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# On the Molding and Influence of the Political Culture in Movie Anna on Female Identity

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***Abstract**: Anna, a movie directed by Luc Besson, despite being of typical commercial properties, contains many more cultural connotations beyond the capacity of a commercial movie. Examining what happened to Anna from three perspectives: nationalist politics, gender politics, and homo-politics, it can be found that political culture suppresses women, who neither get rid of their second sex identity through the international feminist movement, nor form a cogent alliance.*

***Key words**: Anna; Feminism; Female identity; Politics culture*

## Introduction

*Anna*, directed by Luc Besson, is a spy and action movie portraying a female agent, which is not a rare topic that has never appeared in current cinematic creation. Compared to *The Apocalypse Code, Red Sparrow, Salt, Atomic Blonde, Mr. Smith & Mrs. Smith, Charlie's Angels, The Operative*, etc., however, *Anna* is similar but not exactly identical to them, because it pursues its unique ideological connotation. "The body must be the source and core of meaning, and stories cannot be told without making the body a prime medium of narrative significations," said Brooks (Brooks, 2005). The movie *Anna*, in which the predicament confronting women is presented via female body, not only reflects the nightmare of a female agent to survive in the swirl of political struggle, but also gets to the complexity of female body amid the battle of the genders, which is a different interpretation of sisterhood.

## Killing Doll: Body in Nationalist Politics

Individual-national relation is an inevitable issue for movies focusing on special agents, where an agent refers to "secret service or a person specializing in such a cause." (Modern Chinese Dictionary, 2017). Apparently, the latter explanation, i.e. "someone engaged in activities such as intelligence prying, subversion, and sabotage after special trainings", prevails in movies (Modern Chinese Dictionary, 2017). Thanks to special trainings, special agents tend to possess capabilities beyond ordinary people, thus becoming heroes living in plain sight, in which case the narrative about agents naturally turns to be heroic. Female agents, or heroines, embodying narrative factors that are both sexual and violent, better cater for audience's hero complex than their male counterparts. In fact, in movies that talk about female agents, a heroine can be more masculine than a hero, and is shaped as an ideal epitome of beauty, wisdom, and combat. Such a flawless figure is shouldering the heavy responsibility to kill all the way for completing a task and become a killing doll. Unlike male agents, female agents depend on not only violence, but also body to accomplish their assignments;

not only wisdom, but also beauty. Badger game is a time-tested strategy that female agents adopt. In petty politics, male agents give up life, while female ones sacrifice life, selfhood, and dignity.

From the perspective of individual-national relation, it can be said that *Anna* is a different *Red Sparrow*. The protagonists, in both movies, are Russian special agents, and the argument of *Red Sparrow* is repeated in *Anna*.

For a state apparatus, every individual is a puppet that can be easily manipulated. The essence of a female agent as one of the state functionaries is an undesignated signifier, and exists only as a group instead of an individual. A state apparatus cares only about if the task is done rather than whether the agent survives or not. Such relationship takes shape at the moment she's recruited. Being recruited is not a choice for Anna to refuse. As an orphan, she would tramp the streets, and could only rely on her love rat, whose death from the gunshot by KGB member Alex chops off her mere connection to this world. Taking this chance, Anne is forced to promise a commitment that could never be fulfilled. Having seen the face of Alex, saying no to the recruitment means the death of Anna. Fiery and indomitable as she is, Alex's words about the gift of life have her affection and soft spot triggered. Despite certain doubts, she could not turn down the life gifted by her parents. The desire for life and freedom motivated her to survive, and her relationship with the KGB evolves into a relation comprising freedom, depression, imprisonment, and breakout. This antagonism shows how insignificant an individual body is under the context of state order. The state apparatus' indifference to individuals is also reflected on Alex. He is indifferent to others suffering from life and death, and can remain so calm to killing, who would rather not stand up off the chair. From this, his grand theory about life expressed to Anna appears hypocritical, which exactly proves he and the KGB represented by him regard people like Anne as mere manipulated subjects. Everything is an instrument. Female agents are nothing but sacrificial offerings to political struggle in the nationalist politics, which is completely laid bare during the inspection on Anna's trial, when her female superior Olga assigns a task so dangerous that even a male agent may hit a bump to Anna and flatly says, "it doesn't work out, I'll send her home in a body bag." The cruelty of the animal world is evident. Supposing that Anna was still half in faith about her future freedom here, Director Vasiliev shatters her dream of the future to the full extent. She was going to work for the country until the end, or as she says, until a bullet hits her head in the middle. In other words, she will always be watched for killing, have no personal space or free life, and become a manipulated puppet.

## Exchange and Leverage: Body in Gender Politics

Anna, as a killing doll for the state apparatus, is required to work indefinitely until her death. That is to say, her body is controlled completely by the state, regardless of her thought and spiritual pursuit as an individual, who is in need of free space and emotional life. The stricter the system or order control is, the more urgent the individual will need. Georges Bataille, a famous French writer, points out "human body is a manifestation of everyone's soul." (Gao,2010) Anna's personal life and emotional needs have also been conveyed through the body's narrative, which is expressed by her relations to three different characters, namely a woman named Maud, KGB member Alex, and CIA member Lenny Miller. Her relationship to the last two characters is closely interrelated to Anna's job, and it is due to such an occupational involvement that Anna developed an unusual relationship with the two men. Its significance is beyond ordinary male and female relationships and of more implications about gender politics.

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Alex's identity allows him to approach Anna more frequently, and for being her superior, his relationship to Anna gives her a sense of political or work security; and for being a man, he becomes the place where she keeps her desire. For Alex, Anna is a gorgeous woman and employee excelling in performance, who has nothing behind, can satisfy a man's lust, and won't cause a man to get entangled. Consequently, under the triple pressure arising from work, emotion and body, he or she becomes the object, to which one party unleashes the physical desire, and they give or exchange with each other. If the emotional orgasm between men and women is physical contact and intimacy, an intimate encounter of male and female bodies is not necessarily a result of affective development. On this basis, Anna makes requests to Alex and leverages his trust to succeed in assassinating Vasiliev. Although Alex relaxes his guard against Anna, he does not confuse the boundaries between affection and career/politics. As they reunite, where there is no greeting, delight or hesitation, the first thing he says is "I'll kill you with my own hands". It turns out that Anna is just a tool for his desire.

Anna's association with Miller, a leader of a small CIA team, is undoubtedly based on a prerequisite of direct exchange and utilization. Anna anchors her future freedom and safety on Miller's promise, so that she actively extends herself to the guy, in which the woman's body once again becomes the path to her goal. But the two characters never let go of their defense amid apparent intimacy. For Miller, every step is part of the implementation of a political plan, while for Anna, she is aggressively seeking a way out. Anna's assassination of Vasiliev, like a mirror, clearly reflects the nature of the relationship between the two, where Anna simply plays a role as the most powerful weapon in Miller's CIA team when Miller uses her yearning for freedom and safety.

## Sadomasochism: Body in Homo-politics

As of today, more than a hundred years have passed since the emergence of feminist movement. Women in gender relations are getting rid of the second sex status, and seeking personality independence and freedom of life. In the movie, Anna is such a woman with self-awareness, who, nevertheless, is deprived of the right to choose due to the harsh life. She is like a beast in a cage, trying to get out by bumping around. In this process, she is a perpetrator and a victim, she fights against men and women, she is faced with violent conflicts and cold violence. In a practical sense, the realization of the feminist movement requires women getting together to collectively make a stand and efforts. After unveiling the shell on the basic value pursuit of feminism, the movie *Anna* still follows the conventional step of commercial movies with heroic and legendary characteristics by making Anna fight alone, violently resolve the contradiction against the enemy, and utilize cold violence to deal with issues between women.

The so-called "cold violence" or "mental abuse" refers to the act that the sadist influences the masochist by means of nonchalance, sarcasm, humiliation, isolation, depreciation, distortion or denial to cause psychological trauma. "Through mental abuse, it is possible for one to destroy another. It is not overstated to call it psychological murder... To this sort of violence in its indirect form, our society generally turns a blind eye and remains silent about this crime on the excuse of being tolerant." (Hirigoyen, 2017) Cold violence, characterized by its serious hazards and invisibility, has become an increasingly common form of contradiction in modern society. In the movie, cold violence, such as the relation of Anna to her superior Olga, inevitably exists in Anna's life. Inside the KGB that concerns national security, Anna has no other

choice but to accept. Olga, the only surviving female agent among KGB members, has a similar career experience with Anna. Despite being a female, no trait of any sympathy can be seen in her. Apart from the cold leader-member relationship, there are only orders, surveillance, sarcasm and exploitation. She initially treats Anne as an addict, and tells her that she is not one with the background of higher education and is of no any value but sleeping men amid badger game. Later, when Anna reports to her about the progress, she even asks about Anna's sexual life. With a suspicious look all the time, she almost drives Anna to the edge of meltdown. In such an interpersonal environment, dangerous and lonely, few of staff survive five years. Olga often calls Anna "bitch", a word referring to "a bad woman", "shrew" or "slut". In spite of being a woman with similar professional experiences, Olga has shifted from the then masochist to the sadist today.

Anna is a masochist on the job, but a sadist in her personal life. When serendipity brings Maud to Anna, Anna only regards her as a barrier from trouble at first. As the story unfolds, it can be seen that Anne is heterosexual, and she never treats Maud as a family. Therefore, from the perspective of a romantic relationship, it has just been a wishful thinking from Maud, but Anna's failure to say no convinces Maud of falsely believing that Anna is the one. Anna is indifferent to Maud's passion and romance. Maud, who never learned about Anna's special identity or true thoughts, is just drunk in her imagined relationship, and actively builds a small nest for them. In the cinematic scenes where both of them appear, Anna either goes away or is silent, or even leaves Maud for a man's bed in the middle of the night. None of these touches Anna or makes her regret, whether in terms of moral guilt or emotional lability. Maud is a dispensable existence, to which Anna cannot spare time to pay attention. It isn't until American agents break into her house that Maud realizes the arrival of all the fear, intimidation, despair, and helplessness is attributed to Anna. About the possible harm to Maud, Anna neither implies, nor is able to avoid, only to push Maud into the abyss without hiding.

The cold violence relationship in homo-politics indicates that feminism is complex and dynamic. Feminists' pursuit of liberation requires the cooperation and support from society, culture and institutions, especially all the women. The lack of female support can be drastic for personal liberation. But in the movie, Anna's pursuit of freedom originates from abuse. Initially, Olga didn't offer help because she's a woman. An offensive and defensive alliance is formed on the ground of their respective requests, so that the two guarding against each other could never feel the friendship as female from each other. Maud, undoubtedly a feminist, pursues the freedom of personality and homosexual love, worries and takes care of Anna, and manages her love nest well. But she is not honored the respect and love from Anna. Is this a result of differences in national culture, or a dark manifestation of human nature? No matter how it is interpreted, it shows the impure nature of feminism in real situations. The issue about how women break through the boundary of self and establish the boundary of the female group is going to be a global concern to be addressed urgently.

The movie *Anna* is commercial, but its narrative is "a multi-faceted manifestation of ideographic thinking" (Friedman, 2014) Its influence is far from being summarized a daytime sleepwalking by the audience. Female body in the movie, like a mirror, reflects the power relations of politics, gender and female cultures. In the context of globalization, cultural circulation has been improved, and the boundary and core of regional cultures are being adapted and reconstructed. The director sees the infiltration of female culture concepts into daily life, but ignores the drift of the entire culture-geography plate and its interaction.

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