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## GENDER AND PLACE

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## **Presentation**

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First, let me introduce myself: I'm SL and I'm a PhD student in France ; my research unit is called TEO-CERMOSEM ; its purpose is to study local development in (the context of) dry Mediterranean mountains and particularly in Southern Ardèche. The question I would like to address today is the following : is Gender actually linked to place, territories and representations ?

## **Introduction**

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To begin with, tourism in rural areas is more and more seen as an alternative to agriculture, in association with spatial restructuring. So we are made to have a new vision on the social fabric and milieus even if the roles dedicated to women didn't actually changed. Indeed women in agro-tourism are still confined in reception activities (for example Bed&Breakfast).

My study is based on L. Mac Dowell's assumptions. In her book : "gender, identity and place", published in 1999, what she says is :

- ⇒ **Is gender actually linked to geography ?**
- ⇒ **Do men and women live different lives in different parts of the world ?**
- ⇒ **And if gendered attributes are socially constructed, then how does femininity and masculinity vary over time and space ?**

In fact, what she assumes is that female characteristics and needs are more important than the places and opportunities in which they interact with men.

The main purpose is to understand the position of women within local tourist development, to have a better view of their socio-professional groups and of the reasons why they get involved.

**The kind of questions we find in French development issues, are the following :**

- ⇒ **What are men used to doing ? / Where are men ?**
- ⇒ **What are women used to doing? Where are women ?**
- ⇒ **What are men 's budget time?**
- ⇒ **What are women 's (budget time)?**

**In my opinion what is more important is to** review the possible discrepancy that exists between social representations- norms generated by groups- and the type of activities women want to create. The central preoccupation of my study is the following : how far do the rural tourism characteristics imply discriminating representations towards these women .

The methodology is aimed at demonstrating that there is a connection between their life's project and the spatial transcription. The search for confrontation data is based on a qualitative process in the sense that implementation tools are used: for example analysis of discourse and life's stories (narrative) with interviews. This set of tools contributes to uncover women's motivations and their implication in the social Category of men.

I deliberately chose an ethno-methodological approach in order to focus on the private aspects of individuals. That is also the opportunity to understand the singularity of places, or of people who live in a specific territory.

A part from the gender issue, it is important for me to valid the comparatist hypothesis in the three areas concerned : first, Southern Ardèche (France), second, Liguria (Italy), third, Fès (Morocco) you can have a look on the slide that situate these hinterlands.

These are the questions I want to examine in this talk. To begin with I would like to review my bibliographical references and justify my choice, then I will explain my hypotheses and finally I will concentrate on my first results both in France and Morocco. So how far, is the notion of gender part of the construction of territories ?

**Let's come to my objectives of research :**

- ⇒ **Objective 1 : Identify and explain the link "gender-place-territory"**
- ⇒ **Objective 2 : Show how far the field of rural tourism is a place that reveals the gendered**
- ⇒ **Objective 3 : Analyse if the social and spatial trajectory of farmers has an impact on the place construction and valid the taking into account of time in the gendered approach**
- ⇒ **Objective 4 : Demonstrate that actual experience is linked to imagination and representation to a specific relation to the norm of agricultural tourism**
- ⇒ **Objective 5 : Analyse the necessity of a comparatist approach to justify the way the common Western Mediterranean representations are built.**

*Are the kids attributes of agricultural tourism the medium on which manage discriminating representaions towards women are based*

***The central question and hypothesis***

In Europe Researchers lack the background of American women's studies and in French geography, few people work on these theories.

That's why I refer to GDiMéo and Paul Claval, a theorist of territory and spatial praxis :

⇒ *Guy Di Méo*, a French geographer tries to analyse the territory as a social ideological , cultural, economical and political appropriation ; various social groups contribute to that appropriation by projecting their singular representations. The singularity of women is characterized by an appropriation that depends on place, time and activities. In Geography, women's singular experience is important to understand the interactions between women and their social and spatial background. The narrative intends to express things experienced in women's daily life. Through life's histories, I can figure out the individual logical process ("intimate" details ) as well as the personal social context.

⇒ Gender influences many levels of our social organisation : public and political actions, the construction of social and spatial representations. The research tries to focus on the individual territory as Paul Claval names it. *Paul Claval : Géographie et cultures*

**We also notice that**, the places appropriated by women and the praxis show a singular sexual configuration in which the social praxis of woman confine them to the places where they feel confident (schools, day nurseries) whereas men tend to overlook these places in order to invest the places of power. This caricatural structuration generates various facets in the territory (administration, economy and politics) but it's on a specific system or model that I would like to insist : the rural and agricultural tourism in some Mediterranean hinterlands.

**To be more precise**, *There might be other parts of the world where the same system is applied* but this geographical choice is supposed to help me figure out if there are *norms in this field*. *Actually, the tourist activities seem to overemphasise the traditional representations of the good cook, the good receptionist or housewife*. But the question is to understand why women accept this model and whether women are aware of that. When you consider the more or less expected social deed/actions of these women, you understand this importance to focus my research on their actual experience, on their own representations and on how men fit in their lives ...The reconstruction of life's histories, the interpreting of these stories and of course their re-interpretation is of great importance. This introspective thought process involved by life's stories results in defining the « trajectory » of these

men and women, *but what is even more interesting is to see how a system of values (metastructures) connected to agrotourism influence their representations and consequently their trajectory, **how they apprehend the world, that is to say the*** inner values system inducing their representations .

These representations become of an another nature when you compare them with other norms such as contextual points of view : cultural, ethnic, religious, economic or political. In fact, why chose the comparison *as* one of the basis of the research ? The main objective is to valid the singular actual experiences in Southern Ardèche (France), Liguria (Italy), and in the Middle-Atlas (Morocco). In this last country, the rural and agricultural system has just envolved into different levels of development . Groups and individuals have the ability of symbolising and they use it to create symbolical places, to act on the construction of collectives identities and to legitimate the exercise of their authority. At the individual level, the production of meaning comprises the direct individual experience of a limited number of places and also the accumulated representations of an infinity of places that we can only know indirectly. Gendered values interact with decision making and the way local authorities manage the geographical areas ; those places are then envisaged used according to those gendered definition and organisation.

The typical symbolical places are those that depend on the symbolic notion to be identified as places.

**Let's come to my aim question now :**

**Are places the expression of the territorial production of meaning through a system of gendered values in which gendered norms-issued from a dominant agricultural tourist model-contribute to feed the process of construction-re-construction of rural territories ?**

**My hypothesis are the following :**

- 1. The values present in the women life's project reveal the existence of gendered distinction in their social relationships and their spatial transcriptions**
- 2. Agricultural tourism is an activity in which the appropriation of places generate a sexual , gendered identity**
- 3. The actual experiences allow to identify these identities and to determine the interaction with a gendered norm which is inscribed in the territory**
- 4. The lifes stories are an explorer approach which allows to understand the representation, the praxis and the spatial expression – comparasing actual experiences instead of the background in western Mediterranean countries.**

**As for the field of agrotourism now :**

These initiatives deserve all our attention insofar as the demographic, social and economical fallout guarantee a positive evolution : « *These women farmers are the ones who initiates innovating projects and thus doing, prove their ability to understand what is good for rural areas.* »

Only 2 point three percents of the farms are concerned by agrotourism and two recent phenomena emerged : Firstly second homes and secondly new local tourist activities implying a change in their way of life ; datas about agrotourism vary according to two centres : on the one hand the professional organisations of farmers whose aim is to diversify their production and on the other hand the agents preoccupied by money, profitability and efficiency.

In France, women jobs represent 48 to 53% of the direct tourist jobs but they mainly consist in home-made produce, crafts activities and the fallout of accommodation, that's what we call the multi-activities.

This aspects bring out my following point :

Indeed, the multiple temporalities with which women must comply are a major attribute in the gender construction. The micro-local level allows to valid these hypotheses. That is illustrated by Paul Claval when he says : “ in geography, the post-modern approach is based on the analysis of individual trajectories as this is only way to take several things into account : their diversity, the complex interactions with their background, their various actual experiences and the dialectic of their relationships with their own group and those they interact with ”.

*areas studies*

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**To give you an idea, I tested these hypotheses in three different areas.**

The prevailing model is a major tourist centre associated to a spreading area that can consist of several secondary centres. Other areas - often named hinterlands – are more or less under the influence of the major centre. Whenever agriculture and industry cannot provide a real economic dynamic for the population of these economically flimsy rural areas, tourism becomes the dominant activity. The centre is organized according to the week end migrations and the seasonal variations of tourism. These centres usually concentrate all the facilities : camping sites, hotels, amusement parks, outdoor activities areas...). “*Mass tourism*” is thus clearly separated from the spreading area also called “*diffuse tourism*”.

*The first one is in the South of France, in a rural area*

***Ardèche***

*There are 15 of them and they contribute to off-farm waged work like horse riding, bee-keeping, or the commodification of their farm produce ; that is what we call “multifunctional agriculture”.*

***Liguria***

*The study area, located between the districts of Savonna and Genoa corresponds to the Beigua natural reserve where the Sacelles district is the only market town/village. A very busy trail goes right through the reserve ; the tourists accommodation is ensured by local residents, 14 being women and providing horse facilities.*

***Morocco***

*The study area in Morocco has many characteristics about women, such as : 450 000 (four fifty thousand) women live in the nearby city whereas 840 000 (eight forty) of them live in rural milieus. 83% of women are illiterate. This situation leads us to think that women have less access to the social structures and the educational system. The sector of Sefrou is a town, where craftsman activities are concentrated in the urban sector.*

*The datas on agrotourism are still very vague and in Europe few statistics have been made to describe such activities that are often regarded as secondary by the institut of statistics. Less important*

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**Methods**

**Now, I tell you more now about my methods.**

Obviously the problem is not to observe and study the context, nor to underline the strategies of gender policies (even if they will be taken into account) - but rather to gather the representation of their actual experiences thanks to life's stories and the representation they have of the other women abroad in a kind of “mirror effect”. Practically, I ‘ll wait the end of the interview, to question them what they imagine abroad. In the case, the people interwied in Italy have no ideas about what's going on in Morocco or in France , I ‘ll try to present them the situation as objectively as possible, being aware that my discourse can be biased by my own interpretation.

**It is definitely interesting to see that :**

The singular experience of women take an important place in geography in order to understand their interactions with their social and spatial context. *Life's stories have more to do with actual experience than with a mere textual transcribing of their daily life.* Throughout the story, the ambition is to grasp at the same time the process of the person and the person in his social context :

### ***Why introspection ?***

My reference is Daniel Bertaux, influenced by ethnomethodology, who suggests to see life's story as social processes. For him : « From a metaphoric viewpoint, life's stories are signifiers [...] there are two approaches : some are interested in the signified – the meaning contained in what the people express in the interview ; and others are interested in the referent, that is to say the norms, relations and processes that underlie social life ».

In this approach, the subject must speak of his or her life at a given moment. The presence of another person might just help him to speak about his or her trajectory in the context of the case study. *The person might never have had the opportunity to make this introspection otherwise.* This introspection becomes the trigger for the story.

The structural analysis method applied to lifes'stories is relevant to succeed in interpreting the women's narratives. It consists in linking together the different sections of a story and the structuring construction of acting people (the acting people) ; this is how we discover the logic of the story as Roland Barthes describes it. According to him, there are 3 levels of description in the story. First, the "functions level" corresponding to a division of the text into sequences, second the "actions level" of the story , third the level that separates the narrative and the argumentation from the speakers; each level is useful to clearly understand the narrative.

It is advisable to favor the return of the narrative back to the function level of the account- as if in a causality effect- to point out the similarities observed. That's why the "possible field" should take the "acting person" into account so that it might not be disconnected from the individual's real life. The outcome is that we understand that the people's life is articulated in 'steps' of time and that we get an analytical "scheme".

### ***Case studies***

**As you can see on the diagrams, the trajectory is not very easy to obtain/get.**

That is the case for the 4 women farmers' paths of life ; *you can see on the diagram they took their lives into their own hands that only makes sense if women farmers are able to recognize the signs of their previous actions reappropriate them.* Their project to settle in rural areas depended on a break up and consequently men are not seen as socially complementary, but rather as a group to avoid ; it's important for them to settle by themselves. The scheme reveals that their professional and their family life recently struck a balance. The grey triangle refers to the " tripolar triangle of stability that represents the three centres of their life. Their settling project depend on their "personal possible" to find a boy friend and on a relational possible to have somebody to support the project, they seek after. For, them it is crucial to possess their own farm. Besides, striking a balance between what they have- *strong family network with economic opportunities -and what they long for : belongs to the possible.* So the project are many sided as they combine a "possible" side and a side that might be viable.

I haven't yet tested the "mirror effect" because I recently chose this orientation in my research, and most of the interviews will take place next summer anyway.

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## Conclusion

### **To conclude, I'd say that :**

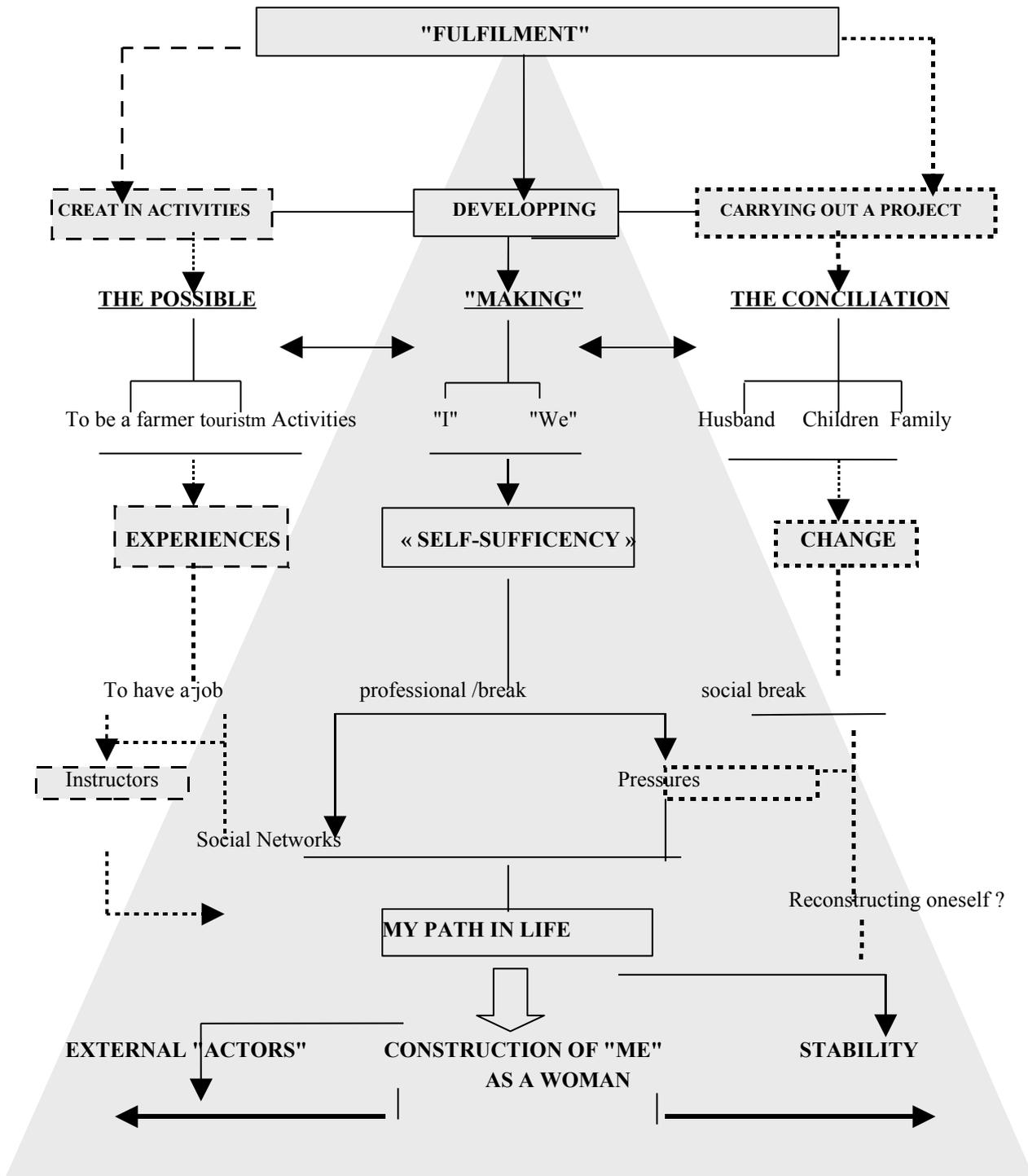
Actual experiences reveal many representations in a system of values and are related to the gendered appropriation of places. That allows us to valid the gendered identities in a social and cultural and religious background.

My research is limited by:

- ⇒ First, the lack of translated English work about gender in France ;
- ⇒ Second, the difficulty to valid the comparatist approach ;
- ⇒ Third, the necessity to interview people in three different languages ;

But, the advantages of my research are the following :

- ⇒ Everything has to be done in this field ;
- ⇒ the studies that have been already done usually favor the North/South vision rather than the East/West one.
- ⇒ The use of a new methodology ("mirror effect") that compares actual experiences throws an interesting light on the topic and the representation's interaction



**Women farmers diagram**

Sophie Louargant, 1999