Travelling Artefacts: The Role of Recognition, Belongings and Acts of Resistance

Mona Lilja and Lena Martinsson

University of Gothenburg

Abstract

This paper, by using manga comics and the veil as examples, argues that increased scholarly attention to artefacts involved in political struggles could add new insights to previous research on resistance and social change. The paper examines how the recognition of artefacts is entwined with different expressions and techniques of power and resistance. These artefacts, which are recognisable around the globe, acquire different meanings and become part of (or are excluded from) particular political struggles and communities of belonging, both transnationally and locally. Power and political struggles are both interwoven with material contexts and sometimes revolve around different artefacts. Artefacts become affective parts of resistance and mobilise people into assuming or rejecting communities, identity positions or subjectivities. The shifting discursive materialities of different artefacts make these items transformative and important factors in political struggles.

Introduction

Through political struggles and acts of resistance, cultural notions and practices of gender and sexuality undergo transformations on a global level. These transformations and conflicts can be understood to be both transnational and very local and particular processes. In this paper, by using manga comics and the veil[1] as examples, we argue that it is important to pay attention to the role that artefacts play in these political struggles and acts of resistance. The paper revolves around two related,

[1] In this article we use the concept of the veil as an umbrella term, which is common practice among scholars in the field (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Amer, 2014).

and in some senses overlapping, aims. Firstly, the paper examines how artefacts become entwined with different expressions and techniques of power and resistance in their travels around the globe. Secondly, the article displays how artefacts, acquire different meanings and influence, become part of, or are excluded by particular political struggles, nations and communities of belonging.

To fulfil these aims, we will exemplify our discussion with two travelling artefacts: manga comics and the veil. The veil is recognised around the globe and is, as we will show, a gendered artefact that is centuries old and of contradictory importance for colonial forces, governments and the creation of imagined national communities in both West and East (Rose, 2004; Abu-Lughod, 2013; Amer, 2014; Scott, 2018). Manga comics build on recognisable discourses and references to different religions, but these comics are quite new. The comics challenge gender and sexuality norms in different ways and in different localities around the globe. This article builds on empirical examples surrounding the two artefacts from reports, books, debates and media, as well as from interviews that were carried out in 2016 with eight female Swedish manga fans in relation to manga comics.

The two artefacts are closely connected to gender and sexuality, as well as to secularism and religion. They are well recognised by people around the globe. At the same time, they can easily become part of, or become rejected within, different contexts, norms and political discourses. What role they will come to play in the future is far from predictable. This double nature of the artefacts – their worldwide recognisability and their many specific and particular expressions – is central to this paper.

Theoretical Starting Points: Artefacts and Resistance

We argue that travelling artefacts, such as the veil or manga, serve as transnational as well as national and local nodes for complex processes of recognition, and they are of importance for political struggles and communities of belonging. We understand 'recognition' in two interrelated ways. The first is as a perception of something we have seen or experienced before, and we have an idea about what it is. The second is that we as individuals or groups are seen and acknowledged as human beings who have the right to live 'liveable lives', as Judith Butler articulates

it. She also writes that recognition is essential in the constitution of socially viable beings. The role of norms is essential in relation to who will become recognised (Butler, 2004).[2]

As we will discuss below, the role of norms relates to how one recognises oneself in relation to these artefacts. As 'discursive materialities', the artefacts become important for emerging communities of belongong. Both manga and the veil, for instance, can work as boundary objects that tie people to each other and thereby contribute to the creation of counter-hegemonic communities of belonging in which one feels recognised and seen.

The veil and manga are not only transnationally recognised artefacts but are also connected with normative principles that are recognisable around the world. The veil, for example, is recognised from various discourses such as subordination, feminism, religion, freedom of religion or women's rights, while manga comics often facilitate feelings and discourses of love or hate, around which the comics revolve. The fact that some artefacts are used or seen around the world, as well as the general discourses attached to them, together make them easy for many people in different settings around the world to feel embraced by these artefacts while simultaneously embracing them. The opposite is also happening: these artefacts can work in a way that excludes some, making them feel like foreigners in relation to others.

It is possible for artefacts to be both disdentified and identified with. In line with this notion, they can be understood as floating signifiers that are recognised from previous discourses; they can also be reconstructed across discourses and between different imageries, thereby occasionally taking on new or transformed meanings in new settings (cf. Hall, 1997). The artefacts, which are not simply passive containers of different meanings, do not simply represent discourses. They are discoursive materialities, and as such they are performative and partake in the ongoing processes of both creating and dividing communities (cf. Butler, 2004; Barad, 2008; Mouffe, 2013). The transnational recognisability

[2] The concept of recognition is a recurrent concept in feminist and queer studies. In the 1990s, Nancy Fraser and Judith Butler debated the concept of recognition and the materiality of redistribution (Fraser, 1995, 1998; Butler, 1997).

of artefacts becomes a means or an entrance, as we will see below, for developing specific translocal notions that make struggles and resistance practices – as well as counter-hegemonic communities of belonging – possible.[3]

Our understanding of artefacts as not simply passive objects that transport meanings is drawn partly from the works of Bruno Latour (2005) and partly from discussions on the 'new materialism'. The scholars of new materialism have identified the 'linguistic turn' as insufficient for promoting an adequate understanding of the interplay between meaning and matter (e.g. Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Lemke, 2015). The linguistic turn's focus on language downgrades matter, which should be conceived as being active rather than passive (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Martinsson, 2006, 2010).

Within the new materialism, some of the representatives of discourse theory and the 'cultural turn' have been interpreted from a new perspective. Among other work in the strand of thought on new materialism, Foucault's work is often mentioned as an influential source and inspiration for materialist scholarship. In particular, Foucault's concept of the body serves as a positive reference (Barad, 2008; Lemke, 2015; Lilja and Lilja, 2018). Foucault stated that:

> what is needed is to make it visible through an analysis in which the biological and the historical are not consecutive to one another … but are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion in accordance

[3] Inderpal Grewal (1999, 2005), for example, has focussed on cultural artefacts (travelling material and/or discursive goods) in her discussion of the formation of new 'consumer' subjects. Among other factors, she displays the importance of objects as being transnationally recognisable as well as highlighting their universal character when they travel across borders. While exemplifying her theoretical outlines with the Barbie doll, Grewal argues that one important aspect of transnationalism is how goods, media, discourses, concepts and information become 'transcoded' – that is, involved in processes of localisation at different sites and in different nations (Grewal, 1999: 801). Barbie, Grewal argues, is a material, cultural artefact that is negotiated in different sites. Due to Barbie's generic expression and the possibility of adjusting her look, the doll harbours different subject positions in different places and creates new consumer subjects on a transnational basis.

> with the development of the modern technologies of power that takes life as their objective. (Foucault, 1981: 151-152)

Thus, Foucault concerned himself with the biological and how it is to be seen as bound together with the historical in complex involvements with power. He also argued that:

> I do not envision a 'history of mentalities' that would take account of bodies only through the manner in which they have been perceived and given meaning and value; but a 'history of bodies' and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested. (Foucault, 1981: 151-152)

Foucault was also more specifically interested in the notion of a 'government of things' and the comprehensive reality that includes material environments as well as the specific constellations and technical networks between humans and non-humans (Lemke, 2015: 17).

The above insight means that, in this paper, we will focus on the agency of matter and the idea that artefacts are more than passive social constructions. Artefacts such as manga comics and the veil stand out as performative forces that are intertwined in various discourses (e.g. Haraway, 1991; Alaimo and Hekman, 2008). Thus, not only humans but also animals, artefacts, objects, buildings, technologies, machines and nature are involved in the becoming of the world (Barad, 2008; Åsberg, Hultman and Lee, 2012; Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). The agency of matter thereby makes it relevant to discuss materiality, artefacts and political struggles.

As stated above, we are interested in how the recognition of artefacts such as manga comics and the veil sometimes creates communities of belonging as well as different expressions and techniques of power and resistance. We also understand recognition as a both dislinking and linkage between non-human and human actors.

Conventionally, power and the study of power have been associated with coercion, the military power of states or the capacity to force one's will on others. From the 1970s onwards, however, scholars such as Steven Lukes (1974, 1986) and Foucault (1976, 1981, 1986) started to challenge this so-called one-dimensional understanding of power by addressing power as fluent and as being embedded in networks performed through

different techniques. With this introduction of new understandings of power, we have also changed how we comprehend resistance. Resistance practices challenge all forms of domination: not just the particular configuration of power relations that we call decision-making power but also discursive 'truth regimes' such as (for example) a hegemonic, secular Eurocentrism or normative orders of gender, race, class, status and caste hierarchies. Power is seldom singular but simultaneously relates to or intersects with other forms of power. The hegemonic discourse of secularism, for instance, can sometimes be connected with race or gender (Scott, 2018). Similarly, just as different forms of power support each other, different resistance practices also interact with and fuel each other (Lilja, et al., 2017).

All in all, the field of resistance studies is expanding and increasingly nuanced and multifaceted. It embraces resistance as a practice that might be played out by large, organised groups and movements as well as by individuals and subcultures. Resistance might be articulated through, or against, power relations or be inspired by other resisters, as in 'copy-cat' resistance. 'Resistance' refers to an act or patterns of actions that have the possibility of undermining or negotiating different power relations – but sometimes resistance ends up reproducing and strengthening the relations of dominance (Baaz, et al. 2017).

As we have argued above, both power and political struggles are entwined with material contexts and sometimes revolve around different artefacts. Artefacts can be used for resistance or, when they are recognised, to mobilise people into assuming or rejecting communities, identity positions or subjectivities. The shifting discursive materiality of different artefacts makes them transformative and important factors in political struggles.

Methods and Materials: Two Artefacts

This paper advances our discussion by drawing on currently published research literature, with the aim of furthering theoretical work in this field. The paper elaborates on how the recognition of artefacts creates communities of belonging, as well as how the artefacts are entwined with different expressions and techniques of power and resistance. Two cultural artefacts – manga comics and the veil – have been chosen in order to be able to exemplify the above objectives from different angles.

Encouraged by the works of Alvesson and Karreman (2011), we will use the examples of manga comics and the veil to contribute to the development of theoretical and methodological understandings of the role of artefacts for resistance and discursive transformations.

Methodologically, this article draws heavily on what Lila Abu-Lughod has presented as 'writing against cultures'. She writes about the danger of generalising about cultures and how doing so prevents us from 'appreciating or even accounting for people's experiences and the contingencies with which we all live' (2013: 6). While Abu-Lughod has written extensively on the complexity found in villages, in her book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013), she also focusses on the complex political processes of which the veil is an integral part. Our work is inspired by this book – even if we focus on counter-communities and resistance to a higher degree – and by the emergence of pluralism and transformations connected to the artefacts.

We have chosen manga comics and the veil as empirical examples because both are part of transformative processes and political struggles that transcend national borders; they are also both principally understood as coming from "outside the West". Many have identified the veil as a patriarchal threat to what is often described as the 'European values' of democracy (Scott, 2018). At the same time, scholars and activists alike have challenged the notion of hegemonic secularism as the only position from which one can act as a political subject (Asad et al., 2009; Scott, 2018). Manga, for its part, has challenged norms on gender and sexuality in different localities around the globe through its multiple references to Buddhism, Shintō, Christian iconography and mythological figures in a postmodern manner.

We will start the analytical section of this paper by outlining a few examples of how the veil fuels both power and resistance, primarily in a European and, specifically, Swedish context: a context that is not possible to understand without reference to a transnational space. As we will show, the veil is widely recognised from the hegemonic secular order in Sweden and from a dominant understanding of Sweden as the most gender-equal country in the world (Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2016) as an expression of oppression against women. The veil has thereby been contrasted against an imagined Swedish community (Anderson, 2006).

At the same time – and with reference to norms that are recognisable around the globe, such as the rights to one's body and to freedom of religion – the veil has also become a node for political mobilisation for groups of women in the European (and specifically the Swedish) context.

Over a period of three years, from 2015-2018, we have followed different forms of national and transnational debate about the veil and resistance performances, such as when a group of Iranian women unveiled themselves in public 2018 – news that soon spread around the globe. We have taken part in Muslim-feminist events in Sweden such as demonstrations, panel discussions and film screenings; we have also listened to speeches and have conducted interviews with the organisers of these events (e.g. Berg, Lundahl and Martinsson, 2016). We have followed politicians' work at the municipal, national and EU levels related to the veil. In the late 1990s, one of the co-authors (Mona Lilja) took a long field trip to Palestine, where she interviewed women about their political participation. We have chosen the material used in this paper to illustrate artefacts as an engine of political acts; thus, we do not aim to paint a comprehensive picture of the historical development of the discourses and practices related to the Muslim veil.

Then, in the analytical part of this paper, we will use a few examples to demonstrate how manga clothes, comics and related material travel around the world and create new subject positions, communities and lifestyles, both in Sweden and elsewhere. While the topics (love, hate, sex, etc.) of manga comics are well recognised, they are still addressed in new ways, thus making the comics attractive to the youth of different places; the comics also become points of departure for identities and negotiated narratives of gender and sexuality. Along with our descriptions of the interviews, which Cathrin Wasshede and Mona Lilja conducted in 2016 with eight female Swedish manga fans, our analysis of manga comics also builds on empirical examples from reports, books and the media.

Artefacts as Nodes for Power and Resistance: The Veil

In this section, we will discuss how the veil is recognised in and wrapped up with different technologies of power and therefore also breeds different forms of resistance. In addition, we will reveal how discourses that move and change around the globe become a means to (or an entrance for)

developing local struggles, identities, exclusions and communities of belonging in relation to the veil.

The veil connects different (and sometimes contradictory) voices, movements and political groups with each other and creates deep chasms between others. To illustrate this situation, we will focus on a debate about the veil that has been conducted in Sweden in recent years. Some people see the veil, and what it is said to express, as a threat to 'Sweden' and what are understood to be Swedish or even universal values. Others seek to normalise the veil in Swedish society and to challenge the notion of religion (and particularly Islam) as being dangerous, non-Swedish and oppressive to women. Those who promote the former standpoint connect the veil to misogyny and oppression against women and, as such, see it as a threat to what is generally understood to be a secular Swedish gender-equality norm. Politicians on both the left and the far right, certain sectors of women's movements and some journalists have expressed that the veil is a threat to so-called Swedish values.

Our first example is an organisation called Kvinnors rätt (the Women´s right)[4], which struggles against what the group identifies as honour-related violence. The leader of Kvinnors rätt is Maria Rashidi. Rashidi has appeared in interviews about her life and struggles, has written many op-ed articles and is active on Twitter. She was born in Iran, where she was later married. After growing up and being able to dress as she liked, following the 1979 revolution she was forced to wear a hijab (veil). After seeking refuge in Sweden, she suffered an acid attack arranged by her ex-husband.[5] Despite this history, Rashidi still views Sweden as a country where she can be free, which she believes is 'a universal right for every human being' (Rashidi, 2016). She recognises the veil as part of a dangerous patriarchal system that can change an entire nation, such as Iran, as well as the lives of the women who live there: 'With the veil women take on themselves a religion and its ethical rules and values. "The cloth" works as a tool for gender segregation … [and] limitations of freedom are interwoven in the veil' (Rashidi, 2015).

[4] http://www.kvinnorsratt.se/svenska/index.php

[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyylKxz9AXo https://www.expressen.se/debatt/problemet-ar-djupare-an-burkiniforbud/

In this poignant statement, Rashidi assigns the veil the role of a domesticating and segregating force. The veil becomes inseparable from a special setup of ethical rules and values. The 'cloth', in Rashidi's understanding as well as our own, is an active agent. But for Rashidi, this cloth works with one clear oppressive orientation, and – in contrast to Abu-Lughod (2013), for example, who discusses the role of the government and Western/Eastern knowledge production – Rashidi sees the problem as lying in religion.

At the same time, many other women, both in Sweden and globally, share Rashidi's experiences of oppression, and they also share her thinking. Many women have experienced how their bodies have become a place for violent political fights and control from states and families alike. Rashidi, and many women in a similar position to her, have struggled to make their lives both recognisable and liveable. For Rashidi, Sweden has become a place of belonging – a place that is now challenged. With the emergence of the organisation Kvinnors rätt, a community of belonging and resistance has been created, and the resistance has many expressions. The struggle against the market is one. In 2015, the veil became one of many accessories – a typical article of clothing – in the advertising campaigns of two large Swedish companies, and Rashidi and Kvinnors rätt reacted strongly (Berg et al., 2016). She stated to the daily newspaper *Metro*: 'To make a campaign and promote the veil is according to us to oppress women and a form of gender apartheid and we must stand up" to it (*Metro*, Linnea Carlén, 12 October 2015). Rashidi and others thus see the normalisation of the veil as equivalent to normalising a patriarchal religious system that threatens gender equality.

In Sweden, Rashidi and Kvinnors rätt resist what they understand to be religious, patriarchal influences that have come from abroad. In this outlook, Sweden, as an imagined community, is under threat, and so is the idea of gender equality and women's freedom. Rashidi turns the situation into a question for the Swedish people; she wants to warn Swedish society. While it is easy to follow Rashidi's thinking, it is also important to note that it is built on an understanding that the veil has just one essential meaning: it is part of an oppressive patriarchal order that has seemed to remain untouched during its transnational move from Iran to Sweden as well as its moves between different classes and groups of people.

As we have already touched upon, we can also view resistance against the compulsory use of the veil on a transnational level. When women in Iran unveiled themselves in public 2018 (which is against the law) and placed their veils on sticks, they acted on more than the local or national levels. Once their images were viewed throughout the world, it became clear that they had acted on a transnational level. Their resistance was easy to recognise. Resistance against the veil is widespread and can be found at different times and in different political settings. In Palestine, for example, the women whom Lilja interviewed in 1999 refused to wear the hijab arguing that 'Hamas discourse reduces women to symbols of moralistic, righteous and religious forms of nationalism'. One woman continued: 'they use different ways to convince women that they have to be covered. For nationalist reasons or for religious reasons'. Travelling unveiled in Gaza became dangerous for these women, who were exposed to violent punishment; men threw stones at them for not covering their hair and bodies. The veil became the marker of 'us' on the West Bank, to be distinguished from 'them' in the Gaza Strip.

Frantz Fanon articulated a contradictory (but also in a sense similar) historical example in the text *Algeria Unveiled*. Fanon not only discussed the Western obsession with the veil but also reminded us of how Algerian colonisers unveiled women in order to 'save them' from medieval tradition (Fanon, 2003). In this case, unveiling women becomes part of a colonising strategy. This resembles the situation in France in 2004, where schoolchildren were prohibited from wearing conspicuous articles of clothing that might tell something of their religious affiliation. This ban affected Muslim girls in particular (Scott, 2007). Another example is a March 2017 verdict from the Court of Justice of the European Union, which made it possible to dismiss (or not employ) a woman in veil if she worked or would work in a position where she might represent the employer in public, for example as a receptionist.

What we can see in all these very different examples from Sweden, France, Iran, Gaza and Algeria is how the construction of nations and colonies has become entangled with the veil and women's bodies. Again, matter and artefacts such as the veil have become the node around which both practices of power and resistance revolve.

In Sweden today, as well as in other parts of Europe, secular notions

of self and others often become a base for discussions about the veil. Joan Wallach Scott, the renowned pioneer of gender studies, writes critically in her book *Sex and Secularism* (2018) about how secularism and Europe are widely seen as being synonymous with 'the historical triumph of enlightenment over religion'. She shows that Islam is often discursively constructed as 'the other', writing that 'in this discourse secularism guarantees freedom and gender equality while Islam is synonymous with oppression' (p. 1), an image she states is wrong. Even secularism follows gender hierarchies, and the secular discourse sometimes becomes an oppressive force in itself, which then breeds resistance.

Scott also argues that many European countries, such as France, have failed to integrate their former colonial subjects as full citizens. As mentioned earlier, the colonial struggle against the veil has a long history; instead of working politically to change structures of inequality, many people have continued to construct the use of the veil as the problem. In Scott's earlier book *The Politics of the Veil* (2007), she demonstrates how the veil has become part of an objectification of Muslim people, who are understood to be non-French. This outlook may be illustrated by the mayor of Cannes, who, after the terror attack in Nice in 2016, banned women from wearing burkinis at the beach. The mayor's words were reported in international media and discussed on social media. The *New York Times* wrote:

> The mayor's ordinance, which runs until Aug. 31, bars people from entering or swimming at the city's public beaches in attire that is not 'respectful of good morals and secularism' and that does not respect 'rules of hygiene and security'. Offenders risk a fine of 38 euros, or about $42. (Breeden and Blaise, 2016).

Secularism, or the secular discourse, thus becomes the unspoken norm. The veil is not recognised as moral, hygienic or respectful, and it even challenges the security of the state (cf. Asad et al., 2009). Linda Berg and Mikela Lundahl (2016: 270) analysed 'Burkini-Gate' with reference to a quotation by Sara Ahmed, who stated that women in burkinis were 'recognized as the stranger, somebody we know as not knowing, rather than somebody we simply do not know' (Ahmed, 2000: 49). We find this twist of both disrecognition and recognition important. To be

recognised by someone as 'the other' is, we suggest, fundamental to the emergence of counter-hegemonic communities of belonging. The burkini ban was resisted in blogs and comics and in other types of protests. As an artefact, the burkini became part of the creation of religiously and culturally imagined transnational counter-communities, which closely interacted with general feminist claims about the right to one's body and about the capitalist market, as well as with the universal right to freedom of religion, all of which are principles that many people can identify with. The universal principle of the right to freedom of religion in some sense thus became the starting point for disparate, particular resistance practices when people wrote blog posts, comic strips and the like, in order to protest against the ban of an artefact – the burkini. Overall, the burkini ban and the resistance it sparked show how the veil is an 'affective' and recognisable artefact that connects some people to each other and disconnects others, thus making resistance against a secular fundamentalism, along with the creation and illumination of political groups, possible.

Even in Sweden, secularism has become an imagined national trait (Thurfjell, 2015). In 2017, the leader of the Liberal Party, Jan Björklund, argued in articles and on Swedish television that the veil threatens 'Swedish values' of gender equality and that the veil is a 'symbol for oppression against women'. In Björklund's argumentation, in which colonial discourses on saving women are easy to recognise, the veil is the antithesis to universal rights and democracy. Like Rashidi, he also assigns the veil just one meaning: a symbol of the oppression of women. In Björklund's rhetoric, the veil is something typical of other, far-away non-democratic places. In an op-ed article, he commented critically on how Swedish trade minister Ann Linde had worn a veil during an official visit to Iran:

> I wonder what girls and women in the [Swedish] suburbs think when they see the Swedish minister in veil during the visit. The picture sends very unfortunate signals and is spreading now in our suburbs and complicates the fight against honour-related oppression. (Björklund, 2017)

In this quotation, Björklund connects the veil to honour-related oppression, which again is a construction of the veil as a symbol of oppression. He also connects the problem with the veil – honour-related oppression – to Swedish suburbia. The *Swedish* minister sends 'unfortunate signals' to the Swedish suburbs when she wears a veil in Iran. She should not have done that. In the TV programme 'Is the Veil an Expression for Oppression against Women?' (Agenda 2017), he reiterated these notions. When the presenter of the programme asked him in which way the veil was an expression of oppression against women, Björklund answered that 'it has to do with honour-related oppression, and in big parts of the Muslim world, women are subordinate to men'. He also stated that honour-related oppression is 'contagious in our immigrant-dense suburbs'. Through articulations like these, the suburbs become constructed as not normal, but dangerous and non-Swedish (Ericsson, Molina and Ristilammi, 2002).

Through the same articulation, Islam also becomes a problematic force connected with distant lands. Scott understands such political rhetoric, which is common throughout Europe, and elswehere to be as dangerous as nationalistic rhetoric and practice (2018). What we find important here is, firstly, that Björklund recognises neither the suburbs as being Swedish nor Swedish women in veil as being part of the Swedish community. As in Scott's discussion, the veil becomes a node for constructing what is and what is not the nation. Secondly, Björklund's understanding of the veil is similar to Rashidi's; in contrast to Rashidi, however, he is in a position of power, being the leader of the Liberal Party and the former Swedish minister of education. Instead of resisting an order that he is subordinate to (or, like Rashidi, threatened by), he is a voice of a strong hegemonic order.

The person Björklund debated during the above mentioned TV programme was the Muslim feminist and anti-racist writer and activist Bilan Osman. Osman had previously been part of a group of women who had started a hijab uprising in Sweden in 2013. The uprising started after a woman was violently attacked because she wore a veil. As part of the uprising, women – including non-Muslim women – were encouraged to wear a hijab for a day in order to normalise it, to turn the hijab into a recognisable cultural artefact and a node around which mobilisation

could take place. In other words, the uprising was an attempt to resist the demonising rhetoric that they were exposed to – a rhetoric that made them non-Swedish. It was a way for everyone – including non-Muslim women, or Muslim women who did not wear the hijab – to support those who did, and thereby challenged exclusionary practices and became a part of a counter-hegemonic movement.

In the TV-debate, Osman argued that Björklund had his concepts all wrong when he in a reductional way connected Muslim countries, honour-related oppression, the veil and the situation in exposed suburbs in Sweden with one another. She thoroughly analysed his notions and said, among other things, that Muslim countries are very diverse and cannot be spoken about in such a stereotypical way. Osman stated that feminist movements were underway in several countries where Islam is the dominant religion and that the veil is often connected to resistance against hegemonic orders. In doing so, she was referring to an imagined transnational community (cf. Anderson, 2006) of resistant and political Muslim feminists. Osman disrupted, and thus offered resistance to, the discourse about feminism and gender equality being phenomena that belong exclusively in Western secular contexts.

She also challenged the notion that women from the Swedish suburbs always come from (and import) fundamentalist cultures and are oppressed by their families. Other stories exist as well. The world outside Sweden should not be reduced. Through this decolonial act of resistance, she blurred the constructed border between secularism – as the condition for supposed universal values such as gender equality, women's rights or even feminism – and religion, as conservative and oppressive. Not least, she opened up the opportunity for a pluralistic way of understanding nations and the veil.

Osman also resisted essentialist understandings of the veil as a symbol of oppression against women, or as being non-Swedish, in a radio interview a few months prior to her appearance on the above-mentioned TV programme. She described why she wore a veil as follows:

> I dress in veil as Muslim, I dress in veil as feminist, I dress in veil as a person who doesn't believe in norms, so I dress in veil [for] many different reasons.… I understand myself as someone who believes … [that] the veil is a way to show one's identity. (Osman, 2016)

While Rashidi and Björklund only acknowledge one way to understand the veil and Islam, Osman displayed, both in the TV programme and on the radio interview, that the veil plays different roles and has different meanings. Without questioning that some women are indeed forced to wear the veil, the veil could also be, as she argues in the TV programme, a sign of resistance; strong feminist movements are also afoot in Muslim countries. She resisted Björklund's notion that the veil is merely a symbol of oppression. In the quotation from the radio programme, she displays how she understands the veil to be something that is possible to connect with many different positions and strategies. It is not only possible to dress in a veil if one happens to be a feminist; Osman underlines that she does it *as a feminist*. And being a feminist is entirely consistent with being a believer. The veil has a multitude of possible meanings and agencies and can therefore contribute to making critical communities of belonging recognisable (cf. Mouffe, 2013). Through this more complex understanding of the veil as something that emerges and becomes transformed together with different positions, political situations, norms and discourses, we argue that Osman, and many others like her, not only struggle for the right to wear the hijab and to be treated equally and not discriminated against; she also challenges and actively resists secularity as the sole condition for critique (cf. Asad et al., 2009). With this struggle, Osman and other feminist Muslims challenge and open the door for more possible ways of being a gendered person in Europe.

The different stands that Osman, Rashidi and Björklund represent could exemplify the many specific translocal articulations of different transnational and recognisable notions of freedom of religion, or women's rights. It is also obvious that pluralistic reiterations like these are in conflict with one another. Who has the right to analysis? Who could be understood as being part of a feminist movement? It is also obvious that these processes are connected with discourses of national belonging and colonialism. Who is 'Swedish', 'French' or 'European'? As Butler writes:

> The discursive move to establish 'the people' in one way or another is a bid to have a certain border recognised, whether we understand that as a border of a nation or as the frontiers of that class of people to be considered 'recognisable' as a people. (Butler, 2015: 5)

The veil thus becomes part of this struggle of who is to be recognisable as part of the big imagined community of 'the people'.

The Translocal Emergence of Cultural Artefacts: Manga as a Node of Resistance

Above we discussed how the veil, as a material artefact, has become a locus of power and a locus of different forms of resistance among a variety of communities. A similar pattern is visible among manga comics, which have spawned new communities and gendered negotiations. During our interviews with Swedish manga fans, they pictured the idea of Japan in manga comics as an exotic and wonderful place where carrying out resistance – in terms of gender-bending, in this case – is possible. Our respondents' narratives reveal how new realities have emerged around manga comics in the Swedish context. In addition, new national and transnational communities have gathered around those manga comics that – based on interpretations of the comics and their images of a sexually free Japan – tend to resist or transform different gender norms. Several of our interviewees saw manga comics – especially the genres of boys' love (BL) and yaoi (which we will subsequently describe as one genre, BL/yaoi) – as a possibility for heterosexual women to bend suggested gender roles and reclaim their sexuality (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). BL/yaoi comics involve two or more fictional men who are romantically and/or sexually involved with each other. While BL/yaoi is predominantly a women's literature genre, this does not mean that there are no men who find entertainment in the genre (Ambulo and Batin, 2016; McLelland et al., 2015).

While the BL/yaoi genre was commercialised in the late 1970s, the genre has recently gained popularity thanks to the emergence of the internet, which has allowed fans to access manga comics from various venues. As a result, manga fandoms have emerged all over the world (e.g. Ito, 2012; Levi, McHarry and Pagliassotti, 2010; Tsai, 2016; Kinsella, 1998). Fan fiction, fan artwork and other fan materials have boosted appreciation of the genre. Fans use websites such as fanfiction.net and archiveofourown.org to write and/or read BL/yaoi comics. In addition, videos with BL/yaoi content have also spread on YouTube (Ambulo and Batin, 2016).

Young Swedes tend to be highly proficient in English and to have widespread internet access. With these factors in their favour, young Swedish manga fans tend to engage in a variety of fan activities (Olin-Scheller and Sundqvist, 2015). A number of annual conventions also contribute to the hype surrounding manga comics: ConFusion, an association/convention for East Asian culture, and NärCon, a convention for gaming and East Asian culture, are among the largest fandoms in Sweden (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016).

The respondents described the sexual pleasures and desires connected with BL/yaoi, and the fact that the comics have two men and no women, as a possibility to stretch gendered sexual norms. One interviewee expressed it this way: 'Yaoi is interesting for young women … who want to read comics about sex without being forced into a female subject position'. Many of the 'manga nerds' we interviewed yearned for gender-fluid relationships in which one person does not necessarily need to take control of the relationship. Exploring and widening the sexual sphere then becomes a way to resist heteronormative ideas about female sexuality and gender binarism. According to James Welker (2006), BL/yaoi serves as a form of 'liberation not just from the patriarchy but also from gender dualism and heteronormativity' (Welker, 2006: 843). When the Swedish women we interviewed described their enjoyment of BL/yaoi, they highlighted the negotiation of dominating discourses of gender and sexuality as being important, as the following quote attests:

> Some manga, especially for girls, use role-playing with gender and sexuality. There are more variations in the way women and men are depicted [than in reality]. This opens up the possibility for the reader to identify as something other than what that person is born as. Young people in Sweden like it. They want to be able to be who they want to be and to bend gender norms. I met two girls who realised while reading Yaoi that they were in love with each other. So, they defined themselves as gay people: women in love. However, when they dress up in cosplay they choose to act as gay men. Such gender bending is wonderful! (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016, 296)

Thus, several of our interviewees saw BL/yaoi as a way for heterosexual women to reclaim their sexuality and to bend gender norms.

The women we interviewed explicitly talked about their commitment to manga as a feminist, even a queer feminist, project. Tricia Abigail Santos Fermin, who noticed a similar pattern while researching manga in the Philippines, argues that BL/yaoi offers tools and spaces for Filipina women to 'temporarily remove themselves from androcentric society's regimentation of their sexuality and be free to confront, explore and realise their desires in a non-threatening and distanced manner' (Fermin, 2013). The sexual and political desires of manga nerds seem to interact in this case, thereby creating gender-bending and sexually transgressive practices (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016).

The respondents described cultural artefacts such as manga comics, clothing and the materialities of cosplay conventions, among other things, as being intertwined in the becoming of different subject positions. One interviewee seemed to confirm this notion when she stated that 'in the West, [Japanese] gender role-playing becomes real, and we take it seriously' (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). Overall, the embodied experiences related to the cultural artefact of manga comics, in the form of BL/yaoi, produce certain subjectivities (gay identifications), practices (gender-bending, sexually transgressive practices) and materialities (such as clothes). In this way, matter – in the form of pictures, texts, comics, the internet, computer data and the like – becomes part of the processes of becoming (cf. Haraway, 1991; Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2008; Åsberg et al., 2012; Black, 2014, Lilja and Wasshede, 2016).

As we will argue below, the transnational recognisability and translocal articulation of manga and its specific context together create a nexus from which manga-related subject positions are recognised, constructed and maintained around cultural artefacts. For instance, many young people who are establishing the figuration of the manga nerd build on the understanding of manga comics as something they have in common with others around the globe – a feeling of transnational belonging that can give them access to the ongoing transformation of gender while simultaneously letting gender be part of, and transformed by, themselves, their bodies and their local context. By the comics' attractiveness to the youth of countries all over the world, manga fans claim that the comics touch upon values and discourses beyond the local and national. When we interviewed young women living in Sweden who

saw manga comics as an all-inclusive cultural artefact, one expressed her views in this fashion: 'Manga is deeply human. It involves human and general topics, such as: Will I be accepted? Will I be loved? These are very basic concerns' (woman, interview, Sweden, February 2015; Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). Thus, during the recognition process, youths in different contexts identify and acknowledge the emotional concepts such as love and hate around which manga comics revolve. The general character of the issues makes them easily recognisable and allows for many people to embrace them.

Given that manga addresses a variety of issues such as love, hate and sexual desire – which many people can recognise but in different ways within different contexts – the genre attracts readers from different transnational localities. Still, it is the combination of the local and global aspects of manga comics that makes them desirable. The general 'deeply human' character of manga thus becomes an entrance to, developing particular or specific 'cultures' and communities of belonging around manga (and its emotional concepts) in different localities. Self-described manga nerds in different contexts and communities understand manga comics as a way of feeling unique and different, thus allowing them to perform a particular, and not a generally recognised, subject position (women, interview, Sweden, February 2015). Discursive borders are often drawn between the norms and subject positions that revolve around manga comics and 'mainstream culture'. One interviewee posited manga as 'punk', stating that manga had become boring once more young people started to embrace it: 'Then it wasn't mine anymore, it was everybody's' (woman interview, Sweden, March 2015).

Thus, addressing general notions that are reiterated around the world (such as love or hate) in combination with a very specific, particular identity position that allows one to feel unique (the manga nerd) seems to be part of the attraction of manga as a cultural artefact. The combination of general and worldwide and specific norms imprinted in the comics makes them appealing to young people outside of Japan, where new communities of belonging and new subject positions are created and become the base for different kinds of gendered resistance (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). Grewal (2005) noted a similar pattern in her discussion of the 'travelling' of the Barbie doll. Through Barbie's

ability to have her look adjusted in particular ways, the transformable, material cultural artefact has become attractive for consumer subjects on a transnational basis. Artefacts, which have a character that can be both recognised around the globe and transformed and performed in particular ways in different, specific localities, hence are interesting subjects around which resistance emerges and change revolves.

Conclusions

In order to develop an understanding of transformations of gender and sexuality both globally and locally, we have argued in this paper that it is important to pay attention to artefacts as parts of power regimes and resistance. We argue that artefacts are important in the emergence of both hegemonic communities and the counter-hegemonic communities that resist them, from small groups of political activists to national and transnational imagined communities. We must also acknowledge processes of recognition as linkages or dis-linkages between humans and non-human actors. Having the ability to recognise oneself with communities both locally and transnationally (while also being recognised by such communities) is an important process in which artefacts play a salient role. Processes of recognition, by connecting us to communities, enable resistance and contribute to making counter-hegemonic communities possible.

The veil and manga, our analytical examples, work in both similar and divergent ways. They merge with specific political, colonial, religious, historical and local discourses and thereby create a range of particular meanings. At the same time, they can both be understood to be artefacts that are crucial in creating a feeling of belonging – of being recognised as part of something larger than us that goes beyond different localities, nation-states or ideologies. Another community of belonging exists – another 'we' that transgresses the ordinary normative orders. We therefore argue that these transnational communities of belonging are important for the ongoing emergence of resistance and transformations of gender and sexuality. The artefacts can both re-create and challenge stereotypical notions of gender, sexuality, religion, secularism, communities and politics.

Through our examples we have displayed a divide between recognising or not recognising the pluralities of meanings and identities connected to different artefacts. The invisibility of alternative knowledge around the artefacts leaves the possibility for resistance unnoticed. The veil is one such example. Women's bodies have become fields for political and nationalistic struggles. The veil is sometimes and in different contexts both forced on or prohibited to women. Women can be punished for not wearing or for wearing the veil. In both cases women become objects for forces and oppression, and in both cases the veil is understood in a reductionist way. In this article a Muslim feminist Bilan Osman, has displayed the importance of a pluralistic understanding of the veil and how this pluralism makes different communities of belonging, politics and resistance possible. With a pluralistic and transformative understanding of the veil, she blurs the divide between secularism/politics and religion and between Sweden, the West and the rest. With this understanding follows the emergence of counter-hegemonic communities both national and transnational.

Our two artefacts have several interesting and important differences. In the above discussion we have displayed tensions between different experiences of the veil and how the veil has become of importance for national, global and colonial power regimes: a situation that has fuelled numerous sorts of resistance over the centuries. Manga, in contrast, is quite new and is recognisable around the globe. As we have shown, the comics, and how they merge with a range of local practices and discourse, can create alternative imaginations and multiple meanings around gender and sexuality. In addition, new discourses and bodies and new resisting subjects emerge. Manga comics, as artefacts, thus quite dramatically challenge the orders of gender and sexuality. Still, they seem to fly under the radar and, interestingly enough, are not generally recognised as being political in nature. Or, to put it another way, this resistance is not typically recognised as a threat to the idea of the nation, as seems to be the case with the veil.

Bringing new perspectives to the fore, and displaying the multitude of discourses that culturally hegemonic practices have shut out, together compose a powerful practice of resistance. As we have discussed above, both manga nerds and many veiled women challenge reductive

hegemonic meanings by reviving hidden or repressed understandings of religious and/or gendered subjects.

Finally, we argue that focussing on artefacts is a relevant method for grasping transnational movements without forgetting the importance of specific contradictory, particular and local articulations and transformations. By following artefacts, we can also reveal stereotypical understandings and homogenous cultures and can detect the pluralism of societies, belongings and resistance both beyond and inside national borders. By focussing on artefacts like manga comics and the veil, we also go beyond studies of organisations (including non-governmental organisations) and their role in transformations. We find our method to be of importance for understanding civil societies and resistance in a transnational era. This focus on artefacts has helped us to go beyond Eurocentric and colonial explanations but not Eurocentric effects. We have found another entrance for understanding movements and resistance and the very complex way of understanding the many contradictory transformations of gender and sexuality.

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