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Feminist Philosophy

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This chapter focuses primarily on contemporary feminist philosophy in Latin America. By "contemporary" we mean feminist philosophy since the 1980s. It is during this period – and particularly since the 1990s – that feminist philosophy has become a recognized academic field in Latin America. Following an introduction situating its rise in a historical context, we examine methodological questions regarding feminist perspectives on activism, the use of gender as a category of analysis, the analysis of ethnicity/race and multiculturalism, and the uses and appropriations of Michel Foucault's discourse theory and Judith Butler's deconstruction. Attention to these methodological issues is crucial if we are to chart the emergence of this field and understand what it is about historical and cultural conditions in Latin America that fuels and energizes feminist debates. The key methodological issues we discuss are specifically linked to assessing the connections, broadly construed, between feminist theory and practice. Our overall analysis links up the achievements of feminist philosophy to the democratization processes in Latin America.

Feminist Philosophy in a Historical Context

Feminist philosophy does not function as an isolated field of knowledge. To a greater or lesser degree, it is interactive in dynamic dialogue or tension with feminist activism in the larger society as well as with interdisciplinary currents in feminist theory. To these extra-philosophical points of reference in the particular case of Latin America we must add the intra-philosophical transnational or international influences of U.S. and Western European feminisms which are filtered into academic feminist philosophy in Latin America through a variety of channels. These channels include the academic and personal experiences of Latin American feminists who have studied or received graduate degrees in philosophy in the United States or Western Europe (later returning to their countries of origin); the availability of books, journals, e-mail lists, and other transnational contacts through the internet and more traditional means; professional contacts generated at various international congresses; the seminars and colloquia offered at Latin American universities by Anglophone and Western European feminist philosophers; and so on. In other words, there is an overabundance of sources influencing

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the production of feminist philosophy in Latin America, a significant portion of which has extra-philosophical and/or extra-continental influences. And yet, we can also identify a strong tradition of feminist and women's movements in Latin America, whose debates and agenda energize and invigorate the feminist philosophical scene.

Like its U.S. counterparts, Latin American feminisms are often distinguished broadly according to a "first-wave" and "second-wave" periodization. The historical and political assessments of feminisms' achievements in Latin America, however, should not be modeled on the chronologies and criteria established outside the region. In the past, such a tendency has led to the distortion and devaluation of Latin American women's achievements and to the failure to understand the complexity of local practices (Femenías, 2006, p. 112). While avoiding a linear and Anglo-Eurocentric sense of periodization, it may still be useful to speak of "waves" in a qualified sense in order to mark the differences of emphasis and peaks of mobilization inevitably resulting from the historical and cultural orientations of feminist philosophy and the feminist movement. Given the uneven paths taken by academic feminisms in different countries and regions, it may be premature to speak of a "third wave," although we will suggest such an option in our analysis.

We could say in general – keeping in mind that generalizations regarding Latin American intellectual and cultural characteristics are subject to exception and contestation – that questions and movements regarding women's suffrage and the first print defenses of a libertarian female sexuality constitute the first wave. Historically, the first wave occurs in the last decades of the nineteenth century and up to the 1930s and '40s. This period coincides politically with the mobilization of women on behalf of liberal and socialist political movements, although the impact of anarchism at various stages of political mobilization can also be felt. Women's right to an education up to the superior levels – a vindication already voiced in the colonial seventeenth century by the acclaimed Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (known retroactively as the first Hispanic American feminist) – was a matter of agreement among the early feminist activists, along with the right to vote. Together with the suffragist goals, the majoritarian feminist agenda of those decades was marked by the right to the administration of inherited and acquired property, the legal recognition of children born out of wedlock, and the strengthening of women's labor rights and rights within the family, including the right to divorce. More controversial among the early feminists were the demands to break down the "double" morality with regard to sexuality, which allowed men sexual freedom but constrained at least middle-class women, if not others, to a code of pre-marital virginity, normative if not compulsory heterosexuality, and monogamy within marriage. The demands for sexual freedom divided women who identified with the rhetorically conservative "moral" approach to attain political suffrage and with some civil (education, labor) rights and responsibilities, and those who embraced more egalitarian views on social and political change. At the 1910 International Feminist Congress held in Buenos Aires, the first to be held in Latin America, the former identified themselves as "feminine" and the latter as "feminist." The first group relied on such essentialist notions as women being the "soul" of the nation, thereby deserving full representation in the nation's political and economic life. Such an argument, which called on women's incorporation into the public sphere as a way of "elevating" the

conscience of the nation, reifies the view (usually applied in a paternalistic and sexist manner) that women are somehow purer or more virtuous than men. In contrast to this ideologically conservative strategy, the feminist sexual libertarians tried to push forward a more democratic, egalitarian agenda, but they did not find enough national support to obtain consensus on the latter.

A relatively dormant period of feminist activism occurs around the middle of the twentieth century once the vote and a great number of civil, economic, and political rights were obtained. The "second wave" emerges in the 1960s partly as a collateral side-effect of the progressive social and political changes of this historical period, including the egalitarian agenda of the 1959 Cuban revolution. But, as was the case in the United States, feminist women challenged the masculine-dominant politics of the period, so that the autonomous women's/feminist movement in various parts of continental Latin America attains visibility in the course of the 1970s. This period, however, coincides with a surge of widespread anti-communist political repression. In 1973 the constitutional governments of Bolivia and Uruguay were overturned; this was followed in the same year by a military coup against the constitutional government of socialist Salvador Allende in Chile. Others fell in chain-like effect, including the government of María Estela Martínez de Perón in 1976 in Argentina. The military dictatorships in the Southern Cone and the various dictatorships in Central America left hundreds of thousands of dead or "disappeared" throughout Latin America in the repression and civil wars that took place during this period. This means that the emerging second-wave feminist organizing and activism as well as the academic freedom needed to support critical philosophy at universities were either formally suspended or driven underground in countries marked by these national political conflicts. Paradoxically for feminists caught in such circumstances, the United Nations organized the "Year of the Woman" (1975) followed by the "Decade on Women" (1975–85). This process placed women's issues at the forefront of an international agenda concerned with fostering global peace and development. Whether impelled to join this global project or to contest it on far more radical and autonomous local grounds, as happened in the case of some radical feminist groups in Mexico (where the 1975 UN conference was held), the invocation of "la causa de las mujeres" (women's cause) became linked to grassroots as well as high-end proposals for the democratization of Latin American societies and governments. In Chile the famous slogan "democracia en el país y en la casa" (democracy in the country and at home) energized feminists and pro-democracy advocates against the regime of Augusto Pinochet. In Argentina the famous protests of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo on behalf of their maternal and human rights to locate the disappeared broke down the legitimation of state violence and the dictatorship's "pro-family" façade. Out of these painful and traumatic political and everyday life situations it is clear to see how Latin American women and feminists gradually elaborated the important conception of women's rights as human rights and of human rights as inclusive of women's rights. By the time partial or full transitions to democracy took place in the 1980s in the countries moving out of the dictatorships, a network of Latin American women and feminist activists had been built whose rallying points were the Encuentros (meetings) held every couple of years throughout the region, beginning in 1981 (Alvarez et al., 2002a).

It was also in the 1980s (moving into the 1990s) that Women's Studies programs and centers were organized in many Latin American universities, as was the teaching of feminist philosophy in university curricula. With rare exceptions, among which we can cite the case of the Mexican feminist philosopher Graciela Hierro (1928–2003), who introduced academic discussions of feminist philosophy in Mexico in the 1970s, the conditions for teaching feminist philosophy in Latin American universities did not exist until the 1990s. These conditions are still restrictive due to the combination of past political problems, current economic constraints, and the generally androcentric orientation of philosophy as an academic discipline. Nonetheless, the great advances women have made in civil society and politics both regionally and worldwide since the 1980s put great pressure on universities to support academic women's studies, gender studies, and feminist studies – trends that in the short and long term lead to a greater recognition and support for feminist philosophy.

We could speak of a third wave of feminism in Latin America linked to the impact and response to the accelerated globalization processes of neoliberal capitalism. While these effects began to be felt in the 1980s, theoretical responses to them took a while to get organized, given the sometimes chaotic circumstances of the previous political period. Moreover, a priority of the "democratic transitions" was to stabilize the restored constitutional governments. By the mid- or late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, we find a critical reexamination of the concept of democracy, with more attention paid to the differences among women, not just in terms of class and religious affiliation, but of ethnicity, race, age, and sexual orientation. At the same time, the influence of postmodern theory is more visible in Latin American feminist philosophy, not in the sense of the direct importation of European or North American philosophers as such, but in the transformative sense, for example, of using and reappropriating elements of Foucauldian discourse theory or of queer theory as developed by Judith Butler as the objects of analysis may warrant it. Likewise, although Latin American feminist philosophers and theorists generally do not view themselves as "postcolonial," there are feminist appropriations of "translation" theory (inspired by the postcolonial theorist Edward Said) and of race/ethnicity (a topic of major interest to postcolonial critics). These recent directions, which could be identified as "third wave" or at a minimum as new orientations in contemporary feminist theory and philosophy, attend to approaches and issues exceeding the previous normative paradigms conceived since the 1960s. At the same time, the second and third feminist "waves" in terms of theoretical orientation coexist synchronically (so much so that this third moment, or turn, is often collapsed into the second). Some theorists simply use the term "neofeminism" to refer to feminisms since the 1960s, at which time issues of sexual violence against women and reproductive rights were brought more forcefully to the forefront than in the earlier suffragist period (Bartra, 2006, p. 1). The slippage in identifying the more recently emerging conceptual frameworks and directions, such as those taken by postmodern and postcolonial feminisms and queer theory, is understandable given the uneven development of feminist philosophy and theory across the continent and often in the same city. We will return to this issue in the section on feminist methodologies, below. The tension between these perspectives results in contested "identity" terrains and undoubtedly in misunderstandings, regrettable but not unusual, among some feminists.

Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy

Within the vast network of feminist perspectives it is possible to delineate some highlights in the last three decades. The late 1980s brought together the first international congresses of feminist philosophy held in Mexico City (1988) and Buenos Aires (1989) (Schutte, 1994, 1993, p. 212). Prior to this, Graciela Hierro is credited with organizing the first panel on feminism at a national philosophy congress in 1979. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Hierro developed a feminist ethics of pleasure, for which she is best remembered (Hierro, 2007). In the late 1980s, the Argentine Association for Women in Philosophy was formed. This group produced the journal *Hiparquia* (1988–99), so far the only journal of feminist philosophy published in Latin America. The journal's founding members were Ana María Bach, María Luisa Femenías, Alicia Gianella, Clara Kushnir, Diana Maffía, Margarita Roulet, María Spadaro, and María Isabel Santa Cruz. In addition to the above and to those whose contributions we mention in our extended discussion of methodology, a list of feminist philosophers in Latin America includes, among others: María Pía Lara and María Herrera (Mexico; critical theory); Margarita Valdés (Mexico; applied ethics); Gloria Comesaña-Santalices (Venezuela; French existentialism, Beauvoir); Laura Gioscia (Uruguay; sexual minorities and women's rights). In feminist theology Virginia Azcuy and Marta Palacio (Argentina) are recognized in phenomenology. The question of the nature of feminist philosophy in Latin America does not arise for most feminist philosophers unless they are specifically dealing with the connection between theory and practice in the region (or closely related topics). By exploring key issues in feminist methodology as a historically situated debate arising from a Latin American context, however, we are poised to conceptualize some of the salient parameters distinguishing contemporary feminist philosophy in this region from its counterparts elsewhere.

Feminist Methodologies: Key Issues

Our goal here is to map a comprehensive conception of "feminist philosophy" born out of its own practices and debates in Latin America as theorists reflect on the meanings and challenges of feminism in their own societies and local contexts. Our conceptual map is not expected to coincide necessarily with traditional areas of expertise in philosophy as this discipline is currently subdivided. The thematic frameworks we identify and develop are based on "on site" discussions of key issues in feminist methodology. Among these we note (1) the dichotomy between academic feminism and feminist activism, and ways to mediate them; (2) the use and abuse of "gender" as a category of analysis; (3) the incorporation of ethnicity/race in Latin American feminist studies; (4) the uses and appropriations of Foucauldian discourse theory and Butlerian deconstruction.

The activist/academic dichotomy, and ways to mediate them

No less than in the United States, feminist philosophy in Latin America is challenged by the tension between feminist activism and academic feminism. The demands of

academic feminism and the professionalization of philosophy can place academic feminists at a distance from the battle for women's rights and for social change in the larger social and political arena. The tension between the academy and activism can be mediated by feminist philosophers in several ways, however. Among these are: the positing of feminist theory as a form of expertise whose object of knowledge is feminist activism; understanding feminist theory in terms of its ongoing, dynamic relationship between theory and praxis; and formulating feminist theory as the outcome of women's critical reflections on their lived experiences and on how the sense of a self, even a militant self, emerges specifically in interaction with and among women struggling for change. These three approaches to combining theory and action (or activism) need not be exhaustive of all possible approaches to the tension between academic and activist feminism, nor are they necessarily exclusionary, in the sense that taking one of these approaches necessarily rules out another. What is at stake here is more often a style of doing theory, given a researcher's feminist commitments, her field of specialization and, within those fields, the issues that take on primary attention on account of their special interest or urgency.

The first approach mentioned above takes feminist theory as a form of expertise whose object of analysis is feminist activism – and more broadly, the women's movement in particular and women's role in social movements in general. Social science research as the theoretical analysis of social movements has contributed significantly to Latin American feminist theory. For example, the Argentine social theorist Elizabeth Jelin (1996, 1990) has written extensively on the role of the "new" social movements in the transitions to democracy in the 1980s as well as on the issue of women's rights as human rights. One important characteristic of social movements is their grassroots origin beyond the traditional structures of political parties. Feminist scholarship in the social sciences has been able to target the study of women's movements and of women's participation in various other social movements, thereby highlighting new forms of women's agency as citizens, women's contributions to democratic processes in Latin America, and women's capacity to organize on behalf of issues such as the need for safe drinking water, adequate housing, reproductive health, indigenous people's rights, and human rights. In addition to these larger social or community oriented issues, as the feminist movement grew, research has been applied to the analysis of the feminist movement as such and its impact on society. For example, the Cuban-born political scientist Sonia Alvarez, both singly and in collaboration with other researchers, has provided numerous theoretical analyses of the feminist movement in Latin America (Alvarez et al., 2002a; Alvarez, 1990, 2002b).

A second way of relating academic theory to activism is to focus on the dynamics of the relationship between feminist theory and political practice. The Mexican feminist philosopher Griselda Gutiérrez, for example, argues for a pluralistic approach *within feminist theory* to the analysis and interpretation of social movements. She stresses, too, that it is also the plurality of different currents in the feminist movement which historically can be said to give birth to the use of gender as an analytic category in feminist theory (Gutiérrez, 2002, p. 9). Her non-reductionistic approach to feminist theory and practice allows for dialogue and debate within each category (theory, practice) as well as for the actualization of an ongoing dynamism and contestation across them. This pluralistic approach contrasts with reductionistic approaches to what it means

to be a feminist or, for that matter, what it means to be a woman, whose effect is to narrow down the "permissible" or "legitimate" rationale for feminist methodology.

A third way of relating theory and practice/activism is through the politicization of human subjectivity and through the use of the personal narrative, combined with analysis, regarding the critical understanding of feminism and of the feminist movement in terms of one's lived experience. While some variations of this approach are based on local adaptations of the transnational radical feminist maxim "the personal is political," others more broadly correlate the recent history of the feminist movement in Latin America with reflections gathered from one's personal experience. A good example of a feminist philosophical analysis born out of this perspective is the work of the Panamanian philosopher Urania Ungo. She bases her approach on the view that the goal of the feminist movement in Latin America was not just to change the institutions, but to change life itself (*cambiar la vida misma*) (Ungo, 2002, p. 97). This perspective was reached by Latin American women who met at the first Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe held in 1981. Ungo traces the history of the Latin American feminist movement in the last two decades of the twentieth century, along with the challenges and conflicts women have faced and still face, in terms of this radical existential and transformational goal, which is at once both personal and political (Ungo, 2000).

The use and abuse of "gender" as a category of analysis

Another methodological debate centers on the legitimacy of using the category of "gender" as a foundational category of feminist analysis. This debate is too quickly oversimplified if it is seen simply as one between "pro-gender" feminists and their opponents (however the latter identify themselves). There are both conceptual and circumstantial reasons why the so-called "gender perspective" has been criticized and at times repudiated. Let us point to the circumstantial factors first before addressing the conceptual.

Early second-wave theory in Latin America often relied on a conceptual framework in which "patriarchy" was the dominant target of analysis and sociopolitical change. While the term "androcentrism" was also used in feminist discourse, the foundational critique of "patriarchy" (loosely understood as the socioeconomic and ideological conditions legitimating the power of men and of male-dominant institutions over women) served as the glue that bound many feminists. When "patriarchy" was posited as the unitary cause of women's oppression, the category "woman" (or the plural "women") functioned to designate the subject(s) of liberation. On one hand, the axis patriarchy–woman served to identify the subordination, exclusion, or marginality that women suffered in a patriarchal society. On the other, it served to mobilize female subjects toward their own emancipation and the transformation of a patriarchal and masculine-dominant world. In addition to the unitary account of oppression linked to the category of "patriarchy," a second focus of analysis, "capitalism," was often adopted, whether as part of, or alongside, that of "patriarchy." In this second case, feminism called for economic justice in addition to, or alongside, the end to masculine dominance. For many women who became radicalized during this period, either "patriarchy" or "capitalist patriarchy" became the object of militant protest and political transformation. Some found it politically unacceptable when feminist theory evolved, shedding these older

conceptual frameworks. The new terminology focused on "gender" as a foundational category of analysis, replacing "woman" and the corresponding notion of her exclusion/subordination in "patriarchy." A new way of speaking and theorizing about women's issues became dominant. In Latin America, it became known as "la perspectiva de género" (the gender perspective) or "el enfoque de género" (the gender focus). This category became so user-friendly that anyone could use it in politics to refer to women's issues, whether or not the intent was feminist. In many cases, the "focus on gender" was used as an alternative to feminist analysis or as a way of softening the more radical and militant critiques of patriarchy.

Moreover, the "focus on gender" came to Latin America from abroad. In the Spanish language, as a Romance language, "sex" and "sexual difference" were the usual ways of distinguishing women from men, as well as "feminine" from "masculine." Until given its prominent role in feminist theory, "género" in Spanish usually meant "species" or "kind" (as in "el género humano," humankind) or, if referring to masculine/feminine differences, its domain was grammar (gendered nouns, pronouns, and adjectives) (Schutte, 1998b). In view of these circumstantial factors, some reject not just the user-friendly "gender focus" (abused by non-feminists) but the whole category of gender as a critical category of analysis in feminist theory (Gargallo, 2007, pp. 83–5). Unfortunately, this wholesale rejection of feminist gender theory creates a great deal of misunderstandings since the uses of "gender" perspective and "gender" theory in Latin American feminist studies also include the radical questioning of gender and sexual normativity, a point that appears to be lost to its critics.

One helpful approach in this regard is offered by Urania Ungo. She notes that while the origins of the category "gender" in feminist theory (her example is Gayle Rubin's analysis of the "sex/gender system") are clearly marked within a feminist framework, nowadays the concept of gender in Central America rules over discussions far removed from the concept's original political and theoretical context (Ungo, 2002, p. 22). Ungo distinguishes the category of gender used in academic feminist theory and even among social "planners" intent on changing the subordination of women from the use of the phrases "gender focus" or "gender perspective" by women organizers who use the latter to replace a feminist vision of society (2002, pp. 23–4). The "gender focus," Ungo explains, is separated or cut off from "the body of theory not only found at its origin but which [actually] gives it its meaning" (2002, p. 24, our trans.). In this displacement of meaning, the "gender focus" becomes synonymous with "women's problems" as identified within the parameters of current masculine-dominant ideologies, whether of Left, Right, or Center. But it also erases the history of the 1960s feminisms which, from the Left, challenged the practices of masculine dominance within its ranks, placing gender alongside class in the debates over revolution and social transformation (2002, p. 25).

Intense debates as to whether to use the terminology of "women's studies" or "gender studies" have also taken place in the United States, and especially in academic programs and departments. These are complex issues and each orientation offers various advantages and limitations. It is important not to promote vilifications of one approach or another. If feminist theory is to evolve over time, we need to be able to re-signify our concerns. We need to use new categories and transformative perspectives if needed as paradigm shifts take place. Latin American feminists' translation,

adaptation, and re-signification of concepts and theories coming from abroad show the resilience of the Latin American feminist movement and of Latin American philosophy in the course of globalization processes (de Lima Costa, 2007). We emphasize that cultural *mestizaje* (mixture) and hybridity have been features of Latin American philosophy in general (Schutte, 1993) and feminist theory in particular (Montesino, 2002, pp. 275–7; Femenías, 2006, pp. 97–125). In other words, in Latin America knowledge does not respond to a homogeneous cultural, intellectual, or existential lived experience, nor should such homogeneity be held up as a normative ideal. The task is to maintain a high level of critical analysis and reflection on the ways in which various categories and terms, old and new, continue to be used.

Theorizing ethnicity/race and cultural diversity as an inherent aspect of feminist methodology

Despite the importance of categories such as gender or sexual difference in feminist critical analysis, these are insufficient to capture the complexities of women's concrete lives and vulnerabilities to discrimination and oppression. Even if we add the variable of "class" or economic sector, feminist theory in Latin America requires the consideration of race and/or ethnicity as categories aimed at articulating the obstacles and challenges to inclusiveness and participation – indeed, to having fair access to social justice – affecting members of marginalized and oppressed social groups within these categories. In Latin America, notions of race (and to some extent, ethnicity) diverge quite strongly from those traditionally operating in the United States. Given the vast majority of mixed-race people throughout the continent, so-called white privilege often extends to part of the mixed-race population, especially if they have become assimilated into the middle and upper class lifestyles and values. But race and ethnicity, or ethno-race, are not only heterodesignated; they are self-ascribed. It is important to understand the ways in which feminist theory is transformed by the practices and cognitive contributions of women who identify as members of marginalized or oppressed ethno-racial groups, identifications that motivate them in their collective protests for social justice.

From different regions (Brazil and the Caribbean, the Andean countries, the Southern Cone, and others) there emerge at least two relatively delimited lines of investigation: one concerning mulata/o and black populations; the other concerning original peoples. The situation of women within and across these groups should be conceptualized as heterogeneous. For example, in addition to intra-group gender differences, there are differences in the degree to which people adapt to or resist interaction and contact with outsiders. One underlying feature affecting members of these ethno-racial groups, nonetheless, is the historical weight of oppression embedded in state policies of racism and internal colonialism directed at their populations. It is to these conditions that feminist theoreticians of ethnicity and race turn their attention.

The Bolivian anthropologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and her collaborator Rosana Barragán (1997) published one of the first anthologies in South America on subaltern and postcolonial studies. According to Rivera Cusicanqui and Barragán the debates initiated in India in subaltern studies offer useful theoretical tools to examine the specific situation of women in Latin America and of the great popular indigenous movements whose fundamental demand is centered on the recognition of their ethnic identities.

They note, however, that unfortunately such texts from points in the global South usually reach Latin America via the influence of academics in the global North. The entry of Latin American theorists into this type of South–South discussion, they maintain, must be from their own standpoint, not one which is already mediated or heavily determined by the conceptual frameworks derived from the North. Specifically, they argue that embracing a subaltern studies criticism of colonialism and its aftermath does not mean the rejection of Western thought if only because, as postcolonial theorists have shown, one of the features of colonial education was to form subjects according to the norms and values of the colonial enterprise (Rivera Cusicanqui & Barragán, 1997, p. 13). Postcolonial critique therefore means reengaging and contesting Western thought in light of the historically given experiences of those marked by colonialism and its legacies.

In an earlier work focusing on the lives of indigenous and mestiza women in Bolivia, Rivera Cusicanqui and her research team emphasize the importance of reaching an understanding of diversity allowing for points of convergence between, on one hand, the concepts of freedom, equality, and development found in "modernizing projects" and, on the other, the cultures of peoples whose deep belief systems are extraneous to such projects (Rivera Cusicanqui, 1996, pp. 13–14). These methodological observations lead to a nuanced and highly contextualized notion of negotiating and recognizing identities and differences within a critical, dialogical, and postcolonial concept of democratic pluralism, with the goal of "accelerating the construction of a completely just society" (1996, p. 13, our trans.).

Rivera Cusicanqui denounces the conditions of "internal colonialism" in which indigenous peoples in Bolivia (and, by extension, in other parts of the Andean region) have lived up until even the last decades of the twentieth century. Despite Bolivia's formal political independence from Spain in the nineteenth century, colonialism subsisted for indigenous peoples due to the ethno-racially stratified nature of society (socioeconomic and political internal colonialism) and to the subjective, psychological "internalizing" among members of such colonized groups of a sense of social inferiority (the psychological complement of the socioeconomic and political oppression). Rivera Cusicanqui argues, methodologically, that using the separate variables of gender and ethnicity is inadequate for understanding the situation of indigenous and economically underprivileged mestiza women. "The only foundation on which to sustain a politics that overcomes gender and cultural discrimination is a good understanding and full representation of the reality of indigenous women" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 1996, p. 14, our trans.). She further explains that in addition to working with women in fully indigenous communities, such an understanding must not rule out attending to the experiences of underprivileged chola (mestiza) women in contexts exposed to modern, integrated, or mixed sociocultural settings because if they are poor, they, too, need to be considered for equitable treatment within the parameters of the larger society (1996, pp. 14–15). In other words, there must be innovative research methods aimed at understanding the heterogeneous conditions affecting the inequities faced by indigenous and mestiza women whether they are migrants or reside in their communities of origin and whether their communities are fairly traditional in ethnic terms or have been moderately or largely impacted by modernizing projects.

Rivera Cusicanqui's analysis shows that as a result of colonialism and the imposition of modern socioeconomic structures, indigenous women were doubly displaced from their traditional roles in society. In their resistance to such displacement, they tend to prioritize struggles on behalf of their ethnic and class (not necessarily gender) identities. Their struggles expose ways in which the dominant (white or white-identified) culture has declared itself "universal," thereby ethnicizing and racializing indigenous cultures as inferior. In popular movements that include some organizations led by women, the more urgent priority has been a demand for ethno-racial recognition as a necessary step for the fair distribution of resources. Correlatively, we note that feminist theory in the global North and programs of aid to women in the global South patterned on the former (whether managed by Northern or Southern elites) need to step down from their presumed universal platforms so as to allow for the transformational input of women from subaltern social and global sectors whose voices and perspectives are fundamental to an inclusive sense of feminism and democracy (Schutte, 1998a; Femenías, 2007).

Afro-descendant women in Latin America constitute another sector demanding visibility in the Latin American women's movement and in the various struggles for economic and social justice. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the social constructionist analysis of race can be very useful. The notion of race can be seen to arise out of the history of colonialism and its two-prong subordination of indigenous and African/Afro-descendant peoples: economically, through the enslavement or exploitation of these populations; culturally, through the imposition of a socio-symbolic order tied to the foundational authority and reproduction of white privilege. The intersection of dominant racialized, class, and gender norms shows how gender is racialized and race engendered, as well as the economic impact of class, which has the effect of "whitening" the more successful Afro-descendants unless they reject such identifications. But critics of the concept of "race" often see it as an illegitimate way (that is, a racist way) of classifying people into superior or inferior types. It therefore makes sense that feminists appealing constructively to the notion of Afro-descendant identity generally do so through the category of "ethno-race" or, alternatively, by incorporating "race" into the category of "ethnicity." This methodological approach denounces and rejects racism at the same time that it acknowledges the value of cultural heritages embraced by Afro-descendant peoples and the importance of empowering the members of these communities in the attainment of social justice.

Moreover, the analysis of ethno-race, researchers warn, needs to be flexible, attentive to internal differences, and capable of articulating political goals with local contexts and historical circumstances. For example, the Dominican feminist Ochy Curiel points out that although the concept of Negritude has been a starting point for political action, its essentializing capacity has led to a "largely homogenized . . . subject": the "black woman" (Curiel, 2007, p. 190, our trans.). She emphasizes that the point of Afro-descendant women's feminism, though, is to combat racism, heterosexism, and class exploitation, and not to overlook the forms of oppression experienced by Afro-descendant lesbians (2007, pp. 189–90). Another non-heteronormative feminist approach to Afro-descendant cultural practices is offered by the anthropologist Rita Segato, who has studied the religious beliefs of the Umbanda in Brazil. These beliefs often break with the concept of the "family" found in "white culture" or they may construe sex and gender identities in ways that symbolic identifications (masculine, feminine) do not

necessarily match biological sex (Segato, 2003, pp. 181–223). Curiel's and Segato's approaches show that, methodologically, the attention to concrete as opposed to abstract universals and the influence of deconstruction and postmodern feminisms have allowed more flexibility in subverting the multiple racist, heterosexist constructs of "the black woman" and "the mulata" that find their ways into the symbolic order and cultural imaginaries of Latin American and Caribbean peoples.

In a recent work, María Luisa Femenías (2007) has argued that feminist theory in Latin America needs to become self-aware with regard to its ethnic (or multi-ethnic) speaking position. This means that "white" feminists must not ethnicize the perspectives of Afro-descendants and of indigenous women, as if they (the white theorists) were not speaking from an ethnic location themselves. Femenías's argument on behalf of inclusiveness and cross-cultural dialogue is important because all too often feminist theory has focused on issues of sex and gender (or class) without paying sufficient attention to ethno-race. It is important to recognize that the social reproduction of ethno-racial forms of subordination can affect relations within women's groups as much as it does the population at large. If the goal of feminism is to overcome those structures that both produce and reproduce the subordination of women, an inclusive multi-ethnic/racial approach, open to the voices of the less privileged and critical of ethno-racial and class privilege within feminist theory and activism, is necessary.

The uses and appropriations of Foucauldian discourse theory and Butlerian deconstruction

Foucault's analysis of discourse as power-knowledge has been highly influential in opening up previously marginal areas of knowledge, such as those of Afro-descendant cultures, but more importantly, those dealing with non-normative sexualities, as we shall see next. Thus, the project of inclusion is not premised on the concept of assimilation but on a critique of the *episteme* (that is, the undisputed conceptual framework of a given historical period) that supports the practices of racism and other forms of discrimination while pretending to uphold the universal citizenship of all. Despite the fact that the critique of racism and other forms of domination can be undertaken within the general framework of a broadly "enlightened" perspective grounded in universal norms and values, when it comes to analyzing and focusing on specific exclusionary practices, some scholars have adopted the postmodern perspectives of Foucault and Judith Butler. In particular, the Chilean Olga Grau (2004) and the Brazilian Guacira Lopes Louro anchor their projects in the use of destabilizing methodological approaches including, as Lopes Louro notes, queer theory (2004, p. 57). These scholars propose an approach critical not only of exclusionary practices concerning women, but of the multiple ways in which the mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion affect numerous other aspects of individuals' lives and social relations. The use of destabilizing approaches is not intended to resolve conflicts or tensions. The goal is to put into play the constant dynamic resulting from individuals' resistance to social structures and institutions whose normalizing force continually affects the construction of their social identities, as with the case of sexual and gender identities.

One important consequence of this theoretical approach is the attention paid to discursive practices insofar as these become the sites of exclusionary practices and

norms. For example, while feminists of various methodological approaches tend to be concerned with how bodies – especially women's bodies – are represented and spoken about, whether medically, in popular culture, or other contexts, the methodological focus on exclusionary aspects of discursive practices adds a highly critical and nuanced approach to understanding violence and discrimination. When discursive practices are analyzed in terms of the normalizing and/or destabilizing aspects of power relationships, as happens in the approaches taken by Foucault and Butler, the ways in which gender and sexual identities are codified for mass distribution, regulation, and consumption can be critically assessed and demystified in a relatively straightforward, effective manner. For example, Olga Grau has shown that in Chile in the 1990s the term "family" functioned as a sign of stability, normalization, and reproduction of values across generations, whether the discourses in which the term "family" appeared came from the modern state in its post-dictatorial transition, the Chilean Catholic church, or an international body such as the United Nations. Grau calls this confluence and intensification of discursive effects "el fenómeno de la hiper-representación" (the phenomenon of hyper-representation) by which the family (as sign) comes to represent hyperbolically the value of stability, continuity, and unification in a world marked by historical processes of globalization and neoliberalism that brought about significant dislocation, fragmentation, and change (Grau, 2004, pp. 128–9). Looking at the psychological, social, and legal effects of this confluence of discursive effects from the side of those suffering its exclusionary consequences alerts us to the patterns of discrimination and violence experienced by those whose sexual identities do not conform to the heteronormative model of gender and sexuality on which the discursive practices rest and which they reiterate. In other words, Grau notes the cumulative effects of presumably independent discursive practices (church, modern state, international agencies) as these connect and intersect, pushing out through their normalizing force those very elements that call in question both the adequacy and fairness of the normalizing representations and practices.

New Orientations

The introduction of methodological perspectives associated especially with the third and fourth topics discussed above (race/ethnicity, discourse analysis) has vast consequences for a broadly understood "postcolonial" – or, as some prefer to call it, a "decolonizing" – approach to feminist philosophy in Latin America. Significant epistemic shifts are required when feminist philosophy adopts a self-critical approach to the discursive practices in which it itself engages and when part of this self-critical approach involves taking a de-hierarchized glance at the roles ethno-racial, not just class and sexual, differences may play in the cognitive models and claims undertaken. A mark of our times is no longer to focus only on the political goals of justice and equity for women (and more generally, for the marginalized and oppressed) but to pay special attention as well to the ways in which such goals are conceptualized and represented discursively for and by intellectuals and scholars, institutional agents, activists, the media, or individuals in every capacity acting by themselves or with others in efforts to bring about change. The professional training philosophers have acquired in their traditional

areas of expertise plays an important role in lending clarity, insight, and strength to feminist inquiry. Yet professional philosophy has all too often depended on a Eurocentric or an Anglocentric – not just an androcentric and heteronormative – discourse to make its case heard. The ethical (dialogic) and political (democratizing) principles engaging feminist philosophy therefore lead to a decolonizing force in its methodological orientation which, on one hand, continues to put in question the blind spots of sexism and androcentrism while, on the other, opens up space for those marginal and oppressed voices that our colonial legacies to date have silenced or kept from being fully heard.

Related chapters: 13 Liberation Philosophy; 22 Philosophy, Postcoloniality, and Postmodernity; 25 Contemporary Ethics and Political Philosophy; 30 Cultural Studies.

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A Companion to African Philosophy
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47

Feminism and Africa: Impact and Limits of the Metaphysics of Gender

NKIRU NZEGWU

For the most part, prevailing definitions of gender in African studies have come from disciplines located within the Western body of knowledge. Scholars are often unaware how much these definitions are steeped in the mores and norms of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the social conventions of European and European American cultures. These intellectual understandings of gender embody the political, social, and imperialist histories of the birth cultures. They reflect as well the binary opposition underlying Western epistemology in which women are defined in opposition to men, that is, are assigned converse attributes. ''Gender,'' Susan Moller Okin, a feminist political scientist, declares, is ''*the deeply entrenched institutionalization of sexual difference*'' (her emphasis); it maps the culture of discrimination against women (1989: 2). This construal of gender, as implying male domination of women, owes its logic to the character of the original social context of discourse in which sex differentiation equals sex discrimination. The logical grammar of the concept exposes the inequality principle that lies at the heart of male–female relationships in that conceptual framework. Much more significantly, it reveals that the analytic category of gender is cognate with the category of woman.

Here I examine two ways in which the metaphysical implications of the concept of gender affect theoretical analyses and erode the cultural specificity and the historicity of societies, such as Igbo society. I start by examining the strategies employed in the false universalization of the Western concept of woman. I will then show how the theorization of a Nigerian female scholar achieves a similar objective even as she strives to produce a culturally grounded account of the position of woman in Igboland. My objective is not necessarily to invalidate the concept of gender per se, but rather to highlight the intrusive nature of the Western metaphysics of gender on theoretical formulations in and about other cultures.

This impact begins in innocuous ways in cross-cultural philosophical analysis. The white female US philosopher, Martha Nussbaum (1995), presents a picture of emotion in Igbo culture that she uses to validate the thesis that emotion is universally viewed as female, and passivity as womanish. She opens her article with a conflicted soliloquy by Okonkwo, the protagonist in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In it Okonkwo agonizes over his killing of Ikemefuna, who had clung to him as a son. He chastises himself for falling to pieces over this killing, especially

since he had previously killed five men in battle. He worries that he has ''become a shivering old woman.'' The excerpt ends with the following self-chastisement: ''Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed.'' Without questioning whether or not this fictional account of emotion has sociological accuracy, or whether the imagery of ''shivering old woman'' is correctly understood, Nussbaum deploys the soliloquy to represent Igbo culture as sexist. On this reading, emotion is relegated to the female side of the divide, a move that allows Nussbaum to globalize the social implication of sexism and to state that, on this showing, ''Women are emotional, emotions are female.'' According to her, ''this view, *familiar in Western and non-Western traditions alike*, has for thousands of years been used in various ways to exclude women from full membership in the human community'' (1995: 360; emphasis mine). This opening strategy might well obscure the fact that Nussbaum is unproblematically treating Achebe's novel as a veridical sociological-cum-philosophical document, and is omitting examination of the specific sociologies and philosophies of the cultures in question.

The slide from fictional narrative to sociological truths may be symptomatic of the tendency to suppose that all societies – Western and non-Western alike – have the same ethical values, and that there is nothing complex or different in the conceptual categories of non-Western societies (including Igbo society). While it is important to see that this homogenization of the Western and non-Western worlds obstructs serious cross-cultural examination, it is more crucial to highlight the ways in which the false homogenization obscures contextual specificities and social complexities of a vast array of non-Western traditions. This homogenization makes them all seem unworthy of theoretical reflection. It needs to be reiterated that such appropriations of Africa legitimize, for example, the misreading of Igbo endogenous categories even when a scholar, such as Nussbaum, may be sympathetically trying to draw the cultures of Africa, China, and Micronesia into serious philosophical inquiry.

Though most commentaries on *Things Fall Apart* tend to focus on the novel's historical plot, notably, the colonial incursion and the Christianization of Igboland, readers focus less on Achebe's complex psychological study of a dysfunctional character in an achievement-oriented society. Caught in the restraining web of his obsessive fear, Okonkwo charges through life to self-destruction. The strength of the storyline is the completely believable way in which this insecure, frightened, frightful man represents a normal, well-adjusted Igbo man. The rich cultural data which Achebe skillfully marshals underwrite the plausibility of this picture. Completely absorbed with the protagonist's achievement, readers miss Okonkwo's periodic deviation from acceptable social norms. An example of this is Okonkwo's participation in the killing of Ikemefuna, the young sacrificial victim who had taken to him as a father, and the inability of his male social peers to make sense of some of his fears.

That Okonkwo's fears were not seen as normal is evident in Obierika's revulsion at Okonkwo's role in the death of Ikemefuna: ''It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families'' (1958: 46). The gravity of Obierika's disapproval is, indeed, proof that Okonkwo, a male, was *expected to show emotion*. The existence of this expectation, and the expressed distaste of Obierika, clearly reinforce the view that males' expression of emotion was not perceived as a sign of weakness in Igbo

cultural logic. From the community's point of view, as conveyed by Obierika, human-ness rather than weakness is implicit in a father's expression of love for a child who has cleaved to him as a son. Such a demonstration of emotion is appropriate for fathers since this is precisely what it means to be a father; just as Okonkwo's emotional upset at his daughter's sickness would be viewed as an appropriate response rather than a sign of weakness. That Okonkwo missed this point and misinterpreted a socially approved behavior and its corresponding psychological state as weakness is a sign of his dysfunction rather than a revelation of Igbo cultural logic.

The problem is that in the haste to universalize a specific culture's reading of emotion, Nussbaum read the passage too literally. She thus came away with a warped interpretation of the Igbo conception of emotion.

Contextual Differences

While some may want Nussbaum to show good reason why she should treat a fictive account of emotion as a sociological account, I am more concerned with the fundamental assumption implicit in her argument that the category of women is unproblematic and that it truly captures female identities in all cultures and in all contexts. I will start by asking a seemingly obvious question: are there women in Igbo society?

An automatic response would be, ''Yes, there are.'' However, shifting to the cultural logic of Onitsha (Igbo) society leads us to the word ''*nwanyi*,'' the singular of ''*umunwanyi*,'' which means offspring who are female. *Umunwanyi* is a category that distinguishes female human beings from *nwoke* (male human beings). Its primary and dominant function is to mark the biological sex of a child. Quite unlike the Western category ''woman,'' *nwanyi* marks physiological differentiation without ranking or defining females in relation to males. In the translation of Igbo concepts to English, *nwanyi* has most regularly been treated as synonymous with ''woman,'' even though they do not share the same attributes or conceptual scope. For instance, *nwanyi* does not exclusively refer to an adult female person; it refers to both children and adults. It does not imply that females are psychologically passive beings who are or ought to be submissive and subordinate to men. No social attribution is made about women's state of being or capabilities at this stage. In fact, there is no meaningful way to determine the social standing and what the temperaments of individuals in this generic category are, since their social identities still have to be independently fleshed out.

Western feminist analyses of the condition of women under patriarchy reveal, regardless of the social class or status of women, that the category ''woman'' defines women as the negative image of men. The ideology of masculinity underlying this patriarchal vision cast women as not just physiologically different, but as opposites. Men are strong and taciturn, women are weak and emotional; men are masters, women are subordinates. As feminist scholar Sheila Ruth succinctly puts it: ''[t]hey all say that women as human beings are substandard: less intelligent; less moral; less competent; less able physically, psychologically, and spiritually;

small of body, mind, and character'' (1990: 89). It is this masculist framework of the Western philosophical tradition that Nussbaum identifies as ''typical in public life'' when ''it is claimed that women, on account of their emotional 'nature,' are incapable of full deliberative rationality, and should not perform various social roles in which rationality is required'' (1995: 363–4).

As a concept of sex differentiation, *nwanyi* does not perform a similar function. This is because gender identity is a flexible, fluid state of being, and is tied to social roles and functions that demand deliberative rationality from females. Given their multiple social roles, Igbo females do not have one gender identity. The Igbo word that most closely approximates the meaning of ''woman'' in the Western imagination is *agbala.* It defines a category of self-assured, assertive females, who may or may not be married, and whose identity is not defined in relation to men. In sum, *nwanyi* and *agbala* refer to the female sex, but they do not ascribe specific social attributes, roles, or identities to them.

Meaningful social identity ascriptions take place at another level. In traditional times, and even today, within different communities, the first meaningful basis of identity is the lineage, where power is diffuse. Basic social differentiation occurs in the following categories: *umuada* (lineage daughters), *okpala* (lineage sons), and *inyemedi* (lineage wives). The principle of organization within each of these socially significant categories is seniority. Complications arise for the idea of a unitary social status for females if we examine the categories of *umuada* and *inyemedi*. Even though both refer to adult females, there are clear differences in identity and consciousness. The social nature of the relationship between *umuada* and *inyemedi* is a ''husband''/''wife'' relationship. As daughters of the lineage, *umuada* are in the social role of husbands to *inyemedi* or wives of the lineage. Consequently, *inyemedi* relate to *umuada* as wives. This husband/wife relationship of *umuada* and *inyemedi* is exactly the same that holds between *okpala* (lineage sons) and *inyemedi* (lineage wives). Under the lineage system, *umuada* (females, daughters) and *okpala* (males, sons) share the same dominant social role of ''husband'' to another group of females who are outsiders to the lineage. As outsiders, *inyemedi* or wives are socially subordinate to both lineage daughters and sons, whom they have to treat as ''husbands.'' The effect on the consciousness of females relating to another group of females on the basis of a dominant/subordinate, ''husband''/''wife'' relationship means that solidarity cannot be built on biology. This fact must be grasped before any meaningful discussion of women's capabilities can begin.

The question of capabilities cannot even be addressed without considering a still further complication. Most *umuada* (lineage daughters) who inhabit a dominant location in their natal family also belong to the subordinate category of *inyemedi* (wives). Unlike the Western marriage structure that eliminates the rights of a married daughter in her natal family, *umuada* are ever-present forces in their natal families. They assume juridical and peacekeeping roles, and regularly perform purification duties as well as funerary rites for deceased members of the lineage. By virtue of the social importance of these roles, the question of being incapable of full deliberative rationality or of being unfit ''to perform social roles in which rationality is required'' never arises for *umuada.* This is because *umuada* never occupy an inferior, subordinate position in their lineage. They are never viewed as ''less intelligent; less moral; less

competent; less able physically, psychologically, and spiritually; small of body, mind, and character.'' A dominant influence in their lineages, while still maintaining permanent residence in their marital homes, *umunwanyi* (females) routinely develop at least two different identities between which they constantly switch back and forth.

By virtue of constantly shifting identity locations, females in western Igboland are never in either a permanently subordinate or dominant situation. Though the *inyemedi* (lineage wives) is a subordinate category within a lineage, no psychological or social attributions of the sort identified by Ruth are made about their emotional being. Further mitigating the effect of the formal subordinate status are the twin categories of motherhood and seniority that effectively transform the position of *nwuye* (wife) to one of formidable importance. Additionally, in a context where, historically, females could and did marry wives, ''being a husband'' or ''being a wife'' is not open to easy physiological interpretation as it is in Western culture. (*Di*, the term that is construed to mean ''husband,'' merely refers to members of the family into which a female is married.)

Females can be both wives and husbands at the same time. Some can actually marry their own wife or wives (with no sexual relationship involved), and they can do so even when they are in a conjugal marital relationship with a male. Clearly, what this reveals are the deep conceptual differences between Igbo and US cultures, and the important sociological differences in the two cultures' conception of marriage that cannot be ignored in any determination of the intercultural relevance of the Western concept of ''woman.'' As a matter of routine, all Igbo females are husbands, given the fact that there inevitably are some females who are wives in the family lineage. Females-as-daughters always stand in a husband relationship to the females who are wives in their family lineage. Because of this relational principle, and the entailed flexibility of identities, there is no absolute female identity outside of relational ties. No Igbo female is simply a wife; the daughter identity remains in force and is never erased by the wife identity. The term ''husband'' is not equivalent to a male designation, and what a female is cannot be sorted out without determining the governing relation between the individual and others.

Western Igboland is an achievement-oriented society, and in such a society individuals (both females and males) are expected to be industrious and to excel. Consequently, a social classification that subordinates women to men, or vice versa for that matter, cannot work. The question of reserving a negative set of psychological attributes for women and positive ones for men does not arise. Females are expected to succeed too, which is why honorific expressions like *agwu* (tiger), *odogu* (the brave), *o gbatulu enyi* (one who felled an elephant) are applied across sex lines to daring, shrewd, successful individuals of both sexes. Despite contemporary modifications of Igbo culture wrought by Christianity and modern social living, the existence of such ascriptions undermines the legitimacy of Nussbaum's claim that non-Western traditions (including the Igbo) share the passive view of women. The problem with Nussbaum's account, as with many feminists' accounts too, is the utilization of European American social histories, cultural values, and norms to frame her concept of woman and then use it to interpret Igbo social practice. This illicit method of interpretation generates stereotypical conceptions of patriarchal domination in Igbo culture at the expense of more compelling accounts.

A Sticky Metaphysics

The second major, and more subtle, way in which the metaphysics of gender generates distortions occurs primarily in the writings of African women scholars. Because the concept of gender has become such an important analytic tool, many African women scholars instinctively employ it without considering its cultural nuances. For many, the impressive thesis of oppression offers a powerful analytical tool that provides a neat overarching explanation for women's obvious disadvantages in societies. We see this in Amadiume's latest book, *Reinventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion, and Culture* (1997), where she utilizes the concept of gender (a) to argue that, historically, matriarchy was the dominant ethos of sociopolitical organization and moral life in Africa, and (b) to try to establish a historical basis for the empowerment of modern African women.

According to Amadiume, in Nnobi (Igbo) society, ''the ideology of gender has its basis in the binary opposition between the *mkpuke*, the female mother-focused matricentric unit and the *obi*, the male-focused ancestral house'' (ibid. 18). This opposition of male and female and of father and mother invokes from the onset the conceptual scheme of patriarchy on which is based ''the ideology of gender.'' Amadiume's deployment of the concept of gender involves an entrenched logic which construes sex differentiation as equivalent to sex discrimination. It endows it with ontological status through treating it as ''a fundamental principle of social organization . . . that predates class and is carried over into class formations'' (ibid. 113). Faced with the fluidity of the male and female roles in the society in question, which violates the sex discrimination logic of her category, Amadiume manufactures a ''neuter gender construct'' (a ''third classificatory system''), to deal with the occasions when ''men and women share the same status and play the same roles without social stigma'' (ibid. 129). In other words, she tries to bypass the internal inconsistency of supposing that men and women who are by her theory intrinsically and definitively gendered can, at the same time, be neuter gendered.

But what does it mean to be gendered and neuter gendered at the same time? If gender is foundational, as Amadiume maintains, then the neuter construct is redundant given that only gendered bodies will share that role, and map their gender status upon it. On the other hand, if the corpus of social roles and statuses transcends the logic and politics of gender ascription, so that ''monolithic masculinization of power was eliminated'' (ibid.), then it must be that the category of gender is not really foundational. Because the shared status and roles existed historically in Igbo society, and no ''social stigma'' was attached to them, gender could not have been the operative category.

This suggests that it was the major social changes instituted during colonial rule that created some of the male-privileging traditions which today are being represented as ''customary'' or ''indigenous.'' We are led to believe that these male-privileging traditions have historically been part of a culture that is supposed to be fundamentally patriarchal, even though ''daughters were *classified as male* in relation to wives and had authority *just like their brothers*'' (ibid. 148; emphasis mine). The point is not that Amadiume does not acknowledge these historical events that

transformed Igbo society, which she does; the point is rather that she is unaware of the displacement of Igbo social history and conceptual schemes by the patriarchal force implicit in her categories of interpretation. For this reason, her acknowledgment of the historical changes wrought by colonialism does not go far enough.

A clear sign that Amadiume's acknowledgment falls short is seen in the fact that the male-privileging features of the concept of gender overwrite aspects of her descriptions of Igbo culture. Because she is committed to a gender frame of analysis, she fails to see the incompatibility between the gendered frame and the Igbo social frame. Thus, despite her brilliant insight that the flexibility of Igbo categories marks an important difference between Igbo society and European patriarchal societies, she undermines this insight by insisting on the gendered description of the surrounding culture.

Matters are substantially complicated by Amadiume's language of gender in that it produces cultural distortions in the Igbo context. It does this in the following ways. First, it injects the metaphysics of patriarchy into the cultures of western Igboland, where it positions the patriarchal scheme at the conceptual background. Second, it initiates a gender-based discourse that entrenches this scheme by making it a foil to the matriarchal scheme in the foreground. Third, it artificially opposes the *mkpuke* to the *obi* and presents this opposition as an accurate analysis of the relationship between the two units. And, fourth, it collapses sex differentiation into sex discrimination, so that all instances of difference are then made to imply discrimination. These steps, of course, guarantee her gender-mediated interpretation.

In fact, it is the conceptual complexity of Igbo culture at the foundational level that explains Amadiume's need to introduce a third category to circumvent, as it seems, the distorting effects of the constructed patriarchal structure that she had inserted into the culture. The neuter category, thus introduced, injects a false flexibility into the culture, and makes the gender-empowerment significance of the three examples she offers as proof of this flexibility problematic. These are that (1) daughters can become ''male''; (2) females can marry and become husbands; and (3) wealthy women can buy access into male associations (ibid. 149).

Given that the direction of mobility in each case is toward the male roles and status, and rarely in the female direction, these examples of social flexibility and female empowerment are hardly convincing. They preserve intact the normative status of men, men's roles, and men's relationship to women. Whatever is ''male'' is privileged and constitutes the social space of worthiness. The existence of this concealed yardstick tells us that, contrary to Amadiume's objective, her account of matriarchy succeeds paradoxically in presenting Igbo society as patriarchal, one in which women were structurally disadvantaged on the basis of sex. Interestingly, her thesis of gender flexibility reinforces this structural disadvantage by exceptionalizing the efforts of successful women. It suggests that only a few wealthy women and a few audacious females could use the ''neuter roles'' to negotiate themselves out of the unfavorable situations of inferiority she had created. In short, her observation that the Igbo social ''system was not monolithic and not rigid because gender-bending and gender-crossing were practised'' (ibid. 149) is deployed in ways that ultimately reinforce the existence of a patriarchal classificatory scheme in which males occupy privileged positions.

Chasing Shadows: Getting our Analysis Right

The theoretical difficulties in Amadiume's analyses show that there is a disjunction between her interpretation of Igbo culture and society and the reality on the ground. If the third classificatory scheme is illusory, as I contend, what does this say for the roles and status she identified as ''neuter''? Do they exist? Are there such roles and status in societies of western Igboland?

For all its claimed capacity to explain the flexibility of Igbo social structure, Amadiume's neuter category obscures the social logic of the roles it is deployed to explain. Basically, this is because it is a response to an artificial dilemma created by an interpretive scheme. Consider the ''male-daughter'' phenomenon that she represents as a neuter role. There is no such linguistic or cultural expression as *nwoke-ada*, which *is* the accurate translation of Amadiume's ''male daughter.'' This is not to say that the social institution alluded to is imaginary, but rather that her representation of it misses the mark. There used to be (and there may still be in some communities) a widespread formal institution of considerable import known as *idigbe*, *idegbe*, or *mgba*. This institution enables a daughter to remain in, or to dissolve, her marriage and return to her natal home to have, with a paramour, children who are assimilated into her own lineage.

There are two senses in which *idigbe* or *mgba* is understood. The first sense describes a situation in which a female is in a consensual relationship with a paramour. She retains her primary identity as daughter and never becomes his wife. Because no bridewealth is exchanged, *ada no na iba* (literally, the daughter in the patrilineal sanctuary) or *ada di na obi* (literally, the daughter in the patricentric unit) has sole custody of the children of the union. The children of a female in such circumstances derive their name, identity, and rights from her lineage or *obi*. In this sense, *adiba*, or *adaobi*, formally describes this status of a daughter within the lineage, and informs the community of her role. It also indicates that her children have the same status in the lineage as those of her brothers. The second sense, which is the one Amadiume constantly alludes to, is also expressed by *adiba* or *adaobi*. It designates a daughter who formally occupies the ancestral family sanctuary of fathers. This occurs on the rare occasion that there is no male successor to pass on the family name, and there is no wife of a childbearing age in the compound to produce a male child. A daughter either foregoes marriage, or ends her marriage to uphold the family sanctuary and to prevent the obliteration of the family name.

Social roles have specific purposes and their meanings and interpretations have to be sought in the relevant sociocultural context of practice. Because Amadiume did not closely attend to the cultural parameters of the roles and status she classifies as neuter, her interpretation of the *mgba* and *adaobi* institution produces fictional meanings in which the gender-loaded imagery of ''male daughter'' is invoked to explain a social phenomenon whose meaning lies elsewhere. This chosen imagery is conceptually problematic for a variety of reasons. It conflicts with the logic of *adaobi* as ''daughter in the patricentric unit.'' It problematizes the presence of this daughter exercising her responsibilities in the natal residence. Also, it implausibly

suggests that this daughter's presence is intelligible only if she is transformed into a male, a logic that casts the female presence as socially and ontologically deviant. The idea of *adaobi* implying the transformation of daughters into males wreaks havoc on Igbo cultural logic. It suggests that membership in an *obi* is predicated on ''being male'' rather than on ''being a child''; it casts daughters as less worthy than sons; and it confers value on them only if they can somehow become sons. Not only does this state of affairs misconstrue the principle of family-as-lineage formation and what it means to be a father, it also arbitrarily nullifies a daughter's membership in her own *obi*.

In concluding, it is worth reiterating that other examples abound of misinterpretations of the cultural ethos of African societies, in which the deployed concept of gender invents false bridges to explain social roles, statuses, processes, and the logic of various practices. In my analysis of the works of Nussbaum and Amadiume, historicity is revealed as the critical constraint that would have limited the free-ranging effect of the metaphysics of the concept of gender. Historicity is not the mere recitation of ''facts'' and events, it involves confronting historical events, historicizing interpretations, and using an appropriate yardstick. The combination of these three ensures that timeframes are not illicitly collapsed, that societal formations are not redefined, and that conceptual frames of different cultures are not illicitly switched. Some of the principal shortcomings in feminist analyses come from inattentiveness to historicity. Nussbaum is oblivious to it, and though Amadiume is familiar with Nigeria's colonial and contemporary history, she underestimates the impact of change, the depth of cultural distortions wrought by the categories (e.g. generic man, woman, wife) and concepts (e.g. work, domesticity, and marriage) borrowed from Britain. Because of these limitations, both scholars adopted uncritically the European and American construal of gender and its implicit thesis of female subordination. In the particular case of Amadiume, this adoption propels her toward interpretive directions that are incompatible with the reasonable, historically sound aspects of her claim that a ''monolithic masculinization of power was eliminated'' in Igboland.

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38

Misunderstanding in Paris

KAREN VINTGES

"Real nonsense," Queen Beatrix said in a radio broadcast in January 2012, commenting on the newest attack on her by politician Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch anti-immigration party, the Party for Freedom (PVV). During her visit to the Middle East, Princess Beatrix, at that time still queen of The Netherlands – as well as her daughter-in-law, Maxima – had worn a headscarf while visiting mosques in Abu Dhabi and in Oman. Wilders had called it "a sad spectacle," criticizing the queen for legitimizing women's oppression by wearing a – beautiful – headscarf. Wilders, who at some point had proposed to raise a tax on headscarves (referred to by him pejoratively as "head-rags") had previously attacked the queen for her cosmopolitan views, such as expressed in her yearly Christmas message, in which she appealed to the people to respect one another regardless of ethnic diversity.

This is yet another example of how the issue of "women's freedom" is confiscated by far-right populist parties and groups in Western Europe, in their – for a large part anti-Muslim – programs and identities. In France, Front National party leader Marine Le Pen fiercely attacks the headscarf for the same reasons as Wilders. However, the headscarf is targeted as a symbol of women's oppression not only by right-wing populist politicians but also by French feminists, who actually supported its legal banning in public schools in 2004. Many authors have signaled the confusion that exists among feminists about the issue (Christine Delphy 2006; Joan Scott 2007; Elizabeth Shakman Hurd 2008; Yolande Jansen 2013). A French professor, during a conference in Rabat in 2011, concluded that with respect to Muslim women, "feminists in Paris have completely lost their way."

The introduction above was deleted from my article for a special volume of a Parisian journal, on Simone de Beauvoir. The – overall friendly – editors had asked me very explicitly to remove "the issue of the headscarf" since, as they explained, it already had split the nation, friendships, and families, and preferably not their journal. So I mentioned the headscarf only as an example at the end – with one of the editors telling me afterwards it was a mistake, since bringing up the issue right away would have drawn more attention to their volume.

A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir, First Edition. Edited by Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer.

While Jansen (2013), Scott (2007), and many others already criticized leading French feminists' support for the legal banning of the veil in public life, what interests me here is whether Beauvoir's legacy is rightly claimed by Elisabeth Badinter and other French feminists to underpin their support for this law. Badinter, known as one of France's foremost intellectuals, in her attacks on the headscarf routinely refers to Beauvoir as her "spiritual mother," presenting her own radical Enlightenment stances as being totally "dans la lignée de Beauvoir" (Rodgers 1995; Long 2013).[1] Is she right? Or do we face a real misunderstanding in Paris of Beauvoir's work, one that reduces the complexity and richness of her legacy?

The title of my chapter, "Misunderstanding in Paris," is drawn from a posthumously published novella of Beauvoir, entitled *Misunderstanding in Moscow* (Beauvoir 2011a). In this novella Beauvoir counterposes an ethical way of life to the way of life of a "super woman" ("*femme totale*") who aims to be successful at all levels (Beauvoir 2011a, 226; Beauvoir 2013, 18). The novel *Les belles images* (Beauvoir 1968) likewise pictures the way of life of superwoman in contrast to another, ethical mode of living.

In her work *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) published two years before *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir outlines her concept of such an ethical way of life in terms of a radically situated, embodied project – a perspective that is the theoretical framework of *The Second Sex* as well, and that calls for a plural feminism in world perspective. In this chapter I first go into Beauvoir's concept of ethics, then into her work, *The Second Sex*. Next I compare Beauvoir's philosophical ideas on ethics and freedom with Badinter's in particular, and finally I return to "the issue" of the headscarf.

1. Pluralism

Beauvoir is known today as the feminist philosopher who wrote *The Second Sex* but she mainly saw herself as a novelist. Her novels, however, all convey her philosophical position, especially her concept of the ethical way of life – be it often in an indirect way, namely by counterposing such a way of life to other attitudes.

The novel *Les belles images* (1966) sketches the life of advertising designer Laurence, who has it all: a beautiful home, family, career, a house in the country. But she feels more and more like King Midas who turned everything he touched into gold. As a designer she knows too well how an attractive and successful image is put together, and she starts to look at her own life – and that of her husband and daughter – as composed of beautiful pictures. Her daughter, namely, suddenly starts to ask difficult questions. Why do we live? Why are people poor? Why is there hunger in the world? Laurence's family presses her to send her daughter to a therapist who will help her to no longer worry about other people's suffering. Even Laurence's much admired father turns out to prefer staying in the world of beautiful pictures, rather than taking action against injustice and poverty. Laurence in the end decides that her daughter should be protected from a morally empty way of life, and should be allowed to "care" and get involved in the world.

Beauvoir had seen the successful superwoman in America, and she saw her coming to Paris. Her book shows how the upper classes in Paris in the mid-1960s copied the American neo-liberal lifestyle, and started to run their own lives as mini-corporations. *Les belles images* is a timely critique of the model of personhood of the successful

neo-liberal subject, that today rapidly spreads across the globe (see Vintges 2017). In the novella, *Misunderstanding in Moscow*/*Malentendu à Moscou*, the superwoman is tackled by one of the leading actors:

> "She's the 'super woman' type," said Nicole. "There are a lot like that in Paris. They have some sort of career, they claim to dress well, to engage in sports, look after their house perfectly, bring up their children very well. They want to prove to themselves that they can be successful at all levels. And, in fact, they spread themselves too thinly, they succeed in nothing. Young women of that kind make my blood run cold." (Beauvoir 2011a, 226)

The model of the superwoman also appears in Beauvoir's novel *The Woman Destroyed* (published in French in 1967). These women claim to "succeed on every level. And they don't really care deeply about anything at all" (Beauvoir 1971, 19), as one of Beauvoir's main characters expresses it.

Beauvoir's repetition of the theme obviously serves as a counterpoint to the ethical way of life that she prefers. In contrast with the superwoman's focus on personal success, an ethical attitude that is about friendship, care, and a political commitment to the well-being of others comes forward in most of her postwar literary work. In what follows I go some more into the philosophical background of her concept of ethics, so as to establish the philosophical differences between Badinter's and Beauvoir's ways of thinking, and counter Badinter's claim that they are totally in line. As we will see, Beauvoir's concept of ethics is much more inspired by Hegel than Badinter's (neo-) Kantian approach. While Meryl Altman (2007) discusses the Hegelian influences in Beauvoir's work as a whole, and Margaret Simons (1999), Nancy Bauer (2006), and Eva Lundgren-Gothlin (1996) focus on the Hegelian elements in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, I discuss the Hegelian notions in Beauvoir's essays on ethics, especially in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) in which she explicitly targets Kantian morality.[2]

Beauvoir starts her essay by pointing to the "tragic ambiguity" of our human condition: we experience ourselves as internality and externality, mind and matter (*EA* 7). For this approach she explicitly refers to Sartre's work *Being and Nothingness*. To him, human consciousness is a "lack of being": we disclose being precisely because we are at a distance from it, in other words we disclose the world because we do not coincide with the world – and therefore we are free. This distance from the world also involves distance from other people and our separation from and enmity towards them. But we also experience ourselves as finite bodily beings. As Beauvoir phrases it, man "experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things" (*EA* 7). Ambiguity in her essay thus first of all means duality (cf. Monika Langer 2003).

But Beauvoir then takes another direction. Namely, she argues that rather than hiding from ourselves this duality or disorder from which we suffer (*EA* 8), we have to accept it. Precisely by doing so we can surpass our dual condition. If we by way of an "ethical conversion" accept our ambiguity, we "will ourselves free" ["se vouloir libre"]: we want to disclose the world, and turn into "the positive existence of a lack" (*EA* 57).

> In Hegelian terms it might be said that we have here a negation of the negation by which the positive is re-established. Man makes himself a lack, but he can deny the lack as lack and affirm himself as a positive existence. He then assumes the failure. (*EA* 13)

Accepting that we always have to disclose the world in concrete projects, we realize our existence as a presence in the world that turns into an "engaged freedom" (*EA* 10). Thus by assuming our human condition, we exactly coincide with who we are (*EA* 13). Every human being is originally free, but one can choose not to will oneself free, in "laziness, heedlessness, capriciousness, cowardice, impatience" (*EA* 25). We only realize our freedom by entering into concrete projects in the world, and ties with our fellow human beings.

Langer rightly argues that Beauvoir breaks with Sartre's approach when she speaks about human self-realization in terms of a "positive existence" and self-coincidence. Coinciding with ourselves would mean the death of consciousness for Sartre, since human consciousness involves distance and lack by definition (Langer 2003, 94). But even more crucial is the way Beauvoir fills in our positive existence as ethical selves. Throughout her essay she specifies this positive existence in terms of experiencing emotions of connectedness with the world and our fellow men, and of living in close relation to them. Wanting to disclose the world not only involves experiences of pride, joy, and passion, but also of love and friendship, hate and desire (*EA* 158; cf. 78) – while to Sartre experiencing emotion was a choice of consciousness and therefore always implied a separation from others (cf. Vintges 1996). Ethical conversion apparently synthesizes our conscious and our bodily dimension into a positive existence as incarnated, embodied consciousness, that communicates with others and directly meets them.

On this basis, reconciliation and mutual recognition by way of love and friendship are possible. Beauvoir adds, in explicit reference to Hegel's philosophy of recognition, that we need others to recognize us as free beings.[3] A thing cannot affirm a man in his existence, and recognize him "as a freedom" (*EA* 82). "Man can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men" (*EA* 72). Therefore "each one depends upon others" (*EA* 82). Beauvoir thus affirms the Hegelian idea of the interdependence of our freedom, which explains her thesis that "to will oneself free is also to will others free," or in other words that man has "to will freedom within himself and universally" (*EA* 78).

But while Beauvoir takes on Hegelian notions of the interdependent and dialogical character of human existence, and articulates these, moreover, in terms of our embodied existence in the world, contra Hegel, she also argues that we always remain concrete and finite realities. Turning into an embodied consciousness:

> rather than being a Hegelian act of surpassing ... is a matter of conversion. For in Hegel the surpassed terms are preserved only as abstract moments, whereas we consider that existence still remains a negativity in the positive affirmation of itself. And it does not appear, in its turn, as the term of a further synthesis. The failure is not surpassed, but assumed. (*EA* 13)

Later in her essay, Beauvoir explains the difference between assuming and surpassing as follows:

> There are thus two ways of surpassing the given: it is something quite different from taking a trip or escaping from prison. In these two cases the given is present in its surpassing; but in one case it is present insofar as it is accepted, in the other insofar as rejected, and that

> makes a radical difference. Hegel has confused these two movements with the ambiguous term '*aufheben*'; and the whole structure of an optimism which denies failure and death rests on this ambiguity. (*EA* 84)

While Hegel envisions a harmonious future, claiming that in a higher moral phase mankind will be united, to Beauvoir we remain finite "concrete realities" (*EA* 104). Our freedom is interdependent, but there is also always "the individual reality of our projects and ourselves" (*EA* 106), and the specificity of "the good of an individual or a group of individuals" (*EA* 145). By an ethical conversion connectedness, recognition, and reconciliation are possible, but this ethical conversion has to be practiced time and again:

> One can not imagine any reconciliation of transcendences ... they are concrete and concretely compete with others for being. The world which they reveal is a battlefield where there is no neutral ground. (*EA* 118)

Only now can we establish the principal meaning of Beauvoir's concept of an "ethics of ambiguity." Since we always remain concrete, socially embedded and embodied human beings, abstract moral theories don't make sense because in the end we can never speak for other persons or groups of persons. Moral maxims or dogmas hide the fact that we are all situated and that our choices often affect others in negative ways. Kant conceives of "the human person insofar as it transcends its empirical embodiment and chooses to be universal." But:

> it is not impersonal universal man who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men, projecting themselves towards their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and as irreducible as subjectivity itself. (*EA* 17–18)

We always deal with a plurality of projects for which ethics "does not furnish recipes." Instead of applying moral maxims "there must be a trial and decision in each case" (*EA* 134).

The principle meaning of the concept "ambiguity" in Beauvoir's text stands for the "irreducible indeterminacy" of our ethics (Langer 2003: 90). The ethics of freedom comes down to inventing our concrete actions in each situation, as if we are dealing with a work of art. Like a work of art our action has to found itself,[4] which explains why Beauvoir in *The Mandarins* even speaks of ethics in terms of an "art of living" (cf. Vintges 1996). Time and again in her essay Beauvoir stresses that there can be no a priori justification of certain ends and means.

There can be no "previous justifications which might be drawn from the civilization, the age, and the culture"; "the good of an individual or a group of individuals requires that it be taken as an absolute end of our action; but we are not authorized to decide upon this end *a priori*" (*EA* 142). When people speak about the "Nation, Empire, Union, Economy, etc.," we always have to ask ourselves which concrete individuals are involved, and which human interests are really at stake (*EA* cf. 145). An ethics of ambiguity recognizes that there can be no a priori justifications, and that every choice is situated and contingent. Such an ethics recognizes that all

actions "must be legitimized concretely" (*EA* 148), and that in each case we have to try to establish what is the main danger so to speak, being aware of the fact that "all authority is violence" and that "no one governs innocently" (1948, 108). Ethics to Beauvoir is socially situated and contingent in character.

Beauvoir counterposes her notion of a lived, contingent ethics to abstract moralities, such as Kantian maxims, that do not address the real substantive problems of daily life.[5] Her concept of a lived ethics comes close to Hegel's vision that ethical life is grounded into the existing world, in concrete social settings and forms of life. Like Hegel, she situates ethics, even arguing that our social situation can prevent us from having access to such a way of life, as was often the case for women in history (*EA* 37–8). But while, with Hegel, she grounds ethics in concrete forms of life, contra Hegel, these do not comprise the forms of life of one single community, but of a plurality of communities or groups of individuals, and of different individuals within them. Beauvoir thus points to both the collective and personal dimensions of our ethical way of life. But in the end, her ethics of ambiguity turns out to be more Hegelian than Kantian in character, in that it involves a model of an ethical self that is thoroughly situated, embodied, and embedded, be it within radically distinct social groups.

2. Misunderstanding in Paris

In *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir applies her own ethics of ambiguity, rather than Sartrean theory as is often – mistakenly – argued. Here she elaborates her argument from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that women in history have been kept "in a state of servitude and ignorance" which prohibited them from developing a personal ethical way of life, as is "the case of women who inherit a long tradition of submission" (*EA* 48; cf. 37–8). Instead, women should have access to such a way of life, and be able to turn into ethical selves. But men should turn into ethical selves as well, relinquishing their status as oppressors. Both sexes should assume their ambiguous human condition – no longer projecting onto the partner that part of their human condition that they don't accept for themselves, men having lived mostly their conscious dimension and women their bodily one. Instead, both men and women should assume both sides of their ambiguous human condition (i.e. their conscious and bodily dimension), and live as embodied consciousnesses in the world (cf. *TSS* 779/*LDS* II:573; Bauer 2001, 186ff).

The Second Sex thus entails that the attitudes of both men and women have to change, and structural societal changes are necessary for this to come about. Beauvoir does not argue for women's assimilation into existing cultures and societies, but for thorough changes in selves and societies. Not only must the economy change, but also "laws, institutions, customs, attitudes, the whole social order" (*TSS* 777/*LDS* II:569). While she, conforming to her belief in the contingency of all morals, does not provide any blueprints for a future society, she does hint at a new kind of - humane - socialism that acknowledges care activities as an integral part of social processes, "where classes would be abolished but not individuals" and where recognizing woman would not mean being "blind to her singular situation" (cf. *TSS* 69/*LDS* I:103). But such a socialism does not exist. The liberated woman is nowhere to be found, not in the United States, nor in France, nor in the so-called socialist countries (*TSS* 776–7/*LDS* II:570).

From Beauvoir's perspective, we can ask ourselves to what extent women in the west are the liberated subjects that they claim, and are claimed, to be. Superwoman in current neo-liberal societies usually hires other – often immigrant – women as servants, so as to be able to manage her life as a successful enterprise. Would Beauvoir consider her liberated? She made it clear that she was not interested in the successes of upper-class or otherwise privileged women. "The successes of some few privileged women neither compensate for nor excuse the systematic degrading of the collective level" (*TSS* 154/*LDS* I:222). She believes societies should turn in new directions for women's liberation to take place, a liberation that would involve men's and women's transformation into ethical rather than neo-liberal selves (cf. Vintges 2017).

Badinter thus misunderstands Beauvoir's philosophical position when she presents her own stances as "totally in line" with Beauvoir's. Badinter endorses the Western Enlightenment claim of progress by Reason, and takes current Western societies as the outcome of such a process and therefore as the superior model of self and society whose culmination is women's liberation. On this basis, Badinter and other French feminists consider themselves entitled to speak for others, more specifically for Muslim women and girls, whom they regard as victims of a culture that, not being based on Reason, is not yet liberated, and who have to be rescued by law from wearing a headscarf.

Beauvoir concluded in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that we have to reject any "false objectivity" and always be aware of the finiteness of our undertakings (*EA* 157). Humanity will always aspire to act upon everything and to know everything. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the dream of a universal science has developed which "also admitted a universal power." But it was "a dream 'dreamed by reason'... none the less hollow, like all dreams" (*EA* 121). In the name of Reason, however, Badinter fiercely defends the ideology of French laicism, a secularist doctrine that is rooted in "neo-Kantian liberalism" and that involves the radical separation of church and state. The state model of laicism ensures freedom of conscience in the private sphere, but as a state does "neither recognise, nor pay, nor subsidise any religion" (Jansen 2013, 205). The legal banning of the headscarf in public places in 2004, and later of the burqa in 2010, is rooted in this ideology that claims to defend the equal rights of citizens against communitarian tendencies and religious forms of identity politics that undermine the neutral state based on Reason.

However, as Jansen demonstrates, in practice, the situation is far more complicated than the philosophical doctrine of laicism suggests. In France, as in many other countries, the state finances all kinds of religious associations and even private religious schools for instance, thus accommodating religion within the public sphere. Moreover, according to many the headscarf law in fact cannot be deduced from laicism, since wearing a headscarf is a private matter. Rather, the legal banning of the headscarf involves a culturalization of citizenship, that is, the privileging of certain models of personhood as a prerequisite for being a citizen. The ideology of radical secularism – as opposed to a moderate type of secularism – comes down, in the end, to discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities (see Jansen 2013, 40, 287–8), and to a politics of forced assimilation – which only contributes to processes of radicalization among Muslim youth.

Badinter, however, sticks to the model of French laicism that, according to her, liberates women and must be defended at all costs (cf. Badinter 1989 and 2006). Badinter and other French feminists who refer to the universal principles of laicism when

supporting the legal banning of the headscarf ultimately act like Kantians, who in the name of Reason, aspire to act upon everything and to know everything. They claim objectivity but – to paraphrase Beauvoir's words – their dream dreamed by Reason is hollow, like all dreams. Although Badinter claims Beauvoir as her "spiritual mother" (Rodgers 1995, 147), she totally overlooks Beauvoir's concern for the situatedness and ambiguity of any morals. She, in fact, takes the opposite stance, rejecting any ambiguity whatsoever. "It's my Cartesian education. I see ambiguity and I want to pierce through it. I am a fanatic of clarity. In this one sense, I am not a *philosophe* but an ideologue" (Badinter, quoted in Kramer 2011).

We have seen that according to Beauvoir we should always evaluate the main danger confronting us on a case-by-case basis, instead of applying fixed rules or abstract maxims. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* she refers to a novel by Paul Claudel about a husband claiming to be his wife's "gardener." We can only be shocked by the arrogance of such a thought: "for how does he know that he is this enlightened gardener? Isn't he merely a jealous husband?" (*EA* 138). Paraphrasing the above, if Badinter takes the headscarf as a sign of women's oppression per se, how does she know that she is the enlightened gardener? For many Muslim women and girls in Western Europe, wearing a headscarf forms part of their Islamic culture and belief and as such of their ethics: wearing a headscarf to them is not a matter of compulsory veiling, but part of their ethical way of life.

As Judith Butler aptly notes in a critique of Badinter, the meaning of wearing a veil varies:

> On some issues, I give Badinter a lot of credit. But what's appalling now is her assumption that a veiled woman means submission and oppression. A veil can mean belief, it can mean belonging to a group, it can mean, perhaps, a woman's negotiation between private and public space. It's about the right to "appear" – to appear as who you are – and it's clear that you need the right to "appear" in order to take part in democratic life. (Butler, quoted in Kramer 2011)

Obviously, when the veil is imposed on women by law, the meaning of the headscarf is oppressive. This is the case, for example, in Iran, where women are heavily intimidated and punished if they don't cover themselves. But even then women's own perspectives should be decisive. During the Khomeini revolution, in March 1979, Beauvoir delivered a speech at a press conference in Paris on the eve of a trip to Iran by an international women's delegation. A large number of Iranian women had asked international feminists for help. In her speech, Beauvoir summarizes that the women's delegation's first task is acquiring information concerning the struggle of the Iranian women, communicating that information, and supporting their struggle. She concludes: "I repeat that this matter is essentially an effort of gathering information, an information gathering mission in order to put ourselves in contact with Iranian women, in order to know their demands and the ways in which they plan to struggle" (Beauvoir 2015, 269). She emphasized the need to support Iranian women from their point of view, instead of imposing the point of view of Western feminists.

Muslim women activists and feminists with and without headscarves all over the world are involved in struggles for change, step by step inventing new mentalities and

socio-cultural changes (Ahmed 1992; Sadiqi 2016; Vintges 2017). From their own perspectives they will also contribute to the bridging of gaps between what risk becoming polarized parts of Western European populations.

The Islamophobia and daily racism against Muslims in Western Europe are still increasing, especially with the rise of extremist forms of Islam like the Islamic State and new terrorist attacks by jihadis in Western European cities. Wilders and le Pen are united today in their plans to create a far-right union in the European Parliament, declaring their friendship and their mutual bond. In other Western European countries anti-immigrant parties and movements as well are on the rise, such as PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident) in Germany, and the Swedish party, Swedish Democrats. Le Pen's Front National is expected to shape the political debate in France in the coming years, as it is moving from the margins to the centre of French politics. Badinter caused a scandal when she said in an interview in *Le Monde*, titled "Un peu de kantisme dans notre société serait bienvenu"/"some Kantianism in our society would be welcome," that apart from Le Pen no one in France defends the model of *laïcité* any longer (Badinter 2011). She later commented that her irony was misunderstood, but Le Pen immediately responded by praising Badinter for praising her.[6]

During the Algerian war, Beauvoir did not hesitate to identify the main danger. She was among the first French intellectuals to oppose the French colonial wars in Vietnam and Algeria, and was appalled by the widespread chauvinism and racism in France towards the 200,000 Algerian Muslims who lived there. She defended the Algerian Muslim woman Djamila Boupacha, who was captured by the French army and tortured. She did so via a letter in the French press and by forming an action committee together with Boupacha's lawyer Gisèle Halimi (see among others Murphy 1995; Kruks 2005; Khanna 2008). Boupacha was an active member of the National Liberation Front (FLN) of Algeria, which led the struggle for independence against France. For Beauvoir, Boupacha was a freedom fighter who rightly and courageously assumed her identity as an Algerian woman. From Beauvoir we can learn that feminists worldwide should support other women in their own struggles, instead of – paraphrasing the words of Beauvoir quoted above – deciding on their good a priori, on the basis of justifications drawn from their own civilization and culture, or on the basis of universal Reason. Feminist approaches, in other words, should be cross-cultural, plural, and contextual. Without claiming former Queen Beatrix as a feminist, I think this is what she meant when she disqualified Wilders' judgment of the headscarf as "real nonsense."

Notes

1 In almost every interview, Badinter positions herself as Beauvoir's spiritual heir. Long (2013), in addition to discussing Badinter's ideas in this respect, gives an extensive account of Badinter's active support for the headscarf ban.

2 Beauvoir mentions Hegel 35 times in her essay. Chantélle Sims (2012) also focuses on the Hegelian elements in Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

3 In her war diaries, Beauvoir goes into detail regarding her reading of Hegel's works in the Bibliothèque Nationale, from July 1940 onwards (see Beauvoir 2009).

4 'Not that we are likening action to a work of art … but because in any case human transcendence must cope with the same problem: it has to found itself' (*EA* 130).
5 In several other places in her work she as well criticizes Kantian universalism, for example in *The Long March*, and in *The Second Sex* (*TSS* 650; *LDS* II:419–20).
6 After installing a Simone de Beauvoir prize in 2008, Badinter and other leading French feminists chose to give it to Dutch politician and author Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who at the time was an outspoken anti-Islam publicist. See van Leeuwen and Vintges (2010).

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