and that those conditions are defined largely by capitalist relations as well as patriarchal ones. (Anja Meulenbelt 1984, 07)

This view is essential to explore the patterns of gender relations in term of power dynamics and the distribution of resources. The aim of feminism within the socialist perspective is to Dismantle the taken for granted beliefs about gender and to challenge the dominants (WARTHON 2012, 12). The feminist movement was influenced by Marxism in the sense that, it links the male domination to man's control over resources, as he is the bread-winner while woman is only the housekeeper.

From feminism we have come to understand an institutionalized system of oppression based on the domination of men over women: sexism. Its contradictions are based on the hostile social relations set into force by this domination. (Susan Davis 1972, 03)

The feminist struggle is mainly based on deconstructing the tools of domination through an equal distribution of resources between men and women. The key to liberation for socialist feminism is through financial independence. That is; women's access to means of production including, education, work, politics, and work, is the only solution for emancipation.

This sphere of action, this shared space, has the effect of ensuring that the issues at stake in the conflict are recognized by the actors who oppose one another, struggling to control the same resources, the same values or the same power (Wieviorka, 2010:03)

Gender roles are, in fact, socially constructed and controlled by man. Women's battle, in this regard, is but a battle about resources. Man's control of resources including the market, education, Politics, and all forms of capitals contribute in making woman in the bottom of society with less resources. The aim of Feminism, in this context, is to fight patriarchy/capitalism to get equal access to resources. To put it differently, women's fight is for gaining access to resources that are dominated by men.

In sum, gender identity is socially constructed and has nothing to do with the biological traits that refer to "sex". That is; being man or woman is related to a process of becoming and a system of socio-cultural interactions that affect gender performativity. performing gender roles is the fact of respecting the traits of masculinity or femininity that are pre-defined by the social norms. at the same time, these norms contribute to the unequal distribution of resources between man and women.

of functions where women's oppression is taken for granted to be an ethical obligation that support the social equilibrium (Barrett 1980, 18).

As far as gender is concerned, ethics and social values are not the only factors responsible for constructing gender functions. However, other elements such as politics, economy, religion, and many other mechanisms contribute in establishing social facts where

About Henrik Ibsen

Henrik Johan Ibsen, born in Norway 1828, is a well-known dramatist. He is among critics 'the Father of Modern Drama'. He lived his childhood in a modest Norwegian city known by trade and commerce. His father was a trade person who suffered several economic troubles that forced Henrik to travel looking for better future. In 1844, he worked in Grimstade in a pharmacy as an adjutant. After many years he worked with Bergen's theatre as a writer and assistant. In this period, he wrote several plays until

he traveled abroad for the first time in 1852 and worked on Shakespeare's plays. After years of self-imposed exile, he wrote his famous play 'A Doll's House'. It is performed in many stages including Bergen's theatre, and Christiania's theatre. He received many critics and criticism and several accusations especially for the personality of 'Nora' in the play. He wrote both prose and verse drama. He died in Norway on May 23rd, 1906 after leaving to the world a rich library of many beautiful texts among which: (Ghosts 1891), (The Master Builder 1893), (When We Dead Awaken 1899) and many other plays.

At the level of style and vision, Ibsen challenges the norms of melodrama and the classical expectations of characters and establishes his own stream of writing with a humanist touch. He goes beyond illusions and the traditional manners that focused on the aesthetic dimension of texts. Instead, he suggests daily life characters with a humanist touch and behaviors. He focuses on criticizing the social conditions he lives in, and sheds light on many issues such as women's rights and politics. These characteristics make his texts an ideal model in the process of investigating dramatic writing in relation to women's issues and the question of feminism.

2- A Doll's House: Nora Slams the door of subordination

2-1 A brief summary

Nora Helmer, the wife of Torvalds Helmer, returns home happy pleasant with what she bought preparing for the Christmas. Her old friend 'Linde' visits her after ten years and the dialogues reveals a great secret that Nora hides from her husband. She lives a crisis due to a past debt that she took to help her husband and her family. After her husband got promoted at work, he decides to fire Nils Krogstad, one of the bank's employee, for his corruption and bad behavior. Unfortunately, Mr. Krogstad is aware of Nora's financial Crisis and starts provoking her to reveal the secret if she refused to mediate for him to keep his position in the bank.

Helmer discovers Nora's secret and starts blaming her and forgets about all his sacrifices to help him financially and as a housekeeper. Torvald refuses his wife's mediation and attempts to keep Krogstad in his position. In these conditions, Krogstad decides to send a discourse informing Torvalds about his wife's cheating. Nora works hard to take the letter and preventing her husband from discovering its content. Finally, Torvalds reads the letter and starts blaming his wife for what he considered as betrayal. He addresses his blame and admonition forgetting the fact that Nora did everything to support him. He discovers his fault and his cruelty and decides to forgive her. Nora after these events discovers her husband's egoism and decides to leave the house and slams the door behind him.



2-2 analysis and interpretation

2-2-1 Nora Helmer: The Christmas Tree

Dramatic writing is based on several elements that all overlap to form relationships between characters and to establish the evolution of events. We think of events with reference to dramatic personae. Also, characters do express their emotions, relationships and their ideas only through dialogue as a central component in dramatic writing. The development of dramatic events is mainly related to acts and counter-acts. That is to say, characters do not meet on stage to be all peaceful and kind, nor to be all malefactors and unjust. They do not gather on stage neither to think, feel, and react the same way, nor to live the same love story or the same story of war. They neither move forward the same steps to eventually reach the same fate nor they turn back the same steps to get fall in the same pits. On the contrary, characters are on the stage to be different, to express differently, and to have different social, physical and psychological qualities. They interact to agree or to revolt, to support or to discourage, and finally to win or to lose.

These differences in obsessions, dreams and actions give the play its aesthetic dimension, and contribute largely in establishing the dramatic conflict. However, at the level of writing, this pattern of emotions, interactions, colors and gazes, which we see during performances as embodied in all elements of the theater industry such as lighting, costume, and all the theatrical effects, are presented through the use of stage directions. The latter are the set of instructions and comments that help showing and indicating the feelings, actions of actors and the set of accessories needed for the performance. Additionally, they are the Para-play or the Para-text through which the writer expresses his vision and his baseline of thought. In this respect, Ibsen's stage directions are key elements to understanding his plays and his philosophy. These directions present a set of elements, signs and symbols that need to be decoded, in an attempt to explore Nora's situation and her migration toward emancipation.

*(SCENE. —A room furnished comfortably and tastefully, but not extravagantly...)*⁹

*(Enter NORA, humming a tune and in high spirits)*¹⁰

(Ibsen, 1879)

The stage directions show that Nora returns home to prepare for the Christmas night. She returns from the world that exists outside the boundaries of the house, or outside her usual position inside the house. The scenic indications show also that Nora returns home singing and full of positivity as if she finds happiness and freedom outside the walls of the house, or as if she gets charged with the feelings of happiness every moment she goes outside. The fact that she encounters the outside world with feelings of joy and happiness indicates that the appropriate world for her lays outside the boundaries of the self. It can be said that, for Ibsen, the battery of happiness exists in the public space and its charging requires transgressing the private space from time to time. The playwright in this line of argument posits the problematic of private/public conflict in which gender occupies a central territory. The binary divisions on which Nora's thinking rests constitute one of the main sub-conscious elements underpinning the patterns of otherness that feed the antagonistic oppressive structures of patriarchy.

Nora. For myself? Oh, I am sure I don't want anything.

(A Doll's house :07)

Nora is inside the private world, she is in the heart of her 'proper' space back to where she ought to be, and fully prepared for her domestic job according to the cultural distribution of roles. It is understood

⁹ Stage direction of the first scene

¹⁰ Stage direction of the first scene

from the stage directions that she does her best to succeed in her private role since the setting/house is well organized, things are well arranged, and everything is in its right position. Beside that she is working hard to delight the family and to make the Christmas night a night of joy and happiness.

This is Nora, the puppet of the house that works day and night to delight her husband and her children. The Doll house that leaves her place, goes out, and spends money only after her husband's permission. Ibsen's choice to start the play in this quiet manner, and calm manner but that connotes deep questions about Nora's situation. He introduces Nora using a beautiful style that hides the internal imbalances within Helmer's family. This is Nora, the quiet, beautiful, smiling doll, always singing, delighting everyone and has no right to be tired or to complain. This is Nora which plays her role properly, doing everything again and again with the same routine without considering or thinking of Betty Friedan's question in 1973, "is this all?"

Nora *"made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night-she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question-Is this all?"*

(Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, 1973)

Henrik Ibsen departure from this calm situation gives another horizon to reflect on Nora's personality with respect to gender and in contrast with the natural way of things. He introduces Nora as a housekeeper and her husband as a breadwinner working in his office/desk. The desk is, of course, a sign of intellectuality, Logical task, and decision making. This situation pushes the reader to ask several questions regarding the viewpoint wanted and defended by Henrik Ibsen. This start is a source of tensions and questioning and it requires a deep discussion in the light of gender and dramatic analysis if we are to explore Ibsen's position toward feminism. In front of this beginning, it is logical to wonder if Ibsen defends this calm situation and this classical role attributed to Nora, or does he just start with the silence which precedes the tempest? In other words, does Ibsen defend patriarchy while presenting Nora as a doll? Or does he present a ready-made situation that needs more criticism and analysis as a preparation for its deconstruction.

"... a PORTER who is carrying a Christmas Tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID who has opened the door.)¹¹ (Ibsen 1879)

Ibsen, from the early beginning, provides a symbolic reference to the cultural backgrounds that contribute to the establishment of social relations and dramatic conflict within this theatrical work. There is a vast cultural distance between the image of Nora as she prepares for the Christmas night, and the image of her husband sitting in his office to complete his work. Ibsen's reference to the Christmas tree in the beginning of the play is a reference to the birthday, to the birth of events, and also to the naissance of conflicts. The Christmas tree is a religious sign that refers to Christianity. It cannot be denied that religion is an important component of the 'Habitus' (using Bourdieu's term). That is to say the deeply buried acts and ways of behaving in everyday situations ((Bourdieu, 1998). Life for Bourdieu is a space of games and a field of relations where individuals practice there 'Habitus'. That is to say, they do their culture including their gender roles, their religion and everything they learn in the process of socialization. Religion as a cultural component plays a central role in the mechanism of socialization and in shaping one's identity. That is why Henrik Ibsen refers symbolically to religion and its role in structuring and organizing social

¹¹ A Doll's House, Stage direction of the first scene

roles through the character of Nora and her preparation to the Christmas party and through the symbolic use of the Christmas tree.

The Christmas tree is also associated with the act of salvation and purification with reference to the incident of crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This incident is located between the sacred and the profane. From one hand, Holiness is represented in the act of celebrating the memory of crucifixion and in glorifying the cause of salvation, on the other hand, the profane is engrained in the notion of salvation in itself, in the sense that someone else is going to be crucified and tortured on behalf of all mankind for sins he did not commit at all. This selfish purification from sins or this selfish access to paradise is very similar to the masculine egoism. In other words, all the women are a version of Jesus Christ with all the sacrifices they make, and all the pains they suffer, for the sake of feeding the masculine desires. The profane is also linked to all the religious and cultural discourses that would legitimize oppression and hegemony over women to be just dolls in the house. With this mind, the analysis of Nora and her husband's roles is an analysis of roles attributed to all women and men. This is in fact, an analysis of the real distance that exists between the position of men sitting on the desk and the situation of women preparing and decorating the Christmas tree.

Helmer. Of course, you couldn't, poor little girl. You had the best of intentions to please us all (A Doll's house:10)

(Nora. Hide the Christmas Tree carefully,)¹²

Nora's duties toward the Christmas tree including preparing it, decorating its leaves, and showing it at the right time, depicts the importance she gives to traditions, culture and to her function as a housewife. Ibsen's reference to the Christmas tree in these stage directions is not absurd, but it is based on Ibsen's vision, style, and conception of dramatic writing and its functions. He emphasizes the role of cultural roots in establishing the existing situation of the house and in feeding patriarchy. The tree does not play only the classical meaning manifested in its chronological role as a Christmas reminder. Furthermore, it is mainly associated to romanticism and its function as a sign of refuge freedom, and a symbol of freedom. It is strongly attached to the cultural umbrella responsible for distributing and organizing gender roles. The Christmas tree with all its connotations is related to the notion of salvation engrained deeply in Nora's Psychology.

With reference to gender, the tree becomes a female character with all the meanings of fertility, production and all the aspects of life giving. With respect to all the connotations discussed previously, Both Nora and the Tree get combined to become one entity sharing the same fate and the same pain. They both participate in the organization of the night party; they are both ready to surprise the man and to fulfill his desires. They are both ready to smile and hide their internal injuries. The tree with all its beautiful lamps lights up the concert hall. It helps everyone to see his steps and dance with his beloved and it witnesses the good night lived by everyone. Yet, it has a passive situation. In the sense that it could not choose its place in the house and it cannot participate in dancing moments. By the end of the night, it remains lonely and nobody kisses its branches as a sign of thank for everything it offers. The fate of Nora and the Tree is the same; they are both no more than a kind doll. With all this in mind, calling Nora as: the Christmas tree, in this analysis is justified and suitable to her situation.

Helmer (calls out from his room). Is that my little lark twittering out there?

¹² A Doll's House, Stage direction of the first scene

(A Doll's House: 05)

Helmer. *When did my squirrel come home?*

(A Doll's House :07)

Helmer, Nora's husband, calls it "my little lark twittering", and this is not quite different from being a doll or being a Christmas tree. Comparing Nora with a twittering sparrow opens for her new horizons of emancipation and salvation since the bird is a sign of flying and freedom. However, as the Christmas tree is imprisoned in the private space even if it is a sign of salvation, the bird will not fly if it is imprisoned in the cage. This is exactly the situation of Nora. She is not an independent bird with a free will, she is not a bird, but rather, she is her husband's bird. Her husband Torvald Helmer expresses that using the pronoun "My". He says (My Little lark, my little skylark, my little squirrel) to indicate that she is a bird, but inside the cage of her husband.

Nora is a songbird that responds to her husband's orders whenever he wants. She sings him all the beautiful songs of obedience and subordination. She adorns her body as she decorates the branches of the tree, and she adorns even her voice to please her husband eyes and ears. But still, both the Christmas tree and the bird foreshadow a state of hope and emancipation embodied in their symbolic meanings. It is possibly, that Ibsen through all these presented signs and symbols prepares the reader for several coming changes and for a future of resistance for Nora Helmer.



2-2-2 Blackmailing stability and resistance

Nora Helmer is striving to please her husband in all ways, she does not buy anything for herself. She is for her husband, in various dialogues of the play, only a small bird in a cage singing and dancing according to his finger's signal. Nora's words, and suggestions, are for Helmer, only a woman's thinking in the ugly sense of the word.

Helmer. *That is like a woman! (A Doll's House: 7)*

She struggles to practice her husband's favorite dance 'the tarantella' for the sake of pleasing his desires. The rising actions of the play reaches its climax with Krogstad's appearance. He starts blackmailing Nora by threatening her to reveal the secret of the old loan she had taken to save her husband's life. If not, she has to convince her husband not to fire him from the bank.

Krogstad. *Hm! —suppose I were to tell him? (A Doll's House;32)*

This blackmailing event, in all its negativity, become a point that changed the stream of events. It contradicts all expectations and serve the interest of Nora. On one hand, it helps her get rid of the secret she had hidden several years. On the other hand, it contributes to prepare the stage for a real confrontation

with her husband. It is the confrontation that does not contradict the feminist struggles as it establishes the first step in the path of liberation; dialogue and the revealing of pain. She starts questioning the law that has no heart and cares not about one's motives and emotions. She blames the law which cannot protect women in such cases. It's the same law that has been criticized in the previous chapter by 'Antigone', Lysistrata, and all the female victims of patriarchy.

Krogstad. *The law cares nothing about motives.*

Nora. *Then it must be a very foolish law.*

(A Doll's House:36)

This confrontation threatens both the stability of the family and the stability of male domination. Krogstad provocation has increased Nora's psychological suffering, but at the same time, gives her a precious chance to resist the structures of subordination. At the outset, she tries to distract her husband so that he would not look at the mailbox and read Krogstad's letter. The mail-box appears as a presentiment for all the woes and misfortunes, and even as a big hammer above Nora's head waiting to destroy the family home and its pillars. It turns later on to be a messenger of emancipation. The letter and the revelation of the truth about the past-debt, creates a different sphere of communication between Nora and her husband. They are for the first time, in a session of ideas. They contradict each other and they try to convince each other. It's like feeling, it's their last opportunity to defend "their personal opinion about life".

Helmer. *Can you not understand your place in your own home?*

(A Doll's house: 96)

Helmer's selfishness appears reminding Nora with her duties again and trying for the last time to lock the cage on his sparrow announcing the triumph of patriarchy. It's the same role done previously by her friend Mrs. Linde saying that "a wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent" (19). Mr. Helmer, fails to do so in front of Nora's consciousness and arguments. Nora discovers herself more, she unties all the ropes that pulls her behind, and she succeeds to gain her husband's first waiver.

Helmer. *I have it in me to become a different man.*

(A Doll's House; 99).

The dialogue between Nora and Helmer establishes a fertile ground for gender conflict analysis. At every moment, Nora raises new questions, breaks the expectations, and challenges the masculine arguments. Nora's consciousness is raising at the level of discovering her identity and the truth about her real roles in Helmer's house. She is continuing to punch and slap her husband and refusing all his arguments.

Nora - *"But our house has been nothing but a playroom.*

Here I have been your doll-wife as I used to be papa's doll-child"

(A Doll's House:64)

Helmer. *No, don't go—. (Looks in.) What are you doing in there?*

Nora *(from within).* *Taking off my fancy dress.*

(A Doll's House:91)

Nora starts believing that her roles in Helmer's house, her relationship with him, and even the idea of love were like wearing a fancy dress. She finally decides to take off her fake clothes and look for another life that can be closed to her real tendencies and desires.

Nora *(shaking her head).* *You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me*

(A Doll's House :93)

Nora revolts against exploitation in the name of love. She gains her identity in her attempts to fulfil her personal desires. She leaves without a word and slams the door behind her husband. In fact, she slams the door of masculine domination and opens new horizons of freedom and emancipation for all women living similar conditions. By this dramatic end, Ibsen's stabs to death the audience's chest by breaking all the ready-made expectations. He chocks the audience who are in use with the stereotypical and common ends by establishing new dramatic structure that questions the status of women in the world. *The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.*

(A doll's house:101)

Conclusions about Nora's journey into emancipation

a) Accepting the doll's roles

Women roles have always been associated to the household; taking care of children and pleasing the husband, while the husband was considered the breadwinner of the family and the boss. These roles have been constructed and deeply rooted in the social mindset, as discussed previously, thanks to the socialization processes which contribute to their naturalization. Furthermore, women often do not consider these roles to be a sort of violence or discrimination since they have been educated to accept it as a natural place. They are educated also to think that pleasing the husband is a sacred duty due to many reasons that differ from society to another. It can be Cultural, religious or psychological reasons.

In the same vein, Nora Helmer's appears giving up all her desires and personal needs. She does her best to rearrange everything things and delight the husband. She seems to be a wife who speaks only the language of love and emotions. She is the doll that dances and sings according to her husband's signal. She even accepts all admonitions thinking that it's her natural duty. This calm situation which characterizes Nora Helmer, cannot be linked negatively to ignorance or lack of knowledge, it is the silence of sacrifice that characterizes all women in her position. That is, it is her sense of duty and fear of destroying the family that pushes her to accept everything. Silence here, is a feminine strategy followed to preserve the unity of family and to let the children away from the bad consequences of divorce.

Nora's first attitude in the play, can be considered as a form of resistance. On one hand, it helps unifying the family. On the other hand, it keeps her away from social accusations as failed housewife. On this stage, Nora role as a doll, is a refuge manifested through the moments of dance and singing. Nora's effort with all this energy to please the husband and protect the family is invisible, it is similar to that of all women doing the best to serve their houses. It's invisible in the sense that no one appreciates it or recognizes it. *"No one notices it until it isn't done – we notice the unmade bed, not the scrubbed and polished floor".¹³*

b) Undressing the secret

The second weapon through which Nora tried to keep the stability of the family is to through hiding the secret of the loan she took in the past. It was an old loan that Nora had taken not for satisfying her personal needs but to help her husband. Since laws do not give much facilities for women in the process of borrowing, Nora was obliged to forge her father's signature and she has hidden this secret for many

¹³ Barbara E. "The Manufacture of Housework"; the Socialist, December 1975, p. 6.

years. on the one hand, she is aware about her husband's male mentality that will not accept her support. On the other hand, she fears that their marriage may reach the point of divorce.

Keeping secrets and not telling the husbands everything is one of the women's weapon to protect the house in the absence of a suitable ground for dialogue, respect and acceptance of difference. revealing secrets may demolish the family and lead to final separation. Nora is aware of all this, so she chooses to hide this secret and get patient about that for many years, as if her intuition is telling her that the continuation of the family depends on this secret.

The appearance of Krogstad's character revives the story of the loan which becomes an essential engine of events and a turning point that would rearrange things in Nora's mind. Revealing the secret turns to be Nora's first step in the path of resistance and liberation. This event contributes in shaping Nora's views regarding her real identity. It's a check exam to know if her husband will take her sacrifices into account or not. Against her expectations, her husband shows his selfish attitude refusing to give her any space to breath freedom. At the end, undressing the secret, goes against Nora's alarmist, and becomes an essential tool in her journey into freedom and emancipation.

c) **Seeking refuge and sisterhood**

In the heart of her distress and suffocation, Nora finds another horizon to breath freedom in her dialogues with Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde. Dr. Rank, a family friend, who stands as a mediation between Nora and the outside world. Dr Rank is the man with whom Nora shares her problems and sorrows.

Mrs. Linde. Nora, you must tell your husband all about it
(*A Doll's house:80*)

Mrs. Linde, 'Christine', is a sign of salvation for Nora. She has succeeded to gain Nora's trust from the very beginning, and it's due to this trust that the readers get to know the story of the debt. She helps Nora by her attempt to convince Krogstad withdraw the letter. Also, she encourages Nora to reveal the secret. the truth. The relation between Nora and Mr. Linde creates a kind of sisterhood and contribute largely crystallizing Nora's change and willingness to face the husband. It is difficult for Nora to take such decision alone, but in fact, there are several incentives behind that including Krogstad's blackmailing and Mrs. Linde support.

Conclusion

The challenge of culture/ shutting the door

Nora. I have never felt my mind so clear and certain as to-night.
(*A Doll's House:97*)

The journey of emancipation begins with consciousness raising. This exactly what Nora in a direct way. Nora's Mind becomes so clear and her ideas are resulted out of logical and structural thinking. Her ideas now go beyond transient anger, they are more systematic and represents to a great extent her vision of the world. After her seriousness and rigor, her husband strives hard to pull her again toward his ropes. He starts using religious arguments to touch her heart, and even accusing her of being a woman without religion.

Helmer. ...—have you no religion?

Nora. I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is.
(*A Doll's House:96*)

The conflict reaches its climax, and the husband uses all his trump cards, including religious arguments to convince Nora not to leave the house. Nora, revolts either with shocking answers or answers that raise more difficult problems regarding women's roles as housekeepers. She questions in a subtle manner religion, Laws, familial duties, and all tools of socialization. she rejects the fact that laws did not care about her feelings. Nora questions the inherited duties step by step. She reveals in a clear way the sad truth; that she was only a doll in her husband's house as she was in her father's house. She discovers that her life was in fact nothing but a doll moving according to other's desires from one place to another.

Nora. Perhaps—if your doll is taken away from you.

(A Doll's House:99)

Nora. No. I can receive nothing from a stranger.

(A Doll's House: 101)

After these questions, she starts deconstructing the mechanisms of socialization by putting things outside the paradigm of 'nature'. She starts westernizing her husband saying that she cannot stay with a stranger. Dismantling the natural way of things leads Nora to last phase in the process of emancipation. It is that of action. In this respect, she translates her thought into real actions by taking off the fancy dress and leaving the house in a search of freedom and salvation.



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