

Transgressing Hopi Gender Roles: A Spatial Study of Polingaysi Qoyawayma's *No Turning Back*



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Abstract: Native American cultures are constituted upon the gendered division of labor. The economic spaces are constructed upon gender roles that allocate specific roles to Native American men and women. The subsequent socio-economic patterns allocate spatially marginalized positions to the Native American woman in comparison with men. The present study explores Native American woman's transgression of traditional economic spaces of Native Americans in Polingaysi Qoyawayma's *No Turning Back*. This study employs Doreen Massey's theoretical formulation of economic space to understand the protagonist's transgression of Hopi gender roles. This study maintains that the protagonist of the novel subverts conventional Hopi division of labor by adopting subversive gender roles.

Key Words: Economic Space, Gender Roles, Hopi Culture, Native American Woman, Spatiality, Transgression

Introduction

This historico-cultural analysis of the Hopi gender roles and gender boundaries suggests that the Hopi women were subject to the supremacy of Hopi patriarchy within the economic spaces. It did not allow Hopi women to leave their space and roles to create their own spatial identity. An analysis of Qoyawayma's portrayal of conventional Hopi gender boundaries and gender roles in *No Turning Back* (1964) reveals that Hopi's gender-specific boundaries and roles are instrumental in containing women into their proper space. Qoyawayma maintains the Hopi culture was:

[r]ich in life, color, and emotion, the Hopi way had been a strong but invisible web, holding the people together. Through their ritual dances, through their songs that had been handed down from generation to generation, they were able to express themselves.

(Qoyawayma, 1964, p. 27)

However, what this Hopi tradition was unable to dismantle was women's subjection to patriarchy. To understand how the Hopi patriarchy exerts its unrestrained power Qoyawayma's *No Turning Back* is an excellent document. It is an extensive commentary on the conventional Hopi gender roles and boundaries and describes how the Hopi women have internalized

these conventional roles and the limitations that are imposed on their movements from the private to public space. This process of internalizing specific gender roles and space starts at the very birth when young girls are presented to Mother Corn, and her naval cord is tied to a stirring stick and thrust into the wattle ceiling of the room where she is born (Qoyawayma, p. 28). The house in which the girl is born is considered as her "true home", and she is reminded of it over the years of life (Qoyawayma, p. 28). These rituals suggest that Hopi women associate themselves with their places; however, this association is taken to such a point where it becomes difficult to isolate it from marginalization to home space and affiliation with the home. This affiliation with domesticity is instilled in young girls at a very early age. Hopi mothers take nothing for granted, and in teaching their daughter, they include "every traditional detail" (Qoyawayma, p. 35). According to Qoyawayma, "One of the duties of Hopi mother is to teach her daughter plaque-making, for many plaques are needed in a Hopi household (p. 51). This training at home enables young girls to "assume the heavy responsibility of a home and children" (Qoyawayma,

p. 39). In other words, Hopi girls are trained in domestic chores and serving Hopi patriarchy within the confines of private space. Hopi women are taught to establish a strong emotional attachment to their home; therefore, the idea of leaving private space becomes unlikely.

Literature Review

According to [Barry M. Pritzker \(2011\)](#), Hopi Indians have a complex social system, which consists of multiple organizational levels, "both vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (non-hierarchical)" (p. 24). However, this intricate social system was established upon the superiority of women. The household, the basic social structure, consists of biologically related women, and "women related through their mothers' line owned the houses in which they lived" ([Pritzker, 2011](#), p.24). This delineation of Hopi gender roles suggests that women were confined to the conventional private space of the home, discouraged to constitute their own space within the economic space, and were not allowed to enter the public realm. Hopi societies, for Alice [Schlegel \(2008\)](#), maintained spatial division through the allocation of distinctive gender roles to men and women. Hopi women have specified roles of feeders and bearers of children, whereas men are supposed to protect them ([Schlegel, 2008](#), p. 131). This gender role and the sexual division of labor suggest that men occupied the public space of war and hardships, whereas the woman was supposed to raise children. Furthermore, Hopi fathers may not have authority within the sphere of home in Hopi society; however, the political hierarchies were maintained by the male members of the tribe.

For [Cattellino R. Jessica \(2004\)](#), a true Hopi woman is a woman who has no desire to enter the public space of knowledge and learning; a woman who is subservient and apt at domesticity; a woman who happily confines to her private space. Alicia Cox (2014) argues that Sevenka requires Native American women to remain connected to the traditional Hopi were under a matriarchal setup; they would perform the Hopi gender roles. On the other hand, Native American woman harbors an aversion to the domestic labor and the roles that Hopi girls played in a traditional Hopi society ([Cox, 2014](#), p. 61). According to Cox, a review of the 1908 *Sherman Bulletin* complements Native American woman's voice and singing skills. [Cox \(2014\)](#) further asserts that the public praise that Native American woman receives is

an example in which she denounces the gender specificity of the institute where girls are trained to cultivate soft and ladylike vocals.

[Massey \(1994\)](#) asserts that an economic space dictates forms of interdependence among the people of a social group (p. 5). In other words, the role of an individual in an economic activity constitutes his/her dependency on the other members of the group. Traditionally, in Hopi cultures, women are dependent upon men. This mode of dependency was primarily constituted upon the Hopi women's reliance on men's labor and production in farming and hunting activities that constitute the economic space. According to Massey, economical spaces are constituted by the notions of equality and justice. A restructuring of economic spaces that primarily protect the interests of one gender further problematizes labor division within economic space. In the Native American scenario, the Euro-American propagation of gendered spatial division of labor further complicated the gender distribution of the workforce. This ambivalent attitude further develops in socio-cultural ambivalence and disrupts social hierarchies. While Massey sheds light on the emergence of separate sphere ideology from a Marxist perspective, Nirmal Puwar traces the historical development of public and private spheres from a sociological point of view. According to Puwar (2004), the division of public and private spaces was founded laid when the first social contract was constituted. Puwar attributes this social contract as a "masculine fraternal pact", which aimed at repressing the feminine section of society. Hence, according to [Puwar \(2004\)](#), "sons were freed from patriarchs (the law of fathers) to form fraternities, women were still subject to the sexual or conjugal aspect of patriarchy" (pp. 15-16). The exclusion of women from the social contract was based on the separation of sexes, but for Puwar, this does not mean that women were entirely "absent" from the public realm. This suggests that women had a definite role in the social contract, but one which is subordinate and subject to the rule of men. Since women's presence in the public realm is constrained by the designation of domains as masculine and feminine, therefore, their presence is "smothered by the definition of that space by hegemonic masculinities" ([Puwar, 2004](#), p. 24). Puwar's arguments make it explicit that patriarchy played an active role in constraining women's entrance into public spaces. The body of the social contract, if it does not negate the existence of women as a community in

the social setup, maintains stringent measures to strict women to the proper place, which is the private space of the home. However, these efforts to confine women to private spaces and subjective positions were not successful always, and irrespective of all these measures, "women often overstepped the mark and moved in domains and places that sought to limit their movement but which the defined anew" (Puwar, p. 24). According to Aziz (2012), this "mobility ... is a sign of transgression" and enables the characters to "manipulate their space as a means of achieving their goal" (p. 63).

Theoretical Framework

Employing Doreen Massey's (1994) notion of economic space, this study develops contours of the Native American economic spaces in the pre-historic, pre-contact, and post-contact era. Economic spaces are the spaces that are produced at the intersection of social and economic relations (Massey, 1994). The location of economic activity and its socio-cultural implications are the central focus of any study of economic space. In other words, the notion of economic space encompasses the socio-spatial framework of any society. Within this socio-spatial framework, the economic space considers the division of labor and gender roles. The notion of gender role is studied in conjunction with the location of that economic activity by individuals of a particular gender. Thus the overarching economic space caters to the study of the "dominance and subordination" of gender within the socio-spatial organization of economic activity (Massey, p. 1).

Since the construction of the Native American normative geography is established upon the ambivalent spatial division of Native American genders, this study explores the Native American woman experience of marginalization, out-of-placeness, and her attempt to create her own spaces within the economic spaces of Native America. This study offers a rereading of Polingaysi Qoyawayma's *No Turning Back* to understand the spatial marginalization of the woman in the Hopi economic spaces, her attempt to engage in out-of-place actions by opting for a government job, and her transgression of the Hopi gender division of labor and gender-specific roles. *No Turning Back* is the life story of a Hopi woman, Polingaysi Qoyawayma, who leaves her native village at an early age with the passion for learning the ways and exploring the world of the White Man. This

autobiographical work documents different stages of Polingaysi Qoyawayma's life. Polingaysi tells the story from her early childhood and then moves on to narrate the events that took place from her first visit to school until her retirement as a schoolteacher. This work recounts Qoyawayma's struggle to bridge the gap between the worlds of her people and the Whites (p. 2). This autobiographical work is set in different geographical locations, but Qoyawayma's village Oraibi is the central location of the work. In this way, the writer establishes the notion of spatiality as the central premise of the autobiography.

At the outset of the discussion on *No Turning Back*, this study reviews the development of Hopi economic spaces, division of labor, and gender roles through different historical epochs. Historical and cultural documents are used as evidence to support arguments that pertain to the creation of Hopi economic spaces upon Hopi patriarchal models. Within these biased economic spaces, Qoyawayma, the protagonist of *No Turning Back*, experiences out-of-placeness. To overcome the spatial ambivalence at the Hopi economic spaces, Qoyawayma steps out of the Hopi gender roles by going to school and learning the White manways (Qoyawayma, 1964, p. 3). However, the protagonist soon realizes that the Hopi and White Manways are the same, as they both do not wish that Native American women may become financially stable; hence the only training they offer at the educational institutes are those that make women skilful at the domestic chores. This study offers a critique of the educational policies that the Euro-Americans adopted in the assimilation and acculturation programs. The educational policies aimed at making the male Native Americans proficient in fields that would produce cheap labor whereas Native American women were trained in homemaking and domesticity. This study delineates Qoyawayma's experience of social out-of-placeness due to her compromised financial positionality within the normative economic spaces of the Native Americans. This study reviews Qoyawayma's struggle to subvert the gender-specific roles as prescribed by the Native and Euro-American patriarchies. Therefore, she engages in acts that appear out-of-place but ultimately culminate in her transgression of the traditional gender roles and division of labor.

Discussion and Analysis

Qoyawayma's *No Turning Back* (1964) is a life

narrative, told by the author herself, of a young Hopi Indian who is “uprooted and forced to adjust to a new way of life” (p. i). The story deals with multiple issues. On the one hand, it narrates the hardships and troubles that Qoyawayma endured during her education and employment as a teacher. On the other hand, and on a larger scale, it deals with Qoyawayma’s “struggle to span the great and terrifying chasm between . . . Hopi world and the world of the white man” (Qoyawayma, 1964, p.i). Qoyawayma, who later became Elizabeth Q. White, is the first Indian child of the Hopi clan to get educated and become a teacher. This story records Qoyawayma’s transgression of the Hopi gender boundaries and gender roles. Her struggle is against the Native American and Euro-American patriarchy and for the liberation of Hopi women from the confines of home and hearth. Qoyawayma contests the conventional gender roles of Hopi Indians and establishes her own identity as an emancipated Hopi woman within the Native and Euro-American economic spaces.

Qoyawayma is the first Hopi girl who challenges the conventional gender-specific roles and boundaries within the Hopi culture. Unlike her siblings, at a very early age, she develops a liking for learning and joins the schoolhouse. Unlike other children of the village, Qoyawayma joins the school of “her own free will” (Qoyawayma, p. 24) because she desires to do so. The boarding school was established to instill among the Native American students the “experience in the ways of the white world” (Hale, 2002, p. 15). The idea behind these schools was to assimilate Native Americans into the Euro-American culture. Therefore, these schools and other similar institutions aimed at teaching young Native Americans lessons in Bible, English language and training that would help them in emerging societies.

However, this is the first transgressive act, a step taken outside of the confinement of private space and entrance into the public space of knowledge and learning. When her mother learns about Qoyawayma’s decision, she becomes angry and scolds her that she has taken “a step in the wrong direction. A step away from your Hopi people” (Qoyawayma, p. 26). Indeed, for the Hopi woman like Sevenka, Qoyawayma’s mother, who has internalized the Hopi patriarchal dictates of gender roles and boundaries, Qoyawayma’s going into public space of learning was an out-of-place action and step was taken in the wrong direction. On the other hand, Qoyawayma

transgresses the private space of the home to destabilize the conventional gender roles in the normative economic space and normative geographical boundaries of Native American society.

Qoyawayma’s early schooling at the Oraibi school instilled a desire for more learning in her. Therefore, when she hears of a group of Hopi young people going to Riverside for training at Sherman Institute, she becomes very excited since she believes that she has learned to spell words, and write them, and speak them well. Therefore, she considers it her due right to be sent to the Sherman Institute for learning and savoring “a taste of life beyond the mesas” (Qoyawayma, p. 49). The boarding schools, along with teaching from religion and arithmetic, also taught skills that will help Native American students opt for different professions (Hale, 2002, p. 23). In this way, these schools not only changed the lives of Native American children but also transformed the overarching economic space of Native American society. The economic space that primarily encompassed hunting grounds and farms expanded to careers like law, medicine, and other professions, which guaranteed ultimate success in the evolving society.

Qoyawayma’s refusal to adhere to the Hopi traditional gender roles comes in the wake of colonial reconfiguration of gender roles within the economic spaces. Therefore, Cox (2014) asserts that Qoyawayma is not a victim of the colonial authority; rather, she is an agent of her own destiny (p. 62). Her “adventurous” (Qoyawayma, p. 57) spirit does not want to limit herself to singing alone; therefore, when a White teacher offers her a paid job and English lessons at her house, she readily accepts it. On the one hand, Qoyawayma believes that it is an opportunity that will help her in developing a well-round vocabulary and confidence in her abilities. On the other hand, it represents Qoyawayma’s new role in the economic space of Native America. The economic space that was previously structured upon women’s dependence upon men and dominated by the Hopi man is now being reconfigured, and a Hopi woman has become financially independent.

Qoyawayma engages in the economic space with the purpose to change her spatial subjugation to the Hopi patriarchy. She is dissatisfied with the socio-spatial location of a Hopi woman who is designated to the spatial confines of her husband’s house after marriage. Therefore, when students at Sherman

Institute are trained to be efficient domestic workers and are taught sewing, patching, laundry, and home economics, Qoyawayma takes a keen interest in these lessons and training. Qoyawayma develops a knack for sewing, which gives her an idea to sew for other girls and charge them for the work. Her teachers also appreciate her and encourage other girls to trust Qoyawayma with their sewing material (Qoyawayma, p. 64). In addition, the training that Qoyawayma receives at the Sherman Institute makes her realize that the Hopi and Euro-American normative economic structures require her to perform domestic duties as a woman (Cox, 2014, p. 65). It is at this crucial point she distances herself from the gender normative culture of both Hopi and Euro-American. Therefore, she masters these domestic skills, but the ultimate goal is not to be an efficient wife or mother in a Hopi marriage; rather, she uses her learning to improve her financial status so that she may be financially independent and also build her dream house. Qoyawayma's association of financial independence with spatial authority is an example of the link between space and financial position.

With the arrival of the Euro-Americans, the economic space of Native America extended to much larger geographical and more organized commercial activities. Within that extended economic space, Qoyawayma does not want to succumb to the Hopi life, just like her other friends who are married now and interested in their homes and their babies (Qoyawayma, p. 65). She does not want to talk about plaque designs, pottery-making, and marriage, because she knows that she would not be happy as a pueblo wife "for all its richness and beauty, the pattern life of the Hopi no longer impressed her with its importance" (Qoyawayma, p. 65). In addition, the Sherman Institute also espoused these normative gender roles. The institute embraced a gender culture that would enforce Eurocentric gender norms. The institute followed the Victorian dress code, expected girls to be married and bear children, and trained women to be subservient to the dominion of men (Cox, 2014, p. 65). However, Qoyawayma revolted against this process of assimilation and subverted the gender allocation as dictated by the Sherman institute and espoused by the Euro-American cultural policies.

Furthermore, Qoyawayma disidentifies herself with the sexual division of labor, and accepts jobs that are traditionally associated with masculinity. The new role of a teacher is indeed an event that leads to her

economic and spatial enfranchisement. It is this Econo-spatial empowerment that makes her adamant about pursuing further training in the field of teaching and education. Now she has no interest in "taking up the old ways of the village"; rather, she is more "interested in learning new ways of living and in losing the fragments of the past that still clung to her" (Qoyawayma, p. 65). For Qoyawayma, the renewed gender roles promised more and more spatial supremacy within the Native and Euro-American economic space. When Qoyawayma arrives at her village, the poverty of the scene makes her heartsick, and she assures herself that this life is not for her and she would never again be happy in the old pattern. A pattern where a woman's only place is her home, which she only leaves after the wedding.

Qoyawayma is also resolute not to marry but to save money to build a house of her own. She considers herself not ready for marriage yet; therefore, "the image of herself, down on her knees in the grinding room, laboriously reducing the blue cornmeal to fine flour for the *piki* wedding bread" is appalling to her (Qoyawayma, p. 70). Her mother, a conservative and traditional Hopi woman, urges her to marry, have babies, and a home, but Qoyawayma refuses to become "a living seed pod for her Hopi people" (Qoyawayma, p.70). The episode documents Qoyawayma's refusal of Hopi gender roles as a wife. She considers that her marriage would ultimately deprive her of the spaces that she aims to construct within the normative economic space. Her three years of stay at the Sherman institute have made her independent enough to take a stand against her mother's recommendation of a marriage proposal to her. She has realized that in order to gain spatial and economic prosperity, she must disavow such proposals. Marriage means not only an economic surrender but also a spatial subjugation to the authority of patriarchy. Therefore, Qoyawayma rejects her mother's proposition of marriage. Her mother has remained a victim of Hopi patriarchal Econo-spatial exigencies, and that hinders her ability to contest gender-specific roles. Therefore, when she recommends a marriage proposal to her, Qoyawayma refuses that with her determination and aspirations for constructing her own house (Qoyawayma, p. 71). For Qoyawayma, the construction of her personal house is more important as compared to be a subservient entity at her husband's house. The instance shows that within the Econo-spatial normative paradigms of Native and

Euro-American societies, Qoyawayma endeavors to constitute her own space that promises both spatial and economic empowerment. She does not agree with her mother's suggested marriage proposal and leaves her village once again.

However, this transgression from the private space to public space does not come readily; rather, Qoyawayma faces harsh criticism and is ridiculed for her views and actions. She contests the gender division prevalent in Native and Euro-American societies and economic spaces; therefore, she works hard at the Academy for three years. In the summers of 1914, she returns to Hopi land, joins the mission at Menmonites, and starts fieldwork. However, she is not satisfied with her work at the Hopi lands and leaves it when she meets an unfortunate accident. After some time, she receives an offer for a substitute teacher position at Tuba City. Here she teaches thirty Navajo pupils, ranging from six years olds to tall and gangling eighteen-year-old Pete. The job not only promised her financial benefits but also proved to be a step towards the destabilization of the patriarchal hegemony of the economic space. Her first cheque brings her a lot of excitement and gives her a "rich feeling of independence" (Qoyawayma, p. 116), economic as well as spatial. Hopi women have never been accustomed to such financial independence because of their limitation on the private spaces of the home. The money guarantees her spatial and financial empowerment that she may later exercise to create her own spatial position within Native and Euro-American economic spaces. She feels that the dream of her own house might become a reality now. Qoyawayma continues her struggle and joins Bible

Institute, where she not only learns but also works and earns an excellent salary. Her financial position grew better, and now she has enough money to pay her extra expenses at the institute (Qoyawayma, p. 120).

Conclusion

These episodes, on the one hand, suggests Hopi patriarchy's efforts to limit woman to their traditional roles and space, on the other hand, it also portrays Qoyawayma's firm resolve to challenge the conventional gender roles and boundaries. It reveals that Native American patriarchy does not allow the woman to create her own space within the Native American economic space, predominantly occupied by Native American men. In Qoyawayma's retaliation, she questions the economic poverty that is prevalent within Native American cultures and resulted from the Euro-American socio-economic incursions. She rebels against the disproportionate and ambivalent spatiality of Hopi women within the Native American economic space. In short, Qoyawayma's life narrative is not simply a story of a Hopi woman who aims to bridge the gap between the two worlds. She is a woman who challenged conventional gender roles and gender boundaries. Her actions were designated as out of place and were charged with transgression. However, it is through her rebellion against the gender roles and resistance to accepting the gendered division of labor that she creates her own space within the Native and Euro-American economic space. She subverted the Hopi and Euro-American patriarchal politics of place and space and proved that women could be equally productive in public spaces.

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