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Dichotomous Logic and the Failings of Girlboss Feminism: Multiplicity Beyond Man's Episteme

By Grace Robinson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of Senior Independent Study

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The College of Wooster
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Abstract

My Independent Study thesis is divided into three chapters. In Chapter 1, I explore the manner in which our colonial and gendered order revolves around a universalized and fragmented episteme. Such an episteme manufactures a dichotomous logic, separating people into categories such as the colonizer/native and man/woman. These categorizations serve to center and uplift white, bourgeois, heterosexual men as embodying ideal humanity, and assigning deviance, irrationality, and bestiality to all of those who do not fit in. I will discuss the way that such a framework was constructed and perpetuated to support patriarchal and colonialist aims, exploring the way that it impacted/impacts white women, colonized men, and those who lie at the intersections of multiple identities. After examining the historical roots and legacy of this logic, Chapter 2 investigates the manner in which it is still utilized within mainstream Western feminism. I argue that by accepting the dominance and exclusion present in the hegemonic episteme, girlboss feminism only serves the interests of a small privileged few and perpetuates the dichotomous hierarchies that it purports to challenge. Finally, in Chapter 3, I provide an account of a few epistemic tools of feminist resistance that serve to challenge an episteme of oppression. Through poetic knowledge and curdled logic, I argue that we can dismantle the dominant claim to pure categorization and universality. And in using these tools, we can form coalitions among women that embraces, rather than disregards, plurality, particularity, and relationality.

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Introduction

Our social reality is deeply patriarchal. Men have created and systematically sustained institutions that privilege their voices, visions, and bodies, while degrading others. Such structural sexism has limited and continues to limit women's ability to flourish. Feminist theory and action has a crucial role in challenging a masculine claim to dominance: at its best, it advocates for methods to unravel our current conditions and creates new webs of meaning that point towards a liberatory future. I went into this project, however, because there was something about the feminism that I knew that felt fundamentally misguided. Mainstream Western feminism told me that the solution to patriarchal power was to give more women a seat at the table. It told me that women's liberation comes from professional and capitalistic success, becoming CEOs, politicians, bankers, and lawyers, just like men. It told me that through relentless rising and grinding, all women could become their own bosses, finally breaking through the glass ceiling and sitting comfortably at the top.

I believe that this sort of feminism is aiming at the wrong target. In a society reliant upon structures of exploitation, domination, and oppression, it is impossible for all women to achieve a state of complete girlbossery. Those who have this ability will likely already have a large amount of privilege to begin with. And still, the overarching system remains largely unchallenged, perpetuating gendered, racial, and class hierarchies that ultimately serve white upper-class men more than anyone else. If a feminism is ignoring the needs of the vast majority of women in favor of a select elite, then it is insufficient. Girlboss feminism does not fight against many of the practices, theories, and institutions that hurt women; rather, it often solidifies them, using them as a platform to give a few

women a taste of masculinist power. In this project, I aim to illustrate the toxicity inherent in our current system of knowledge, discuss the overwhelming replication of this system in Mainstream Western feminism, and finally suggest feminist epistemic tools of resistance, those that radically and creatively invite us to think of ourselves and our world anew.

In Chapter 1, “Dichotomous Logics, Purity, and Dominance,” I explore features of the Western episteme (or hegemonic grid of knowledge), that perpetuates structures of dominance and oppression. Our theories, practices, and institutions revolve around a particular sort of human, what philosopher Sylvia Wynter refers to as Man—He who is white, male, bourgeois, heterosexual, and Christian. Through pure, dichotomous logics, Man pits His “ideal” features against others: you are either man *or* woman, white *or* nonwhite, heterosexual *or* homosexual, etc. These dichotomies are utilized to elevate Man to a status of ideal humanity, subjectivity, and rationality, and degrade those who do not fit in. I highlight two dichotomies that have been used to structure Man’s dominance—man/woman and colonizer/native. Through analyzing the Western philosophical canon from the ancient to modern period, I track the manner in which these social hierarchies have been justified and upheld. Finally, I examine the effects that dichotomous logics have on people who hold multiple othered identities, noting the manner in which they are often erased within a lens of purity.

In Chapter 2, “Girlbossery, or the Failings of Mainstream Western Feminism,” I discuss the shortcomings of one common feminist response to Man’s dominance—“leaning in,” which suggests that the remedy to patriarchy is having more women in high-ranking positions. To illustrate the potential issues in such a theory, I examine Betty

Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, the instigator of a widespread lean-in approach among feminists in the beginning of the second wave. In her book, Friedan solely focuses on the issues plaguing the 1960s-era American housewife, yet treats such a figure as if her experience is reflective of all women's oppression. By making this association, Friedan ignores the vast majority of women, excluding them from participating in her solution. Furthermore, she does little to fundamentally challenge Man's episteme, one that relies on the exploitation and dominance of others. In vying to get a small amount of already-privileged women into jobs of capitalistic prestige, Friedan and the Lean In movement as a whole will inevitably perpetuate the oppression of women who hold multiple othered identities. I argue that this is a tremendously insufficient feminist solution.

Finally, in Chapter 3, "Tools of Epistemic Resistance," I propose an alternative feminism, one that provides alternative ways of conceptualizing ourselves and our world. Rather than accept an episteme of dominance, I envision feminist theory and action that challenges dichotomous and categorical logics. I emphasize the importance of poetic knowledge in thinking about ourselves as embodied, relational beings, instead of accepting Man's obsession with becoming transcendent and unified wholes. I go on to discuss curdled logic, which rejects Man's dichotomous logic and claim to universality—through dwelling at the intersections of multiple identities, the practitioner of curdled logic highlights the absurdity inherent in such categories. I conclude with motioning towards a pluralistic account of feminism, and discuss how women can build coalitions of resistance while also holding onto to their multiplicity.

Patriarchy is complex and multifaceted, with many different manifestations depending on space, time, and culture. I do not claim to address all of the nuances of such

an order, nor do I want to declare that I have found an exhaustive or perfect feminist solution. My intention in this project is not to create a universal and impenetrable theory. However, in providing an account of manner in which the Western episteme begets patriarchal hierarchy and detailing the failings inherent in the common Lean In response, I hope to gesture towards strategies and actions that will prove useful in getting us out of our current oppressive structures. Just as all folks, I am couched in my own positionality, my perspectives intrinsically tethered to my body, relationships, communities, and experiences; therefore, just as all theories, this project is reflective of my viewpoint, my biases, my epistemic insights and blind spots. In order to fully uproot hegemonic systems of exploitation, feminists must engage in rigorous and relentless processes of critique, both against the episteme they are challenging and the knowledge they are curating. In this project, I aim to illustrate the profound importance that this critique holds in refuting systems of dominance and creating viable liberatory alternatives.

Chapter 1: Dichotomous Logics, Purity, and Dominance

How we come to understand the world around us is defined and limited by the larger webs of meaning and implicit background assumptions of our society. 20th century philosopher Michel Foucault refers to this prevailing knowledge structure as an episteme:

By episteme, we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way in which, in each of these discursive formations, the transitions to epistemologization, scientificity, and formalization are situated and operate... the episteme is not a form of knowledge or type of rationality, which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyzes them at the level of discursive regularities.¹

For Foucault, the time, place, and culture in which we reside serves as the epistemological foundation for all the knowledge that we accrue. All cultures are undergirded by such epistememes, creating a formalized system in which we can come to understandings about ourselves, others, and the world around us. However, there are also epistemological and practical dangers that come with such a deep-set structure: these underlying grids of knowledge often go unchecked and unanalyzed, so thoroughly rooted into the people who live within them that they cannot conceive of other options.

Furthermore, these epistememes often emerge from structures of power. Foucault sees knowledge and power as intrinsically tied to one another, with a mutually reinforcing

1. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Rupert Swyer, (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 191.

relationship: people who have knowledge of their world are better able to manipulate and control it, and those with power can create and sustain knowledge that serves their interests. Therefore, the webs of meaning that come from an episteme are often reflective of hierarchal power structures, whether implicitly or explicitly, and thus define the realities of the social world and its inhabitants: “if you and I cannot discern or recognize the kind of person we are and could be, we are trapped, imprisoned within a customary order of things, with fixed cultural norms and background assumptions; ensnared in an episteme.”²

There are many features of the Western episteme that have evolved alongside structures of power and hierarchy. Decolonial philosopher Sylvia Wynter articulates this progression incredibly articulately: stemming from the beginnings of the European colonial project in the 15th century, the European episteme has been saturated in rigid social dichotomies that have upheld the humanity of a certain sort of individual at the expense of all others. This individual was Man, identified as male, European, Catholic, high class, and heterosexual.³ It was only Man who was viewed within the episteme as representing ideal humanity. Because He was endowed with this great intrinsic value, this dominant web of meaning espoused that it was Man’s duty to pioneer, to spread His superior rationality to all corners of His world. All other people who did not fit into Man’s criteria for ideal subjectivity, such as women, native peoples, and those of a lower class status, necessarily required paternalism and spiritual salvation, justifying structures

2. Lee McBride, *Ethics and Insurrection: A Pragmatism for the Oppressed*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 19.

3. Sylvia Wynter, “The Pope Must Have Been Drunk, The King of Castile a Madman: Culture as Actuality, and The Caribbean Rethinking Modernity,” in *The Reordering of Culture: Latin America, The Caribbean and Canada in the Hood*, eds. Alvina Reprecht and Cecilia Taiana, (Ottawa: Carleton, 1995), 24-6.

of dominance and oppression. As time progressed and the episteme shifted, the definition of Man changed with it. With the Protestant Reformation and Enlightenment emphasizing reason and individual thinking, the 18th century conception of Man moved to accommodate a shifting episteme while still upholding similar power structures: the ideal human being—Man 2—was now male, Christian individualist, bourgeois, heterosexual, racially white/genetically superior, and a bearer of inalienable rights.⁴ Just as the schema that came before it, those who could not assume this status were deemed fundamentally deficient, in need of scientific “development” or discipline. The ability to instrumentalize this episteme to control and exploit others was in part due to a claim to supraculturalism, or transcendence of culture. Even though Man and His claim to embodying ideal subjectivity was predicated upon an episteme particular to a specific time, culture, and place, it nonetheless represented “its own local culture and its conception of the human, as natural, supracultural, and isomorphic with the human species.”⁵ In making a claim to have a one-to-one relationship with what it means to be human, Man lived within and sustained an episteme that supported His claim to power, one that provided scientific and theological justifications for His innate superiority and duty to propagate the world. Man saw Himself as able to grasp objective truth through the use of scientific reasoning and ideal rationality, categorizing the things of His world into tidy categories and delineating the epistemic boundaries of intellectual, social, and spiritual knowledge.

This episteme has profound effects for all who live within it. In her article “Purity, Impurity, and Separation,” philosopher María Lugones explores the manner in which a

4. Wynter, 27-9.

5. Wynter, 17.

hegemonic logic of purity shapes our identities and modes of being. As the ideal subject, Man is presented as a pure unity, as without multiplicity, as a complete whole. Thus, His world also must be fundamentally unified, able to be understood through abstraction and categorization from the perspective of the ideal detached observer.

I see this reduction of multiplicity to unity as being completed through a complex series of fictions. Once the assumption of unity underlying multiplicity is made, further fictions rationalize it as a discovery. The assumption makes these fictions possible, and they, in turn, transform it from a simple assumption into a fiction. The assumption of unity is an act of split separation; as in conceiving what is multiple as unified, what is multiple is understood as internally separable, divisible into what makes it one and the remainder... [This assumption] generates the fictional construction of a vantage point from which unified wholes, totalities, can be captured. It generates the construction of a subject who can occupy such a vantage point. Both the vantage point and the subject are outside historicity and concreteness. They are both affected by and effect the reduction of multiplicity. The vantage point is privileged, simple, one-dimensional. The subject is fragmented, abstract, without particularity... The ahistoricity of the logic of purity hides the construction of unity.⁶

This fiction of a unified world follows from Man's urge for control: it is through the creation of unity that He can claim a supreme ability to grasp such unity, to formalize and systematize it. Despite being irrevocably tethered to His episteme, Man yet again claims supraculturalism and universality—as a detached observer, He is epistemically privileged

6. María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 128.

in a way that others are not. Reason is what unifies Him, what distinguishes Him from the subject in multiplicity who “perceives, understands, grasps its world as multiple sensuously, passionately as well as rationally without the splitting separation between sense/emotion/reason... [lacking] the unidimensionality and the simplicity required to occupy the privileged vantage point.”⁷ Man’s chief project to assert Himself as transcendent is to remove himself from any markers of culture; He is without race and gender, detached from the markers that weigh others down into their bodies, into their multiplicities. Intellectual practices and institutions revolve around this claim to ideal, unified rationality, reinforcing Man’s knowledge and feeding into power:

His production as pure, as the impartial reasoner, requires that others produce him. He is a fiction of his own imagination, but his imagination is mediated by the labor of others. He controls those who produce him, who to his eyes require his control because they are enmeshed in multiplicity and thus unable to occupy the vantage point of control... The lack [of unity and purity] is symbolically produced by marking the producers as gendered, racialized, and “cultured.”⁸

It is through the marking of these bodies as tainted that Man’s purity becomes possible. Dirty with need, emotion, and sensuality, they stand opposed to Man’s clean and detached rationality. Such impure subjects require taming and control—they need His order, His unified episteme. It is from the logic of purity that fragmentation and dichotomies arise:

7. Lugones, 129.

8. Lugones, 131.

To the extent that he is fictional, the tainting is fictional: seeing us as tainted depends on a need for purity that requires that we become “parts,” “addenda” of the bodies of modern subjects—Christian, white bourgeois men—and make their purity possible. We become sides of fictitious dichotomies. To the extent that we are ambiguous—non-dichotomous—we threaten the fiction and can be rendered unfit only by decrying ambiguity as nonexistent—that is, by halving us, splitting us. Thus, we exist only as incomplete, unfit beings, and they exist as complete only to the extent that what we are, and what is absolutely necessary for them, is declared worthless.⁹

An episteme of purity, and thus Man’s claim to power, rely upon a dichotomous logic, in which the world’s inhabitants can be neatly identified as one thing or another: they are either Man (rational, transcendent, ideally human) or non-Man (irrational, bodily, depraved). There is no ambiguity to these categories, no gray area in which the multiplicitous subject can find themselves. Such a pure logic, after all, was not intended to account for such nuance—it is a fictitious creation, serving the interests of he who has the power to claim pure knowledge.

In an episteme that claims to be supracultural and impartially rational, Man has curated a grid of knowledge that has placed Him as its central subject, upholding His dominance, control, and appeal to superiority. This power is reinforced partially through a rigid dichotomous logic, one in which non-Men are framed as holding characteristics deemed lacking by the episteme, placed in neat boxes that directly contrasts them to the greatness of Man. Through stereotyping and gross generalizations, Man has sustained a

9. Lugones, 131.

logic of purity that degrades and fragments the vast majority of people who live within it in order to uplift a few. The lover of purity says that you are either man *or* woman, white *or* non-white, heterosexual *or* queer, bourgeois *or* low-class, Christian *or* pagan, abled *or* deformed. Furthermore, if you exist in one or many of these othered categories, you are caricatured by the episteme, your multiplicities and fluidity erased in order to fulfill Man's need for unity. This dichotomous logic is crucial in abetting Western structures of hierarchy: it both justifies Man's dominance and sets tremendous epistemological boundaries for how the inhabitants of the episteme think about themselves, their interpersonal relations, and the social world as a whole.

In this chapter, I will examine two crucial dichotomies that have structured Western patriarchal and colonial hierarchies of power—man/woman and colonizer/native—through exploring the presence of such logic throughout the Western philosophical canon. This sort of thought is overwhelmingly pervasive, tacitly perverting even the most brilliant and foundational minds of the discipline. Although there is an urge to dismiss these less savory theories and focus on their more appealing works, I argue that it is crucial to view them as part of their overall collection. These dichotomous philosophies delineate certain folks as fundamentally less rational and human, which has profound implications for other epistemological and ethical works that often center themselves around the “rational subject”. Such a radical level of exclusion has incredibly important consequences, as it works to further justify and sustain an episteme of dominance. Although it is often framed as a detached armchair discipline, philosophy is tangible and it is everywhere; it affects the way we think and find meaning, and in turn shapes the reality in which we live. The dichotomous logic shown throughout the

Western canon demonstrates the melding of theory and practice, the interplay between Man's knowledge and power, as it both emerges from a fragmented social world and reinforces it.

Man/Woman

The history of Western philosophy shows a rather pervasive masculinist through line. Many of the most foundational philosophers have essays solely devoted to arguing for men as more rational, capable, and human. These works, often overlooked today in favor of centering their more palatable theories, demonstrate the acceptance of an episteme that centers and values the bodies, minds, and experiences of men over women, as well as a dichotomy that puts "men" and "women" into two tidy and separate categories. Regardless of the school of thought in which they reside, rationalism or empiricism, idealism or realism, misogyny seems to be a point of agreement, a unifying force that has upheld patriarchy throughout the Western episteme. Such dichotomous and degrading ideas places men into the realm of ideal subjectivity, capable of achieving (or approaching) ultimate rational perfection, while women are typically denigrated as simple bodily helpmates, wayward and inverted. Through the prevalence of this gendered dichotomy, the Western philosophical canon reflects and strengthens patriarchal structures of dominance.

Aristotle (384-322 BC), one of the fathers of modern philosophy, argued for the innate difference between the sexes in his book *Generation of Animals*. He centers men as those who possess "the principle of movement and generation,"¹⁰ due to their ability

10. Aristotle, "On the Generation of Animals," in *Philosophy of Woman: Classical to Current Concepts*, ed. Mary Briody Mahowald (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 23.

to produce pure, generative semen. It is the male's semen that contains the principle of Soul, which is able to create life. Men have enough natural heat in their bodies so that they are able to purify their semen into a concoction for "ultimate nourishment."¹¹ While men have this perfection, women's bodies are marked with inferiority. Their semen—menstrual blood, according to Aristotle—is reflective of their cold and infertile bodies; "the female, in fact, is female on account of inability of a sort, viz., it lacks the power to concoct semen out of the final state of nourishment because of the coldness of its nature."¹² While the man bestows the movement, soul, and life necessary for conception, woman's function in reproduction is reflective of her elemental bodily state; she passively provides the matter in which the male can endow life. Obviously, Aristotle notes, the Soul is far better and more divine than the material, and being a strong, hot, generative being is far more perfect than being a weak, cold, passive one. Therefore, he concludes, "we should look upon the female state as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature."¹³

Just as many of his theories, Aristotle's argument for the innate superiority of men tremendously influenced the philosophical ideas that came after it. As time progressed, influential Western philosophers, the vast majority of whom were men, continued to investigate inherent differences between men and women in order to support their misogynistic theories of gender. One arena in which these ideas took flight was within Christian philosophy, which often utilized previous philosophical reasoning and concepts

11. Aristotle, 27.

12. Aristotle, 24.

13. Aristotle, 28.

to vouch for a patriarchal Christianity. The Christian faith already had gender hierarchy baked into its Scripture: "...man is made in God's image and reflects God's glory. And woman reflects man's glory. For the first man didn't come from woman, but the first woman came from man. And man was not made for woman, but woman was made for men."¹⁴ According to the Bible, the first man, Adam, is the original creation and glory of God, while woman, Eve, is the creation of man, attached to him. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), a Christian philosopher inspired by Greek thinkers, shaped much of the modern Christian theologian system. He utilized scripture in his work *The Trinity* to define and perpetuate a patriarchal gendered order. From studying the Bible, he concludes that:

... the woman together with her husband is the image of God, so that the whole substance is one image. But when she is assigned as a help-mate, a function that pertains to her alone, then she is not the image of God; but as far as the man concerned, he is by himself alone the image of God, just as fully and completely as when he and the woman are joined together into one.¹⁵

Man is quite literally centered as the direct subject of God's divinity here. Created from God, he reflects His image both autonomously and in a married unit. While man innately embodies the glory of God, woman serves as man's dependent; she is imperfect and undivine if she is not fulfilling her role as helpmate, as wife. Woman for Augustine, just like Aristotle, is thereby synonymous with a sort of fundamental depravity.

14. 1 Corinthians 11:3, 7-9.

15. Augustine, "The Trinity (from Book XII)," in *Philosophy of Woman: Classical to Current Concepts*, ed. Mary Briody Mahowald (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 47.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a prominent Christian theologian, synthesized both Augustine and Aristotle's work to refine and strengthen Christian conceptions of gender. In "On the First Man," he reinforces a rigid distinction between the purposes of men and women: Aquinas accepts Aristotle's premise that "the active power of generation belongs to the male sex, and the passive power to the female," but he further deepens the divide, arguing "man is further ordered to a still nobler work of life, and that is intellectual operation."¹⁶ Just as Augustine, this innate physical and intellectual superiority is proven for Aquinas in Scripture; as he finds, "the first man, in likeness to God, was the principle of the whole human race,"¹⁷ embodying his image and perfection, while the first woman was fashioned from man, naturally less close to divinity. Even though Aquinas concedes that women are inherently misbegotten and were foreseen by God to be a source of sin for man, he nevertheless argues that their existence serves a purpose: "it was necessary for woman to be made, as the Scripture says, as a *helper* to man; not, indeed, as a helpmate in other works, as some say, since man can be more efficiently helped by another man in other works; but as a helper in the work of generation."¹⁸ Men are capable of conducting the important matters on their own, but women still have occasional use to them as the passive providers of the matter that will carry their generative and soulful seed. Furthermore, as she is fashioned from him, man loves and protects his weaker and less dignified wife, guiding her through his superior strength, reason, and wisdom. Through both Scripture and the refinement of its ideas by theologians such as Augustine

16. Thomas Aquinas, "On the First Man," in *Philosophy of Woman: Classical to Current Concepts*, ed. Mary Briody Mahowald (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 55.

17. Aquinas, 56.

18. Aquinas, 55.

and Aquinas, Christianity's widespread popularity was accompanied by the increasing reification of dichotomous gender roles that placed man as the center of God's creation, with woman as misbegotten and destitute.

The legacy of these thoughts was shown in the beginnings of modern philosophy around 500 years later. Even philosophers who did not claim any strong religious beliefs accepted many of its dichotomous assumptions around gender. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), a foundational Enlightenment philosopher, was heavily concerned with the relationship between the individual and society, namely, how to reconcile natural individual freedom with necessary social structures. One of his most foundational ideas is the social contract, an agreement among members of a society to cooperate for larger social benefits—such a theory served as a framework for future liberal governments. His book *Emile* is centered around the philosophy of an educational system within this social contract, one that facilitates man's natural development while encouraging them to become ideal citizens. It illustrates its philosophy with the fictional character of Emile, following his transition from boy to man through the ideal education given by his tutor. Although the book largely revolves around the education of man, Rousseau allocates a chapter to define the proper education for Emile's female counterpart, Sophie. Rather than the rigorous intellectual and physical teachings assigned to men, Sophie's education revolves around preparing her to become the ideal wife for Emile. This distinction is a crucial one for Rousseau, as it illustrates the innate differences between the sexes: the "perfect man" and the "perfect woman" have discrete and complimentary virtues. Following the thoughts of both Aristotle and later Christian philosophers, Rousseau states:

It is part of the one [man] to be active and strong, and of the other [woman] to be passive and weak. Accept this principle and it follows in the second place that woman is intended to please man. If the man requires to please the woman in turn the necessity is less direct. Masterfulness is his special attribute. He pleases by the very fact that he is strong. This is not the law of love, I admit. But it is the law of nature, which is more ancient than love. If woman is made to please and to be dominated, she ought to make herself agreeable to man and avoid provocation. Her strength is in her charms and through them she should constrain him to discover his powers and make us of them.¹⁹

The association of active strength with men and passive weakness with women perfectly demonstrates the powerful perseverance of the ideas of Aristotle's argument for biological male superiority. Furthermore, the insistence of woman's place within a patriarchal family structure mirrors the Christian philosophies that had a significant chokehold on Western thought. However, Rousseau's ideas here represent somewhat of a turning point, in which such traits are framed not as completely reflective of fundamental deformity, but some sort of feminine perfection. A woman's project, therefore, is not to attempt to overcome such characteristics, but rather to nurture them, so that she can assume a state of natural and divine womanhood.

The faculties common to the sexes are not equally shared between them; but take them all in all, they are well balanced. The more womanly a woman is, the better. Whenever she exercises her own proper powers she gains by it: when she tries to usurp ours she becomes our inferior. Believe me, wise mother, it is a mistake to

19. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Marriage," in *Philosophy of Woman: Classical to Current Concepts*, ed. Mary Briody Mahowald (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 89.

bring up your daughter to be like a good man. Make her a good woman, and you can be sure that she will be worth more for herself and for us.²⁰

Woman is more valuable to herself when she is more valuable to men. Her education, therefore, “must be wholly directed to their relations with men... to give them pleasure, to be useful to them, to win their love and esteem, to train them in their childhood, to care for them when they grow up, to give them counsel and consolation, to make life sweet and agreeable for them.”²¹ Man’s virtues are directed towards leadership, independence, and strength, while all of woman’s virtues orbit around helping the boys and men in her life fulfill their purpose. Her ability to assume proper womanhood is ultimately defined and assessed by the men that she serves.

The chapter concludes with envisioning Sophie as a young woman, as a model of proper feminine education:

A pupil of nature like Emile, she is better suited for him than any other woman. She is indeed his woman, his equal in birth and merit, his inferior in fortune... She has taste without study, talents without art, judgement without knowledge. Her mind is still vacant but has been trained to learn: it is a well-tilled land only waiting for the grain. What a pleasing ignorance! Happy is the man destined to instruct her. She will be her husband’s disciple, not his teacher. Far from wanting to impose her tastes on him, she will share his.²²

20. Rousseau, 91.

21, Rousseau, 91.

22. Rousseau, 100.

Sophie is a woman defined by vacancy—when Emile arrives, full of knowledge that strengthens and emboldens his independent subjectivity, she will be a glass filled halfway with ideals of submission, service, and shallow charm, with the remainder empty, waiting to become whatever he would like her to be. But again, such a position was ideal for Rousseau, and was expected at the time for whichever ladies had the privilege to center their lives around such delicate docility. In an episteme in which “masculine” and “feminine” refer to two neat and mutually exclusive categories, her nature, albeit inferior to that of man, was necessary to compliment him. Determined by birth, it becomes Sophie’s destiny to maximize all of the characteristics relegated to femininity and minimize those of masculinity, becoming Emile’s woman, his wife.

The conception of dimorphous gendered virtues was prevalent throughout Western philosophy during the Enlightenment era. Such a view within the intellectual community both reflected and perpetuated the patriarchy of its time. Utilizing the legacy of philosophers prior, these thinkers sought to explain the observed sexual differences of Western bourgeois culture as innate and divine. While Rousseau focused on developing an educational system that brought out these sexual virtues, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) explored the nature of gendered roles through his aesthetic theory. In his book *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Kant defines and elaborates upon two of the finer human feelings, sublimity and beauty. Sublimity is that which is profound, astounding, and simple, such as a mountain peak or a tremendous storm. The sheer power of the sublime is monumental, arousing an overwhelming and terrifying feeling in the observer, moving them to action. The beautiful, on the other hand, is delicate and ornamented, like a meadow or flower beds; it inspires a joyous and pleasant

sensation, rather than the deep movement created by the sublime. In Section Three, entitled “Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and Sublime in the Interrelations of the Two Sexes,” Kant applies this difference to the fundamental nature of men (the sublime) and women (the beautiful). According to his theory, “women have a strong inborn feeling for all that is beautiful, elegant, and decorated.”²³ From childhood, girls are more compassionate, delicate, modest, refined and inclined towards aesthetic beauty, as opposed to boys of the same age. Intuitively, there seems to be an essential difference in the innate qualities bestowed onto the two sexes. Kant argues that this distinction becomes clearer as girls and boys become adults; women, the “fair sex,” have a beautiful understanding, whereas men, the “noble sex,” have a deep understanding, which associates them with the sublime. For a woman, this beautiful understanding can be utilized in actions that do not require laborious toil or hard intellectual work, as such activities go against the very nature of her sex. Instead, these actions should be relegated to men, whose inherent sublime nature endows them with the ability for “strivings and surmounted difficulties, . . . deep meditation and sustained reflection.”²⁴ Since women do not have this sublimity, he advises them to not trouble themselves with intellectual pondering and to reject learning deeply about fields such as geometry, philosophy, or history. Rather, Kant notes that “the content of woman’s great science. . . is humankind, and among humanity, men. Her philosophy is not to reason, but to sense.”²⁵ The fair

23. Immanuel Kant, “Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and Sublime in the Interrelations of the Two Sexes,” in *Philosophy of Woman: Classical to Current Concepts*, ed. Mary Briody Mahowald (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 117.

24. Kant, 117.

25. Kant, 118.

sex's chief virtue is sensitivity, being emotional, kind-hearted, and complaisant; it is this sensitivity, rather than rationality, that should be cultivated as their chief goal.

Kant uses this distinction between the nature of men and women to develop different virtues for each sex. Because women are beautiful, their moral judgements are guided by this sense of beauty:

Women will avoid the wicked not because it is unright, but because it is ugly; and virtuous actions mean to them such as are morally beautiful. . . they do something only because it pleases them, and the art consists in making only that please them which is good. I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles, and I by that not to offend, for these are also extremely rare in the male. But in place of it Providence has put in their breast kind and benevolent sensations, a fine feeling for propriety, and a complaisant soul.²⁶

Women were not meant to wrestle with deep moral issues; that again is relegated to the domain of sublimity, of men. Instead, they are driven by their sense of beauty, which gives them different sorts of virtues: whereas men have the ability to pursue deep truths and utilize rationality, women have the capacity to be kind, self-possessed, and compliant. Kant notes three particular virtues that the fair sex fulfills: neatness, sensitivity to shame, and modesty. These characteristics are extremely becoming of women and are the signs of one who has completely embodied her innate beauty. Even women's faults are beautiful, according to Kant; her vanity allows her to exemplify her charms and pleasantness, so long as it does not lead to conceit and destroys her innately modest and

26. Kant, 119.

deferential character. Although women cannot have the same moral and intellectual depth as men, they have the unique abilities that only the beautiful could embody.

Once Kant has laid out the foundation of women's inherent qualities, he turns his attention to how they manifest themselves in their interrelations with men, or rather, men's perceptions of the fair sex's beauty. He notes the "complete fascination"²⁷ that men have with women's beauty, driven by their sexual desire. This obsession is not necessarily a negative thing, as it structures marriages and unions. However, he encourages men to have a "finer taste"²⁸ and cultivate the ability to make judgements on the exterior charms of women, based upon what in her face, form, and character embodies morality:

A woman in whom the agreeableness beseeming her sex particularly makes manifest the moral expression of the sublime is called *beautiful* in the proper sense; so far as the moral composition makes itself discernible in the mien or facial features, she whose features show qualities of beauty is *agreeable*, and if she is that to a high degree, *charming*.²⁹

For Kant, a women's virtue is inherently tied to their aesthetic charms and beauty. Because they blossom from this beauty, there are to be evaluated from their ability to embody and exhibit pleasantry, docility, and particular physical features.

However, according to Kant, there is one problem with beauty, the defining quality of the feminine: it is fleeting. As he states:

27. Kant, 121.

28. Kant, 121.

29. Kant, 121.

Finally age, the great destroyer of beauty, threatens all these charms; and if it proceeds according to the natural order of things, gradually the sublime and noble qualities must take the place of the beautiful, in order to make a person always worthy of a greater respect as she ceases to be attractive.³⁰

Although beauty may be the central feature of women, it is not the same as men's long-lasting sublimity. Rather, as she ages and loses the beauty that has defined her, she must try to find aspects of nobility to fill the vacancy left by that depletion. Kant suggests that she may take up reading books and broadening her insights, with her husband as her first instructor.³¹ However, even if she tries to embody of these qualities, the new absence of her beauty will surely be distressing: "nevertheless, when the epoch of growing old, so terrible to every woman, actually approaches, she still belongs to the fair sex, and that sex disfigures itself if in a kind of despair of holding this character longer, it gives way to a surly and irritable mood."³² Still, if she holds onto the psychological and behavioral qualities of her beauty, even when she no longer embodies physical beauty, she can hold onto some sense of her innate identity. By remaining modest, sociable, pleasant, and benevolent, the aging woman can be ". . . a finer person than a man of like age and perhaps ever more attractive than a girl, although in another sense."³³ Although she may have lost some of the aspects that define her worth as a human, the woman can hold onto some dignity and worth by learning from her husband and remaining complaisant and kind.

30. Kant, 123.

31. Kant, 123.

32. Kant, 123.

33. Kant, 123.

Kant ends this essay with a description of the ideal marriage. He believes that marriage should constitute a single moral person, balanced both by the man's sublimity and woman's beauty. Although a woman cannot fulfill sublime qualities, she is bothered little by this so long as she can find these features in her husband: ". . . she demands all these qualities in a man, and the sublimity of her soul shows itself only in that she knows how treasure these noble qualities so far as they are found in him."³⁴ Similarly, the man can tolerate his wife's lack of sublime qualities: "by their fine figure, merry naiveté, and charming friendliness, he is sufficiently repaid for the lack of book learning and for other deficiencies that he must supply from his own talents."³⁵ While the husband serves as the source of depth and knowledge for his wife, the wife provides her husband with comfort, a reprieve from the burden of rationality and profundity that fulfilling the duties of the sublime entails. As Kant himself says, "the principal object is that the man should become more perfect as a man, and the woman as a wife."³⁶ As men focus on cultivating these higher, sublime goals, women's supposed excellence is to embody the qualities of the fair sex, supportive, pretty, and docile, caring for her husband in his pursuit of excellence. Note, however, how Kant frames this distinction particularly in his discussion of the interrelations of the two sexes: while women ought to idealize and treasure men's sublimity, men view women's virtue, beauty, as a "deficiency", a pleasant distraction from the demanding quest for deeper knowledge and higher abilities.

34. Kant, 123

35. Kant, 124.

36. Kant, 124.

Importantly, Kant's conceptions of gender did not arise out of nowhere—in fact, they were fueled by the many philosophers who had vouched for the same conclusions for centuries. Regardless of the manner in which they justified gendered hierarchy, all of these thinkers arrived at a notion of gender that assigned opposing attributes to men and women, with no possibility of reconciliation. As time progressed, such scholarship became less blatantly misogynistic: rather than the Aristotelian view the female condition as a deformity with little worth other than for the baser purpose of generation, the Christian conception of divine marriage uplifted women as capable of having some value. Still, the work of both Augustine and Aquinas obviously used gendered dichotomies to uplift man as godly, a reflection of His image, and reject the worth of woman outside of her service and submission: while man is whole intrinsically, woman finds full divinity through her association to him. Rousseau and Kant both embraced the idea of separate virtues for man and woman, assigning intellectualism, rationality, and strength to men, and frivolity, naivety, and obedience to women. It is critical to understand, though, the manner in which such distinctions perpetuate patriarchy, albeit in a slightly more subtle way than Aristotle. There is an independence allotted to men in their association with sublimity. They are allowed to explore, lead, and pioneer as they curate their deep individual abilities. They have the sort of subjectivity that is transcendent, one that is connected to the divine and perfect. As Rousseau states, “men and women are unequally affected by sex. The male is only a male at times; the female is a female all her life and can never forget her sex.”³⁷ While man is given the ease that comes with being the ideal subject, the one who has epistemes and institutions designed around him, woman is

37. Rousseau, “Marriage,” 90.

constantly defined by her ability to fulfill the virtues of femininity that define her. Her role is not to question, not to engage—it is to follow nicely, to service and comfort man in his quest for sublimity. As the modern feminist philosopher Mary Bittner Wiseman argues in her response to Kant, women’s relegation to the beautiful serves as a baser foundation to which men can establish themselves as innately superior beings:

Woman becomes the figure for all that is subject to the law of reason made practical: she is the immediately present before it is transcended, nature before it is reduced to rule, desire before it is right or wrong, feelings before they are constrained before by principles. Woman marked by beauty becomes the condition for the possibility of male man’s being able to be fully human, to be fully rational, to be dutiful.³⁸

Regardless of the varying justifications for such dichotomies, the philosophers discussed all utilized this same mechanism: “woman” is the mark that men transcend as ideally rational creatures. It is her submission that allows him to dominate, her relegation to the affairs of the body and family that gives him the power to monopolize intellectual and political institutions. And, as generations pass, such a gendered division reifies and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; man finds himself transparently within the sphere that has been curated with his interests in mind, with woman as his helpmate, his beautiful follower.

Colonizer/Native → White/Non-White

Another aspect of the Western episteme that crucial in comprehending dichotomous logic is the colonizer/native dichotomy. Stemming from the beginnings of

38. Mary Bitter Wiseman, “Beautiful Exiles,” in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 174.

European colonialism in the 15th century, this understanding centered white Europeans as civilized bearers of rationality and divinity, as juxtaposed to the native peoples who were viewed as bereft, animalistic, and barbaric. Just as is seen in the development of misogyny, colonizers and colonial philosophers instrumentalized Christianity to degrade those who adhered to other forms of spirituality, framing them as subhuman and in need of salvation. Since only Christians were children of God, it was the duty of colonizers to spread His word across the globe, to curate the land in His way and destroy whatever would not comply. Such an understanding eased the colonial project in its quest to acquire as much land, resources, and power as possible. This episteme is seen reflected in the thoughts and actions of the earliest European colonizers. In 1492, Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) traversed the ocean blue, sailing Westward with funding from Spain. Once he and his men arrived on the north coast of present-day Haiti, he sent Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabelle of Castille, King and Queen of Spain, a letter illustrating the promising fruits of his travels. This is how the letter opens:

Sir,

As I know that you will have pleasure of the great victory which our Lord hath given me in my voyage, I write you this, by which you shall know that, in twenty days I passed over to the Indies with the fleet which the most illustrious King and Queen, our Lords, gave me: where I found very many islands peopled with inhabitants beyond number. And, of them all, I have taken possession for their Highnesses, with proclamation and the royal standard displayed; and I was not gainsaid.³⁹

39. Christopher Columbus, "Spanish Letter to Luis De Sant Angel, 1493," in *The Columbus Memorial*, ed. George Young, (Philadelphia: Jordan Bros., 1893), 37.

According to Columbus, these “underdeveloped” lands were full of boundless potential resources: mines of metals, harbors for ships, trees abundant with fruit, and fields and soil rich for planting, breeding cattle, and building towns.⁴⁰ In regards to the native people of the island, Columbus notes that they were “incurably timid, . . . artless and generous with what they have, to such a degree as no one would believe but him who had seen it.”⁴¹ The natives had no sense of what the colonizers deemed to be worthy; “like senseless brutes,”⁴² they offered up their bountiful resources in exchange for the European’s scraps. Perturbed by the inequality of such trade, Columbus eventually forbade them, “and I gave gratuitously a thousand useful things that I carried, in order that they may conceive affection, and furthermore may be made Christians.”⁴³ In his eyes, the native people were without religion or a spiritual life, fundamentally bereft without the presence of the Christian God. Ever the virtuous practitioner, Columbus took a few natives by force as soon as he arrived in order to fuel God’s mission, so that they could learn his language and provide him with information of the land: “to this day I carry them with me.”⁴⁴ Such began the widespread European colonialist legacy of a colonizer/colonized distinction: the Christianity and civility of the colonizers was juxtaposed against the paganism and barbarism of the colonized in order to justify the exploitation, kidnapping, and murder of colonized folks and communities.

40. Columbus, 39.

41. Columbus, 40.

42. Columbus, 41.

43. Columbus, 41.

44. Columbus, 42.

After the success of his 1492 voyage, Columbus and 1500 men set out on a second trip. This time, King Ferdinand sent him with a letter to be offered to the Indigenous populations of the conquered lands. Again, there is a clear utilization of Christianity as the chief purpose of such colonialism:

In the name of King Ferdinand and Juana, his daughter, Queen of Castile and Leon, etc., conquerors of barbarian nations, we notify you best we can that our Lord God Eternal created Heaven and earth and a man and woman from whom we all descend for all times and all over the world. In the 5000 years since creation the multitude of these generations caused men to divide and establish kingdoms in various parts of the world, among whom God chose St. Peter as leader of mankind, regardless of their law, sect, or belief... He was named Pope, which means admirable and greatest father, governor of all men... The late Pope gave these islands and mainland of the ocean and contents hereof to the above-mentioned King and Queen, as is certified in writing and you may see the documents if you should so desire. Therefore, Their Highnesses are lords and masters of this land.⁴⁵

The Indigenous peoples of the Americas did not speak the same language as the colonizers, let alone ascribe to the same episteme. They had their own spiritual system, their own ways of meaning, their own relations to one another and the land of which they were a part. Still, the colonizers treated their own perspective with profound universality, assuming that their God was The God, and the entire world was given to Catholic Christians as a reward for ascribing to the True Faith. This claim, of course, has

45. Ferdinand, King of Aragon, "Letter to the Taino/Arawak Indians, 1493," in *American Philosophies*, eds. Leonard Harris, Scott Pratt, and Anne Waters, (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 9.

terrifically horrible consequences on the people marked as pagans, as barbaric, as not fully human:

Should you fail to comply [with the colonial process], or delay maliciously in so doing, we assure you that with the help of God we shall use force against you, declaring war upon you from all sides and with all possible means, and we shall bind you to the yoke of the Church and of Their Highnesses; we shall enslave your persons, wives and sons, sell you or dispose of you as the King sees fit; we shall seize your possessions and harm you as much as we can as disobedient and resisting vassals. And we declare you guilty of resulting deaths and injuries, exempting Their Highnesses of such guilt as well as ourselves and the gentlemen who accompany us.⁴⁶

The blame for colonial atrocities is quite blatantly shifted to the native people themselves, as a punishment for their own deviance, their refusal to fit in cleanly to Man's universal system. Any of the supposed civility of Catholicism is completely abandoned if those who are conquered in God's name do not comply. Everything in the world revolves around colonial interests; should the colonizers encounter people who challenge such a totalizing episteme, they will be wiped out in order to continue Man's mission.

These ideas were reinforced both in practice and philosophical theory. The argument that Columbus was making in the late 15th century was given later explicit justification from John Locke (1632-1704), an incredibly foundational thinker for the later development of Western republican governments. A liberal thinker, he was heavily concerned with individual's rights to liberty and property, which he explores in his book

⁴⁶. Ferdinand, 9-10.

Second Treatise of Government. He relies on God as a justification for securing such rights: “God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being.”⁴⁷ Land becomes man’s property when he (or the beings that he owns) puts labor into it, removing it from the common state of nature; “thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my *property*, without the assignation or consent of any body.”⁴⁸ Because God gave the earth to the “industrious and rational”⁴⁹ to cultivate it usefully, those lands untouched by European techno-industrialism are rendered as spaces open for development. After all, such untamed lands do not provide a fraction of the useful goods that European properties do; “for I ask, whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniences of life, as ten acres of equally fertile land do in Devonshire, where they are well cultivated?”⁵⁰ The production of such conveniences is necessarily contingent on appropriate labor and cultivation—without the industrious and rational development of the land, Man cannot reap the fruits that God intended him to sow. A dichotomy is set up here, as well as the forceful imposition of an episteme; Europeans are the ones who can utilize their reason to

47. John Locke, “On Property” in *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 18.

48. Locke, 20.

49. Locke, 21.

50. Locke, 24.

correctly develop the land, while Indigenous people—not fully rational or simply bodily—allow the land they live on to go to waste. Because they do not cultivate their land in the proper (Man’s) way, then it is the duty of Europeans to colonize, to take charge of the land and the beings within it and claim them as their own.

As the colonial project continued to proliferate, the epistemes surrounding it further reified. The colonizer/native dichotomy developed into something deeper; Western philosophers attempted to strengthen this distinction through rationality and science, eventually arriving at the modern phenotype-based conception of race. Ever the renowned proponent of social dichotomies, Immanuel Kant demonstrated the early endeavors to put people into gross racial boxes in his essay “Of the Different Human Races.” He notes that although human beings belong to the same genus, we have different races, “deviations that are constantly preserved over many generations and come about as a consequence of migration... or through interbreeding with other deviations of the same line of descent, which always produces half-breed offspring.”⁵¹ Through time, people adapt to the conditions of their climate, which causes them to have recognizably distinct racial characteristics. Kant believes “that we only need to assume four races in order to be able to derive all the enduring distinctions immediately recognizable within the human genus. They are (1) the white race; (2) the Negro race; (3) the Hun race (Mongol or Kalmuck); and (4) the Hindu or Hindustani race.”⁵² Throughout the essay, Kant attempts to rationally justify his categorizations, creating a system that can explain racial stereotypes through scientific reasoning:

51. Immanuel Kant, “Of the Different Human Races,” in *The Idea of Race*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lott, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000), 9.

52. Kant, 11.

For the red-brown skin color (as an effect of the acidic air) seems to be just as suited to the cold climate as the olive-brown skin color (as an effect of briny bile of the juices) is suited to the hot regions of the earth. We can, in fact, come to this conclusion without even taking into account the natural disposition of the native American, which reveals a half-extinguished life power. The diminishment of life power can, however, also be seen as entirely natural for the effect of a cold region of the world.⁵³

The behavioral and psychological characteristics that Kant assigns to each race have a mutually reinforcing relationship with the science he uses to delineate such categories. Because native Americans have adapted to a cold climate, they have a dwindling life power, and are “too weak to work in the fields.”⁵⁴ Logically, it follows for Kant that those who have acclimated to heat, the Negro race, will embody the opposite characteristics:

The growth of the spongy parts of the body had to increase in a hot and humid climate. This growth produced a thick, turned up nose and thick, fatty lips. The skin had to be oily, not only to lessen the too heavy perspiration, but also to ward off the harmful absorption of the foul, humid air. The profusion of iron particles, which are otherwise found in the blood of every human being, and, in this case, are precipitated in the net-shaped substance through the evaporation of the phosphoric acid (which explains why all Negroes stink), is the cause of the blackness that shines through the epidermis... In short, all of these factors account

53. Kant, 16-17.

54. Kant, 17.

for the origin of the Negro, who is well-suited to his climate, namely, strong, fleshy, and agile. However, because he is so amply supplied by his motherland, he is also lazy, indolent, and dawdling.⁵⁵

The horrific stereotypes that Kant so coolly assigns to Black individuals here emerges from his detached system. From this framework, it is perfectly reasonable to make such generalizations because they are justified by the science that he uses: it is the climate in which non-white folks were raised that has caused them to become naturally inferior. Thus, rather than being irrationally bigoted, Kant can call himself a rational observer. After speaking in length about the wayward deviance of the Negro, Hun, and Hindu races, Kant can now make an ultimate claim about inborn white supremacy:

The only part of the earth that we can justifiably think to have the most fortunate combination of influences of both the cold and hot regions is the area between 31 and 52 degrees latitude in the old world (which also seems to deserve the name old world because of the people that inhabit it). The greatest riches of earth's creation are found in this region and this is also where human beings must diverge least from their original form, since the human beings living in this region were already well-prepared to be transplanted into every other region of the earth. We certainly find in this region white, indeed, brunette inhabitants. We want, therefore, to assume that this form is that of the lineal root genus.⁵⁶

Those who come from this particular latitude (white, European people) are the original, ideal form of Man. They did not have to hastily adapt to excessive and foul climates—

55. Kant, 17.

56. Kant, 19-20.

Man was established and developed in optimal conditions. Kant's thoughts here ultimately reflect the very issue that Wynter discusses: through a claim to universality and supreme rationality, white Europeans were able to delineate themselves as ideal subjects, and systematize others into othered categories of inferiority. Kant himself admits that this system is lacking; that there are people who do not fit tidily into his sweeping generalizations.⁵⁷ Still, despite this inadequacy and despite the fact that he never once left his small Prussian town, Kant feels confident to set the groundwork for racialized dichotomies, encouraging later scientists and thinkers to confirm and elaborate upon his work: "we must... venture to offer a history of nature, even if we are also—and rightfully so—hostile to the impudence of mere opinion. This kind of history is, however, a separate special science and it could well serve to move us gradually from opinions to true insights."⁵⁸ Through this attempt at a scientific justification for European colonialism and dominance, Kant abetted the systematization of racial dichotomies, allowing the racist theories of the Western world to further materialize.

However, such theories did not stay simply within the confines of the written page; arguments for white superiority actively aided racist practices and institutions. A dichotomous and hierarchal conception of race was a foundational part of the United States government, specifying exactly which men were afforded the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), one of the Founding Fathers, the third president of the United States, and owner of over 600 slaves during his adult life, was heavily influenced by the political and ethical philosophies of

57. Kant, 21-2.

58. Kant, 22.

his contemporaries. In determining the structure of the newly developed state, Jefferson utilized racial dichotomies to safeguard Man's interests. In his essay "Laws" from *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he argues that an America in which slaves are freed and live alongside their former owners is not feasible, as it would "produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race."⁵⁹ Additionally, Jefferson notes that there are obvious and irreconcilable differences between these two races. White people are far more rational, beautiful, and artistic than Black people, who are driven by baser-level, bodily instincts. "In general, their existence appears to participate more sensation than reflection"⁶⁰: they are desirous rather than loving, hasty rather than sensible, with constantly fleeting emotions rather than profound ones. Even though they have been "confined to tillage,"⁶¹ slaves are nevertheless in situations in which they could "avail themselves of the conversation of their masters,"⁶² taking advantage of the cultivated arts and sciences that surround them to demonstrate an ability to reason and imagine. But despite this magnificent opportunity, "never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture."⁶³ For Jefferson, this inability suggests that they are fundamentally inferior:

59. Thomas Jefferson, "Laws" in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 138.

60. Jefferson, 139.

61. Jefferson, 139

62. Jefferson, 140.

63. Jefferson, 140.

I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications. Will not a lover of natural history then, one who views the gradations in all the races of animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those in the department of man as distinct as nature has formed them? This unfortunate difference of color, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people... The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.⁶⁴

Even though Jefferson shows a peculiar level of awareness by acknowledging that white superiority may not be a fundamental truth, he nevertheless treats it as if it were, in both his theories and practices. He helped to create and sustain a government built on the violent exploitation and oppression of African slaves and Indigenous Americans. Must that hierarchal structure be challenged, Jefferson stresses that such deviant races must be expunged, removed, sent back to where they came from, so as to not soil the greatness of Man—the lover of natural history must understand that this is a necessity.

In making such claims, Jefferson is extending the evolution of the colonizer/native dichotomy to the white/non-white hierarchy, and setting the foundation for the continued violence and degradation against people of color that still saturates our

64. Jefferson, 143.

world today. By giving white Europeans a claim to superiority through an appeal to Christianity or scientific rationality, Man was able to create an episteme that supported His material interests through the relentless exploitation and dispossession of people of color. In this understanding, people can be quantified, placed into one of two mutually exclusive categories: colonizer *or* colonized, white *or* non-white. As decolonial philosopher Franz Fanon highlights, “the colonial world is a compartmentalized world... a world divided in two”⁶⁵:

The colonial world is a Manichaeian world. As if to illustrate the totalitarian nature of colonial exploitation, the colonist turns the colonized into a kind of quintessence of evil. Colonized society is not merely portrayed as a society without values. The colonist is not content with stating that the colonized world has lost its values or worse never possessed any. The “native” is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but the negation of values. He is, dare we say it, the enemy of values. In other words, absolute evil.⁶⁶

The framing of white colonists as spiritually chosen and morally divine justifies and aids the colonial process: colonized folks and people of color are rendered as depraved and animalistic, in desperate need of salvation and development. By forcefully imposing their value system onto the lands and people they conquered, colonizers declared themselves to be kings and accused those who refused to comply of heresy, trampling the native

65. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 3.

66. Fanon, 6.

languages, webs of meaning, and identities to near extinction in the process of making the world theirs.

Multiplicity, Impurity, and Erasure

For thousands of years, dichotomous logic has had a profound effect on perpetuating hierarchal structures of dominance. This core feature of the Western techno-industrial episteme encourages separation and fragmentation, resulting in the man/woman or white/nonwhite dichotomies to uplift Man's status as the ideal subject. However, when attempting to appeal to a logic of purity, we inherently leave out those who do not fit into Man's categories as neatly—those who lie at the crossroads of multiple identities, who cannot be put into one thing or another so tidily. Such complications are shown in the man/woman distinction. After examining the works of philosophers from the Classical era to the age of Enlightenment, it is notable that when they discuss women, they are overwhelmingly talking about the sort of woman that would be relational to Man—white, bourgeois, Christian, heterosexual. They speak of the virtues of women who are to be Man's wives, those who will care for Him and raise His children. These sorts of characteristics are not considered for women who occupy other deviant categories—“woman” within this dichotomy is only she who is close enough to the privileged vantage point, those who have the ability to curate themselves as Man's ideal helpmate. Therefore, poor women, colonized women, non-Christian women, or women who do not conform as neatly to the Western gendered binary are not “woman” in Man's sense.

Obviously, only a tiny fraction of women can fit into Man's exact requirements for Womanhood. Thus, the vast majority of women are othered in multiplicitous, nuanced

ways that transcend just the man/woman hierarchy. María Lugones discusses the manner in which the Western dimorphous conception of gender was imposed onto colonized folks, as well as the way that such a conception particularly harmed native women:

Judging the colonized for their deficiencies from the point of view of the civilizing mission justified enormous cruelty. I propose to interpret the colonized, non-human males from the civilizing perspective as judged from the normative understanding of “man,” the human being par excellence. Females were judged from the normative understanding of “women,” the human inversion of men. From this point of view, colonized people became males and females. Males became not-human-as-not-men, and colonized females became not-human-as-not-women.⁶⁷

As both women and native, Indigenous women occupied the dehumanized ends of two of Man’s dichotomies. And still, she is neither “woman” or “native” in Man’s episteme, as womanhood is reserved for white bourgeois women and Indigeneity focused on colonized men. Through this logic, she is semantically erased from existence.

This semantic erasure was designed to ease systems to physically erase her, to dispossess her, to force her to assimilate. The bodies of native women, removed from the rigid patriarchal distinctions of the West, represented a grave threat to the gendered order that sustained Man’s dominance. Women as agents, as crucial to their intellectual and spiritual communities as men, was a feature of many Indigenous societies that was incompatible with colonial dominance. Additionally, women in precolonial societies embodied and enacted principles that were completely opposed to capitalist aims of

67. María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25 no. 4 (2010), 744.

exploitation and profit. Ecofeminist scholar Vandana Shiva calls the projects of regeneration in which Indigenous women were involved as reflective of the “feminine principle,” that which is centered upon the organic, interconnected systems of nature.⁶⁸ Native women utilized the resources around them in a sustainable manner in order to ensure the health and longevity of their families and ecosystem. In order to impose a colonist schema which declares “productivity” and “profit” as its chief values, Indigenous women’s autonomous identities and regenerative modes of being needed to be dismantled. Thus, to remove them from their anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal modes of being, native women become marked as both deficient natives and deficient women, rendered as in need of ‘development’ according to Western guidelines: “from being the creators and sustainers of life, nature and women are reduced to being ‘resources’ in the fragmented, anti-life model of maldevelopment.”⁶⁹ Her identity, land, labor, and relationship with her community is systematically attacked as she is turned into another resource to exploit in the colonial project.

The imposition of dichotomous logics engenders native women’s exploitation. Through their systematic degradation, Man can justify His claim to development as He sees fit. Such “development,” of course, is maldevelopment from many colonized women’s perspective, who become unable to sustainably provide for their families in the way they once could.⁷⁰ However, in forcing her, her community, and her environment to adhere to Man’s episteme, native women become understandable within His terms, as

68. Vandana Shiva, “Development, Ecology, and Women,” in *Staying Alive*, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 5.

69. Shiva, 6.

70. Shiva, 6.

wayward beings, not-humans-as-not-women who are in desperate need of Man's techno-industrial and capitalistic order. It is through this radical epistemic stripping that Man can create a universal system that benefits Him, categorizing all the things within it as potential tools to further His mission. The experience of non-white women is particular, multiplicitous, and complex: it varies depending on factors such as location, language, sexuality, financial security, skin tone, interpersonal connections, and community. Importantly, however, the intersections of oppression that non-white women face cannot be understood as just the consequences of the man/woman + colonizer/native dichotomy. Rather, their experiences under a colonial and patriarchal system exceeds categorical Manichaeic logic. Her identity as a woman and as of color are not two mutually exclusive categories; they are both tethered to one another, defining her experience as a non-white woman in a way that makes them inseparable from one another:

Intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other... given the construction of the categories, the intersection misconstrues women of color. So, once intersectionality shows us what is missing, we have ahead of us the task of reconceptualizing the logic of the intersection so as to avoid separability. It is only when we perceive gender and race as intermeshed or fused that we actually see women of color.⁷¹

When we examine the intersections, we see that Man's dichotomies are all interconnected: all are agents of control, dominance, and exploitation for the service of a privileged elite. They all take root in Man's quest for universal order, distorting the

⁷¹ María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007), 192-3.

particular embodied experiences of the people living within them. These oppressive projects often work together, resulting in forms of oppressions that are complex, multifaceted, and difficult to uproot. Solely examining one dichotomy provides us with a particular manifestation of Man's order, yet it cannot capture the whole picture. Therefore, if they are devoted to fighting the repressive structure that has degraded women for centuries, feminists cannot detach themselves from fighting against the many other dichotomies that perpetuate women's exploitation and exclusion. Ultimately, feminist theory and action must address racist, ableist, heterosexist, classist, and gender essentialist forms of oppression. If not, we risk replicating the same systems of hierarchy, disregard, and erasure that we are attempting to break from.

Chapter 2: Girlbossery, or the Failings of Mainstream Western Feminism

In her 2013 best-selling book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg begins by discussing her own experiences navigating her first pregnancy as a senior corporate worker:

My pregnancy was not easy. The typical morning sickness that often accompanies the first trimester affected me every day for nine long months. I gained almost seventy pounds, and my feet swelled two entire shoe sizes, turning into odd-shaped lumps I could see only when they were propped up on a coffee table. A particularly sensitive Google engineer announced that “Project Whale” was named after me.¹

Sandberg’s pregnancy made it easy for her to see just how inaccessible 9-5 jobs can be for many women. Spending most of her days nauseated and exhausted, she went to Google founder Sergey Brin and demanded the need for pregnancy parking:

He looked up at me and agreed immediately, noting that he had never thought about it before. To this day, I’m embarrassed that I didn’t realize that pregnant women needed reserved parking until I experienced my own aching feet. As one of Google’s most senior women, didn’t I have a special responsibility to think of this? But like Sergey, it had never occurred to me. The other pregnant women must have suffered in silence, not wanting to ask for special treatment. Or maybe they lacked the confidence or seniority to demand that the problem be fixed.

1. Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2013), 3.

*Having one pregnant woman at the top—even one who looked like a whale—made the difference.*²

This is the claim that Sandberg is ultimately making in her book: in order to secure a just, egalitarian, and equal world for all, we need more women in leadership positions. She notes that when compared to women “...in places like Afghanistan and Sudan, [where] girls receive little or no education, wives are treated as the property of their husbands, and women who are raped are routinely cast out of their homes for disgracing their families,” women in the United States and the “developed world” are “better off than ever.”³ Their position in society has gradually advanced, as women now outnumber men in acquiring higher college degrees and are increasingly entering fields previously filled solely by men. Despite the fact that these women are as (if not more) qualified than their male counterparts, Sandberg highlights the glass ceiling that makes it nearly impossible for women to actually reach capitalistic success on the same level as men: despite accounting for about half of the population, women do not hold their fair share of political or economic power. This fact is a hindrance not just to basic equality, but also our collective success: “the laws of economics and many studies of diversity tell us that if we tapped the entire pool of human resources and talent, our collective performance would improve... When more people get in the race, more records will be broken. And the achievements will extend beyond those individuals to benefit us all.”⁴

2. Sandberg, 4 (emphasis added).

3. Sandberg, 4-5.

4. Sandberg, 7.

Sandberg finds that the obstacles that a woman faces in her quest to succeed are both external and internal. She is the subject of sexism, discrimination, sexual harassment, and given little flexibility in regards to childcare. She is held to a greater standard than men and has to prove herself repeatedly in order to stand on solid footing. On top of the social and structural hurdles, “[women] hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in.”⁵ Women internalize misogynistic narratives, thereby quieting themselves, lowering their expectations, and compromising their standards. Ultimately, Sandberg states: “my argument is that getting rid of these internal barriers is critical to gaining power.”⁶ Unlike the systemic limitations to women’s success, the internal obstacles are fully under a woman’s control: “we can dismantle the hurdles in ourselves today. We can start this very moment.”⁷ By ridding herself of the sexist expectations that she has come to believe, the woman can ultimately become an advocate for her own success, in turn becoming bosses who encourage other women’s inclusion and achievement.

Although Sandberg is striving for a world in which women are able to hold as much influence as men, she completely ignores the systemic barriers that make it impossible for all women to achieve the sort of success that she holds. By not acknowledging the underlying patriarchal institutions that rely on the denigration of women’s worth and labor to create the conditions for men’s success, Sandberg cannot

5. Sandberg, 8.

6. Sandberg, 8.

7. Sandberg, 9.

truly create a comprehensive proposal to end women's oppression. Ultimately, *Lean In* is the how-to manual for educated women to achieve Enlightened Girlboss status, to break the glass ceiling and stay at the top, so they are able sit with the men at the conference table on the highest floor and look down on the rest of the world as they make the important decisions.

Of course, the ideas reflected in Sandberg's work did not arise in a vacuum. In fact, they are reflective of the legacy of mainstream Western feminism, which has typically focused not on radically uprooting patriarchal systems, but rather reforming them to be slightly more inclusive. Rather than the profound systemic overhaul that would be needed in order to truly refute the hegemonic episteme and achieve true equity and justice for the women it most shuts out, this sort of feminism often revolves itself around encouraging women to change their mindsets, to view themselves as capable as men in embodying the "rise and grind" attitude that will perhaps lead to capitalistic success. Only a small subsection of women is able to benefit by this solution, and it is typically those who have the education and race and class privileges to assume the roles formerly occupied solely by white men. Both patriarchal and racist hierarchies are perpetuated by juxtaposing the "ideal humanity" of white men against the deviant otherness of everyone else. These dichotomies are absolutely necessary for these systems to continue running, so that some, overwhelmingly women and people of color, can continue to be exploited (through the use of their bodies and labor) in order to allow men to thrive. Mainstream feminism's attempt to get the women in the door who can embody Man's values will inherently leave out the women who cannot.

In this chapter, I will investigate the manner in which mainstream Western feminism has continued to uphold Man's episteme. Rather than radically challenging its premises, white bourgeois women overwhelmingly accept this universalized and categorized logic so as to bring them as close to Man's place in the hierarchy as possible. This acceptance of the hegemonic patriarchal and colonialist schema has profoundly toxic effects for both women and people of color. Ultimately, in attempting to reach the sort of Ideal Subjectivity laid out by the hegemonic episteme, this sort of feminism accepts and perpetuates its legacy of exploitation, exclusion, and domination.

The Mystique

Betty Friedan's 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* has been cited as the instigator of the second-wave feminist movement in the United States, rousing millions of suburban housewives to reconsider their place in society. Its core argument lies in the refutation of the feminine mystique, the cultural assumption that women ought to find ultimate fulfillment in their roles as homemakers and mothers. Men are taught to wrestle with larger questions of their personal identity, to go to college to develop a sense of lifelong purpose, and to find careers that fulfill their intellectual and creative curiosity. Women, on the other hand, are repeatedly instilled with the idea that their chief goal should be to find a husband and have children. Media and education such as women's magazines and colleges center around the mystique, pushing women to find their identity outside of themselves and ignore any call for personal ambition. Because of the far-reaching profundity of this myth, young women saturated in the culture of the feminine mystique often find themselves accepting the role laid out for them.

Although women seek out the housewife role to enjoy the comfort of fitting into culture expectations, it inevitably causes misery for those who occupy it. Even though all of her physical needs are met, the existential anxiety that the suburban housewife faces cannot be explained in terms of material scarcity, but rather the deprivation of the human need to grow and fulfill one's potential. Friedan finds that women who accept the mystique allow their development to be stunted; she revolves herself around others rather than develop a sense of individual agency, becoming childlike and immature. The weaker her core of self is, the more the housewife will live through her husband and children. Although the feminine mystique insists that she ought to be happy assuming her role as mother and wife, it is simply not enough for any woman:

If women's needs for identity, for self-esteem, for achievement, and finally for expression of her unique human individuality are not recognized by herself or others in our culture, she is forced to seek identity and self-esteem in the only channels open to her: the pursuit of sexual fulfillment, motherhood, and the possession of material things. And, chained to these pursuits, she is stunted at a lower level of living, blocked from the realization of her higher human needs.⁸

The housewife busies herself with trivial domestic duties, repeatedly waxing the kitchen floor, baking cookies, or going to PTA meetings, none of which produce creative or higher fulfillment. Her identity is only understood as existing within the house; she becomes neurotic as she feels she is unable to be seen, hardly existing.

In order to solve the problem that has no name, Friedan argues that we can no longer see "housewife" as the worthwhile occupation that the mystique purports it to be:

8. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Books, 1974), 304.

If women do not put forth, finally, that effort to become all that they have it in them to become, they will forfeit their own humanity. A woman today who has no goal, no purpose, no ambition patterning her days into the future, making her stretch and grow beyond that small score of years in which her body can fulfill its biological function, is committing a kind of suicide.⁹

Women must create a new life plan, one in which they no longer see housework, marriage, and motherhood as careers or means of ultimate purpose. Rather, they need to embark on creative work of their own, searching for jobs that challenge them and developing “lifetime interests and goals which require serious education and training.”¹⁰ Women should devote themselves to curating their own autonomous identities by fully participating in their college educations, rather than viewing them as means to acquire a husband. This deep participation in an intellectual community will lead women to deepen their knowledge in careers outside of the home: “with the vision to make a new life plan of her own, she can fulfill a commitment to profession and politics, and to marriage and motherhood with equal seriousness.”¹¹ No longer tethered to the restrictive role of the feminine, the woman can leave the home and enter the workforce as a fully actualized being.

Friedan’s work eloquently speaks to the very real anxiety felt by millions of women around the United States in the 1960s. White suburban housewives were often viewed solely as existing in the eyes of others, in their relationships to their homes,

9 Friedan, 324.

10. Friedan, 333.

11. Friedan, 362.

husbands, and children. Although the feminine mystique was valorized as women's utmost devotion to their divine femininity, those living under it felt empty and unheard; as inherently complex human beings with a desire for creative stimulation and personal growth, the role of housewife reduced women to their ability to properly bake a casserole, to sexually fulfill their husbands, and to dress their children before sending them to school. Stuck in the breadwinner/homemaker\masculine/feminine dichotomy, the housewife was forced to fulfill a role that denied her humanity. The lack of personal, autonomous gratification that Friedan articulated spoke to the genuine restriction that women faced. Nevertheless, Friedan's reliance on the very dichotomies that she attempts to challenge prevent very serious and grave consequences to those that do not fit her definition of "women".

The Feminine Mystique very clearly centers the experiences of white middle-class women in both its addressing of sexist oppression and its proposed solution. The whole book is devoted to analyzing the life of the housewife, the college-educated woman who does not work and is guaranteed a family wage by her husband. While this particular instance is certainly a genuine component of American sexism, Friedan's tunnel vision completely ignores the experiences of poorer women, women of color, and single mothers, those who have no choice but to work to provide for their families. This preoccupation with the middle-class housewife profoundly affects her ideal remedy, in which women ought to join the men in their higher creative work. This sort of work, she emphatically notes, is not that of cooking, cleaning, or caregiving— "for a woman of intelligence and ability it is simply not enough."¹² Of course, uplifting white women to

12. Friedan, 333.

participate in the education and careers of white men simply relegates more of this “lesser” work onto poorer women, those who are unable to afford the college education that Friedan seems to take for granted. Implicitly stated in this text is the idea that the women who do not have the economic security of the white middle class will continue to assume the roles that the transcendent woman leaves behind.

Exclusion

The Western mainstream feminist focus around white middle class woman’s experiences of oppression will inevitably lead to the exclusion and domination of other women, particularly poor women of color. Although sexism is baked into the structural foundations of the United States, our system is also profoundly racist and classist: therefore, a woman’s interactions with her world will vary wildly depending on the additional social markers that she embodies. However, the women that the dominant American feminist movement has historically made a priority of addressing are the ones with the most privilege to begin with. White and middle class, these women often live in the same homes as the constructed Ideal Subject, caring for His children, sharing His bed, and upholding His values, giving them a particular insight into Man’s criteria for humanity and how to assume it as best as possible. Although they represent only a tiny fraction of women, white bourgeois women have utilized the Manichaeian distinction that places them and only them into the definition of “woman,” claiming to embody all women’s experiences with oppression:

White feminist struggle became one against the positions, roles, stereotypes, traits, and desires imposed on white bourgeois women’s subordination. They

countenanced no one else's gender oppression. They understood women as inhabiting white bodies but did not bring that racial qualification to articulation or clear awareness. That is, they did not understand themselves in intersectional terms, at the intersection of race, gender, and other forceful marks of subjection or domination.¹³

By centering themselves in the feminist movement, bourgeois white women further the hegemonic association of womanhood with whiteness, assuming the status which safeguards the privilege that they have and upholds the control of white men. This framework completely ignores the hierarchies of race and class that have historically allowed (and continue to encourage) them to exploit and control those who are Indigenous, of color, or poor.

This point is not to diminish the particular intimate, interpersonal oppression that these women typically face as spouses to this sort of man. Friedan touches on this experience well, exploring how the housewife loses her sense of identity and autonomy when she has been relentlessly defined as the tangential companion to Man. However, we must note that this sort of personal degradation should be distinguished from the tangible material deprivation that countless American women faced and continue to face in America. These women, often poor and people of color, are unable to sit as close to the Ideal Subject as the housewife does, and therefore are not granted the same opportunities to ascend to His level. In advocating only for a very particular sort of women's success, we ignore the circumstances that allow her to break the glass ceiling more easily than others; we ignore the multiplicitous otherings that compile and shape many women's

13. María Lugones. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 203.

experiences, preventing them from going to night school or reinvigorating old artistic passions. Instead, Friedan pushed for a feminism that advocated for the individual housewife's vocational fulfillment, at the expense of addressing the structural factors that limit some women's movements more than others.

In treating the particular experience of the housewife as if it was reflective of the conditions of all women, divergent accounts of oppression are erased. Friedan concocts a fictitious narrative in which women were not working at the time of *The Feminine Mystique*, although the true situation during this time period was far different. When the book was published, over one-third of the nation's workforce were women, and this number was rapidly increasing.¹⁴ To ignore this truth is to ignore the millions of working women during this period, who often had very different experiences with sexism than the housewife. Many women worked as a manner of survival, as a means of ensuring security for their themselves and their families. These jobs were not often the corporate or white-collar jobs that Friedan advocates that women fulfill in *The Feminine Mystique*, but they were absolutely necessary for many poor women and women of color. In needing to have a job out of necessity, rather than any sort of intellectual fulfillment, these women had no choice but to work the sort of jobs that Friedan says are not enough "for a woman of intelligence and ability."¹⁵ Friedan's solution for women's identity crisis is to escape the domestic duties that keep them in the home and instead find "the kind [of work] that was forbidden by the feminine mystique; the lifelong commitment to an art or science, to

14. Zillah Eisenstein, "The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism," in *Philosophy of Woman: Classical to Current Concepts*, ed. Mary Briody Mahowald (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 401.

15. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 333.

politics or profession.”¹⁶ However, this proposal ignores the women who have no choice but to continue working the lesser-valued jobs that Friedan seeks to transcend. In her critique of *The Feminine Mystique*, feminist philosopher bell hooks notes:

She did not discuss who would be called in to take care of the children and maintain the home if more women like herself were freed from their house labor and given equal access with white men to the professions. She did not speak of the needs of women without men, without children, without homes. She ignored the existence of all non-white women and poor white women. She did not tell readers whether it was more fulfilling to be a maid, a babysitter, a factory worker, a clerk, or a prostitute than to be a leisure-class housewife.¹⁷

In her tunnel-vision on the boredom of the suburban housewife, Friedan erases women who do not fit into this narrative. She focuses on the white women’s ascent to (white) male-defined greatness, encouraging them to find intellectually satisfying careers. However, hooks notes that “only women with leisure time and money could actually shape their identities on the model of the feminine mystique.”¹⁸ Friedan explores the experiences of a minority of women in the United States: those with the financial and social privileges to assume the image of ideal femininity. She does nothing to advocate for the women who were already working out of necessity when this book was published, often in laborious and oppressive conditions for little pay.

16. Friedan, 336.

17. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 1-2.

18. hooks, 2.

In making this move, Friedan implicitly accepts that some women will be left behind should her aim be achieved; someone, after all, must take on the domestic duties that she escapes. Although she writes as if she is accounting for the experiences of all women, she is truly only speaking for herself and women like herself. But by making “the problem that has no name” synonymous with “the problem for all women,” Friedan allows for the housewife’s psychological hardships to completely eclipse the economic dispossession faced by poor women and women of color. Feminism’s universal account of oppression is eerily similar to the hegemonic patriarchal episteme that it purports to reject. Historically, white, bourgeois men have created and perpetuated a framework of understanding in which they are the subjects—those who do not fit into their particular definition are lesser, subhuman, unworthy of the same privileges. By focusing only on the middle-class white women’s agenda and refusing to include anyone who does not fit in, the feminist movement upholds the same dichotomies. The dominant voices in the movement fail to recognize their particular privilege as women who are able to reach a level of economic success and intellectual fulfillment that is similar to that of Man’s. However, this oversight is perhaps by design. hooks insightfully argues that “the system of racism, classism, and educational elitism remain intact if [white middle-class women] are to maintain their authoritative positions.”¹⁹ Should the feminist movement achieve its goal of (implicitly white and educated) women achieving the same sort of success as men, it will inevitably continue to harm the women, often poor and black, who are unable to meet these terms and conditions. This particular account of American-dream-esque, capitalistic success has been manufactured and sustained in order to uphold the power of

19. hooks, 13.

a minority at the expense of the masses. White women are pining to fit themselves into this minority, at the expense of degrading the other women and individuals who do not adhere to the hegemonic schema that they have upheld and perpetuated: “as long as... any group defines liberation as gaining social equality with ruling class white men, they have a vested interest in continued exploitation of others.”²⁰ Women’s liberation in this schema, therefore, means something more like being better able to successfully fit into the patriarchal dichotomous definition of value.

Universality and Fragmentation

In speaking in such simple terms about the childishness and fragility of the housewife, Friedan in many ways continues the masculine refusal to acknowledge the true worth of her work. The labor that has been traditionally relegated to women, that of caring for children and family members, is quite literally what sustains us. Man has historically claimed Himself to be the Ideal Subject, his “achievements” reflective of his transcendent perfection. However, without the care of mothers, wives, and sisters, Man would not be able to flourish in the way that he does. It is through the countless hours of mothers’ labor and devotion that boys have grown into men. And it is through her relegation to being his bodily helpmate that he has the privilege to pursue prosperity in the capitalistic, colonialist sphere. Without the relentless unpaid and exploited labor of women, there would be no Man to idealize. However, Friedan seems to ignore this fact, reducing this work to simply that of the underdeveloped and weak. By suggesting that the problem that has no name is due to women’s own fragile wills or desire for security,

20. hooks, 16.

Friedan directly parrots the hegemonic conception of femininity as intrinsically less able and refuses to acknowledge the vast extent that her labor is a precondition for Man's success. Instead of focusing on the structural incentives that keep women at home, Friedan chooses to place blame on the individual woman: in order to be valuable, she must stop choosing to stunt her development and start contributing to the world as her husband does:

They say one day science will be able to make the human body live longer by freezing its growth. American women lately have been living much longer than men—walking through their leftover lives like living dead women. Perhaps men may live longer when women carry more of the burden of the battle with the world instead of being a burden themselves. I think their wasted energy will continue to be destructive to their husbands, to their children, and to themselves, until it is used in their own battle with the world.²¹

Friedan often writes with such vitriol about the housewife that it is easy to forget that she is advocating for her. Much of her thesis relies on a sort of denigration of femininity, the idea that all the housewife does is excessively and neurotically care about her children and husband. She fails to acknowledge how this excessive care is symptomatic of a patriarchal society that has consistently kept women trapped in an identity of wife and mother in order to secure Man's supreme place in the hierarchy: "instead of asking what the origins of the feminine mystique are, Friedan asks only why women accept it."²²

21. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 363.

22. Eisenstein, "The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism," 403.

In arguing for women to assume the roles of Man, Friedan accepts the masculinist account of value without much question. With a lack of investigation into the role that women's work has played in structuring our current reality, she accepts the hegemonic episteme that purports women to be underdeveloped and fragile. Therefore, it is the individual woman who is responsible for her own condition and the damage that such excessive femininity causes on the people around her. In upholding Man's degradation of femininity, Friedan also upholds the other dichotomies used to center Him. Friedan demonstrates her tacit acceptance of the larger cultural schema in the manner in which she talks about the people who are less able than the housewife to reach esteem within it. These deviant folks, those who cannot or will not accept the conditions for humanity laid out by Man, are discussed by Friedan in the same way as our dominant episteme encourages: as innately lesser than, unnatural, and perverse. Furthermore, she argues that such abnormality is due to the failure of the woman who raised them, the result of her femininity reaching its logical extreme. She views the housewife's neuroticism as the cause of all that is undesirable, unable to be explained by pure and heterogenous systems. All that strays too far from Man's dichotomies, therefore, is not the fault of the structures themselves, but rather reflective of the inherent weaknesses of the individual woman. Friedan tracks the process in which the woman's immaturity causes the "progressive dehumanization" of her children, in which they fail to develop into "self-actualized" individuals. Because the housewife's development is "arrested" "at an infantile level, short of personal identity, with an inevitably weak core of self,"²³ she seeks fulfillment by living through her husband and children. Her infantilism causes the infantilism of her

23. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 278.

children, who “retreat even earlier into phantasy from the tests of reality.”²⁴ In arguing that the ugly excesses of femininity are responsible for the manifestation any societal deviance, Friedan furthers the hegemonic culture’s denigration of women and its dichotomous othering logic: Man’s “deviant” children are not symptomatic of the fundamental issues in his rigid hierarchies or his need for control, but rather the toxic and wayward femininity of the women who raised them.

Friedan first explores this progressive dehumanization in the recent “increase in overt manifestations”²⁵ of homosexual men. The housewife is forced to identify solely as a wife and mother, which causes her to live through her son. Because of this, she becomes neurotically coddling and needy, instilling her own passive naivety in her son, who then assumes the same extreme femininity as his mother. The gay man, like his mother, becomes a “Peter Pan, forever childlike, afraid of age, grasping at youth in their continual search for reassurance in some sexual magic.”²⁶ He takes on the same disposition as his mother, so toxically feminine and. infantile that he is unable to fulfill his identity as a man and instead requires a masculine presence in his adult life.

Today, when not only career, but any serious commitment outside the home, are out of bounds for truly ‘feminine’ housewife-mothers, the kind of mother-son devotion which can produce latent or overt homosexuality has plenty of room to expand to fill the time available. The boy smothered by such parasitical mother-love is kept from growing up, not only sexually, but in all ways. Homosexuals

24. Friedan, 279.

25. Friedan, 263.

26. Friedan, 263.

often lack the maturity to finish school and make sustained professional commitments. The shallow unreality, immaturity, promiscuity, lack of lasting human satisfaction that characterize the homosexual's sex life usually characterize all his life and interests... This lack of personal commitment in work, in education, in life outside of sex, is hauntingly "feminine."²⁷

Here, Friedan reinforces Man's othering stereotypes of gay men in order to encourage white middle-class mothers to ascend to roles outside of the house. This pathologization of queerness as a condition that can be understood in terms of the failings of the anxious mother serves to reinforce a dichotomous patriarchal framework that relies on essentialist ideas of masculine and feminine. Through this lens, homosexuality is a mistake, one that goes against the proper (heterosexual) nature of things. Friedan uses the hegemonic logic that she purports to reject, one that assumes that men ought to act a certain way, to further denigrate those men who fall outside of a traditional adherence to masculinity. And she continues her association of femininity with simple frivolity and infantilism; without the destructive force of a mother's unchecked femininity, no man would ever identify as gay, since no boy would be saturated in its toxic unreality and childishness.

Extrapolating from Freud's insights, one could say that such an excess of love-hate is almost implicit in the relationship of mother and son—when her exclusive role as wife and mother, her relegation to the home, force her to live through her son. Male homosexuality was and is far more common than female homosexuality. The father is not as often tempted or forced by society to live through or seduce his daughter. Not many men become overt homosexuals, but a

27. Friedan, 264-265.

great many have suppressed enough of this love-hate to feel not only a deep repugnance for homosexuality, but a general and sublimated repulsion for women.²⁸

Friedan engages in rigorous intellectual gymnastics to blame women here. Again, she instills the idea that men's hatred for women is due to women themselves—it is the mother's overwhelming and neurotic love for her son that causes him to grow up to be a misogynist. Furthermore, Friedan uses the absence of lesbian visibility in the 1960s to uphold the idea that men and their systems are in no way responsible for societal deviance. According to her, there are fewer homosexual women because fathers are engaged in higher-level pursuits that keep them outside of the home and less preoccupied with their children's wellbeing. She ignores the profoundly pervasive structural incentives to silence queer women and force them into heterosexual marriages: in order to keep the patriarchal hierarchy in place, women must remain accessible as resources for sexual and emotional exploitation and childrearing. Instead, Friedan insists that the lack of lesbian presence in American society is not reflective of the totalizing grip of Man's dominance, but rather emblematic of the fact that men are doing something *right*— if only everyone were to embody Ideal Subjectivity in the manner in which they do, then such aberrations of nature would simply not occur.

Friedan's reliance on both othering logic and the insistence of femininity as a force of deviance continues in the second stage of her analysis, in which she argues that “at its most extreme, this pattern of progressive dehumanization can be seen in the cases of schizophrenic children: ‘autistic’ or ‘atypical’ children, as they are sometimes

28. Friedan, 264.

called.”²⁹ Just as in the case of queer children, autistic children are those who have been instilled a weak and fragile ego by their mother’s own poorly developed sense of self. In order to survive the mother’s incessant and frantic care, the child retreats from the world, leaving them stuck at a “very primitive, sub-infantile level”:³⁰

These children often identify themselves with things, inanimate objects—cars, radios, etc., or with animals—pigs, dogs, cats. The crux of the problem seems to be that these children have not organized or developed strong enough selves to cope even with the child’s reality; they cannot distinguish themselves as separate from the outside world; they live on the level of things or of instinctual biological impulse that has not been organized into a human framework at all. As for the causes, the authorities felt that they “must examine the personality of the mother, who is the medium through which the primitive infant transforms himself into a socialized human being.”³¹

According to Friedan, the “childishness” of the autistic individual is solely the consequence of the suburban housewife who herself has no core to her being. Due to her own incompleteness and failings, the child becomes autistic, deficient, and primitive: “he becomes a ‘thing,’ or an animal or ‘a restless wanderer in search of no one and no place, weaving about the room, swaying back and forth, circling the walls as if they were bars he would break through.’”³² Of course, all of Friedan’s speculations here are wildly inaccurate and damaging, but she nevertheless uses them to insist that all that she views

29. Friedan, 286.

30. Friedan, 286.

31. Friedan, 287.

32. Friedan, 288.

as aberrant is simply no more than a consequence of the extreme excesses of femininity. Autistic people are stripped of their multiplicity and humanity, which is as nuanced and rich as that of Man. Instead, Friedan continues to subject them to universalized categorical logic, one that degrades and pathologizes them. Just as all that else that exists outside of His tidy system, autism is a problem to be solved, one that is exemplary of inherent issues with the individual rather than with the system that decries them to be deviant. Autistic people are case studies of mothering gone wrong, and will simply disappear once the women who raise them rid themselves of their fragility and weakness. Ultimately, it is the individual women who is responsible for both her and her children's inability to transcend into Man's sphere.

By making these claims, Friedan continues her quest to uplift neurotypical, heterosexual, middle-class white women to the "level of men" by accepting all of their terms and conditions; she seems to have no problem reinforcing the patriarchal insistence on the depravity of queer and autistic individuals, so long as women can work a 9-5 job and participate in politics. Friedan is right to acknowledge that white women have been excluded from the larger creative sphere of men by creating a myth that women's true role is that of the housekeeper. She is also correct in saying that this systemic belittlement and ostracization of has abetted misogynistic ideas and misery of the suburban housewife. However, Friedan fails to extend this sort of sympathy to any group other than her own. She refuses to consider the notion that the oppression of black, queer, neurodivergent, or poor people also relies on the same dichotomous logic, one that uplifts a miniscule fraction of the population by means of othering and degrading the value of all others. The women who Freidan discusses are acknowledged to be dynamic and worthy

of value and esteem, but those who do not fit into her very particular definition of “woman” are not; they are swept to the side, marked as deviant so that they can continue to be placed into the category of “other” that the men before her have instated. What is heartbreaking about Freidan’s argument is that she refuses to look past herself: she will not examine the way that this dichotomous logic harms everyone who exists outside of the Ideal Subject. Rather, in her quest to bring the white suburban housewives to the level of their husbands, she tacitly accepts the fact that others will be left behind.

Liberal Individualist Feminism within Structural Patriarchy

In her argument for the woman to assume the masculine account of esteem, Friedan works within the othering logic set up by patriarchal dichotomies. She provides an analysis that focuses mostly on the housewife’s individual failings as the source of her own oppression, rather than examining the larger systematic factors that have limited her. In her account, the educated woman has become weak due to her relegation to housewifery, causing her to retreat into the comforts of home. It is due to the limitations that she places on herself that the bourgeois woman finds herself trapped in the mystique—if only she shed herself of her frailty and infantilism, then she could join her husband in the neoliberal, capitalistic rat race. In allowing the individual woman’s psyche to bear most of the culpability for her condition, Friedan adopts the same liberal individualist episteme as Man. Stemming from the era of the Enlightenment, liberal individualism stresses the importance of personal freedom and flourishing. Such a philosophy is baked into the foundations of the American and many other Western governments, promising every individual’s right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Of course, by “individual,”

our founding fathers only meant those who met the criteria for ideal humanity—Man, white, bourgeois, and Christian. Those who did not fit into this definition were excluded from these promises and abused by those who did in order to ensure their individual success and dominance. People of color were brutalized; their bodies, land, and labor exploited in order to secure the individual flourishing of the white bourgeois. Although undoubtedly benefiting greatly from the domination of people of color, white women were also utilized as means to Man’s end; viewed as deformed men, they were relegated to being bodily helpmates in order to ensure the continuation of Man’s bloodline while he engages in “higher endeavors”. The individual liberalist premise that everyone can succeed off of their own hard work and determination, therefore, is not rooted in any sort of historical truth. Man’s success was completely and irrevocably dependent upon the exploitation and control of others.

Despite the tangible relentless failings of liberal individualism to provide anything close to genuine equity, Friedan accepts this philosophy and utilizes it throughout her book. She provides little to no structural analysis for woman’s oppression, instead focusing on the internal barriers to success that she places on herself. By centering the personal failures of the American woman to achieve Man’s level of flourishing, Friedan plays right into His hands: the institutions that were created for and saturated in sexist and colonial ideologies remain unchallenged, and the burden to adapt remains with her. In her critique of *The Feminine Mystique*, feminist philosopher Zillah Eisenstein stresses that women’s ideas of inferiority “do not come from air... there must be real needs in a society that reproduce these ideas and give them new life.”³³ Calling for individual

33. Eisenstein, “The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism,” 403.

women to pull themselves up by their bootstraps ignores the structural incentives at hand that systemically degrade and devalue women in order to reinforce patriarchy. Women's subordination serves a structural, societal purpose—it maintains and perpetuates patriarchy and its economic expression in capitalism. Man's myth of individualistic success ignores the countless women who have given both their labor and lives to allow Him to flourish. In adopting this account of liberal individualism, Friedan fails to investigate who would be exploited should some women ascend to the level of white bourgeois men. Women's liberation cannot come solely personally or interpersonally—even if some women were to succeed in reaching capitalistic success, the patriarchal structure upon which it was founded would remain largely unmoved. Within both a misogynistic and racist system, poor women of color would continue to be degraded and exploited for the benefit of an elite minority. True gender equity, therefore, can only be achieved from the radical restructuring of a system that has allowed for one type of person's flourishing at the expense of all others. But in accepting the premises of liberal individualism, Friedan cheers on the women who are able to approach the glass ceiling and ignores those who cannot. Associating the identity crisis of white bourgeois women with the central crux of women's struggle, the Lean In brand of feminism disregards the multifaceted layers of exploitation and domination that has allowed for some women's tokenization within capitalism more than others.

Friedan's individualist solution services the continuation of patriarchy, even harming the white middle-class women who join the workforce. She encourages women to find fulfillment through education and employment, but overlooks the lingering societal and structural expectations that will still cause women to carry the burden of

housework. In her article “After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment,” philosopher Nancy Fraser explores the consequences of what she calls the Universal Breadwinner Model, which, mirroring Friedan and Sandberg, aims to achieve gender equity primarily by promoting women’s employment. Fraser believes that in ideal conditions, the Universal Breadwinner Model would succeed in preventing poverty and exploitation; by promising secure jobs for all genders, women would be able to stay out of poverty and have financial independence. In respect to other principles of gender equity, the model is not as effective. Although secure breadwinner jobs would achieve income equality for those participating in them, “it contains a basic social fault-line dividing breadwinners from others, too the considerable disadvantage of the others—most of whom would be women.”³⁴ Because it holds men and women to the single standard of worker, it is only able to eliminate marginalization and inequality so long as women are employed. Overwhelmingly expected to shoulder all of the homemaking duties, women in situations where full-time caregiving is a necessity will continue to face economic insecurity. Importantly, the model does nothing to incentivize men to pick up their fair share of the caregiving work—in fact, by uplifting the value of paid work, it degrades unpaid work, reducing men’s motivation to equally participate in domestic duties and leaving women to carry the weight of both traditional employment and caregiving work. Regardless of women’s participation in the workforce, patriarchal ideas of women as caregivers, mothers, and wives will cause her to take on far more of the homemaking than her male counterparts. The women who become breadwinners will likely become “working mothers,” burdened with both the role of paid worker and unpaid

34. Nancy Fraser, “After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment,” in *Ethical Issues for a New Millennium*, ed. John Howle, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 44.

domestic laborer: “they are to operate within the patriarchal sexual division of labor in both the public and private spheres.”³⁵ Ultimately, this proposal fundamentally fails at dismantling androcentrism: the ideal citizen is “...the male half of the old breadwinner/homemaker couple, now universalized and required of everyone.”³⁶ Rather than preserving the particular values of caregiving, the Universal Breadwinner Model valorizes the sphere traditional to men and encourages women to fit in. By requiring only women to change their behavior, such a model does not encourage men to take any sort of accountability.

Should all women achieve full liberation from patriarchal dominance, men would have to share the responsibilities of maintaining the home and taking care of the children and family. They would also have to rid themselves of their structurally reinforced superiority complexes, surrendering their supreme control over the means of production that relies upon the exploitation and degradation of others. The sort of feminism that encourages women to develop strong egos in the way that men do, overcoming their internal barriers to success, does not require the overarching system of patriarchy to change; leaning in, therefore, still safeguards men’s comfort and privilege:

Given Friedan’s lack of a power analysis, she thinks men have something to gain in women’s equality. I would agree. But they also have much to lose—the sexual privilege they enjoy within the sexual hierarchy that divides home and work. Once men lose their male privilege, they will have to share the burdens and responsibilities of childrearing and domestic labor. They will lose privileges and

35. Eisenstein, “The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism,” 408.

36. Fraser, “After the Family Wage,” 46.

freedoms that have existed as a result of patriarchal oppression. The destruction of a system of power and oppression does not result in everyone gaining equally and in the same way.³⁷

The dismantling of patriarchy is fundamentally against men's interests, which have been historically reinforced at the expense of women. Even if some individual men surrender the power that they hold and even if some women are able to break the glass ceiling, the systems that have been built around a masculinist hierarchy will remain. Thus, genuine liberation for all women will only come from the thorough undoing of the structures that have perpetuated male dominance. This restructuring will fundamentally require men to change. Fraser argues that instead of the Universal Breadwinner Model which requires women to acquiesce to the requirements of both the traditionally masculine and feminine, we should strive to secure a Universal Caregiver Model, one that makes "women's current life patterns the norm for everyone... Women today often combine breadwinning and caregiving, albeit with great difficulty and strain. A postindustrial welfare state must ensure that men do the same, while redesigning institutions so as to eliminate the difficulty and strain."³⁸ The Universal Caregiver Model would not force women to adopt men's definition of worth or success, nor would it relegate them to solely the domestic sphere. Rather, by dismantling the dichotomous breadwinner/homemaker gendered order that has structured our state and institutions, this model encourages people of all genders to participate in both employed jobs and domestic duties, alleviating the burden typically placed on women and holding men accountable for their share of the labor.

37. Eisenstein, "The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism," 404.

38. Fraser, "After the Family Wage," 53.

However, in addition to reconfiguring the breadwinner/homemaker dichotomy, we also must tear down the institutions that support male control and comfort. This goes beyond just changing labor expectations between men and women. It also requires that we accept that liberal feminism is irrevocably tethered to an exploitative system, and is thus fundamentally bankrupt. As Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser write in *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*:

[Sheryl] Sandberg and her ilk see feminism as a handmaiden of capitalism. They want a world where the task of managing exploitation in the workplace and oppression in the social whole is shared equally by ruling-class men and women. This is a remarkable vision of *equal opportunity domination*: one that asks ordinary people, in the name of feminism, to be grateful that it is a woman, not a man, who busts their union, orders a drone to kill their parent, or locks their child in a cage at the border... Feminists must take a stand: Will we continue to pursue “equal opportunity domination” while the planet burns? Or will we reimagine gender justice in an anticapitalist form—one that leads beyond the present crisis to a new society?³⁹

Liberal individualist feminism “empowers” a few privileged women to be leaders of capitalistic control and exploitation. This is not feminism. This is, overwhelmingly, the same structure of dominance and hierarchy as before—one that still disproportionately harms women! —except this time, some of the commanders wear stilettos.

39. Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (New York: Verso, 2019), 2-4.

In order to actualize what Arruzza, Bhattacharya and Fraser call feminism for the 99%, one that advocates for “kicking back” rather than “leaning in,”⁴⁰ we must thoroughly critique the episteme that stems from centuries of Man’s dominance. This, of course, means challenging gross stereotypes based on factors such as sex, race, class, or ability, but it also requires us to interrogate hegemonic conceptions of worth, individuality, and success. We must ask what (and who) our larger economic, epistemic, and social conditions are serving, and if such conditions ought to be replicated in feminist theory and activism. In investigating the shortcomings of our current episteme, we find potential for alternatives that are not couched in capitalistic and exploitative premises: “in the vacuum produced by liberalism’s decline, we have a chance to build another feminism: a feminism with a different definition of what counts as a feminist issue, a different class orientation, and a different ethos—one that is radical and transformative.”⁴¹ Through the radical reevaluation of ourselves, our social world, and our episteme, women can curate liberatory visions of a feminist future, ones that are not necessarily tied to our current conditions. In opting out instead of leaning in, women will no longer scramble to catch up with Man in His world. Rather, we will set foot on untrodden paths, drawing ourselves, our realities, and our futures not from Man’s eye, but our own.

40. Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, 13.

41. Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, 4-5

Chapter 3: Tools of Epistemic Resistance

In 1984, Black lesbian feminist thinker Audre Lorde was invited to speak at the New York University Institute for the Humanities conference, regarding the diverse experiences of American women. She noticed immediately that the conference was dominated by white, heterosexual women, while she and other non-white and queer women were relegated to a single panel. Lorde's experience highlights a fundamental problem with mainstream Western feminism, in which its theories and practices revolve around Woman of the Man/Woman dichotomy: she who is white, bourgeois, and heterosexual. Any woman who does not fit these criteria is seen as tangential, as an object to fit into one panel at the end of the conference so as to maintain a façade of diversity. Their lived experiences are not considered when developing central feminist epistemologies, ethics, and theories. Rather, they are placed into an "othered" box, as the sorts of women who are tasked to discuss diversity within the feminist movement in a side room at the conference, not those who propose central ideas or develop creative solutions. As Lorde notes,

To read this program is to assume that lesbian and Black women have nothing to say about existentialism, the erotic, women's culture and silence, developing feminist theory, or heterosexuality and power. And what does it mean in personal and political terms when even the two Black women who did present here were literally found at the last hour? What does it mean when the tools of a racist

patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of the same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable.¹

In centering only one sort of woman's theories and actions in the feminist movement, we segregate and ignore all other options. We see difference as something to be tolerated or relegated to the margins in exchange for a clear and tidy central vision. In the case of mainstream Western feminism, the vision that is focused on is that of the *Mystique*-esque housewife, she whose oppression is treated as synonymous with that of all women. However, such a tunnel vision disregards the many additional otherings that work alongside of the man/woman dichotomy to perpetuate hierarchy, some of which may materially benefit the mainstream feminist theorist. As white, heterosexual, and middle- or upper- class, she maintains a privilege simply not granted to poor women, queer women, and women of color. In fact, the comfortable material reality that gives her the space and time to participate in the professional and intellectual sphere is built upon the labor of others, often the very folks that she excludes from fully participating in her sort of feminism: "if white American feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting difference in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color? What is the theory behind racist feminism?"²

1. Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 94.

2. Lorde, 96.

The refusal of Friedan-ish feminists to fully see the diversity in women's experiences is reflective of an overarching trend, where privileged women instrumentalize the feminist movement to further their own aims and (either implicitly or explicitly) safeguard the other dichotomies that secure their place in the hierarchy. White bourgeois women hold considerable power and privilege that many others do not; in being seen as relational to Man, as those whom it is His duty to provide for and take care of, these sorts of women often receive the economic and material comfort that comes from the exploitation of others. Of course, Woman's position is tenuous here—she is only afforded these privileges so long as she subscribes to Man's definitions of who she should be, irrevocably tethered to Him as a beautiful and subservient wife. Should she fully strike out on her own and attempt to find success on her own terms, the benefits that she receives from her affiliation with Man would cease; it is her compliance in assuming essential femininity that rewards her with protection and security. However, as many feminists have stressed, being seen as a solely relational being is not enough for any agent. There are structurally and epistemically imposed limits on Woman's ability to reach the same level of individual liberty and autonomy as Man, ones that they are made painfully aware of as they watch their brothers, fathers, and husbands achieve an individualistic success that is simply unobtainable for them. Even though she is rewarded with the material fruits of Man's labor, Woman often feels existentially bereft, a phenomenon that Friedan articulately vocalizes in the *Mystique*. Comfortable yet starved, Man's woman yearns for a seat at the table.

Thus, many white feminists propose a compromise: they will continue to uphold and serve the dominant episteme in exchange for a seat as close to Man's as possible,

thereby ascending to positions of higher regard without tremendously shaking the status quo. This arrangement presents compelling benefits to both Woman and Man. Firstly, in accepting dichotomous logics such as racism and classism that structures systems of oppression, the material wealth and power of the white bourgeois can stand unchallenged. The colonial exploitation and capitalistic dominance that sustains their comfortable reality stands strong, as Woman is vying to exploit and dominate in the way that Man does, rather than radically create alternative visions of leadership and success. Secondly, in avoiding grave challenges to Man's epistemic systems and claim to power, this solution still holds His comfort as a chief concern. He is in no way expected to change. For example, according to this proposal, Woman must prove to Him that she will still engage in all of the proper womanly duties while also participating in professional and political life; that she can do it all. According to Friedan, this girlboss-mother balance is what housewife ought to be aiming for: "a woman is handicapped by her sex, and handicaps society, either by slavishly copying the patterns of man's advance in the professions, or refusing to compete with man at all. But with the vision to make a new life plan of her own, she can fulfill a commitment to profession and politics, and to marriage and motherhood with equal seriousness."³ By advocating for women to tack on vocational fulfillment in addition to the already demanding work of motherhood, the Lean In solution does not truly challenge patriarchal premises. It seems to accept that Man is fundamentally "masculine" and incapable of taking on more "feminine" duties, and thus does not challenge Him to participate in these sorts of tasks. Rather, if Woman wants a larger piece of the pie, if she wants to chase professional achievement, she must

3. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Books, 1974), 361-2.

continue to demonstrate her devotion to the role of wife and mother. She must demonstrate that she will not severely threaten his patriarchal and essentialist gendered order, that she will continue to play by His rules and care for Him and His children in the way she always has. So, white bourgeois feminism does not liberate us from even the Man/Woman dichotomy. It upholds a fundamental distinction, in which Man continues to be free to liberally engage in whatever intellectual and professional tasks that interests Him, while Woman is still identified as wife and mother, although this time perhaps alongside of new and shiny professional titles. Therefore, through committing to central hegemonic ideals of success, value, and hierarchy, white bourgeois women actively aid and abet racist, colonialist, heterosexist, and patriarchal projects. *Leaning In* still requires Woman to be Man's helpmate, still a crusader for His episteme and mission; all that this sort of feminism hopes for is that in exchange for her devoted service, she will be compensated with a semblance of His power.

Throughout history, there are countless examples of white bourgeois women utilizing their privilege to oppress and dominate othered groups. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a Canadian Indigenous writer and activist, illustrates just one of these instances: after the War of 1812, American loyalists were given land grants in present-day Ontario, land that was occupied by Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg people. In order to claim this space for themselves, the settlers needed to dispossess the Indigenous communities residing there. Importantly, the Nishnaabeg's webs of meaning did not adhere to Man's; they had different ways of understanding themselves, their relations to one another, their connections to their larger material and spiritual ecosystem, many of which challenged settlers' aims. Their understanding of the land was not that of something to be owned,

and their conception of gender did not fit into the Western dichotomous patriarchy. To colonize efficiently and totally, Man needed to impose His episteme onto the land and things within it, creating an order that fit within His understanding so as to make it more efficiently controllable. By promoting Christian, civil, Western values, the Nishnaabeg could be assimilated into the colonialist culture, thereby disregarding the colonialists' need to fulfill any land treaties and quieting any of the epistemic threats that may come from a multiplicitous and non-patriarchal understanding of gender. Thus, Methodist missions were employed throughout the territory, which served as sites of intensive assimilative education, aiming to fashion boys and men into "farmers and carpenters" and girls and women into "managers of effective British households and patriarchal nuclear families in village-like settings, thus removing Indigenous peoples from the land completely and erasing those who did not conform to the colonial gender binary completely."⁴ As Simpson stresses, white women had an incredibly crucial role in enforcing this order onto the Nishnaabeg people:

Much of the teaching at the Methodist missions was done by white women, which means in this context that much of the policing of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg bodies, intimate relationships, and parenting were done by and through white women. White women were the ideal, and missions were out to quietly destroy Nishnaabeg nationhood by erasing strong, powerful Nishnaabeg women who were skilled at fishing, hunting, trapping, sugaring, ricing, and medicine. White women were out to destroy our political system, health care system, economy, and system of governance. White women were out to destroy gender variance and

4. Betasamosake Simpson, Leanne, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 96.

fluidity, our knowledge of families, kinship, birth, birth control, sexuality, breastfeeding and attachment, and community parenting. They were out to destroy our education system and spirituality. White women were out to remove us from political influence in our communities and our nations and to position us as “less than” our male counterparts. They were out to destroy our agency, self-determination, body sovereignty, and freedom and to contain us under the colonial heteropatriarchy within which they lived and used to have power over us. White women were out to destroy our intelligence and political systems. This is genocide.

This is sexual and gendered violence as a tool of genocide and as a tool of dispossession. It is deliberate.⁵

Often throughout history, white bourgeois women have not been mere passive helpmates for Man’s quests; they have been active agents of oppressive and exploitative regimes, hoping that by continuing structures of dominance, they will be rewarded for good behavior. For Simpson, this fact completely negates the possibility of any sort of coalition building or reconciliation between Indigenous women and the white women who facilitate colonial projects:

Genocide sets up a clear dichotomy in which, unless white women are willing to divest themselves of the power of being white, there is no shared marginal space with Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg women. Describing interactions between white women and [Indigenous] women as “experimental and not oppositional” is a fiction that exists only in white women’s theorizing themselves out of the

5. Betasamosake Simpson, 96-7.

responsibility for benefiting from and the replication of the gendered violence of colonialism through assumed allied spaces of women-to-women contact zones.⁶ Man's women have not historically demonstrated the willingness to remove themselves of the benefits that come from being tethered to Him: of being white, bourgeois, and heterosexual. They have not shown an overwhelming desire to remove themselves of such privilege and recognize that the same hierarchal episteme is responsible for both their degradation as women and others' degradation as non-white, poor, queer, disabled, etc. Rather, Woman views the feminist cause as complete once she is on the same level as Man, once she has found a similar success as Him in a capitalistic, techno-industrial hierarchy—she has shown that she is okay with perpetuating dichotomous systems of oppression so long as she can get ahead.

Ultimately, white bourgeois feminism often does not and cannot escape the hegemonic conceptual frameworks in which it resides. It does not radically imagine new futures, new possibilities; rather, it safeguards Man's power-knowledge system by working within it. Woman centers herself in her feminist theories and proposals and relegates all other women, those who sit at the intersections of multiple identities, to the margins. For Audre Lorde, this othering is unacceptable:

Those of us who stand outside of the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference—those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older—know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with

6. Betasamosake Simpson, 100.

those identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*

They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.⁷

As Lorde insightfully argues, working within all of Man's terms and conditions will not result in true liberation for any marginalized community. It is His house, His episteme, His rules; thus, He will always be one step ahead, always have the final say. All that chasing after Man's definitions of success accomplishes for Woman is (1) a state of perpetual exhaustion from attempting to obtain the unobtainable, attempting to break the glass ceiling while also being expected to perform the countless duties of motherhood and wifery, and (2) the continued exploitation and domination of many denigrated others, as Man's hierarchal order will continue to stand strong. Girlbossery is tremendously insufficient. In order to truly improve conditions for all of the folks damned by the current order, the only tenable option is to think outside of it, to refuse the premises that do not serve us and radically, creatively develop new ones: as Sylvia Wynter says, "the maps of spring always have to be redrawn again, in undared forms."⁸ In this chapter, I aim to explore some of these alternatives—refreshed and reinvigorated ways of thinking

7. Lorde, "The Master's Tools," 95.

8. Wynter, Sylvia, "The Pope Must Have Been Drunk, The King of Castile a Madman: Culture as Actuality, and The Caribbean Rethinking Modernity," in *The Reordering of Culture: Latin America, The Caribbean and Canada in the Hood*, eds. Alvina Reprecht and Cecilia Taiana, (Ottawa: Carleton, 1995), 35.

about our selves, relationships, and worlds that fundamentally challenge the current episteme of oppression. Here, we put down the old tools and create our own.

Poetic Knowledge

Man's knowledge system revolves around science and detached rationality. Through these, He declares Himself to be transcendent, to have a seat at an aloof vantage point in which He can reach an objective understanding of the world. Such a claim to universal knowledge is interwoven with an urge for universal power. Scientific knowledge allows Him to know His world insofar as He can manipulate it; through detached experimentation, Man learns what conditions lead to particular outcomes. He claims the world to be His own as He finds the most efficient and productive methods of "developing" it: the land is measured in terms of potential yields, the things within it as potential resources, all to be maximized and exploited for His benefit. Through poking and prodding, the scientist categorizes and classifies, delineating clean borders between things, all of which fit into His universal order. As it turns out, this sort of disciplined knowledge has been very successful in aiding Man's claim to power. Proliferating throughout the Enlightenment era, the Western techno-industrial episteme fully embraced the tenets of scientific knowledge as its supreme doctrine. Scholarly institutions began to devote themselves to the pursuit of this thinking, furthering its centrality in our power-knowledge system. As this obsession grew, so did the need to classify, to control the connections between all things. Thus, Man has developed and continues to perpetuate a knowledge system that aims for universal and detached order, a disciplined understanding

of the world that operates through “the act of relentless categorization.”⁹ Because it serves Him so well, Man fetishizes scientific rationality to the point where any other forms of meaning making are eclipsed, framed as not capable of discovering Truth in the way that science inherently can.

Of course, science does provide a sort of knowledge, one that can be legitimately beneficial in gaining insight into how the world works. And it is also worthwhile to note that many of these insights provide benefits that are hard to refute: for example, the medical practices and technologies garnered through the methodological and scientific process have improved many folks’ well-being in incredibly tangible ways. Importantly, however, there are also countless ways in which science has failed. Although it claims itself to be value-neutral, scientific rationality is ensnared in Man’s episteme, and has often been utilized for Him and His interests. It is those who are in “developed” regions (those in which Man resides) that reap the vast majority of the fruits of scientific knowledge; giving those in the “First World” higher quality health care and more materially comfortable living conditions, while determining the most efficient ways to exploit the resources and people in colonized (or formerly colonized) regions. Additionally, through the systematization of His world, He “scientifically” distinguishes Himself from those debased as other. Under this impulse, gender is dimorphous and biologically determined, and the characteristics that accompany male and female are essential features of evolution and nature. Here also, race is phenotypic; people can be categorized neatly according to their visible traits, from which fundamental racial features can be discerned. Science is a search for a universal order, often ordered by He

9. McKittrick, Katherine, *Dear Science and Other Stories*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 35.

who claims divine transcendence. Left unchecked, what is supposedly “value-neutral” quickly becomes value-laden, oriented towards upholding the interests of the privileged.

Scientific knowledge has been abused in the past, warped by the hands of the powerful, but that is not its only issue. Even if there somehow emerged a truly ideal observer to enact scientific processes rationally and neutrally, regardless of how perfectly such methods are carried out, the truths that we come to know from scientific knowledge will never be enough. No matter how hard we aim for universal explanation and understanding, we will always come up short. Because in its quest for detached Truth, scientific knowledge fails to acknowledge the grounded, relational, human truths that structure our experience as humans. As Martinican decolonial writer Aimé Césaire stresses, scientific knowledge is “gnawed from within... gnawed by hunger, the hunger of feeling, the hunger of life”:¹⁰

Mankind, once bewildered by sheer facts, finally dominated them through reflection, observation, and experiment. Henceforth mankind knows how to make its way through the forest of phenomena. It knows how to utilize the world. But it is not the lord of the world on that account.

A view of the world, yes; science affords a view of the world, but a summary and superficial view... In short, scientific knowledge enumerates, measures, classifies, and kills.

But is not sufficient to state that scientific knowledge is summary. It is necessary to add that it is *poor and half starved*.

10. Césaire, Aimé, “Poetry and Knowledge,” in *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry 1946-82*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1990), xliii.

To acquire it mankind has sacrificed everything: desires, fears, feelings,
psychological complexes.

To acquire the impersonality of scientific knowledge mankind *depersonalized*
itself, *deindividualized* itself.

An impoverished knowledge, I submit, for at its inception—whatever other
wealth it may have—there stands an impoverished humanity.¹¹

Stemming from the Enlightenment, the modern conception of science aims for a clear and tangible order to all things. However, in doing so, it removes itself from certain truths critical to our understanding: the truths that come from existing in bodies, existing among each other, existing within a material, social, and spiritual world.

When our episteme views scientific knowledge as capable of grasping supreme Truth, we risk disregarding all other forms of knowledge as irrelevant or purposeless. To do so would mean to ignore many of the understandings that emerge from our dynamism, our particularities. This eclipsed knowledge comes from immanence, rather than from a claim to universal transcendence. It is poetic, “born in the great silence of scientific knowledge.”¹²

Judgement is poor from all the reason in the world.

The image is rich with all the absurdity in the world.

Judgement is poor from all the “thought” in the world.

The image is rich with all the life in the universe.

Judgement is poor from all the rationality in existence.

11. Césaire, xlii.

12. Césaire, xlii.

The image is rich with all the irrationality in life.¹³

Poetry, “that process which through word, image, myth, love, and humor establishes me at the living heart of myself and of the world,”¹⁴ does not seek control or unity. It does not preoccupy itself with relentless categorization and formalization. Instead, through narrative, imagery, metaphor, and art, poetic knowledge speaks to forms of meaning that have been stifled by the obsession with scientific knowledge. It attempts to articulate what is inarticulable in the dominant episteme—the nuanced, the muddled, the embedded. Through the unearthing and exploration of this knowledge, the poet formulates alternative maps of meaning, pointing towards directions unconsidered by Man.

In her essay “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” Audre Lorde argues that poetic knowledge is crucial in unfettering women from epistemic barriers and thus challenging the dominant order. So as to become a universal and rational observer, the scientist must remove himself from his feelings, his humanity. He must disregard his particular positionality and relationality behind a veil of ignorance. This appeal to transcendent and detached knowledge serves to distinguish him from women, who are marked as essentially bodily and irrational beings. Man’s infatuation with scientific knowledge serves to confine her, to mark her emotions as frivolous and unsubstantial. She is epistemically marginalized, her voice and visions silenced. Due to this systemic disregard, Lorde argues that every woman has “an incredible reserve of creativity and

13. Césaire, li.

14. Césaire, lv.

power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling,”¹⁵ one that has been repressed for generations. Poetry is the tool needed to excavate these reserves; through it, women can share a sort of knowledge that has been shunned by the hegemonic episteme:

For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were meant to kneel to thought as we were meant to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets. And there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power. They lie in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. They are made realizable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare.¹⁶

Unlike the scientist, the poet does not sacrifice her emotions; rather, she utilizes them as a source of wisdom and strength. Poetry invites her to utter her hopes, anxieties, perceptions, and dreams. From fashioning these feelings into language, the resulting poetry resonates within her and also among others. The poet expresses a piece of herself, as well as the wisdom that emerges from such grounded experience. In uncovering this deep, embedded, and artistic knowledge, Lorde argues that poetry allows women to imagine creative liberatory futures and take steps towards realizing them:

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems,

15. Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” in *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, eds. Susan Shaw and Janet Lee, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2015), 372.

16. Lorde, 373.

carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives... For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action.¹⁷

Poetry articulates the understandings that are inarticulable within scientific knowledge. Visions of a world outside of current hierarchy, dominance, and dichotomies require creativity. They require a radical re-envisioning of what we know and how we know it. They require a renewed exploration of what has been deemed by Man as inefficient, irrational, and unscientific. They require trusting poetry as a real source of wisdom. Through these processes, women formulate revolutionary actions that stem from their poetic visions, ones that are shaped by the sort of world that they want to see.

Importantly, poetic knowledge can be incredibly constructive for any folks who are epistemically marginalized. Poetry allows the poet to see themselves as outside of what they are believed to be. Though narrative, creativity, and metaphor, they redraw themselves as figures outside of the logics of oppression. In her book *Dear Science and Other Stories*, Black feminist theorist Katherine McKittrick describes the potential of Black creative texts and narratives to serve as radical theory and inspire radical action. These works refuse hegemonic, phenotypic definitions of race, destabilizing disciplined, categorical thought:

In their narrative, poetic, visual, psychic, and physiological responses to racism, black cultural producers reconfigure normative and biologically determinist understandings of race by producing works that are in tandem with, yet imagine

17. Lorde, 372.

our past-present-future outside, colonial logics... Black creative work is, I put forth, all at once, resistance, critique, method-making, praxis, and a site of neurological and physiological experience.¹⁸

Black creative processes and products both challenge oppressive logics and actions and push past them, repositioning race not as stable and universal, but rather as relational and dynamic. Poetry allows the theorist to acknowledge the profundity of racial categorizations in shaping social and material realities, yet also rebel against these fictitious dichotomies, unfolding new intellectual spaces that redefine Black pasts, presents, and futures.

Poetic knowledge—narrative, art, storytelling, metaphor— is both theory and praxis. It shifts the manner in which we see ourselves, others, and our worlds, and thus points us towards a radical reimagining of our reality and our dreams. It does not seek to constantly quantify, to arrive at a perfectly detached a-human state. Instead, it finds the poetry of human experience as its chief inspiration, and in doing so, it engenders a renewed focus on particular phenomenology, interwoven connectedness, and grounded normativity. It does not uplift one sort of person, nor one sort of knowledge system, as capable of grasping total knowledge. Rather, it acknowledges the manner in which understanding is tethered to our positionality, and therefore encourages epistemological sharing, communal and inter-communal storytelling and collaboration, in order to glean a more holistic picture. In this way, poetry is radical creative theory. As McKittrick stresses: “if we do not do this work, if we do not collaboratively call into question a system of knowledge that delights in accumulation by dispossession and profits from

18. McKittrick, *Dear Science*, 50-1.

ecological and genocidal practices, if we do not produce and share stories that honor modes of humanness that cannot and will not replicate this system, we are doomed.”¹⁹

The poet artistically unearths what the scientist cannot. In doing so, she both challenges his epistemic blind spots and cultivates new forms of knowing and being.

Curdled Logic

Because I, a *mestiza*,
 continually walk out of one culture
 and into another,
 because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan
*simultáneamente.*²⁰
 [a soul between two worlds, three, four,
 my head buzzes with the conflicting, the contradictory.
 I am guided by all of these voices that speak to me
 simultaneously.]

Dichotomous logic pervades Man’s episteme: to control His surroundings more easily,
 He compartmentalizes and categorizes them, placing the world into neat and

19. McKittrick, 74.

20. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999, 99.

manipulatable boxes. According to this line of thought, one is man or woman, white or nonwhite, heterosexual or queer, Christian or pagan, etc. This manner of understanding the social world is grounded in a self-serving fiction: all of these dichotomies work to uplift those who are male, white, heterosexual, and Christian into a role of ideal subjectivity, and debase those who embody “othered” identities. An assumption built on fiction inherently leads to the misinterpretation and exclusion of the beings who do not fit into its schema. There have always been and will always be folks who do not fit cleanly into these categories, who naturally resist Man’s urge to pin them down and label them. From this truth emerges the *mestiza* consciousness and curdled logic, a way of being that rejects such dichotomies and embraces that which cannot be contained. In her chapter “*La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness*,” feminist Chicana thinker and activist Gloria Anzaldúa describes her experience as a *mestiza* (a mix of Spanish and Indigenous heritage), one who resides within many different cultures and identities. Anzaldúa was a woman, but not white, nor heterosexual; she had strong and deep connections to Mexican culture, yet grew up in the United States; she spoke many different languages, codeswitching from Standard English to Mexican Spanish to a hybrid of both. There is no place for someone like her within Man’s logic of purity. The *mestiza* is constantly straddling the intersection of all of these different cultures, undergoing “a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war”²¹ as she navigates their often-conflicting messages. These different aspects of her, all crucial to her personal identity and social reality, are constantly in dialogue with one another, providing insights and possibilities unknowable to the pure:

21. Anzaldúa, 100.

In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.²²

The *mestiza* cannot accept the strict dichotomies of Man's episteme; to do so would mean to kill the multiplicity that resides in her. So, she "develops a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned."²³ Although she has been excluded due to her border-dwelling nature, such exclusion allows her to look upon this dichotomous logic from an outsider perspective. She recognizes her ability to occupy many different spaces, cultures, and tongues, and in doing so inherently critiques Man's desire to occupy a unified and whole vantage point: the *mestiza* sees that it is His claim to pure unity that marks her as deviant and fragmented, allowing Him to control and manipulate.

22. Anzaldúa, 101.

23. Anzaldúa, 101.

Ultimately, Anzaldúa asserts, she will stay as she is, fully embracing the borderlands and the constant travel and upheaval that it requires: “stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain.”²⁴

María Lugones furthers Anzaldúa’s ideas in her book *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, emphasizing the revolutionary potential that lies within the *mestizaje*. She makes a distinction between the logic of purity and the logic of curdling through the image of making mayonnaise: the aim in this process is to separate the yolk from the white as cleanly as possible, then slowly combine it with oil and water to emulsify neatly. This sort of separation reflects the logic of purity, in which things are able to be separated from each other into mutually exclusive categories, serving an overarching tidy order and understanding. However, not all separations can be understood in pure terms. Sometimes, the emulsion separates, causing curdling: the ingredients coalesce toward oil or toward water, leaving “yolky oil and oily yolk,”²⁵ impurity.

When I think of *mestizaje*, I think both of separation as curdling, an exercise in impurity, and of separation as splitting, an exercise in purity. I think of the attempt at control exercised by those who possess both power and the categorial eye and who attempt to split everything impure, breaking it down into pure elements (as in egg white and egg yolk) for the purposes of control. Control over creativity. And I think of something in the middle of either/or, something impure,

24. Anzaldúa, 86.

25. María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 122.

something or someone mestizo, as both separated, curdled, and resisting its curdled state.²⁶

The curdled live in a world that revolves around the logic of purity. This world centers Man as an impartial reasoner outside history and culture, from which He is given transparency, or the ability to “perceive their needs, interests, and ways as those of the group.”²⁷ Such transparency is reflected in His ability to see Himself as embodying ideal subjectivity and rationality, untainted with “need, emotion, [and] the body”²⁸ in the way that others are: “He is the measure of all things. He is transparent relative to his position in the hetero-relational patriarchy, to his culture, race, class, and gender. His sense is the only sense. So curdled thoughts are non-sensical.”²⁹ The curdled are thick, rather than transparent—their bodies and systems of meaning are seen as fundamentally different from the ideal subject and are therefore ostracized. It is through this relentless othering of thick individuals that Man maintains his claim to unity and transparency. He fragments them into pure categories comprehensible to His episteme and decrees their systems of meaning to be unintelligible. In doing so, He erases the creativity and multiplicity of thick folks, only considering what cleanly fits into the hegemonic episteme.

Even though curdled beings are intelligible to the transparent and rendered as something to be tamed, they exist nonetheless, with a special ability to understand Man’s pure mechanisms of control. When this knowledge is developed and shared among other thick members, it can result in brilliant resistance:

26. Lugones, 123.

27. Lugones, 140.

28. Lugones, 131.

29. Lugones, 143.

When seen as split, the impure/multiplicitous are seen from the logic of unity, and thus their multiplicity can neither be seen nor understood. But splitting can itself be understood from the logic of resistance and countered through curdling separation, a power of the impure. When seen from the logic of curdling, the alteration of the impure to unity is seen as fictitious and as an exercise in domination: the impure are rendered uncreative, ascetic, static, realizers of the contents of the modern subject's imagination. Curdling, in contrast, realizes their against-the-grain creativity, articulates their within-structure-inarticulate powers.³⁰

The curdled have a deep understanding of themselves, both within their own psyches as borderland-dwellers and within their larger society as those marked as impure and thick. They see the manner in which Man's logic of purity is based upon a self-serving fiction, yet as the bearers of the brunt of its consequences, they also have an intimate knowledge as to how it works to structure systems of oppression. From this innate understanding, the curdled are able to curate theories and actions of resistance that expose the underlying absurdities of Man's episteme of purity and suggest radically creative alternatives.

The art of curdling, as Lugones calls it, sometimes emerges out of necessity and survival, yet she stresses that it can also serve as an agent of personal and societal metamorphosis. Curdled actions embrace and affirm ambiguity—they are parts of “festive resistance,”³¹ which joyfully and creatively play at the borderlands and toy with Man's obsession with purity:

30. Lugones, 133.

31. Lugones, 145.

Bi- and multilingual experimentation;
code-switching;
categorical blurring and confusion;
caricaturing the selves we are in the worlds of our oppressors, infusing them with ambiguity;
practicing trickstery and foolery;
elaborate and explicitly marked gender transgression;
withdrawing our services from the pure or their agents whenever possible and with panache;
drag;
announcing the impurity of the pure by ridiculing his inability at self-maintenance;
playful reinvention of our names for things and people, multiple naming;
caricaturing of the fragmented selves we are in our groups, revealing the chaotic in production;
revealing the process of producing order if we cannot help producing it;
undermining the orderliness of the social ordering;
marking our cultural mixtures as we move;
emphasizing *mestizaje*;
crossing cultures;
etc.³²

32. Lugones, 145.

All of these actions throw the foundation of Man's structures into question: they render them instable. Through performance and play, the practitioners of impurity disrupt categorical order by blatantly refusing to fit within it. Rather than engaging in the art of curdling solely as a means of survival, impure resisters find the creative joy that comes with embracing the multiplicitous and ambiguous. They may play up the caricatures that have been imposed onto them so far as to render them meaningless; they may subvert them entirely to demonstrate their absurdity. They resist any sort of categorization, laying somewhere between either/or as they travel between worlds, tongues, and cultures. Through curdled resistance, the multiplicitous become both everything and nothing that Man has declared them to be. In doing so, they poke holes in Man's claim to unity and transparency, revealing the hot air that has sustained such premises for centuries: "*mestizaje* defies control through simultaneously asserting the impure, curdled multiple state and rejecting fragmentation into pure parts. In this play of assertion and rejection, the mestiza is unclassifiable, unmanageable. She has no pure parts to be 'had,' controlled."³³

For Lugones, a central feature of curdled actions is playfulness: "an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred, and finding ambiguity and double edges as a source of wisdom and delight."³⁴ In many ways, such playfulness directly contradicts the manner in which Man operates. He must define the rules of His world and work within them; He must have complete knowledge and control of Himself and others; He must

33. Lugones, 123.

34. Lugones, 96.

have no tolerance for the *mestizaje* or ambiguous. The curdled subject refuses to ever saturate herself fully in such logic; if she were to comply to an episteme of purity, she would lose her multiplicity, sacrificing many of the worlds that she belongs to in exchange for a performative façade of unity. Instead, in engaging in curdled actions, she emphasizes playful exploration:

Rules may fail to explain what we are doing. We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are open to self-construction. We may not have rules, and when we do have them, there are no rules that are to us sacred. We are not worried about competence. We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful, we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular “world.” We are there creatively. We are not passive.³⁵

The art of curdling presents a grave challenge to the dominant episteme. Man often takes Himself incredibly seriously, with the weight of being The Ideally Rational Observer on His shoulders. Through playfulness, trickstery, and foolery, the curdled dismantle Man’s pedestal—they demonstrate the humor within the logic of purity, the ridiculousness of its assumptions: “We can... make the picture of those who dominate us funny precisely because we can see the double edge, we can see them doubly constructed, we can see the plurality in them. So we know truths that only the fool can speak and only the trickster can play without harm. We inhabit ‘worlds’ and travel across them and keep all the memories.”³⁶ Not only can the curdled reveal the underlying impurity of Man, one that

35. Lugones, 95-6.

36. Lugones, 92.

He has tried to repress for centuries, they can also guide folks towards a new way of being that is not defined by rigid dichotomies and fragmentation. The *mestiza* demonstrates that despite Man's efforts to tame her, to push her into pure and controllable parts, she has stubbornly persisted, evading His advances at every turn. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we exist. They like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven't, we haven't."³⁷ *Mestiza* perseverance has and will continue to deeply challenge the purity that Man holds dear. In developing curdled theories and action, feminists unravel hierarchal webs of meaning and spin new ones, both actively affirming playfulness, ambiguity, and *mestizaje*, and rejecting an episteme that claims to understand and thus control through dichotomous hierarchies.

Difficult Coalitions within a Pluralist Feminism

So far in this chapter, I have presented two epistemic actions that serve to undermine Man's power-knowledge system and create liberatory alternatives. And yet, even with the strong potentials of poetic knowledge and curdled logics, profound obstacles remain towards achieving a reality that does not replicate the oppression it attempts to run from. Our world functions with so many operators of oppression—patriarchy, racism, classism, ableism, colonialism, heterosexualism, gender essentialism, xenophobia, etc. Along these lines, women may be marginalized in some ways and privileged in others. They may lie at the intersections of multiple identities, and thus face complex and interlocking oppressions. These multiplicities are further complicated

37. Anzaldúa, 108.

through the myriad positionalities that women hold; scattered among and throughout place, time, and culture, with different bodies, interpersonal relationships, communities, and ethical obligations. Of course, all of these factors have a tremendous effect as to how a particular woman perceives and is perceived. Thus, there simply is no universal or archetypal women's experience to claim. The question emerges: how can the feminist movement advocate for "all women" with this pluralism in mind?

As discussed previously, the Western mainstream feminist answer to this question is magnificently insufficient. It has either ignored difference entirely or seen it as something to be shallowly acknowledged, with the chief aim still being to create a single and unified vision for (all) women. At its most blatant, this sort of universal feminism has resulted in women taking the reins as agents of exploitation and violence against others; in tacitly associating Womanhood with their particular social markers, white bourgeois women have regarded only their interests as relevant to the feminist movement, resulting in their involved domination of Black and Indigenous peoples. The consequences of this complete ignorance are demonstrated in the Lean In/Girlboss movement, in which the prescribed solution is only feasible for a few women, and in fact relies on the continued oppression of others. But even at its more subtle, in which difference among women is recognized and perhaps even tolerated, this form of feminism is toxic. Importantly, it does not escape the potential for a particular voice (in all likelihood the one that holds the most privilege) to eclipse the conversation and center her interests more prominently than others. This privileged theorist recognizes difference, but still tacitly working within a universal logic, she constructs "difference" as "divergence"; she continues to associate herself with universal womanhood and casts all others as deviant, "denying that we are

women or... requiring that we assimilate if we are to be women at all.”³⁸ In doing so, she continues to factor herself as the most important in structuring Real Feminist Theory and Praxis, and fashions other women as outsiders, as those who discuss difference. In this schema, women who are non-white, queer, poor, etcetera may take part in the feminist movement as educators on such difference, as those who provide the Real Feminists with small considerations and footnotes:

Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educated men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women of Color to educate white women—in the face of tremendous resistance—as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought.³⁹

This marginalization inescapably upholds epistemic hierarchies. In recognizing difference without *recognizing* difference, we risk continuing Man’s legacy of universality and fragmentation, claiming to advocating for “all women” when only really considering a fraction of them.

Of course, developing a pluralist feminism is incredibly difficult. As women are positioned in countless ways, they also have different fears, interests, and dreams. Among individuals and groups, these may conflict or completely oppose each other. Furthermore, in a reality saturated with multiple oppressive orders, solidarity among women is not a

38. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 70.

39. Lorde, “The Master’s Tools,” 96.

guarantee. In fact, it has been betrayed countless times by countless women, among race class, and colonial lines, in order to secure a higher place in the pecking order. This is not to say that every woman equally bears the brunt of guilt for structural dispossession; some of this participation may have been enthusiastically conducted, and some of it through coercion or out of necessity. However, it is important to note that the legacy of these interlocking oppressions further complicates the ability of women to form coalitions. As Black feminist philosopher Kristie Dotson notes when discussing the complex relationship between Black and Indigenous decolonial goals, “there is no innocence in settler colonial USA. None of us are historically or presently innocent of Indigenous dispossession and/or participating in and benefiting from anti-Blackness (along with a host of other historical oppressions).”⁴⁰ Women hold countless identities, with countless axes of privilege and oppression within Man’s order, further influencing their individual desires for the feminist movement (and their view of the feminist movement to begin with), as well as their perception of women with differing social markers.

And yet, despite the real obstacles, coalition building among women is a critical tool in disrupting Man’s dichotomous logic and action. He fashions each othered category as separate and fragmented from the other, so as to hide the intersections. He does not want us to know that each dichotomy was set up with Him in mind, that by betraying one another we are servicing Him more than anyone else. He does not want to recognize that thoroughly dismantling one facet of this oppressive order necessitates the

40. Dotson, Kristie, “On the way to decolonization in a settler colony: Re-introducing Black feminist identity politics,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 14, no. 3 (2018): 192.

deconstruction of the rest. In order to truly work towards a future without the exploitation and domination of women, the feminist movement must work towards a future without the multiple categories of exploitation that devalue women beyond just the man/woman dichotomy. We need to coalesce and communicate, working together to achieve a liberatory goal while recognizing our particularities.

One of the most obvious barriers towards this coalition building is white bourgeois feminists centering themselves in theorizing and practice: as María Lugones writes, “the white woman theorist did not notice us yet, her interpretation of the question placed the emphasis on theorizing itself, and the generalizing and theorizing impulse led the white theorist to think of all differences as the same, that is, as underminers of the truth, force, or scope of their theories.”⁴¹ In her own association with universal womanhood, the white feminist theorist claims the ability to create a unified and whole theory, viewing other women as those who muddy her clear perception. To truly see other women would mean to face parts of herself that she does not want to consider; her ancestors and her own perpetuating of racist, classist, ableist, and heterosexist hierarchies.

You block identification because remembering that self fractures you into more than one person. You know a self that is decent and good, and knowing your self in our mirror frightens you with losing your center, your integrity, your oneness... You block identification with that self because knowing us in the way necessary to know that self would reveal to you that we are also more than one and that not all the selves we are make you important... You block identification with that self

41. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 72.

because you are afraid of plurality: plurality speaks to you of a world whose logic is unknown to you and that you inhabit unwillingly.⁴²

In order to open the possibility of forming coalitions with other women, white bourgeois feminists need to constantly work to rid themselves of their claim to unity and purity. They must be willing to face a truth about their past and their present that they have tried to avoid, acknowledging the manner in which they have perpetuated systems of oppression. They must realize that they do not and cannot have all of the answers, that when they aim for a universal feminism, they also create an exclusionary one. In doing so, they open themselves to logics of impurity, multiplicity, and poetry.

In fact, such plurality is absolutely necessary for a thorough feminism, one that accounts for the diversity of women's experiences. As María Lugones argues, "it is that plurality that enables us to acknowledge, discern, investigate, interpret, remake the connection among crisscrossing oppositional subaltern worlds of sense, oppositional to the very logic of subjection."⁴³ In recognizing the complex and multifaceted nature of women's identities and knowledges, pluralistic feminism reduces its blind spots, better able to recognize the many interconnected manifestations of Man's order. A deep understanding of our differences allows us to be better allies and co-resisters, as we reject a claim to a total, all-encompassing solution in favor of actions that reflect particularity, place- and culture-based factors. We create what Betasamosake Simpson calls constellations of coresistance:

42. Lugones, 73.

43. Lugones, 197.

Individual stars shine in their own right and exist, grounded in their everyday renewal of Indigenous practices and in constellated relationships, meaning relationships that operate from within the grounded normativity of particular Indigenous nations, not only with other stars but also the physical world and the spiritual world. Constellations in relationship with other constellations form flight paths out of settler colonial realities into Indigeneity. They become doorways out of the enclosure of settler colonialism and into Indigenous worlds... When these constellations work in international relationship to other constellations, the fabric of the night sky changes: movements are built, particularly if constellations of coresistance create mechanisms for communication, strategic movement, accountability for each other, and shared decision-making practices.⁴⁴

Ideally, these constellations show us meanings that are imperceptible from a dominant lens. They recognize the grounded peculiarities of each individual, as well as the particular constellations that they form, those that emerge from the bonds of relationships and community. Betasamosake Simpson sees these individual constellations as illustrating important insights into the particular normative and epistemic framework of the communities they reflect. When combined with other constellations, these maps of meaning expand, offering unforeseen paths towards liberation. Sometimes, these coalitions may be closer to home, located between similar communities, such as Indigenous tribes connected by place or history. However, Betasamosake Simpson also believes that there are also more distant constellations that are worthy to work with. When we collaborate with people and communities who are situated differently than us,

44. Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 217-8.

we recognize particular strengths of our understandings as well as uncover areas that we may have overseen. Through this diversity, we can challenge each other, encourage each other to think and act in new creative ways.

In coresistance, we create a more holistic illustration of the many faces of Man's hierarchy, and we thus find ways to collectively weaken all of its manifestations. Gendered, colonial, and racial violence often accompany each other, all as means to ensure control and subordination. Therefore, collaboration among marginalized groups can lead to a more thorough comprehension of how such oppressions intersect. For example, both Dotson, a Black feminist, and Betasamosake Simpson, an Indigenous feminist, acknowledge the potentiality between Black and Indigenous activists to work together from shared oppression in the settler-native-slave triad. Dotson notes that Black and Indigenous experiences underneath settler colonialism often looked (and continues to look) different, and yet also stem from the same root evil:

US settler colonial society... did not come into being without the integral roles played by "slaves" to turn discovery-based claims to dominion into capitalist enterprises and industry structures. Eliminating Indigenous peoples and expropriating their land and labor was a requirement for settlement, but in this space, the historical use of slaves and indentured servants to aid in building this society invokes a triad of "settler-native-slave," which is, also prevalent today.⁴⁵

In order to claim the land as their own, settler colonialists needed to remove Indigenous peoples from their relationship to that space. In order to "develop" the land into something profitable, settler colonialists needed the exploited labor of African slaves.

45. Dotson, "On the way to decolonization in a settler colony," 194.

Thus, both populations were “assigned roles in the theaters of settler futurity,”⁴⁶ both ultimately forced to exist within a colonial hierarchy. This shared past can lead to shared visions and actions against the dominant colonial-patriarchal order. Betasamosake Simpson speaks of the way that this connection can manifest into Indigenous and Black action in Canada:

Within Nishnaabewin, I have ethical obligations to the Black community. I think then we would have to figure out political mechanisms to respect each other’s governance, sovereignty, and jurisdiction while committing to taking care of our shared ecosystem. I think we would have to figure out how we can support each other so both of our peoples could live free on the north shore of Lake Ontario. To me that’s what solidarity could look like under grounded normativity. That’s what a constellation of coresistance and freedom could look like under radical resurgence. That’s a future I’m interested in building.⁴⁷

Both Dotson and Betasamosake Simpson recognize the shared root of their oppression and marginalization, and thus advocate for developing coalitions that will advocate for both Black and Indigenous interests; when combined, this cooperation provides a much greater pull to uproot settler-colonial theories and practices.

There is so much wisdom that can be deduced from shared and collaborative creativity. Importantly, though, building and sustaining these constellations is not easy. Due to the differences in oppressions, women will inevitably have differences in their theories and proposed solutions. An Indigenous American feminist, for example, may

46. Dotson, 195.

47. Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 231.

advocate for the reclaiming of her native land—the return to a homeland. She will rightfully note the manner in which she and her ancestors have been systemically dispossessed from their land, and therefore argue that it is their right to restore that relationship, to rectify the harm put upon them and their land by centuries of Western “development.” A Black feminist, however, may not find that proposal feasible: the shared cultures, histories, and identities of Black Americans are not necessarily defined by an ancestral homeland, but rather a collective experience within the settler-native-slave triad. A lower-class feminist living on formerly native land may point out that she does not have the resources to move anywhere else. A feminist of multiple or ambiguous ethnicities may question the idea of a “homeland” to begin with. Even though all of these women are committed to coresistance, they may come up with completely divergent, sometimes opposing, solutions. Women’s perspectives differ because women’s experiences differ. We speak different languages; we have different understandings; we hold different priorities. These are difficult coalitions.

However, the solution to conflict, tension, or disagreement is not to ignore its existence, or to disregard it entirely in favor of a one-size-fits-all approach. We are fully multiple beings, grounded beings, and our feminism must reflect that fact. Thus, we also must accept that we will not always come up with clean solutions from the coalitions that we form. As we travel among groups, as we speak different languages and reside in different places, we will become more comfortable with being uncomfortable, acknowledging our shortcomings and ignorance in addition to our insights. We recognize who we are and how we are perceived in different spaces, as well as who the folks in those spaces are to us:

As I form my words in this multitude, I hear my voices, and hear you hearing me. I/you extend myself/yourself or recoil, stand my/your ground among subjects, consider my/your concreteness. As I live and think our relations, given the history and contemporary situation, I ponder and negotiate details and larger strokes, stolen kisses, and endearing embraces, entrapments and tortures and, inevitably, the identity markers and community relations, many fragmented and plural communities. As I feel my ground, it is the midst of concrete, complex, non-reducible, cantankerous, fleshy, interrelated, positioned subjects, noncontainable within any easy, abstract, hard-edged, simple classification. It is from within this multitude that I want to consider the question of community.⁴⁸

An important part of difficult coalition building is recognizing the multiple identities that we all hold, and how these identities shape our relationships in and among groups. Based on differences in places, cultures, beliefs, ethical frameworks, oppressions, and histories, traveling between worlds makes us see such multiplicity; the discrepancy between the way we know ourselves and how others know us. In her elaboration upon the work of Indigenous feminist Audra Simpson, Dotson discusses the importance of acknowledging this distinction in building coalitions of resistance:

Black feminist identity politics, as I have outlined it here, clarifies “this is how I am, to you” for the sake of potential, difficult coalitions. Understand that my identity politics and this recounting is not a move to innocence. And it is, let me be very clear, not a move to defensiveness either. It is, however, an “endless play” of consciousness... Because life in this settler colonial USA, for my specific

48. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 195-6.

people, has never been easy. *But that does not make us innocent. And, yet, I refuse defensiveness...* [Black] determination to survive needs to be re-membered or, at the very least, not forgotten by honoring both my folks' collective continuance *alongside* of a suspicion that this collective agency compels me to be more and less complicit with Indigenous dispossession. It is Black feminist identity politics that offers this space for re-membering or, at the very least, not-forgetting.⁴⁹

When we see both who we are to ourselves and who we are to others, we can hold multiple perspectives. As a Black woman, Dotson deeply understands the manner in which her ancestors have constantly struggled under Man's order, and she also recognizes that such struggle may have resulted in the furthered dispossession of Indigenous folks. Through acknowledging the different positionalities we hold in different groups, we see the manner in which our oppressions intersect, as well as divide. We understand the complicated and opaque history that different worlds may have with each other, but as women committed to disrupting Man's order, we can use that acknowledgement to work towards showing up for each other in ways that we did not or could not before. When we travel to these unfamiliar spaces and make difficult coalitions, we gain wisdom previously unconsidered. This knowledge, this recognition of "this is who I am, to you," as well as "this is who I am, to me," allows us to work to create solutions—not those that aim for pure unity or cohesion, but rather those that are messy, dynamic, dialectic, constantly recognizing epistemic shortcomings and working towards rectifying them.

49. Dotson, "On the way to decolonization in a settler colony," 196. See also: Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interrupts: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

This is hard work. And it is constant work. But these sorts of difficult coalitions allow us to see what is obscured in our dominant episteme: the intersections, the heterogeneities, the relationalities, the positionalities. Here, there is no Woman, no one archetype of the feminine experience. Instead, as Lugones writes,

I want to initiate the practice of uttering/writing and reading/hearing words like “woman,” “*mujer*,” “*jota*,” and “lesbian” concretely and specifically in their plurality and as emphatically open ended—as if you held a multitude of interrelated specific subjects in your attention and you thought, felt, and understood yourself as among them in your own specificity and in the problematic, often oppressive character of that specificity, as enmeshed in shifting and historically threaded resistant but also ossified relations of solidarity and exploitation, of tenderness and abuse.⁵⁰

The category of “womanhood” holds so many identities; it is loosely bound together by the experience of being perceived as a woman in a patriarchal world, yet it also holds such tremendous diversity, containing many folks who are more different than alike. In coalition building, we recognize the usefulness that our common ground has in developing aligned strategies and visions, but we also are constantly aware of our distinctions. We hold these contradictions, rather than attempt to theorize them away. “Woman” may be fraught, full of multiplicities and oppositions and complexities; “woman” may be a rather arbitrary category to begin with; and nevertheless, we believe in the power that coalition building among women holds—that through a shared relegation to disunity and impurity, we can work together to fundamentally challenge

50. Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 195.

Man's claim to cohesion and control. As Lorde argues, difference among women is "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic... Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways to actively 'be' in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters."⁵¹ Through the acceptance and exploration of our differences, women in coalition are able to "descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future,"⁵² ones that reflect the plurality and poetry of the people who create them.

Ultimately, in fostering interdependence among women, we curate conceptions of particularity, connectivity, and community that have been repressed in Man's episteme for centuries. In His ravenous dash for transcendent unity, Man has left behind so much wisdom. When multiplicitous women connect and collude, we pick up all of the pieces that he has overlooked, and develop weapons that he has not even considered. While He obsesses over universality and detached rationality, we develop poetry—the understandings that are tethered to our bodily, emotional, social, and spiritual existences. While He blinds Himself with a fetishized position of unity, we accept the impure, chaotic, and uncertain, articulating the connections and crossroads that He has ignored. While He delineates epistemic borders in order to uphold His hierarchy, we make coalitions that transcend those boundaries, generating forms of meaning outside of His realm of possibility. Audre Lorde wrote, "interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the 'I' to 'be,' not in order to be used, but in order to be

51. Lorde, "The Master's Tools," 95.

52. Lorde, 95.

creative.”⁵³ Through collective creativity, we use the strength of our relationality to develop ourselves as active, visionary forces. We are poetic, multiple, and interconnected, and as such, we become something dangerously unimaginable.

53. Lorde, 95.

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